

## Adult education working in care settings

*It is a basic human right that all older people should have the opportunity to engage in stimulating mental activity; acquire new skills and share existing ones; it is integral to a good quality of life and promotes health and well-being.<sup>1</sup>*

### Introduction

This briefing sheet is intended for those involved in the care of older people including residential care managers, adult education providers, the voluntary sector, those wishing to develop education programmes, inspection agencies and health and social care providers.

This sheet looks at how adult education can make learning for older people within care settings work. It incorporates the proposed Code of Practice for Older People Learning in Care Settings. It particularly draws on the practice of the following projects; Bromley, Calderdale, First Taste and Flanshaw Lodge. Their aims were:

- to develop learning opportunities for older people in residential care settings by engaging them in learning;
- to involve care staff to promote learning and participation in activities;
- to explore the potential of embedding learning in care settings in order for learning to become part of everyday activities.

It is particularly timely with the development of the National Service Framework for the care of older people, and the creation of the Single Assessment Process, that they could lead to the possibility that direct payments could be used to pay for learning. The Independence, Well-being and Choice (the Adult Care Green Paper), and Opportunity Age; with its enhanced role for local Directors of Adult services are also vital documents, which might impact on progress in this area.

There are many benefits apparent for the older people participating in the learning courses, many of which were similar to those highlighted in other research about learning later in life. Some of the benefits are personal development, gaining new skills, and a sense of achievement within the activity undertaken. Personal development includes better physical and mental health through increased self-confidence, self-esteem, increased mobility, reduced dependency on others, better ability to manage pain and illness, lowered levels of depression and faster recovery rates. People are left with a greater sense of wellness and general well being.

<sup>1</sup> See Code of Practice (page 2)

## Code of Practice

This draft Code of Practice has been created for providers and agencies to use as guidelines when organising activities/ learning in care settings. We aim to encourage adoption of this Code.

### Older People Learning in Care Settings A CODE OF PRACTICE

**Peter Lloyd**  
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#### Our goal is active engagement

1. It is a basic human right that all older people should have the opportunity to engage in stimulating mental activity; acquire new skills and share existing ones; it is integral to a good quality of life and promotes health and well-being.
2. Different modes of mental activity should be recognised; they can range from passive to the creative; older people should have varying control over the learning activities in which they participate.
3. Past skills and interests of older people and their hopes for new interests and skills should be recorded in personal files, assessment reports etc.
4. Older people should be fully involved in the maintenance of their past skills and interests, and in developing new ones, of their choice. They should be involved in the creation of care packages and support plans. Action to achieve learning goals should be recorded and targets set.
5. All older people, care homes, sheltered schemes, care agencies and those in domiciliary care should have access to a local directory of activities, (following the guidelines of *'Mapping Learning Opportunities for Older People'*, produced by NIACE and *'Care Homes in the Heart of the Community: Final Report of the NAPA Growing with Age Project'*, available from NAPA).
6. Residential units, care homes and sheltered schemes should encourage older people to maintain contact with the local community by facilitating residents to attend outside learning activities and inviting outsiders to participate in scheme/home activities.
7. Managers and care staff should be trained to achieve active engagement of residents. Training courses must contain one or more modules/units covering the aims of learning etc. and implementation.
8. Inspecting agencies (Commission for Social Care Inspection, Social Care Institute for Excellence, Audit Commission for Housing Associations, Supporting People audits etc.) should include criteria relating to above. The criteria should reflect abilities of older people receiving services.
9. Care staff should receive recognition and reward for their special additional skills or tasks.
10. Local authorities, Local Service Providers etc. must address the issues of funding for tutors, transport, accessible venues and resources.

## Why learning courses?

Currently many care settings offer activities for older people that are designed to pass time and for enjoyment. However, they often lack a learning and personal development structure to them. As the activities are not a course of learning, they can lack continuity and do not build on previous sessions. The benefits from taking part in activities are usually short term, whereas a more structured learning approach has longer-term benefits. Learning can help to change people's mindsets, leading to stronger relationships between carers and those being cared for.

Dench and Regan's (2000) 'The Impact of Learning on Health and Social Involvement', survey of older learners, found that those in poor health or with a disability were more likely to benefit from learning. In particular, they were more likely (compared to those with good health) to report that learning improved their enjoyment of life, their self-confidence, their ability to cope, their satisfaction with life and how they felt about themselves.

## Employees - benefits and challenges

The involvement of care staff is essential, and some examples of employee experience and development are listed below -

- The personal and professional development of some care staff was apparent . This included an attitudinal shift about the possibilities of lifelong learning for older people, the development of specific skills, increased motivation and self-confidence, feeling more valued and encouraged to share their own interests, and more aware of their own learning needs.
- It was found that deeper relationships were formed where older people learnt with their carers, as carers had more of an opportunity to find out new things about the older learners (and vice versa). This led to the older learners being more valued.
- Learning programmes can occasionally be viewed as intrusions and not integral to care. This was particularly the case for staff not involved in provision who felt that learning activities are not 'real work'.
- Staff shortages make consistency and participation in training and learning activities difficult for care staff and tutors. It is not always easy for all members of staff to attend the training and maintain activities due to the high rate of sickness, rota schedules and a high turnover of care staff. These problems are in part due to shift hours, low pay, high incidences of sick leave, employees feeling undervalued, poor management and lack of communication.

## Projects - general discussion

- All the projects experienced a transformation with the day centres/care settings turning into more lively environments. The general atmosphere had lifted in the homes with older people expressing themselves more.

- Learning sessions can challenge the negative preconceptions towards mentally frail older people and their capabilities. Learning can improve the quality of life for older people and allow them to maintain their ability to communicate effectively, establish and maintain friendships and retain a sense of independence. A decrease in levels of depression and a slowing of the onset of debilitating mental conditions such as dementia has social and economic benefits. It can help reduce the cost of medication.
- Embedding learning into care settings can benefit not only the participants, but also those involved in their care and beyond. Benefits to older people, along with staff gaining personal and professional development and more job satisfaction have potential in the long term to reduce the costs of running homes through improved living and working environments.
- A proposed 'book of life' or similar system could identify people's past, their learning achievements and current interests.

***“When a newcomer arrives I ask them about their family, their career, hobbies and where they have travelled. I then complete a ‘map of their life’. Finding out a person’s interests stops you offering an inappropriate activity“.***

*Gwen Owen, (BUPA Care Homes) River Court, Watford. BUPA Today, Friday 29<sup>th</sup> April, 2005.*

- Taster sessions for staff and older people have been shown to be successful ways to encourage them to participate in new activities, build their confidence and for carers to gradually lead the work.
- Celebrating the achievement of older learners is essential. Maintaining a sense of pride and achievement is important to the confidence and motivation of the participants. Visual displays of participants' work have been shown to be a positive way to increase participants' confidence and to maintain interest in the learning activities.

## **Recommendations**

### **Managers**

1. **Refer to the Older People Learning in Care Settings Code of Practice.**
2. Management and care staff should be trained to achieve active engagement of residents in learning activities.
3. Managers should build learning into care assessments and packages.
4. Explore how care budgets might help fund individual learning needs.
5. Managerial support is essential for the smooth development of the projects. The positive impact of good management, support from colleagues and line managers, will benefit the staff and residents as well as help the tutors integrate with them.
6. Management's support is vital to ensure staff have the time available to attend the courses.

7. Time should be provided before and after programmes start, and before and after each session to engage with care managers/staff.
8. Ensure care staff are present during sessions and do not leave it to tutors.
9. Learning courses should be provided with a good venue that has adequate space accessible to learners and uninterrupted sessions. Continuity is the key for maintaining involvement of both staff and the learners.
10. Training should include such issues as dominant group members, record keeping, recording learning gains and using appropriate materials and support programmes for tutors.
11. Providers should evaluate their tutor feedback processes to help tutors with any emerging issues.
12. Programmes should be planned in such a way that providers could contact each home the day before a class to remind them and to encourage them to give the 'students' homework or something as preparation.
13. Training programmes should be provided for care staff. This training should encourage staff to participate and share ownership of a project.
14. Develop with tutors a simple proforma to determine student's interests and experiences (and areas to avoid).

## **Tutors**

1. Tutors need to adapt their practice to meet the needs of the older learners, and to research as much as possible individual interests, expertise and experience as well as current capabilities.
2. Training on understanding dementia, in order to learn to adapt their teaching strategies to meet the needs of frail older learners, is beneficial. Tutors will gain a greater understanding of the needs of people in care settings, and experience in providing an appropriate curriculum.
3. To consider in each session how to bring in 'today' and not just work in the past.
4. To set homework if appropriate.
5. To build on local relevance where appropriate.
6. Displaying completed work by the older learners and carers is a valuable way of increasing self-worth and increasing others interest in participating in future courses.
7. To consider ending programmes with a celebration and perhaps demonstration or expression of achievement i.e. a poem, picture, song or dance, children's game, story etc.

## The learning technique

1. Courses should be: short and flexible; designed for people to leave and return during sessions and to be able to work at their own pace.
2. Recording of achievement and development plans demonstrate that learning experiences are about developing people not isolated activities.
3. Incorporate into the courses ways to demonstrate and communicate any learning gains that could contribute to the evaluation process and even residents' care plans.
4. Tutors should keep records and provided case studies. The recording of achievement and development plans demonstrate that these learning courses are about developing people and not isolated activities.

## References and further reading

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NAPA . (2005), **Care homes in the heart of the community: final report of the NAPA Growing with Age project**, available from NAPA.

The project has also produced four practice guides that offer ideas and practical guidance: Developing Community Links; Getting Out and About; Creating Links between Care Settings and Local Faith Communities; How Community Aware is Your Care Setting? These are available from NAPA. Tel. 020 7831-3320, email [sally@napa-oap.co.uk](mailto:sally@napa-oap.co.uk)

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This is the sixty-seventh in a series of briefing sheets, which aim to provide an introduction to a variety of lifelong learning issues. Many earlier titles in the series are still available including:

- 66. Adult participation in learning
- 63. Promoting financial capability provision for older people
- 60. Sources of funding for learning for older people
- 54. Mobile ICT resources for older learners
- 48. Older people and mentoring
- 45. Older people and learning
- 35. Cultural diversity - responding to the learning needs of older people from black and minority ethnic communities

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NIACE, the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education, has a broad remit to promote lifelong learning opportunities for adults. NIACE works to develop increased participation in education and training. It aims to do this for those who do not have easy access because of barriers of class, gender, age, race, language and culture, learning difficulties, or insufficient resources. Registered charity number 1002775; Company registration number 2603322.