



**ARMCHAIR ADVOCATES:
KEY ISSUES AFFECTING
OLDER PEOPLE
2012**

brap

This short briefing is intended to give you a quick overview of key issues affecting older people, particularly in relation to social and political participation as well as advocacy.

It is the result of conversations with over 50 people conducted as part of the Armchair Advocates programme. As part of this programme, we are also producing a directory of local engagement activities. All material is available from www.brap.org.uk.

Participants raised a number of issues with us. These are the top five.

We hope that if you're an older person reading this you won't feel so alone in your concerns. If you work with older people, hopefully this paper will give you some pointers on how to involve and engage your beneficiaries.

About Armchair Advocates

The Armchair Advocates programme is designed to give Black and minority ethnic people over 50 the skills and confidence to get more involved in the decisions that affect them. brap is providing training on using online communication, how to voice opinions, using social media, and a range of other skills. We're also working with older people to help them see how they can be involved in consultation and shaping services, how and where they want. Armchair Advocates is funded with the support of the Lloyds TSB Foundation for England and Wales.

About brap

brap is a think fair tank inspiring and leading change to make public, private, and voluntary sector organisations fit for the needs of a diverse society. brap offers progressive, tailored, and common sense solutions to equalities training, consultancy, and community engagement issues. For more information about brap and Armchair Advocates, visit www.brap.org.uk.

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Campaigning

Many older people are unaware of how easy it can be to campaign or lobby (at both a local or national level). This is partly to do with the visibility and accessibility of organisations like 38° and Age UK – although there have been massive improvements in this area recently. In addition, there is an issue with the sheer range – the dispersal – of opportunities. We're trying to combat this at a local level with a guide to current consultation opportunities in Birmingham (see *Armchair Advocates: current consultation opportunities 2012*, a companion piece to this guide). If you work with older people you might want to familiarise yourself with some of the larger campaign groups – like the ones mentioned above – so people are aware of national opportunities too.

2

Complaining

What stops us complaining or challenging public services when we don't get the service we deserve? A few things:

- many older people don't know what their rights and entitlements are
- a lot of older people don't feel valued by service providers. "I know I'm not being listened to: our [older people's] views aren't important," explained one participant
- many of the people we spoke to didn't know where to go to complain
- a lot of people can't be bothered. After all, complaining properly is hard work
- many people we spoke to were worried that raising issues there would have negative consequences when they next needed to access the service

3

Speaking up and speaking out

A number of factors restrict older people's propensity to speak up about the issues affecting them. These range from familial ("I find it difficult to tell my children that I don't want what they're suggesting: they just expect me to be happy") to societal ("you reach a certain age and people start putting words in your mouth. I'm not stupid: I can think for myself").

There are also technological factors at play here. Often, for example, there's an assumption that day centres always have computer and WiFi access. In our experience, this was not always the case – especially in poorer areas. Furthermore, a lot of people have only intermittent access to constantly changing technology. This mean recalling what to do each time is difficult.

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Bingo again (and again, and again...)

Connected with the point above, older people often relayed a feeling that because they'd reached a certain age, people assumed they were brain dead. This was often talked about in terms of paternalistic service provision (especially in day centres), with beneficiaries being passively spoon fed the same, unchallenging leisure activities (bingo an example that cropped up time and time again). Others talked about how older people get lumped together and seen as homogenous, despite the variety of interests and aspirations of people aged between 55 and 85.

5

Crime, grime, and?

We talked at length about the specific issues that participants were worried about. Some of the most prominent were:

- work-based and employment discrimination (for those still seeking working)
- rubbish and litter in the streets
- fear of crime and an attendant anger at cuts to police budget
- the state of public transport – irregular or inaccessible buses can stop people going out
- experience of healthcare provision: in particular, customer care
- being able to stay at home and live independently
- having enough to live on and manage financially

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brap offers tailored, progressive and common sense approaches to equality and human rights training, consultancy and community engagement issues.
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