What makes a good place to grow older for people who belong to minority communities?

Insights from the *Ageing Equally?* research projects

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Image credit: The Centre for Ageing Better

About the Ageing Equally? research programme

Depending on their backgrounds, culture and life circumstances, different people need different things to feel socially connected and supported in their daily lives. Ambition for Ageing funded the 'Ageing Equally?' research programme to find out more about this by asking: "What makes a good place to grow older for people who belong to minority communities?"

The programme resulted in thirteen reports by eleven different community based organisations. The Equalities Board team produced simpler summaries of each of these. In each summary we identified some findings from the report about a specific community that could relate to ageing well in place for marginalised communities more generally.

Key Insights

We concluded that older people in minority communities often have the same understanding of what it means to age well as other community members.

What people need to age well includes:

- Good health, work, family, financial stability, and social connections.
- Keeping connected to our culture and, for some, our faith.
- Living in safe, clean, welcoming environments with good public transport.
- Access to the services we need.

However, we also learned about the ways in which people who belong to a marginalised community may experience neighbourhoods differently, and have different relationships to both place and the communities that live there. Our findings about this are grouped below according to the themes identified in Ambition for Ageing research into 'What makes an age-friendly neighbourhood?'[1].

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[1]Thorley, J. (2018) *Building Age-Friendly Neighbourhoods in Greater Manchester: evidence from the Ambition for Ageing programme*, GMCVO
https://www.ambitionforageing.org.uk/sites/default/files/Building%20Age-friendly%20neighbourhoods%20in%20GM%20FINAL.pdf

The Ageing Equally? research projects

Shorter projects:

EHF: **Ethnic Health Forum** researched barriers to accessing services for older people in the Kuwaiti Bedoun community in Central Manchester

Eu1: **Europia** researched the assets and skills of Polish people aged 50+ in Greater Manchester.

StG: **St George's Centre** researched what makes an age-friendly neighbourhood for older people with long term mental illness who live in central Bolton.

VO: **Visible Outcomes** researched what makes an age-friendly neighbourhood for refugees over 50 years old who live in Salford.

WY1: W**ai Yin Society** researched how Chinese older people, especially disabled people and those who speak different community languages, can grow old and happy.

Longer projects:

CGL: **Change Grow Live** and Broom/Gekoski considered how older people in recovery from substance misuse experience ageing in Tameside

Eu2: **Europia** researched European expatriates aged 50+, from Romanian, Czech, Portuguese and Roma communities, with a focus on Salford, Tameside, Oldham and Bolton.

HI: **Halal Incorp** looked at Muslim men aged 50+ in Central Rochdale

He: **Henshaws** looked at the experiences and needs of visually impaired older people in two communities in North and South Manchester

MCO: **Manchester Congolese Organisation** looked at what factors affect how elders in the Francophone African community age well in Manchester

OC: **Oldham Coliseum Theatre** highlighted what makes a good place to age for Pakistani women aged 55+ in Glodwick, Oldham.

RRS: **Rethink Rebuild Society** looked at ageing well for older Syrian refugees in Salford and Oldham.

Y2: **Wai Yin Society** explored traditional Chinese beliefs of growing old amongst members of the older Chinese community in Manchester

> You can read and download all the 'Ageing Equally?' project reports and summaries from the Ambition for Ageing website here:
> **https://www.ambitionforageing.org.uk/ageing-equally**

Community Integration and belonging:
"We look out for each other."

- Individuals' sense of community can come from their neighbourhood, their identity, or their interests and these all need to be supported in communities. [He]

- Even when there are differences between people in a minority community, people may have a stronger sense of belonging to their community of identity and its organisations than to a local community. [MCO WY1]

- Having weak connections with neighbours may be enough for someone to describe their neighbourhood as friendly, but not enough to feel like they belong. [MCO]

- People with minority identities need support to build personal, community, and social capital so they can stay connected to others as they age. [CGL]

- Diversity within a local area may make a place feel more welcoming for new arrivals from other minority communities. [VO]

- However, diversity within BAME communities means that even when there are places of worship and places to go for settled BAME communities, these may not meet the needs of new arrivals. [VO]

- Tight-knit communities and traditionally close family structures create bonding capital, which is very important in helping with the challenges of migrating to a new country. However these structures can be obstacles to communities developing bridging capital and can increase the risk of isolation. [OC]

- Migrants need specific support in communities as their experiences of migration and loss are important in shaping their relationship with where they live now, as well as their world view. [HI RRS]

- Older people need to be able to maintain connections to places beyond their local areas. This may be particularly important for migrants and those who do not feel safe in their local area. [HI StG]

- People who speak minority community languages need to access their social networks or they will be at even greater risk of poor health outcomes and social isolation. [WY2]

- Service providers need to understand that everyone mostly uses the same local services. Then they will be more able to help people to integrate into their local communities. [Eu2]

- Service providers need to understand the wider community and take a "whole community approach". This makes it easier for marginalised communities to support elders as they age, and for the wider community to address stigma. [CGL]

Meeting and participation opportunities: "Something I can be a part of."

- Older people in small minority communities need targeted appropriate social support plus culturally appropriate activities and services, as well as mainstream services being fully accessible. [Eu1, WY1]

- People may feel more confident accessing community-specific and community-organised services. These need to be supported. [WY1]

- Service providers need to consider the culturally specific relationship between elders and younger people in a marginalised community when planning services. [EHF]

- Older women in minority communities carry memories through the skills and traditions of daily life that are important to the whole community. They need to be able to celebrate their stories, memories, and cultural traditions and skills. [OC]

- Co-production, where professionals and community members work together as equals, is important in creating a service that is trusted by people who are marginalised in their local area. [StG]

- Decisions made at city region and national levels have impacts on marginalised individuals and the organisations that support them. So they must be represented at all levels of strategic decision-making [He]

Accessibility, facilities and transport:
"Things that let me stay independent."

- A strong sense of community depends on a range of social and physical infrastructure and is important for people to age well in communities [He]

- Affordable leisure facilities and transport are important for people from marginalised communities who may be more likely to live on low incomes [RRS]

- People within marginalised communities may face additional cultural, language and financial barriers to accessing public transport. [OC]

- Members of dispersed minority communities may become more confident at using local transport through being motivated to travel outside their local area to access community assets and socialise. [MCO]

- Service providers need to understand the whole person and take a "whole person approach" to ageing well so that they can take intersectionality into account and address all aspects of wellbeing. [CGL]

Community resources and spaces: "A place where I can…"

- Access to culturally-appropriate community spaces, including places of worship, and community spaces for cultural activities, is essential to a sense of belonging. [VO, OC]

- Places of worship, such as mosques, can play an important role in a believer's life and wellbeing. However, it may not be possible for people to socialise informally in these places and they may need access to other places to meet deeper social needs. [HI]

- Older people from migrant communities want and need support to integrate into their local communities, but also need their own mother-tongue community centres. [EHF]

- People in some marginalised communities need accessible central meeting places. [He]

- It is important for people to be able to go to places where they can connect with nature. [OC]

Feeling of safety:
"A place we feel safe and secure"

- People in marginalised communities need to feel safe in order to develop a sense of belonging. [MCO, VO]

- Positive welcoming contact with local people can help create a sense of belonging for marginalised people even though they may fear or experience discrimination. [RRS]

- Many older people of working age, especially men, are focused on work and creating financial security. [Eu2]

- Co-production is important in creating a safe place. [StG]

Information and communication:
"How do I find out what's going on."

- Learning English is very important to older people from non-English speaking countries. For some people, a belief that it is harder to learn when you are older can be a barrier. [Eu2, RRS]

- Language barriers can have hidden effects that increase social isolation; for example, even when people feel they are fully aware of local services, language difficulties may mean that there are things they do not know. [EHF]

- Older people who speak minority community languages can experience hidden language barriers that increase their social isolation even within their community. [WY2]

- English language learning provision needs to be widely available and age-friendly both in content, and how it is provided, to make it accessible, useful, and respectful. [EHF, EU1, WY1]

- Older migrants may view digital exclusion as equally important as English language barriers. [HI]

- As well as learning English, newly arrived migrants need to learn digital skills and how health and social care systems work to be able to access services. [RRS]