

BUILDING BRIDGES

A project newsletter from CDS

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In brief:

- Most disabled people in Britain are over retirement age.
- Older people have been left out of debates about disability.
- Older people have the same needs as younger disabled people for equal rights.
- Older people should be better represented in discussions about disability policy.

OLDER PEOPLE AND DISABILITY RIGHTS

The majority of Europe's 30 million disabled people are aged over 65, yet government and local authority policies to promote disability rights have been targeted primarily at younger adults. So, why are older people with impairments not seen to have disability rights in the way that younger adults often are? How do older people's groups think about disability issues and how



do services for older people measure up to the aspirations of the Disability Discrimination Act? How could older people be more involved in promoting disability

equality? These are just some of the questions addressed in the 'Building Bridges' research project. See inside for more details.

TALKING TO OLDER PEOPLE'S GROUPS

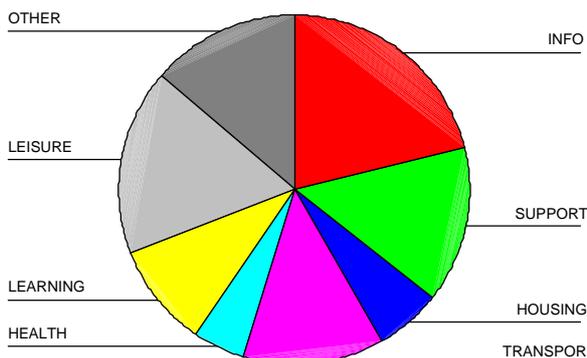
Project researcher, Dr Parvaneh Rabiee visited a total of 21 local organisations working with and for older people in Leeds, to interview key people about the way groups respond to disability in old age. She found many similarities between the needs of older and younger disabled people.



THINKING ABOUT DISABILITY AND OLD AGE

“I don’t like to label people. I wouldn’t label somebody as disabled unless it’s physical and you cannot avoid it, and the person has got the appearance of whatever...when you label people disabled, you put them in that category that makes other people see them different”

‘Just because people are getting older and physically less able does not mean they don’t want to enjoy their lives.... As far as we are concerned, that is a disability’



ABOUT THE PROJECT

The Building Bridges project was funded for six months by a research grant from the UK Economic and Social Research Council. The aim is to



look at the way local older people’s groups deal with disabled people and disability issues. The project researchers were Mark Priestley and Parvaneh Rabiee of the Centre for Disability Studies. The research in-

cluded a postal survey of more than 70 local groups working with older people and interviews with key staff in 21 organisations. Some of the key findings are reported in this newsletter. More details will be available soon.

ABOUT THE ORGANISATIONS

57 organisations responded to the questionnaire.

More than three quarters had been formed after 1980 with more than a third established between 1994 and 1996. Almost all of them employed staff (either as volunteers or as paid workers) but most had less than 15 employees. Around a third employed a majority of older people, and had at least one disabled employee.

Half had a majority of older people on their management committee. A similar proportion included at least one disabled person. The more older people there were on management committees the more disabled people there were.

More than nine out of ten organisations provided some kind of service to older people. The most common services were information provision, leisure opportunities, support services, transport, and learning opportunities. Housing and health services were less common. Many groups were involved in the provision of more specific services (such as equipment, rehabilitation, counselling, befriending, or decorating).

CAMPAIGNING TOGETHER?

Both older people and disabled people have been involved in campaigning for equality and human rights, often on similar issues.

We believe that building bridges between the concerns of older and disabled people could lead to improved services, and strengthen the claims of both older people and disabled people.

The purpose behind our project is to find out some of the main

issues that are common to groups of older people and disabled people, and some of the barriers to working together.



'I don't know how the disability movement would define it, I've never asked the question'

ABOUT THE ISSUES

Services often treat older people very differently to younger adults. Older people with impairments have been excluded from many of the developments in services for 'younger disabled people'. Health authorities and social services treat older people differently. For example, they may be placed on different hospital wards and denied

the sorts of treatments that younger people get. Older people have different arrangements for leaving hospital and are not entitled to the same sort of continuing care. Day care and residential services are often organised to segregate older and younger people into separate groups. Financial benefits

are different for older people, and they were initially barred from receiving the direct payments available to younger disabled people. Few of the campaigns about older people's rights make reference to disability rights issues. Disability policies continue to emphasise the needs of younger people rather than the majority of older people.

'If it wasn't for our group they would be less able to do things that they wanted to do, to enjoy life or to have a quality of life, if they were to have to fend for themselves in this type of society. That sounds really quite awful really but the society that we live in is not very enabling'

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We're on the Web! Catch up with more project news at...
www.leeds.ac.uk/disability-studies

WHICH ISSUES ARE IMPORTANT?

We asked organisations to identify the kinds of issues that had been most important to them, The table opposite shows which issues the groups thought were 'very important'. Issues like 'independent living', 'health' and 'active ageing', were the most frequently mentioned issues of importance.

Independent living	64.9%
Health	61.4%
Social/leisure activities	62.5%
Active ageing	54.4%
Crime and abuse	52.6%
Benefits	50.9%
Mobility and transport	49.1%
Care and carers	47.4%
Age discrimination	33.3%
Housing	31.6%
Race discrimination	26.8%
Disability discrimination	24.6%
Pensions	23.2%
Lifelong learning	17.5%
Employment	10.5%
Sex discrimination	7.1%

We would like to hear from you...

Why not have your say on the issues that matter to older and disabled people and what we can do about them.

'You have a young government it is not thinking in 2002, or 2001, it is thinking about what is going to happen in 2020. That is what is wrong with this government. It has got to start thinking in terms of the elderly, of the retired population...in this country they believe that old age is a disease - just like a disability is a disease...They have to be dragged kicking and screaming to do everything that they should for humanity' (a quote from one of our interviews)