

SOPA Planning Group Meeting 25th August 2020 via zoom.

Participating: Diana Findley (chair), Rohini Sharma Joshi, Bella Kerr, Eileen Wallace, Catriona Mason, Ian Donald, Lynne Short, David Paterson, Keith Guy, Betty Milton, Narayan Shrestha, Dianna Stirling, Christine Wilson, Nancy Bryson.

Apologies: Louise Brown Nicholls, Carl Bow, Alan Sidaway, John White, Sam Gibson, Grahame Reece, Maureen O'Neill, Gordon Fraser, Denis O'Keefe, Jo Cowan, Lesley Stevenson, Anne Monroe, Sandra Wilson.

In attendance: Theresa Casey (Coordinator)

1. Diana Findley extended a warm welcome to everyone on behalf of the Trustees and introductions were made around the group.
2. Diana asked if there were any declarations of interest to be made – none.
3. Minutes of last meeting. Due to the interruptions in meeting dates, these were the minutes from 1st November 2019 (circulated in advance). Proposed: Lynne Short, seconded Catriona Mason. Approved.
4. The chair's report of SOPA activities was circulated in advance. Diana also mentioned that SOPA had been circulating the Trustees' meeting minutes since these had gone online. No questions from the group.
5. Theresa gave a short introduction to the SOPA film project, *Older people – A Bonus not a Burden*, which was undertaken during lockdown. The films are all available to view and share on YouTube, Facebook and twitter. The film made in North Berwick was shown and then Diana invited feedback.

Key points:

- While the film project was a good initiative, we have to be conscious of digital exclusion, as many older people either don't have access to digital technology or prefer more traditional means. It was pointed out that there have been opportunities to increase access either with funds for technology or assistance with skills, although SOPA recognises that there will still be people who miss information and communication because they are not online.
- The TV license issue was raised. SOPA should remain in touch with the campaigns on this issue to share information about access to free licenses and also any political developments around enforcement of non-payment sanctions.
- GWT really welcomed the films for the positive approach they brought to tackling ageism and have incorporated them into their training.
- Stirling University and the Festival of Ageing had also picked them up.

Diana asked for views on whether SOPA should do more and what else could be done with them

- Very positive feedback from the group and enthusiasm for continuing to build impact.
- We could do more to reach target audiences with the ones we have and it was suggested the second stage should focus on what we do with them rather than the numbers of videos, and to make sure we are not leaving anyone out.
- Diana mentioned OPSAF and how they also link to work around challenging language which negatively stereotypes older people
- Lynn offered to put SOPA in touch with journalist who might be interested, specifically the BBC's 'The Nine'.
- The films would be very helpful for attracting members.
- There was discussion around further opportunities to bear in mind with potential collaborations and reach to different parts of the country or different locations (e.g. rural, island etc.) to build up a library of films.
- Diana suggested they be disseminated to the Older People's Champions.

Diana thanked everyone for their input.

Action: The small group who have led the project with the film-makers will be meeting again shortly, so she will discuss these ideas and suggestions with them.

Action: Theresa can send the films as files to anyone who would like to use them for an event, share on their website etc. Contact Theresa if so.

6. Discussion. Ahead of the meeting we had invited suggestions of topics for discussion and the following had been highlighted by David Paterson:

Mental health and older people: the need to undertake research into mental health issues and general wellbeing in the older population arising from social isolation, loneliness and bereavement, throughout the period of the lockdown and its longer-term effects.

As well as medium and long-term actions, SOPA feels it is very important to look to the immediate future as autumn and winter are approaching. The winter months may deepen experiences of fearfulness, isolation and loneliness.

David began by saying that spurred on by the House of Lords enquiry which SOPA has been invited to participate in, he had reviewed the comments and feedback he was hearing from his group. This led to the topic above being highlighted. In an ideal world a researcher would be appointed to gather and analyse this sort of information but collectively we can help to bring it together (such as with the connection with the Poverty Commission which SOPA is participating in.)

Members of the group then went on to share experiences of the groups they represent and their own personal testimony of the impact of COVID and COVID measure. Before the break we had a discussion and various points were made:

- The impact on mental health cannot be over-estimated – it really has had a huge impact and it is difficult to reassure people.

- Mental health and mobility are linked – lack of exercise and loss of confidence, reduced mobility and restricted access to everyday experiences are all linked. Physical health has suffered and is very apparent.
- It's great to see the return of social and community contact through initiatives such as garden visits, going out on a minibus, 1:1 visits at home rather than at a centre; phone services, movement programmes online, shopping services – people need more than the four walls around them,
- Fear of the virus is very real – if no vaccine is found then the lives of older people will remain very much curtailed and there will be an even longer period of restriction.
- Older people have been a significant part of the community that looks after society through volunteering. They have looked after everyone else and it's become obvious, we have to look after them too.
- Services relying on older volunteers (many of them) will struggle – the example of clothing banks addressing clothing poverty was given, charity shops unable to open. Who will pick up the volunteering now that people who did it while furloughed are going back to work?
- Another example is befriending services – the loss is on both the part of the befriender and the befriended.
- GWT project in Care Homes and also Day Care Centres has emphasised 'staying together apart'. Free training available (see <https://generationsworkingtogether.org>)
- Many services and social activities (e.g. local U3A) won't be able to reopen this year, it is hard to bring people together and people are scared to go back out.
- Carers (e.g. people caring for a partner or parent) are desperate for help and a break from caring – problems can multiply.
- Partners of people in care settings have been hit by lack of contact ('heartbroken')
- Depression and loneliness may have hit people who have never experienced it before.
- The lovely spring weather made a big difference at the early stage of lockdown – there is a huge concern about the effect of shorter, dark days and poor weather.

Maureen O'Neill sent her feedback in response to the topic by email:

"Last year I worked with VHS and Health in Mind to bring together a group of voluntary sector, health and local authority representatives to consider mental health in old age as we were convinced that services change and that there is less recognition of the issues. We commissioned some research and were about to go to the Minister in March when the pandemic took over everybody's attention. As SOPA has said it will be an increasingly important part of the recovery.

This is the link to the VHS page which has the papers we stimulated as well as the work VHS has done in the past relating to loneliness and isolation. I would be pleased to talk to you about the work if you wanted. Just let me know and we could organise a zoom call. <https://vhscotland.org.uk/health-topics/mental-health/>

Mental Health is a key strand in the FiOP strategic plan although our activities have stalled a little because of the pandemic."

Faith in Older People www.faithinolderpeople.org.uk

7. Break

8. **Presentation: Ange Jones, Age Friendly Communities.** SOPA is an associate member of the Age Friendly Communities Network and member of the steering group. Diana welcomed Ange who shared information about the Network and the WHO Decade of Healthy Ageing. (Slides attached with these minutes)

The UK Network of Age-friendly Communities supports local areas to take a strategic approach in becoming age-friendly so that people of all backgrounds can actively participate and be part of shaping the place they live in.

The Network currently is made up of over 40 cities, towns, districts and counties working together to share learning and promote age-friendly practices.

The UK Network is affiliated to the World Health Organisation's Global Network for Age-friendly Cities and Communities. To become officially recognised as age-friendly, the leadership of a city, town or county must make a written commitment to actively work towards becoming a great place to grow old in, for all of its residents. This is done with the support and engagement of older people and relevant stakeholders.

<https://www.ageing-better.org.uk/age-friendly-communities>

Action: TC to make an email introduction to Lynn Short and Ange

Discussion included how Ange / the Network could work together with SOPA and respective roles. Ange highlighted it would be great to secure more network members from Scotland.

One of the benefits of being part of a global network is that it can help to find examples of age-friendly communities and provision that work well or could be adapted. She is happy to reach out for examples and info.

There are criteria to membership (see links above).

Asked about the relationship between the UK Network of Age-friendly Communities and other networks such as Dementia Friendly, Ange explained those relationships tend to be at the local level.

Older People's Champions could be a good link into a local authority becoming a member of the network.

Diversity – Ange said diversity was a really important part of the network and locally though it varied from place to place as to how prominent the commitment to diversity was. The message developed for the Decade of healthy Aging have been a good opportunity to emphasis diversity and inclusion.

Protected characteristics – COVID has brought disproportionate impact on some communities over other. Intersectionality if very important.

Diana thanked Ange very much for stimulating an interesting discussion.

9. The year ahead for SOPA: Discussion

Diana outlined general plans for the year ahead and welcomed members' views and suggestions. General plans include a commitment to the Assembly but taking it out of parliament every second year, outreach, staffing, funding and partnerships (as per previous Trustees minutes)

There was agreement that there is a continuing risk to face-to-face events and that SOPA requires a Plan B of virtual events and activities.

Discussion: thematic groups. The proposal to run small groups on themes was welcomed.

Lynne suggested that if these were done pre-election 2021, they could run with the aim of influencing party manifestos. This would provide a sense of purpose and help small groups come to clear objectives – what would they like political parties to commit to?

The suggestion of an 'age-friendly communities' group was welcomed.

Diana asked which of the themes would be a priority. The previous discussion highlighted the overarching importance of health. Health and Wellbeing also covers food, transport, loneliness etc.

There was a proposal to distinguish Primary Care (ass to GPs) as a topic and a caution that the topic is very big – Care needs to be treated separately (issue of COVID impact is obvious).

It was also mentioned that 'older people' covers a span of 50 years or so, so there are differences in what we need to think about and discuss from a 50-year old to a centenarian.

10. Planning group: participants reflected on the meeting and felt it had worked very well. There wasn't time to discuss changing the name of the Planning Group Meetings to Members' Meetings to reflect the growing number of member organisations and associate members

Members thanked Diana for her chairing.

11. Next meeting: AGM 28th October 11am via zoom. and then Members' Meeting November (date tbc)

12. Thanks and close.