



Wales: A Good Place to Grow Old?



Age Alliance Wales Conference
13th June 2012
Swalec Stadium, Cardiff

Age Alliance Wales Conference 2012

Wales: A Good Place to Grow Old?

13th June 2012,
Swalec Stadium, Cardiff



Life expectancy is increasing – it is predicted that within the next 25 years, the number of people in Wales will increase by 33%. At this year's annual conference, Age Alliance Wales launched a new report, produced in partnership with the Bevan Foundation, which highlights the realities of life for older people in Wales today and calls for the Welsh Government, local authorities and local health boards to take urgent action to improve the quality of life for older people in Wales. Age Alliance Wales has identified six 'key indicators' of change with which it will monitor progress and hold public bodies to account:

- A reduction in the number of older people living in poverty
- A reduction in elder abuse
- A reduction in the percentage of older people (aged 75 and over) experiencing delayed transfers of care
- An increase in the proportion of older people participating in community learning
- An increase in the proportion of older people, especially people in the oldest age groups, who use the internet
- An increase in those receiving early intervention services

Angela Roberts, Acting Chair, Age Alliance Wales

Angela opened the conference by welcoming delegates and highlighting the launch of the report. She welcomed Sarah Rochira, Older People's Commissioner for Wales, and thanked her for her work as Age Alliance Chair in the previous year. Following Angela's introduction, Carol Wardman, Church in Wales, gave a short speech supporting the report and highlighting the valuable work of older volunteers.

Victoria Winckler, Director, Bevan Foundation

Victoria introduced the report, *Wales: A Good Place to Grow Old?*, and gave a brief overview of the contents. She noted that the question mark at the end of the title was the most important part – it highlights the differences in older people's experience across Wales.

Victoria noted that 2010 was a landmark year for many reasons, not least of which that the number of older people in Wales exceeded the number of children for the first time. In the next 25 years, this number will increase even further. While there are many people enjoying their older age, too many are living in poverty or ill-health. Although the Welsh Government has acknowledged this and has made steps to improve older people's lives, not enough is being done.



The report highlights three key areas where Age Alliance Wales are calling for action:

- Longer, healthier lives
- Independent and fulfilling lives
- Learning in older life

In summing up, Victoria acknowledged that there is pressure on the public purse, but noted that some of the measures called for, such as early intervention, actually save money. Victoria expressed the hope that in a few years, if another report is written with the same title, the answer to the question will be yes.

A copy of Victoria's speech can be found at: www.agealliancewales.org.uk

Roy Noble, Growing Older in Wales



Roy thanked Age Alliance Wales for inviting him to speak. He gave an amusing and informative talk about older people and growing older in Wales for different generations. He emphasised that older people should be treated with respect and dignity and should not have to worry about getting older because of financial issues. He also said that the Welsh Government should listen to older people and Age Alliance Wales when making policies. Finally, Roy encouraged members of Age Alliance Wales to continue to make things happen.

Personal perspectives

Personal perspectives on ageing were given by three people who had utilised the services of AAW member organisations. Sylvia Jones is an active member of the Age Well scheme at Amlwch, organised by Age Cymru Gwynedd a Môn. Sylvia read out one of her poems which made a big impact on the audience and which can be downloaded from the website. Evan Williams benefitted from a rapid medical response when he suffered a stroke. Evan was thrombolysed within one and a half hours of calling 999 which, according to medics, saved his life. Evan has since been working with the Stroke Association to publicise the benefits of early intervention. Vernon Jones had work carried out on his property by Care & Repair in Newport under the Safety at Home scheme. Mr Jones was also supported to successfully apply for a Disabled Facilities Grant and Vernon and his wife now feel safer and more confident in their home.



Gwenda Thomas AM, Deputy Minister for Children and Social Services



The Deputy Minister thanked members and said she was looking forward to reading the report. She said that while she believes that the Welsh Government has achieved much for older people, there is still more to be done.

The introduction of the Social Services Bill for Wales will provide a new legal framework for Social Services and local authorities will have to demonstrate how they are discharging their duties through prevention and early intervention. A public consultation on the Bill was launched this year.

The Deputy Minister acknowledged the work of the Older People's Commission and hoped that Sarah Rochira will continue to build on the work carried out by Ruth Marks. She then went on to make the following key points:

- The Welsh Government has also made care and carers a priority. The contribution made by carers (most of them older people) is recognised and has led to the Carers Strategy being refreshed. Five of the twelve recommendations in the Older People's Commission report on dignity in care apply to the Welsh Government. The improvements are now being taken forward.
- The white paper, Sustainable Social Services for Wales lays out the development of early intervention and prevention services to enable people to be independent in their own homes. The Deputy Minister assured delegates that the Welsh Government shares Age Alliance Wales' concern about levels of poverty. A written statement issued earlier this year provides the framework for the development of the Tackling Poverty Action Plan.
- The Welsh Government has also provided funding to help older people with their council tax – in 2011/12, 58,000 older people received help. As well as this, the benefit take-up schemes have been consolidated.
- The Financial Inclusion Strategy is also being moved forward and will widen access to affordable credit and assist people facing housing difficulties. Owing to the impact of welfare reform and the increasing demand for advice, a review of advice services in Wales will be launched.
- The Keep Well This Winter campaign will centre around three themes – keep well, keep warm and keep safe.
- The Welsh Government has published a Strategic Equality Plan to highlight the differences that need to be made to change people's lives. Public authorities will be required to set outcomes against which changes will be measured. A framework for action on independent living is being developed using engagement and consultation with disabled people.
- Funding for the Rapid Response Adaption Programme delivered by Care & Repair Cymru is being maintained – it is estimated that for every pound spent, £7.50 is saved from the Health and Social Care Budget.
- The Deputy Minister confirmed that the Welsh Government is committed to maintaining the free bus pass for older and disabled people.
- Finally, the Deputy Minister emphasised the need to work together in order to face the challenges ahead and achieve a fair and inclusive society.

A full copy of the Deputy Minister's speech is available at; www.agealliancewales.org.uk

Sarah Rochira, Older People's Commissioner for Wales

Sarah Rochira told the audience that we should be angry about the way older people are treated in Wales; older people are not problem that needs to be fixed, but actually help to keep the country afloat by caring for relatives and friends and by volunteering. She warned against complacency and stated that good practice for some should be standard practice for all.

There are enough strategies linked to ageing, we now need to work together to make a difference but need to be wary of placing too much emphasis on health and social care at the expense of prioritising the importance of friendship and love in maintaining and boosting wellbeing. Sarah quoted a recent conversation with an older person who had told her that all she needed to be happy was 'someone to love, something to do and something to look forward to.'



Workshops

During the workshop session, delegates broke into groups to discuss what Age Alliance Wales, the Older People's Commission for Wales and public sector organisations can do to make improvements to meet the challenges laid out in the *Wales: A Good Place to Grow Old?* report. The discussions produced a range of actions that have been collated and will be fed back to delegates and the Commissioner. The actions for Age Alliance Wales will be presented at the next CEO summit in September and will help to shape the Alliance's workplan for the next year.

Angela Roberts, Acting Chair of Age Alliance Wales summarised the issues raised during the conference and thanked delegates for attending.

