

# Scottish Older People's Assembly Newsletter

The Scottish Older People's Assembly is a voice for  
older people across Scotland



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## Welcome to the February 2024 SOPA Newsletter

By Margaret Fisher - Editor and SOPA Trustee

A belated Happy New Year to all our members and readers and a warm welcome to SOPA's February issue. It was encouraging to receive a favourable response to the November newsletter. One person emailed, calling it "a good read". SOPA is very keen to hear your views, whether favourable or otherwise, because we want to ensure we keep you informed about issues that are relevant and matter to you and your organisation. So please feel free to let me have your feedback at [newsletter@scotopoa.org.uk](mailto:newsletter@scotopoa.org.uk).



Following on from a successful Assembly in October, since November our Lead Officer, Hetty Malcolm-Smith and the trustees have been busy. SOPA's Age-friendly communities project is forging ahead and we now have Perth & Kinross Council registered as an Age-friendly Community within the UK network of AfCs. You can read Tony Donohoe's report in the SOPA News section.

On a particularly icy day on 17th January, Hetty, Tony and I attended the Scottish Government's Festival of Ageing held in COSLA's building at Haymarket, Edinburgh, where Emma Roddick, MSP opened the event. You can read about it in the feature article.

Despite the bad weather, the trustees met on 25th January for a strategy development day at Strathclyde University to decide our next three-year plan. We found that in person get togethers tend to result in a lot more suggestions coming forth than group emails tend to do, allowing ideas to percolate and be thoroughly discussed and debated. The day was led by one of our two vice chairs, Teresa Lavery whose excellent work on the strategic plan formed a basis for our deliberations. The starting point for the next three-year strategic plan was informed by what came out of issues raised at the workshops by attendees at the Assembly, so grassroots in origin. You can read Teresa's report in the SOPA News section.

From this work, we identified some key issues impacting older people which resulted in three working groups to be set up. The initial areas chosen are social inclusion, an

Older People's Commissioner and social care. These smaller working groups will comprise volunteer representatives from our member organisations and/or associate members, each chaired by a trustee, to focus on a specific issue of interest impacting older people. The intention is to hold meetings remotely online so that members throughout Scotland, regardless of where they may be based, can contribute. Each group will then produce recommendations which SOPA will feedback to our stakeholders and to government, as appropriate. In this way, we hope to increase our engagement and influence, so that we help to amplify the voice of older people in Scotland on issues we feel need addressed. Those who are interested in being on a working group are asked to contact our Lead Officer at [hetty@scotopa.org.uk](mailto:hetty@scotopa.org.uk).

SOPA's AGM took place in Glasgow on 29th January and was well attended by members both in person and online. The formal business was followed by three presentations which you can read about in the SOPA News section.

The newsletter can be found online, on SOPAs website [www.scotopa.org.uk](http://www.scotopa.org.uk) and is emailed directly to members. Please feel free to highlight any issues of relevance to your organisation and share the link to any article of interest to help spread the word and increase our voice.

I also extend an invitation to any of SOPA's member organisations who wish to have an article about their work and activities included in the Members Articles section of the next newsletter, due out after Easter sometime in April, to contact me, the editor at [newsletter@scotopa.org.uk](mailto:newsletter@scotopa.org.uk).

Best wishes for 2024 from all at SOPA

*We'd love to know what you think of our newsletter - survey can be found at this link:  
<https://www.surveyhero.com/c/eau4gph4>*

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## Meet More of the SOPA Team

### Meet Hetty Malcolm-Smith, Lead Officer, SOPA

I became Lead Officer of SOPA in September 2022. I returned to Edinburgh with my family in 2018 having lived and worked in London since my early 20s. Before working at SOPA I was Head of Operations and Company Secretary for Learning on Screen, a UK educational membership charity. I also have experience in project management, events and PR and comms in both the charitable and private sector.



The best thing about the role is working closely with the Board of Trustees, the AfC Project Coordinator and wider member and partner organisations to deliver SOPA's aims and contribute to SOPA's organisational development.

The real strength of SOPA is in our membership and it was fantastic to meet so many members in Glasgow in October 2023 at our Assembly. This year is especially exciting as we deliver our new objectives for 2024-2027.

There are lots of plans for 2024 which we actively encourage our members to be involved in, including working groups, our Assembly planning groups and outreach groups. We also intend to expand and build our membership. As a membership organisation we are always keen to share news and be a hub for our members so please do contact us with any information.

SOPA continues to build on its previous partnership work with our members as well as our work with Age Scotland through the Older People's Champions campaign. SOPA also builds on its successful Age-friendly Community development across Scotland led by Tony Donohoe.

Outside of SOPA I'm vice-chair of Braidburn School's parent council, a parent-rep on Lothian's Children Hearing Services Working Group and last year completed my Level 1 BSL.

I am always keen to hear from you so please contact me on [hetty@scotopa.org.uk](mailto:hetty@scotopa.org.uk) or [07434 867890](tel:07434867890)

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## Meet Teresa Lavery, SOPA Joint-Vice Chair

I was fortunate enough to take early retirement in 2018 after 30+ years working mainly in the public sector. I learned very quickly to enjoy my freedom, but I did think that it would be interesting and constructive to offer my skills to a third sector organisation that might be moving towards a period of change. I didn't realise it at the time when I was appointed as associate trustee at SOPA that there was more than one change to tackle with my new fellow trustees, so I've been kept busy for a while.



I think that my past work experiences helped with some of the change management that we undertook. I am particularly pleased with being able to help shape SOPA's next three-year plan and to work with fellow trustees and members in developing ways of measuring our impact on issues that affect older people in Scotland.

I worked in local authorities in planning and evaluating public services and, in the last 10 years of my career, I worked specifically in health and social care services.

I did a lot of work in public consultations on services and in building relationships between service providers and service users. Much of my work was organising and supporting the planning work of senior managers in Health and Social Care in developing, delivering and evaluating services. I also did a lot of work with voluntary sector organisations to help them develop in ways that equipped them with the business skills to bid for, and deliver, local services under contract with local authorities and the Health and Social Care Partnerships.

I am enjoying my retirement. I enjoy getting out and about with friends visiting galleries and exhibitions and places of interest. I am an active member of the 3Ls art club at Strathclyde University's Centre for Lifelong Learning. The Centre and the art club have given me the confidence to put some of my paintings into public exhibitions – something I could not have imagined doing 10 years ago. I have taken up Bridge which is a game that will keep me learning forever, and I have a young cockapoo dog who makes me go out walking at least three times a day, regardless of the weather.

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## SOPA News

In this section we tell you about what SOPA has been doing since the last newsletter two months ago, working with partners plus some information on any events happening within the next two months.

News updates on:

- SOPA's Three-year Plan 2024-2027 and the "to do" List for Members
- SOPA Annual General Meeting on 29th January 2024 in Glasgow
- Latest News on SOPA's Age-friendly Communities (AfC) Work
- SOPA Events and Members' Meetings Announced
- New SOPA Website Coming Soon

### SOPA's Three-year Plan 2024-2027 and the "to do" List for Members

By Teresa Lavery

After the last year of reviewing, consulting and identifying priority issues, SOPA members have produced a plan for delivery over the next three years.

As we start to roll out the plan and as SOPA's two members of staff plan their workloads for 2024, it might be useful to have a quick overview of the objectives we hope to achieve over the next three years.

Why have a three-year plan? A three-year plan will help us focus on our long-term aims as we undertake our day-to-day work. It helps us recognise the priorities identified by members and to plan how to use our resources effectively.



Our three-year plan will also be useful in informing our funders and supporters about what we are doing, how we are doing it and how we measure our successes. These are crucial factors that funders and potential funders will take into account when deciding if, and how much, they plan to fund our work.

The SOPA trustees spend a lot of time and effort with members and other stakeholders in ongoing consultations. Most recently we have undertaken an online survey, our assembly workshops, meetings with politicians and civil servants and our Older People's Champions to name a few.

We have overhauled our website and newsletter, and our Lead Officer, Hetty Malcolm-Smith, is active on X (formerly known as Twitter) in keeping people up to date with what is happening.

We want to use digital technology to support members networking amongst themselves as well as with Trustees, and we are looking forward to establishing members' working groups through 2024 to examine key issues in depth and make recommendations to the SOPA board on action on priority issues.

Our 4 "high level" objectives that we aim to achieve are:

- Getting policy-makers at every level of government listen to older people and act on what they hear
- Delivering the "your issue, your voice" project to highlight local issues that impact on older people
- Celebrating positive contributions of older people in Scotland
- Having an Older People's Champion in every local authority in Scotland

We also need to work on expanding and strengthening the membership and ensuring SOPA's future sustainability.

The trustees have also considered how to measure the impact of our work – not just measuring how well we perform on a day-to-day, month-to-month basis but measuring our success in delivering long-term change for the better. This requires us to think about how we will know when we have achieved success, when we get there and how we can use evidence of our successes to demonstrate SOPA's ability to deliver, or help deliver, long-term changes for the better.

### **Where are we now as at February 2024?**

We held our AGM on 29 January 2024 and presented the three-year plan to members. We will shortly send out to members the three-year plan in various formats including our new logo for members to take to their networks when talking about SOPA.

We have agreed three priority topics for discussion by members' working groups which will be established in the next month or so. The working groups are asked to tackle priority issues at some Zoom meetings over a period of two to three months and make recommendations on action to the Board of Trustees. The first three topics are:

- Social Care (we anticipate a number of working groups tackling various aspects of Social Care over the life of the three-year plan)
- The potential pros and cons of the proposed Older People's Commissioner in Scotland
- The impact of social isolation and ways in which it might be tackled in Scotland

The Board of Trustees is looking forward to delivering the three-year plan with SOPA members and other stakeholders. Our two members of staff are working on their calendar of work for 2024 to ensure that we tie in with key activities over the year, such as Scottish Government and Parliamentary action, key activities of our members and our planned Parliamentary Reception.

Our new objectives can be found at: [SOPA | ABOUT US \(scotopa.org.uk\)](https://scotopa.org.uk)

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## **SOPA Annual General Meeting on 29th January 2024 in Glasgow** **By David Paterson and Hetty Malcolm-Smith**

SOPA's Chair, David Paterson, warmly welcomed 37 of our members and associate members to the 2022/23 annual general meeting. Due to a clash of dates with another partner organisation, SOPA moved its usual December AGM to last month. Nonetheless, we were delighted to see so many representatives from our member organisations attending in person, especially as the weather that week had been bad enough to cause public transport difficulties. Several others attended online, including members from the Highlands to the Scottish Borders.



Despite the cold and wet winter weather that day, we were comfortable and warm in the relatively new refurbished meeting facilities at the Mackintosh At The Willow. Formerly known as the Willow Tearooms, it is considered by many to be an art nouveau masterpiece designed by Charles Rennie Mackintosh.

The Chair thanked our Lead Officer, Hetty Malcolm-Smith, for all her work in organising the AGM and for all her work during the past year. He reported that last year SOPA had continued to earnestly promote the voice of older people through a range of initiatives. These included a parliamentary reception at Holyrood, meetings with cross party groups, regular members meetings and participating and working with a range of organisations and working groups on older people's issues, such as the Older Peoples Strategic Action Forum.

In addition to SOPA organising and delivering a very successful and well attended Assembly on 9th October last year, other notable achievements include the continuing appointment of Older People's Champions and the Age-friendly Communities Project funded by the Tudor Trust.

The members noted and approved the results of the election of trustees. These were David Paterson, Catriona Mason, Mary Osei-Oppong and Chris Grant. Office-bearers were re-elected unopposed.

Elaine Alsop, SOPA's independent financial examiner, spoke about the annual accounts she audited which were duly approved. She noted risks are recorded on a risk register and policies continue to be under review to ensure governance arrangements are robust to support the delivery of SOPA's three-year strategic plan.

Three presentations followed the formal AGM business. Teresa Lavery, SOPA's Vice Chair, informed members about the board's development day held on 25th January 2024 and the ongoing work of the trustees on our strategic plan for the next three years and also the new working groups being set up. Tony Donohoe, SOPA's Project Coordinator for Age-friendly Communities updated our audience on his work to date.

Our keynote speaker, Dr. Louise Brown Nicholls, Senior Lecturer in Psychology Health and Wellbeing, University of Strathclyde, is founding Director of the Strathclyde Ageing Network. Her research is focused on understanding human memory and attention, and how these cognitive abilities are affected by adult ageing, especially healthy ageing. She delivered an interesting and illuminating presentation on her research into health and wellbeing through the adult lifespan. The presentations were followed by a lively question and answer session.

The meeting closed with the Chair thanking members, trustees and staff for their commitment and engagement throughout the past year.

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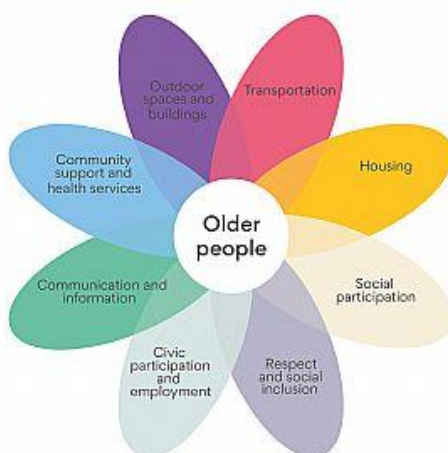


## Latest News on SOPA's Age Friendly Communities (AfC) Work:

### Exciting Development as Perth & Kinross Council Join UK Network and More

By Tony Donohoe - SOPA AfC Project Coordinator

Scottish Older People's Assembly (SOPA) is the lead organisation in Scotland promoting Age-friendly Communities (AfCs). SOPA's Project Co-ordinator, Tony Donohoe is working with representatives from different areas around Scotland to adopt the AfC approach and become part of a global movement, supported by the World Health Organisation.



Further to our update in the November Newsletter there has been an exciting development for the Age-friendly Communities project in Scotland with the Perth & Kinross Council area now registered as an AfC with the UK network of AfCs. This means that older people in Perth & Kinross can look forward to the progression of various activities and initiatives that are age-friendly over the coming months and years. Perth & Kinross now join South Lanarkshire and South Ayrshire as part of the growing Age-friendly movement in Scotland. For information on the Perth & Kinross AfC you can contact their Lead officer, Andrea Paius (Perth & Kinross Health & Social Care Partnership) [apaius@pkc.gov.uk](mailto:apaius@pkc.gov.uk).



Other developments in our Age-friendly work include making connections with Age-friendly representatives in Northern Ireland and Wales to learn about other approaches across the UK. In Wales, for example, they have an Older People's Commissioner who supports the development of AfCs across the country. The development of AfCs is one of the main priorities within the Commissioner's current Work Programme. In Northern Ireland there is a strong network of AfCs covering all areas – Belfast, for example, has an Age Friendly Belfast Plan covering the period 2023-2027. Through making connections and learning from across the UK we are aiming to develop the best approach to AfCs in Scotland.

SOPA's AfC Network Group has grown to have representatives from eleven Local Authority areas in Scotland. As well as the three AfC areas there are eight other areas at various stages of considering adopting the AfC approach to make their communities more age-friendly and promote ageing well among older people. Through establishing and supporting the group SOPA is hoping to assist in increasing the number of AfCs across Scotland over the next year. Our national Advisory Group is also playing a role in helping to develop the SOPA AfC project going forward and we are also undertaking an evaluation of the project to measure our impact and help improve the sustainability of the project.



SOPA is also hosting two specific events on AfCs in March 2024 – one focusing on AfCs in rural areas and specific challenges and another on how to resource an AfC in your area. We hope that these events will bring together interested parties to share practice and learning on two key aspects of developing and delivering AfCs in Scotland.

Over the next year or so we want to help as many communities as possible in Scotland to become more age-friendly. We are looking forward to an exciting 2024 and developing the AfC approach in Scotland!

If you or your organisation wish to find out more then please contact Tony Donohoe, AfC Project Co-ordinator at Email: [tony@scotopa.org.uk](mailto:tony@scotopa.org.uk) or Mobile: 07745 355234

## **SOPA Events and Members' Meetings Announced**

**By Hetty Malcolm-Smith**

It was great to see so many SOPA members at our AGM this week and we are now pleased to let you know our plans for future meetings so you may put them in your diaries.

### **SOPA Members' Meetings**

We have now planned a series of online members meetings. The meetings will be from 2.30pm to 4pm. We have decided on zoom to allow as many members to attend as possible. Please do contact me if you would like me to send you a zoom link. I will send out an agenda prior to each meeting, but do let me know if there are any topics you would like included.

Meeting dates:

Tuesday 27<sup>th</sup> February 2024 – 2.30pm- 4pm

Tuesday 30<sup>th</sup> April 2024 – 2.30pm- 4pm

Tuesday 25<sup>th</sup> June 2024 – 2.30pm- 4pm

Tuesday 27<sup>th</sup> August 2024 – 2.30pm- 4pm

Tuesday 29<sup>th</sup> October 2024 – 2.30pm- 4pm

### **SOPA Outreach Meetings**

We are planning our first two outreach meetings of 2024 in March. These will be in Edinburgh and the Borders. The Edinburgh meeting will be on 5<sup>th</sup> March 2024 between 2.30pm and 4pm (venue TBC but central) and we are currently planning the Borders event so will let you have details shortly.

The events will focus on SOPA's current objectives, Age-friendly Communities and discussions around Your Issue, Your Voice. It will also of course be a great networking opportunity!

We will be disseminating details and invites shortly.

If you would like us to visit your area and deliver a similar event please do let me know at [hetty@scotopa.org.uk](mailto:hetty@scotopa.org.uk)

### **SOPA Working Groups**

SOPA have agreed three priority topics for discussion by members' working groups which will be established in the next month or so. The working groups are asked to tackle priority issues at some Zoom meetings over a period of two to three months and make recommendations on action to the Board of Trustees. The first three topics are:

- Social Care (we anticipate a number of working groups tackling various aspects of Social Care over the life of the three-year plan)
- The potential pros and cons of the proposed Older People's Commissioner in Scotland
- The impact of social isolation and ways in which it might be tackled in Scotland

Further details about how to join these groups will be sent out shortly to members, however in the meantime, if you are interested in participating in any of these groups please email me at [hetty@scotopa.org.uk](mailto:hetty@scotopa.org.uk)

### **SOPA Assembly Planning Meetings**

SOPA Assembly planning meetings will be announced shortly so please start thinking if there is anything you would like us to include or if you have any feedback from the last Assembly.

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### **New SOPA Website Coming Soon**

**By Hetty Malcolm-Smith**

SOPA will be launching a new website in the next few months which will include all our news, events, campaigns plus a dedicated hub page for our members. We will of course let you know when it's launched!

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## Features

### Older People's Champion Campaign

*Since the launch of SOPA's joint campaign with Age Scotland, the number of councils with Older People's Champions or Spokespeople has increased to 19 local authorities.*

*Further information about the campaign and how you can get involved, along with an up to date list of Older People's Champions and their contact details, is available on the Age Scotland website at <https://www.ageuk.org.uk/scotland/our-impact/campaigns/older-peoples-champions/contact-details-opc/>*

### Interview with Older People's Champion, Councillor Alf Kelly, Falkirk Council

By Margaret Fisher

Councillor Alf Kelly was first elected to Falkirk Council in May 2022 as one of four councillors representing Ward 3 for Denny and Banknock. He is the only Labour councillor for this ward. He is also the Council's Older People's Champion (OPC), a role for which he volunteered due to his interest in older people's issues, pointing out that he himself is now "older".



"I've always been interested in politics and my community and wanted to make a difference," he said, "so at the grand old age of 78 I gave up working after being persuaded to stand for election."

Alf told me that he had been asked many years ago to stand for the local council, but at that time he was working and bringing up a family, so he had turned it down because family is more important to him than anything else.

Since the last election, Falkirk Council now has 15 new councillors, which is half the total number of 30 councillors who have never been on the Council before. Around six members are aged under 30.

"I think it's a good thing," he said. "We have a lot of younger people. I'm the oldest councillor and we've also got the youngest member of the Council as well in our party. I think having all these new people does make a difference."

He said: "A lot of young people seem to think all the problems are about the young, but it's trying to get them to understand when they say that all the older people are using up this and that money. I say to them 'who do you think paid for your health service, your education, who do you think your mother got benefits for?' It was we older people working back then and paying taxes, so now we're just expecting younger people in their turn to do what's been done for them basically, that's how I see it."

When Humza Yousaf became First Minister in March last year, he did away with the role of a named minister for older people. Alf put forward a motion that Falkirk Council write to the Scottish Government asking them to reinstate the dedicated older people's minister. The Council accepted the motion and sent the letter. The reply stated that this role was now within the equalities portfolio of Emma Roddick, MSP along with her responsibility for migration and refugees.

Alf said: "There's no named Scottish minister, that's the problem. So we lose the focus on older people and there's so many things that older people need like health, housing, benefits such as pension credit, transport, heating, isolation, loneliness, dementia and dementia care. We need a focus to point people, so they know where to go in the Scottish Government. There's nowhere to go as they lose focus and that's why I asked the Council to write."

While health and dementia come under the health portfolio, and some other older people's issues lie within some other portfolios, he feels that a named minister for older people would be able to oversee and link all the many issues and ensure they were being dealt with by the relevant minister within each of the other portfolios like health in particular.

Alf gave several examples of his OPC work in the wider Falkirk Council area. He pointed out that while the town is Denny, his ward has lots of villages, each with different communities. These include Banknock where he lives, Dennyloanhead, Dunipace, Frankerton where Strathcarron Hospice is, Haggs, Head of Muir, Longcroft, Stoneywood and Allendale.

"There are four of us representing this ward", he said "but I am the only councillor in this area representing my party which is Labour. Within the area we have seven community and sports halls and we work together well on a lot of issues, for example when there was a problem with a community hall."

While he has his own council ward, because of his role as an OPC it gives him the remit to cover the whole of Falkirk so that he can go to various pensioners clubs and events within the older people's network and take up issues identified and pass them on to the local councillor for their attention. For example, as an OPC he visited a dementia related home for older people in Falkirk and spoke with the staff and the matron who runs it to see what is happening with them. He often finds out about problems just by chatting with folks.

He said: "I tend to be more hands on rather than sit back and send emails. After speaking with the matron of the home, I went and got another councillor, Jack Redmond who is a joiner to trade and we built a bar for them in the lounge so the

residents with dementia can sit down with relatives visiting over a coffee or a glass of wine. The son of one resident comes in when the football is on and he and his father sit down together over a pint and something light to eat. It's to make it more of a home, rather than just a care home, or an institution, because it is their home and they've got their own bedroom. It's not like the residents don't know what's going on, it's just that their memory tends to fail them."

His hands-on approach extends to the Falkirk Older People's Network which is where he met SOPA's Chair, David Paterson who is also chair of that network. The Denny library runs a dementia day on a Monday where people sit in groups and talk about things they remember and what they used to do. It gives people a purpose to come out. In the village where he lives there is the Nifty Fifties club which meets in a local community centre for social get togethers, sometimes a bus run and a party at Christmas. It is about just meeting up with other people, being sociable and addressing isolation. In his OPC role, Alf finds that by attending these various occasions and talking with people generally, he finds out their problems and issues which he then feeds back to the Council.

He said: "People who would not normally come and tell you their difficulties you find out while just sitting talking over a cup of tea. For example, you find out that they haven't got aids in their house that would help them get about. I get someone from social work to see them and what they need. Basically you're picking out from a chat what they really need and not waiting for them to come and tell you."

Another recent example of learning about what help is needed for people who do not usually come forward was when he was out campaigning and an old lady answered the door. She told him her husband had just died and she could not get out any more, including to vote which she wanted to be able to do. She was unaware she could get a postal vote, nor how to apply for one, so Alf arranged for the Council to send her an application form. It is generally issues like this which he "picks up" and identifies as a problem he can help an older person with. He then takes the necessary action, wearing both hats as an OPC and a councillor, as there is frequently a crossover.

He said: "I think it's more important with the one-to-one chats, as that's when you pick up problems. Like with benefits for instance, there's so many people who still don't realise they are entitled to pension credit, but even if they only get 10 pence it's a gateway into all the other benefits for them. It's not the people who come out to clubs and everything else, it's the ones who don't, who sit in the house and we don't always find out they need help."

BT changed from the old style landlines and used new technology which means that if the electricity fails, and someone falls in the house, they cannot access the emergency call system. Falkirk Council has a Mobile Emergency Care Service which overcomes this issue, but not all councils have this. The Council also has plans to build 106 new social houses, what used to be called council houses, by 2030 in Banknock village and still more houses in other areas. They plan to future proof them with wider doors so that older people living in them with mobility issues are catered for.

Champs is a Falkirk Council initiative that supports the Scottish Government “Promise” which helps young people who are or have been in care. Alf is in discussion with the person who organises it from the Council. He suggested it might be an idea to bring older people and the younger people champs together to the benefit of both. His idea is to integrate the older and younger people in some way, so that if an older person has not got a family or their family lives far away, if they have a young person coming in to visit, or somewhere to meet up with them, you can talk with them and help to address loneliness and isolation. He points out that a lot of the kids who are in care do not have grandparents that they are in touch with. It would be an opportunity for them to come together with a young person who would want to have a type of family connection with an older person they can sit and talk to. However, Alf says that this is likely to take some time to get something like this off the ground.

Alf has an interest in antiques which began as a hobby and then grew into a business, following his full-time work as a TV engineer for many years while raising his family. He says he gave up all his other work when he was elected to concentrate on his work with the Council. It seems that his tendency to take a hands-on approach has also transferred very effectively into his work as an Older People’s Champion.

Details for Cllr Alf Kelly can be found at: [Falkirk Committee Information - Council Member Details](#)

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## **Festival of Ageing - 17th January 2024 in Edinburgh**

**Expert Research on Brain Health - Panels Discuss Positive Ageing  
By Margaret Fisher**





On a freezing cold mid-January day, I attended the Festival of Ageing, organised by the Scottish Government, together with SOPA's Lead Officer Hetty Malcolm-Smith and our Age-friendly Communities Project Coordinator Tony Donohoe. The Festival of Ageing brought together experts from a variety of fields to discuss the latest research on ageing, as well as practical strategies for staying healthy, happy and connected.

Emma Roddick, MSP opened this event and spoke about her responsibility for older people within her ministerial portfolio as Minister for Equalities, Migration and Refugees. She was appointed as a new minister in March 2023. She said that the Scottish Government recognises the challenges of an ageing population where three quarters of a million people, or one third of the workforce, is now aged over 50. Research indicates there is an increasing number of underactive and non-active people with 100,000 over 50s who want to work but can't. She stated that she works closely with the Older People's Strategic Action Forum (OPSAF) to keep abreast of the needs and concerns of older people. She said discussions at the Festival of Ageing will help inform the government in refreshing and updating their Older People's Framework. She stated that the First Minister's three main aims are equality, community and opportunity.



She then answered a number of questions from the audience, facilitated by Rachel McTavish, broadcast journalist and television presenter. One issue highlighted was ageism in the workplace for the over 50s, the recruitment practices of some employers which had the potential to adversely impact the hiring of over 50s and the increasing use of AI technology used to sift through CVs and select candidates for interview. Ms Roddick said there were some concerns about the use of AI and that the various issues raised with her would be considered by government.

Mike Stevenson, a motivational speaker and expert on positive ageing, spoke about how to retain enthusiasm as we age. He spoke about the importance of feeling valued and included. He gave international examples of positive ageing where there can be cultural differences in attitudes to ageing positively.

It appears that lifestyle could be the key to ageing well, according to research by Professor Alan Gow of Heriot-Watt University's Department of Psychology.

His research into brain health and how our thinking skills develop and change as we age shows that lifestyle can be key to how well we age. It was surprising to learn that our speed of thinking starts to reduce in our early twenties. Our perceptual speed piques early then declines. The good news is that changes in thinking skills are variable and we all experience this in different ways.

In a research sample of 3,000 people across the UK, over 90% of participants believe it is possible to maintain and improve our thinking skills. This is due to a combination of genetics and lifestyle where the latter has the greatest influence on the opportunity to improve. This is because, if people feel they have some control over what they can do, they are more likely to take action.

The research found there are several complex factors affecting brain health and thinking skills where twelve areas stood out. These include hearing loss, brain injury, high alcohol consumption, smoking, depression, obesity, diabetes and air pollution. Researchers found that about 40% of dementia cases are attributable to a range of these factors being present. In looking at each factor or element separately, they found that small improvements in each factor could result in small marginal gains. When these marginal gains are combined, it can result in an overall improvement in brain health and thinking skills.



Of the twelve factors, 46% of improvement can come from eating a healthy diet, 45% from playing games, 36% from physical activity but only 16% from educational classes such as learning a new hobby or skill. Yet knowing the beneficial effect of these combined marginal gains, only 50% of the research participants said they would change their behaviour.

Another piece of research, an intervention study, which tries to change behaviour and then predict what will happen, involved 48 participants with half being a control group. The other 24 took part in various volunteering activities such as working with primary school children helping them with reading and numeracy. This gave the older people a sense of purpose which is seen as very important, followed closely by challenging the mind with games and puzzles and being active.

So, if we want to make improvements in brain health, the research suggests we should ask ourselves what we can do a bit more of, such as physical activity and healthier eating, do a bit less of, for example moderating alcohol consumption or giving up smoking, and embed these behaviours.

We all know change in behaviour is never easy. You only have to look at how many well-intentioned new year resolutions fail by the end of January, whether it be to lose weight or go to the gym. Thanks to Professor Gow's research, we are fortunate to know more nowadays than ever before about what we can do to improve our chances of ageing well, both physically and cognitively, as the two appear to be linked.

Two expert panel discussions, led by Ms McTavish, featured in the programme. One panel focussed on rethinking work, retirement and ageing. Mike Douglas, Director of Social Enterprises, Age Scotland, spoke about attitudes to older people in the workplace. He gave the example of someone being sent an ageist birthday card intended to be humorous, yet you would never see someone mocking disability or race in this way. While there have been improvements in employing older people with some employers, the panel felt that there is still a lot required to be done to improve attitudes towards older workers.

It was also felt that rather than full retirement, employers should consider accepting employees to work part-time or reduced hours, even in a more junior role if they had previously been in management, if that was what the employee wanted. Age Scotland is working with some larger employers to help them to improve how they view and interact with older people at work because they have a lot of skills and experience to offer within a diverse workforce.

To a question from the audience as to how to change employers' attitudes to older workers, Mike Douglas responded "from the top". He said that just because there are HR policies in place does not mean managers have ever read them let alone acted on them. However, managers are now expected to do more and more with less and less, so change needs to come from management and management training.

One member of the audience referred to the feel-good film "The Intern" where a successful start-up business hires a retired older man, played by actor Robert De Niro, as an intern. There are several comedy moments in the film when he interacts with and befriends young tech-savvy employees. It may be that real life needs to imitate fiction and employers should consider taking on older retired people as interns to benefit from their skills and experience.

This also chimes with Professor Gow's research findings of older people needing to feel they have a purpose in life which can help to alleviate depression and improve wellbeing. It could also help to reduce the number of over 50s referred to by Ms Roddick who are not active since it could meet the needs of older people who still wish to work, but for a reduced number of hours. It was suggested that older interns could be partnered with young workers starting out in their careers to the benefit of both and to the employer's business.

SOPA's Tony Donohoe along with Brian Sloan, Business Development Director, Sporting Memories and Alison Clyde, CEO Generations Working Together took part in a discussion on inclusion, community and wellbeing. Tony said that he was working towards getting people at local level to influence policy and government in order to increase the number of age friendly communities in Scotland.



The final speaker of the day was Dr Jenny Peachy, Senior Policy Advocate, Carnegie UK Trust who spoke about her research on ageing in Scotland involving 6.900 participants. She explained how wellbeing is a feeling which relates to the extent to which people feel they are flourishing in four areas: social, economic, environmental and democratic. Many young people in the survey experienced multiple challenges affecting their wellbeing which were different to that experienced by older people. In part this may be because society has changed over decades. People in the over 55 cohort (but not those in their 80s and 90s) felt they were doing better in terms of wellbeing than younger cohorts. Areas found to have a significant impact on wellbeing were disability, level of annual income and housing tenure. It is perhaps no surprise that this research confirmed that better off older people who have their own home report a higher level of wellbeing, though not older people who have a low income, disability and ill health. This applies to younger people also who struggle to find affordable housing even on reasonable incomes. This research is relatable to Emma Roddick's opening remarks that the Scottish Government is concerned about the current cost of living crisis and its impact, not just on older people.

While ageing well is something to be celebrated, as the contributions and research from several speakers show, positive ageing and wellbeing has many factors and complexities, some of which we can try to improve through marginal gains and behaviour change, if we choose to do so. Others, however, require influencing government, something which SOPA continues to do, in partnership with its members to give them a voice, working with stakeholder organisations for the benefit of older people in Scotland.

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## Members' Articles and News

In this section, we feature our member organisations and their activities. As “a voice for older people” SOPA feels it is important to air that voice by letting you know what our members are currently doing.

We love hearing from members and are happy to feature your events and activities in your local area. We would be delighted to hear from you for the next bi-monthly issue of SOPA’s Newsletter if you would like to contribute an article for us. Contact the editor at [newsletter@scotopa.org.uk](mailto:newsletter@scotopa.org.uk)

News from:

- AbilityNet
- ACEIT
- Association of East Lothian Day Centres
- Generations Working Together
- Hourglass
- LGBT Age Action Group of LGBT Health and Wellbeing
- Linking Lives UK
- Mearns & Coastal Healthy Living Network (MCHLN)
- Retired Police Officers Association Scotland (RPOAS)

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### AbilityNet

**By Rob McClean - Digital Inclusion Programme Officer**

Bridging the Digital Divide: An Introduction to AbilityNet and BT's Partnership for the Over 65s

In an age of ever-evolving technology, a widening digital divide threatens to leave some behind. Thankfully, initiatives like the partnership between AbilityNet and BT Group are stepping up to ensure that everyone over the age of 65, can reap the benefits of a connected world. This collaborative effort is a beacon of hope, empowering older generations to embrace technology and bridge the digital gap with confidence.

*Understanding the Need:*

For many over 65s, navigating the digital landscape can be daunting. Fear of the unknown, unfamiliarity with devices, and anxieties about online safety can create a formidable barrier. This digital exclusion not only limits access to crucial online services like healthcare and banking but also isolates individuals from social connections and valuable information.

### *Empowering Senior Skills:*

Recognizing this urgent need, AbilityNet, a leading digital accessibility charity, and BT Group, a prominent telecommunications giant, have joined forces. Their innovative partnership, aptly named the "Senior Skills Programme," aims to equip the over 65s with the digital skills and confidence they need to thrive in the modern world.

### *Tailored Training, Accessible Delivery:*

The program offers a unique blend of personalized and accessible training delivered in a format that resonates with older adults. Individuals can choose between one-on-one sessions or group workshops conducted in familiar community settings like cafes, libraries, or even their own homes. This flexibility ensures individual needs are met while fostering a supportive learning environment.

### *Demystifying the Digital:*

Training sessions cover a spectrum of essential skills, catering to diverse interests and comfort levels. From mastering the basics of smartphones and tablets to navigating the internet safely, exploring email and social media, and even accessing online public services, the program empowers seniors to conquer their digital fears and unlock a world of possibilities.

### *Beyond Functionality, Building Confidence:*

The partnership goes beyond mere technical training. Recognizing the emotional barriers hindering digital adoption, the program fosters a supportive environment where anxieties are addressed, and confidence is nurtured. By emphasizing a "fearless" approach to technology, the program empowers seniors to embrace learning and celebrate their achievements, no matter how small.

### *Impact Beyond Individuals:*

The "Senior Skills Programme" extends its impact beyond individual empowerment. By equipping the over 65s with digital skills, it contributes to a more inclusive digital society. Seniors can stay connected with loved ones, engage in their communities, access crucial services, and even contribute their valuable skills and perspectives online. This digital inclusion enriches society as a whole, fostering intergenerational connections and bridging the digital divide.

### Looking Ahead:

The AbilityNet and BT partnership, currently operating in select UK cities, serves as a vital model for bridging the digital divide across generations. To request a place call Abilitynet on 0131 376 3020 or visit our website:

<https://abilitynet.org.uk/free-tech-support-and-info/digital-skills-training-people-over-65>

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## ACEIT

By Isla Whateley - Communications Coordinator

Digital exclusion is a nationwide issue that disproportionately affects older people. In a time when more and more essential services are moving online, many are getting left behind. According to research from Age UK, one in five over-65s do not use the internet at all. The majority (67%) of UK adults who are “offline” are over 70, says the Centre for Ageing Better. This is why ACE IT exists, to improve the health and wellbeing of those over 50 by helping them to access the digital world and online services.



ACE IT began in 2001 as a subset of Age Concern Edinburgh and became a charity in its own right in 2005. We ran the Edinburgh Silver Surfer’s group from 2003 to 2016, and have been running the Moose in the Hoose project in Edinburgh care homes since 2005. This involves bringing digital devices into care homes to empower the residents using the digital world, such as quizzes and reminiscence activities like listening to their favourite music on YouTube or seeing their childhood home on Google Earth. One care home resident even created a chart-topping album, the Lost Songs of St Kilda, with the help of an ACE IT volunteer! [Read more in our blog here.](#)

Today, as well as the Moose project in care homes, we provide free one-to-one coaching to anyone over 50 in Edinburgh who needs help with a digital device or getting online. This can take place at our offices in central Edinburgh or at various community locations across the city. Learners are paired up with a volunteer who will go at whatever pace they need to help solve their problems and learn new skills. We also run free online safety presentations throughout the year which cover common concerns such as online banking, password management, viruses and avoiding scams.

We rely heavily on volunteers to provide our essential services and are always looking for more, for both the Moose service in care homes and our one-to-one coaching. In 2023, ACE IT was awarded a Volunteer Friendly Award to recognise the effort we have made to make the charity a great place to volunteer. You don’t need to be an IT expert to volunteer, but confidence with everyday digital devices (laptops, smartphones, tablets) is necessary. For the Moose in the Hoose service, volunteers take on more of a socialising and befriending role rather than teaching or coaching. Ideally, volunteers will be able to provide two hours of their time a week. More information on volunteering, and how to apply, [can be found on our website here.](#)

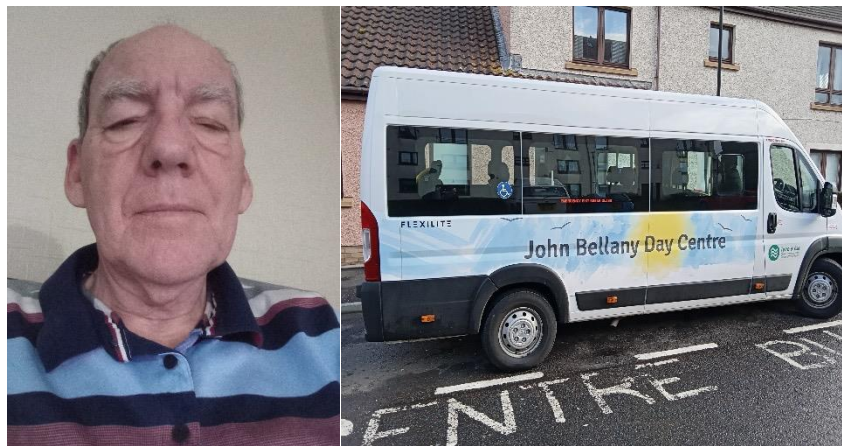
To keep up to date about ACE IT and what we do, [subscribe to our monthly newsletter](#) or follow us on social media (we are @aceitscotland on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram). If you need help with a digital device or getting online, feel free to send us an email on [info@aceit.org.uk](mailto:info@aceit.org.uk) or call 0131 667 2053

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## **Association Of East Lothian Day Centres**

**By David Ferrier - Chairperson**

-----The Association of East Lothian Day Centres (AELDC) is a Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation established in April 2012. It consists currently of nine Day Centres for Older People in Dunbar, East Linton, Gullane, Haddington, North Berwick, Ormiston, Port Seton, Prestonpans, and Tranent.



The organisation has a strong relationship with East Lothian Council, Health and Social Care Partnership and Integrated Joint Board. They have identified funding that will allow the creation of a new Day Centre within Musselburgh, supporting its surrounding communities. We continue to value all the support provided by the local residents and organisations in each locality through their financial contributions and practical support and by volunteering within the Day Centre, undertaking a range of helpful tasks.

Through COVID19 and beyond, Day Centres have provided outreach services to those who have chosen to attend the Day Centres or live at home without using this service. We are able to offer a range of supports through the use of our Day Centres staff, or specifically recruited staff. This allows carers to have respite where they can devote time to their own particular needs, family demands, maintain their hobbies, attend GP or hospital appointments. They can choose our sitter service or negotiate other vital opportunities that allows our older people to retain contact with the outer world. The support to carers is crucial and ensures that our older people can retain contact with their wider communities for as long as possible.

It has continued to be important that the H&SCP has financially supported this component of service separately from the annual Day Centres budget. For the first time, East Lothian Council decided that all older people's Day Centres budgets would have to go out to tender and so we were required, over the past few months, to prepare and submit our commissioning presentations via their procurement portal.



For many of the Day Centres staff and trustees this was a very new experience. Although it was considered to be a soft tender it was challenging for everyone. The process has now been completed and all Day Centres have successfully received a positive decision from the Procurement Service with a six year contract.

The Association is currently attempting to re-establish itself on a number of fronts. We are needing to recreate our Development Days when all Day Centres trustees and managers are able to get together and look at the big issues that present themselves, such as the National Care Service plans, and attempt to have a stronger voice in presenting our views.

We continue to support our staff, volunteers and trustees with our LearnPro training package and face to face training and have contracted human resources support. The H&SCP has supported us financially on an annual basis to ensure that these resources continue to be available.

Being a trustee within a charity carries a large responsibility as they take on the role of an employer. Operating a small business brings many complexities and challenges. We seek to engage more within the wider charitable sector and participate in meetings and conferences to ensure we keep in touch with current issues, but more so to be able to have cross table discussion about all the key local and governmental planning.

As can be seen we have much to do and people to see. We have a strong group of trustees across East Lothian and have a determination that our people will have the best services made available to them so that our older people and their carers and families have a life together that is both fulfilling and satisfying.

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## **Generations Working Together Excellence Awards 2024**

**Global Intergenerational Week returns for 2024!**



We are delighted to be returning for Global Intergenerational Week 2024. The campaign will run 24 - 30th April 2024.

**Our Daily Themes for 2024 are:**

Day 1 (24/04): *Let's Raise Intergenerational Awareness*

Day 2 (25/04): *Let's Build Intergenerational Partnerships*

Day 3 (26/04): *Let's Combat Loneliness and Social Isolation*

Day 4 (27/04): *Let's Celebrate Intergenerational Spaces and Communities*

Day 5 (28/04): *Let's Break Down Age Barriers*

Day 6 (29/04): *EU day – Solidarity between Generations*

Day 7 (30/04): *Let's Build Intergenerational Workplaces*

**Details of how to get involved...**

Join us on 14 February 2024 for the launch of Global Intergenerational Week 2024:

- A brief introduction to and history of GIW24
- Hear from some of our partners on their work and their plans for #GIW24
- A discussion on how YOU can get involved.

Register to join us here >> <https://generationsworkingtogether.org/events/launch-global-intergenerational-week-2024-14022024>

If you are interested in taking part in the 2024 campaign you can also **now register as a supporter.**

If you have any questions about the campaign, email our campaign lead and Policy Officer, **Ruairidh Smith.**

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**Hourglass (Safer Ageing)**

**By Chara Clarke - Partnership and Development Officer, Northern Ireland & Scotland**

Hourglass (Safer Ageing), is the only UK wide charity dedicated to calling time on the harm and abuse of older people. We deal with the very worst elements of physical, sexual, financial, psychological, domestic abuse and neglect and we stand alone in this field, offering life changing support to victims, their families and wider communities. Our mission is simple, no older person should be harmed or abused.

We offer a range of services to people who are concerned about abuse of an older person, or needs advice to age more safely. Our services include:

**24/7 Helpline 0808 808 8141:** Confidential helpline providing information and support to anyone concerned about harm, abuse or exploitation of an older person. The helpline is operated by trained staff and volunteers who can signpost to appropriate agencies and provide information, advice and support to help you make the right choices about keeping safe.

**Casework:** We work with those who have suffered abuse on a 1-1 basis, to ensure they can recover from the event and address the risk factors that make older adults potentially more susceptible to harm. These risk factors can include isolation, loneliness, difficulty accessing services, lack of home security, digital exclusion etc.

**Awareness Raising:** We seek to raise awareness about how to recognise and respond to abuse, and provide information seminars and training to various community and business groups.

**We are  
Hourglass**



the only UK-wide  
charity calling  
time on the harm,  
abuse and  
exploitation of  
older people.

**CONCERNED ABOUT AN OLDER PERSON?**

**FOR MORE INFORMATION**

You can view and download our brochures by scanning the QR code

**1 in 5 people don't know what to do if they suspect an older person is being abused.**

Hourglass works to end the abuse of older people and promote safer ageing for all.

- Financial abuse
- Psychological abuse
- Sexual abuse
- Physical abuse
- Domestic abuse
- Neglect

**Hourglass is here to help.**  
Call our freephone 24/7 Helpline  
**0808 808 8141**

Thumbnail brochures shown:  
• SEXUAL ABUSE  
• PSYCHOLOGICAL ABUSE  
• DOMESTIC ABUSE  
• PHYSICAL ABUSE  
• FINANCIAL ABUSE  
• NEGLECT

Hourglass delivers a freephone 24/7 Helpline which is unique in focusing exclusively on the abuse of older people and is delivered by a team of staff and volunteers. This year we will respond to almost 10,000 calls.

Research from WHO shows that 1 in 6 people over the age of 60 will experience abuse each year.

Research was commissioned by Hourglass in 2020 around the attitudes of people on abuse of older people:

1 in 3 people don't see

- Using Power of Attorney over an older person for personal financial gain as abuse
- Taking money from an older relative's bank account as abuse
- Verbal threats, mockery or intimidation towards an older person as abuse

1 in 4 people don't see

- Acts of domestic violence towards an older person as abuse
- Unwanted sexual contact with an older person as abuse
- Unwanted physical contact towards an older person as abuse.

1 in 5 people don't see

- Pushing, hitting or beating an older person as abuse

Hourglass want to partner with as many organisations as we can that have any sort of contact with older people to help us ensure they understand what abuse looks like and for them to know that is they are facing any type of abuse or neglect that they have support to get through this.

### **24/7 Helpline 0808 808 8141**

Our 24/7 helpline is entirely confidential and free from a landline or mobile. The number will not appear on your phone bill. Our lines are open 24/7 – including weekends and bank holidays.

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## **LGBT Age Action Group of LGBT Health and Wellbeing**

### **Fit for Purpose**

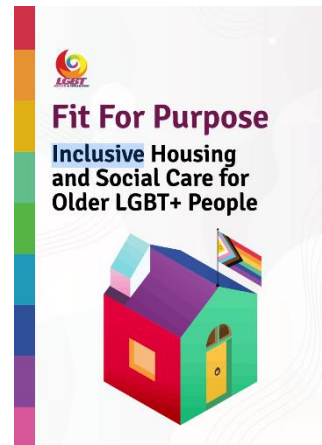
**By Tim Puntis**

Late in 2023 the LGBT Age Action Group of LGBT Health and Wellbeing published a ground-breaking report called "Fit For Purpose, Inclusive Housing and Social Care for Older LGBT+ People"

Older LGBT+ people have many of the same needs as non-LGBT+ older people– ageing happens to us all if we live long enough. But across their lives older LGBT+ people have had unique experiences and circumstances that bring additional challenges to ageing. These experiences and life circumstances lead to different financial, social, and health outcomes. These differences are most apparent in the health, social care, and housing needs of older LGBT+ people. This report, from the Age Action Group, has identified these needs in a Scottish context and has made key recommendations on how this support should be provided.

The Age Action Group was established by LGBT Health and Wellbeing to address inequalities older LGBT+ people in Scotland face. The Age Action Group sits within the wider LGBT Age Project and stems from the belief that older LGBT+ people are best placed to speak and act of their own behalf in order to push for and create future change.

Copies of the report can be found and downloaded on the LGBT Health and Wellbeing website here: <https://www.lgbthealth.org.uk/resource/fit-for-purpose/>



## Linking Lives UK

By Michelle Candlish, National Scottish Development Manager

### Two's Company Befriending – Partnerships with Churches

We provide an effective and professionally run framework, linking in with Social Work

and GP's, enabling churches to set up a befriending service in their community which is both straightforward and safe to run.

This includes:

- full training to set up a befriending scheme
- access to all written resources/templates required to set up and run a befriending scheme
- help on how to find referrals
- ongoing support
- regular opportunities to meet with others running similar services across the UK
- free admission to our annual conference, including volunteers
- templates for leaflets, newsletters
- localised webpage
- office 365
- promotional material
- Activity ideas



*Good Conversations – Monthly Zoom or Face to Face Training for Groups - open to anybody*

This 2-hour training is for volunteers engaging in activities such as lunch clubs, community cafes, food banks and drop-in groups.

The session empowers volunteers to be confident in their role and includes:

- Understanding guests needs and how to approach them
- How to open and maintain beneficial conversations
- Active listening skills
- Keeping their guests, themselves, and their organisation safe
- Understanding boundaries
- Managing expectations and risks

*Power of One – Monthly Interactive Webinar - open to anybody*

This **free resource** helps individuals support those around them who may be experiencing loneliness and/or social isolation. It is a one-hour inspiring webinar packed with ideas equipping people to make a positive difference in just one other person's life.



[linkinglives.uk](http://linkinglives.uk)

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## **Mearns & Coastal Healthy Living Network (MCHLN)**

**By John Duncanson - Funding and Development Officer**

Mearns & Coastal Healthy Living Network (MCHLN) supports the voice, wellbeing & health of the over 50s in Kincardine & Mearns – many of whom might be living alone, on lower incomes, in food poverty and/or experiencing mobility difficulties, be living with dementia, facing loneliness, isolation etc. - and all of whom have a valuable contribution to make to society.

Celebrating its 20<sup>th</sup> year in 2022, the charity serves an area of approximately **300<sup>2</sup> miles** that's home to over **45,000 people**. It's worth noting that, being rural, this catchment area is relatively poorly served by public transport - or affordable alternatives – further increasing the potential for isolation.

Since its establishment to address these issues, MCHLN has grown from a fledgling charity to one engaging some **200 older people a week**. It also coordinates a volunteer network of around **90 individuals** that recently gave over **3,000 hours** of their time for the year – the equivalent of **83 working weeks**.



Running **550 groups**, classes, and activities annually, MCHLN is focused on combating the negative effects of loneliness and isolation - as well as working against exclusions, such as digital. It focuses on the things that older people themselves say are important, and regularly hosts open forums to ensure its activities are in line with the wishes of those it serves. Its activities, services and groups promote social engagement and both support and assist/enable individuals with the practical issues of day-to-day life whilst promoting inclusion, health &

wellbeing, and reducing loneliness and isolation. The charity currently has over **500 registered clients** - and receives over **1,000 requests** for support a year.

A significant part of MCHLN's operation is transport - providing an **affordable** door-to-door service to facilitate attendance at healthcare and other appointments benefitting wellbeing. Last year, volunteers drove over **39,000 miles** providing this service - making the lives of so many residents that little bit easier. This was recognised by MCHLN being presented with two community transport awards by the Lord-Lieutenant of Aberdeenshire - one of which was for the organisation itself, the other being for volunteer, KF (87) – to mark his **20th year of volunteering**.



In 2023, the charity expects to have completed over **1,000** affordable, door-to-door transports for older people – helping ensure their health & wellbeing.

The charity is very well respected as an integral part of services in the locality - and works closely with partners including **AVA** – Aberdeenshire Voluntary Action, **KDP** – Kincardine Development Partnership, **CLD** – Community Learning & Development, **CMHT** – Community Mental Health Team, **AHSCP** – Aberdeenshire Health & Social Care Partnership, **Age Scotland** – National charity for older people, **Alzheimer Scotland** – Scotland's dementia charity, **Local Community Planning Group / Local Outcome Improvement Priority groups/Befriending organisations**

*"The team of dedicated staff and volunteers at Mearns & Coastal Healthy Living Network are a significant asset to our local older residents."*

*Sandra McGuigan – AVA Development and Children & Families Officer*

*"A great example of what can be done."*

*Sue Briggs – CLD Evaluation and Improvement Officer*

Mearns and Coastal Healthy Living Network, <https://mchln.org.uk>

## **Retired Police Officers Association Scotland (RPOAS)**

RPOAS have introduced a well-being programme for our members of the Retired Police Officers Association in Scotland (RPOAS). It has been in existence for around 3 years now including planning and implementation. We have worked with and supported over 70 families and it continues.



Matt Hamilton, President of the Association has been an active member of SOPA for over 4 years.

### **Transition and Wellbeing – care and support in retirement for the police family** by Ian Gregory, Signposter, Highland Area, RPOAS

"As we get older, no matter how well we take care of ourselves, and no matter how capable we are, there comes a time when we need some help, support, and advice, or perhaps we simply want someone to talk to, when things go wrong. During our working lives, we tend to have the benefit of peer support - friends and colleagues whom we can discuss things with, someone to refer issues to, and a feeling that we are part of a team. We don't tend to realise just how much this matters until we retire, when - overnight - our entire way of life changes. The whole structure of our life is suddenly different, and we are very much on our own. It can be a real shock to the system, and never more so than if you have been part of the emergency services, or the military - organisations where we learn to depend totally on one another, and where there is a strong sense of loyalty to our colleagues.

Retirement can be a blessing, but it can also be quite lonely, particularly if one suffers ill health, or is confronted with problems which we have never had to deal with before. Who do we turn to? Who can help? What can I do? As we all know, even if we have spent a lifetime helping others, it is very different when we, or our immediate family, are affected. Yes, there are plenty of excellent organisations out there who might offer help, but who do you turn to? And that is exactly why RPOAS, working with Police Scotland, and other interested partners, decided to address this issue.

We all like to speak to someone to whom we can relate - and police officers tend to want that person to be somebody with the same life experience, who has done the job, and who can understand, and for that reason it was decided to set up the Transition and Wellbeing Team, appealing to retired officers to act as "Signposters" - people prepared to undergo extensive training, covering everything from mental health to benefit entitlements, as well as bringing their own life skills to the table. The team covers the whole of Scotland, and are ready at any time to support retired officers with absolutely any issue on which they need help - Ill health; financial and debt problems; access to entitlements; pensions; housing; family matters and personal concerns, and indeed anything at all which is causing them worries. Any member of RPOAS can access the service, and can either refer themselves, or be referred by a family member or a friend. They can be assured of total confidentiality, and they can be certain that they are *always* the priority - all the T & W staff are volunteers, and all are dedicated to providing 100% support to members and their loved ones.



T & W has been a great success, and the feedback from members has been very positive indeed. In many cases, people have said that they really just needed someone to talk to, someone who would listen, and who could gently steer them

towards a solution, with the ability to take on the more complex issues when needed. Perhaps other organisations might want to consider setting up a similar service? There is no doubt that being able to speak to people with a shared background, and a commitment to help former colleagues as they travel through retirement, is hugely beneficial, and it benefits not only the members, but also the volunteers, the Association, and everyone involved.

Life is a journey. It does not end with retirement - a whole new road opens up ahead of us, so let's help each other to enjoy it"

RPOAS - Retired Police Officers Association Scotland

## **And Finally....**

### **80 Year Old Ladies Learning To Play Shinty** **By Margaret Fisher**

You are never too old to learn something new as they say, including taking up a new sport.

In the November issue, I mentioned that I had recently taken up playing croquet after having to give up badminton due to a back injury. So I was intrigued to discover, in an online BBC article, about a group of ladies in their 80s learning to play shinty. They call themselves the Snowdrop Seniors and are based in Lochgilphead. They had never played shinty before, some who originally came from England knew nothing about the sport.

When I lived in Inverness, I worked with a colleague who grew up with shinty, playing it at school and, for many years after, was in a team as an adult. While shinty is more popular than football in many parts of the Highlands, I had never seen it played, so he took me to see a couple of matches.

One match I recall, in the mid 1990s, took place at Oban for the final of the Camanachd Cup which is the premier competition in shinty. They lost to Kingussie. It felt like the whole world was there, certainly the shinty world appeared to be. There were people of all ages present, young and old, families with children of all ages running around with their own shinty sticks or caman. Even the toddlers had tiny shinty sticks and were playing with each other in a grassy spectator area imitating the players on the pitch vying to win the trophy. When a friend's daughter, who was married to a shinty coach and former player, gave birth to their baby boy, the team he coached had a baby sized shinty stick specially made as a gift for the baby. It was proudly put on display in their home.

Hockey is perhaps the nearest game to shinty. I was never any good at schoolgirl hockey which we had to play as part of gym and sports in secondary school then. I was always in the B team and hated having to go out to play in freezing cold rain or frosty winter weather. The much better A team had to go out on a Saturday morning to play in competitions.

Before that, I first learned to play hockey at school in Australia before coming back to Scotland, many moons ago, where the opposite of freezing was the problem. Namely playing in scorching hot sunshine on an open pitch with no shade while madly running around playing against another school. In those days, any girl feeling faint was sat at the side by a teacher, given water and told to lower her head between her knees so she wouldn't pass out, and a substitute went on to the scorched grass playing field. No health and safety in those days.

So after my youthful experience of what I thought was a similar game, years later when I got the chance to watch a shinty match, I couldn't have been more wrong. Admittedly I only spectated at a couple of games, but it was nothing like the hockey I had known and clearly so much rougher. Shinty players are allowed to raise the caman well above shoulder height, something not allowed with the relatively gentler game of hockey.

It was both interesting and exciting to watch shinty being played, but what really stood out for me was the family atmosphere where most people all seemed to know each other because several of the spectators, many of whom were older former players, had grown up together either supporting shinty or playing it in their local communities, as well as down the generations.

As with many other sports like football, historically shinty was a male dominated sport. It wasn't until the 1990s that the women's game became more formalised. Today women's shinty is mainstream and there is a Women's Camanachd Association. Based in Inverness, the Camanachd Association is the world governing body of this uniquely Scottish sport.

You can read about the Snowdrop Seniors ladies at this link below - it just goes to show you are never too old!

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c6p1rdzyg6mo>

If you are interested in finding out more about shinty in general just click this link:  
<https://shinty.com>

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