

WISE MEN OF THE EAST NETWORK



Commissioner for Older People Legislation Team
Equality, Rights and Social Need Division,
Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister,
Block E, Castle Buildings,
Stormont Estate
Belfast
BT4 3SR

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Wise Men of the East Network submission to Commissioner for Older People in NI

The Network was established in 2001 and has been working in East Belfast and Castlereagh to overcome isolation of older men, identify illness earlier and prevent illness, and link older men to support networks. The Network has gained considerable credibility with local groups, public representatives, with Belfast City Council Community Services and other public bodies, especially the local South and East (and latterly Belfast) Health and Social Care Trust.

The core relationship within the community has helped sustain the services Wise Men of the East provide, and the continuing support from local men and men's groups. Nine local men's groups send voluntary and paid representatives to Network meetings and identify participants for events. These groups provide the core relationship of the Wise Men of the East Network, working across the community divide. The strength of the relationships established, coupled with a belief in the need for the Network, sustained these relationships across the interface during serious inter-community conflict from 2001 to 2004.

Our vision is: *Health*- to help keep older men in the East Belfast area out of institutional care for longer, thus reducing the burden on acute budgets and waiting lists. It is estimated that early intervention, this includes mental health including depression, can make significant impact on the ability of people to live at home longer and on their quality of life. *Peace Building*-to support personal development through education and foster relationships based on alternatives to violence. *Local History*-to explore the past and move forward to the future by recording information onto websites and producing exhibitions based on desk top and physical activities that use the local environment. *Social Networks*-to create bonds based on mutual interest that sustain relationships and contact through difficulties and times of conflict.

Network Values

To help shape the agenda and public policy debate around men, with reference to men and older men in East Belfast and Castlereagh, and believe in diversity, good community relations and a society that is free from all forms of discrimination.

The Network supports the Commissioner to achieve an equality of outcome so that we may eventually arrive at equality of condition. Raising awareness of the barriers that prevent men from participating in community and civic life will be crucial. The contribution of positive role models can help improve and lead to better understanding of the complex, positive and diverse contribution men make to society. For this, affirmative/positive action will be necessary. The role and function of the commissioner we believe can have a very positive effect for men and older men.

Our main concerns are in response to imitating the highly successful women policies and research emerging from member European countries.

- The lack of male centric research:-
 - men's and a wider view of home making.
 - family friendly policies that acknowledge the influence on family and community of men working in high risk employment.
 - family friendly policies that acknowledge the influence of male employment away from home.
 - equitable resources and services for male victims of abuse and perpetrators of abuse.
 - the influence of negative stereotyping of men on self esteem through media and large voluntary organisations.
 - influence of men's role as protector and outworking in times of communal conflict.
 - the influence of a lack of male friendly GP surgeries on men's use of health services.
 - the influence of written questionnaires to reflect patient consultation in GP surgeries.
 - older men and community care and home income.
- The limitations of the functions of the commissioner
 - go beyond NI to have a two way function scrutinising policy at Great Britain, all island of Ireland and EU.
 - take cases of discrimination to EU Court of Human Rights.
 - gender impact assessment for directives coming from EU.
 - expand equity and human rights to include a more general objective of services for men.
- Men's issues
 - National screening for prostate cancer based on research.
 - Improved access to children by fathers living away from home based on progress through family courts.

The Network is very supportive of the participative nature of the office and welcomes involvement to support advisory bodies through its representation for men and the older men's sector

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