

# Community Development with Older People in Stockwood

## Evaluation of St Monica Trust's Bristol Ageing Better project

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Bristol Ageing Better (BAB) funded a series of 10 projects focused on Community Development for Older People (CDOP). **This document contains the executive summary for the evaluation of the CDOP project in Stockwood, delivered by St Monica Trust.**

This evaluation was conducted by UWE Bristol and a team of Community Researchers. The full evaluation report will be available in Spring 2021 on the BAB website.

### Background to the project

St Monica Trust were commissioned to deliver the CDOP project in the suburb of Stockwood. Like the other CDOP projects, the work in Stockwood **aimed to reduce social isolation and loneliness in the older population**, as well as to ensure that older people **felt better able to influence decisions in their community**. St Monica Trust engaged a Stockwood community development worker to **build on the strengths that already existed** in the community and to work with residents to create **citizen-led projects** that would last long after the funding for the project ended.

Stockwood contains many families who have lived in the area for many years, but with 40% of the local population aged over 55 (compared with 29% for the whole of Bristol) it has **one of the largest ageing populations in the city**. Many older residents have lived in their homes for a long time with some still living in the house they moved into as young people.

This evaluation **explores whether the project has made a difference to older people living locally by achieving the aims of the BAB programme**. The involvement of older people as community researchers has been an essential element of the evaluation of the BAB programme, with support from the research team at the University of the West of England (UWE), and as such the UWE-led evaluation for the Stockwood project was led by a BAB volunteer Community Researcher (CR).

### Executive Summary

As Stockwood already contained numerous activities for older people, the CDOP worker **did not need to organise lots of new groups and events**, the priority instead being to build support from the community and to offer encouragement, help, guidance and advice to **ensure the existing activities remained sustainable**. The CDOP worker also **identified gaps in the activities on offer**, and provided new activities where necessary, one of the most notable examples being a bereavement group, which started as a very small meeting that has now grown and is replicated throughout Bristol.

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Training has also been a helpful part of CDOP work. **The asset-based approach proved beneficial** and Stockwood residents were **encouraged to identify the skills and abilities they have that could benefit the community**. An important part of the work in Stockwood was to support and guide residents who formed a group of local people called the Greater Stockwood Alliance. To make this group sustainable so that they could achieve what they wanted, have their voices heard in decision making and represent the community views, took a great deal of effort and time. However, when the Covid-19 crisis occurred this group was able to very quickly recruit over 100 volunteers to aid people in the community practically and emotionally.

This report is an **account of a community on the cusp of change**. In ten years time Stockwood will be very different from the place it is today as the older generation passes away, and there is a danger that some of Stockwood's rich history may be lost or obscured in the process. Stockwood is changing gradually and the slightly isolated community on a hill going nowhere will have to adapt, change and be flexible. Whilst this report is about a suburb on the outskirts of Bristol, **what is happening in Stockwood is echoed throughout the UK where communities are facing change**, residents are getting older, and are worried the 'old ways' - their history - and the place they know as home is breaking up. In those circumstances, isolation, loneliness and depression may increase and perhaps different and **innovative ways to deal with these problems need to be sought and tested**.

The CDOP project in Stockwood has demonstrated the **importance of getting to know an area and its culture before community work can begin** in earnest. This can be accomplished even before the appointment of a Community Development Worker by commissioning older people as Community Researchers who know the area and requesting them to produce a mini asset map or survey. This can provide an accurate picture of the activities taking place, the people, their culture, their history, and who else is working in the locality. It can also help the Community Development Worker and the service provider to gain insight into the character of the area from the perspective of 'an insider'.

It is also essential to **define the CDOP worker's geographic boundaries before an appointment is made**. For example, will it include the whole of the political ward or target specific parts of it? **Rather than spreading too thinly over the whole of the ward, it might be more productive to concentrate on a specific district or locality**, thus enabling more in-depth work. It needs to be borne in mind that within a political ward districts may be very different and have their particular individual problems, traditions and history, as is clearly the case in Stockwood.

The findings of this report show that **boundaries and the community people identify with can affect the activities people attend**. For example, people who consider themselves to be living in Knowle might naturally look to Knowle first, whilst those who identify as living in Brislington might look to see what Brislington has to offer rather than the activities taking place in a nearby community they do not identify with. However, the findings of this report also indicate that **people will travel to another area if they have a particular interest in an activity and they are sufficiently motivated**. Thus, **integrated publicity over a wide area** advertising activities could attract those that have transport to take advantage of what is offered in other communities.

It is useful to **consider how community development work overlaps with other agencies in the area, and how they might complement each other**, and how information can be shared. In Stockwood, it is an asset to the community to have the Bristol City Council Community Development Practitioner for Stockwood and the CDOP worker working in the area. **Information is shared** and activities and projects benefit from the presence of these development workers. Stockwood also has a **regular networking meeting** where various agencies with an interest in Stockwood can come along to share ideas and information – something that has also greatly benefited community development work in the area.

**Activities can only take place where there is a suitable venue** and these can be at some distance from people who would like to take advantage of what is on offer and where activities are needed. **Stockwood ward does not have a central hub or community centre** from which to operate. Therefore, it may seem **all activities are concentrated in one area whilst other areas are neglected and thus create resentment**.

It has been an asset to the community of Stockwood to have the **CDOP worker operating from a base at the Southern Links Children's Centre**. Using the Children's Centre for training, social events and the community picnic **brings together parts of the community that would not necessarily have much contact with each other**. To be able to **meet and chat in an office privately** as well as more generally in a public local coffee shop or library is an advantage and something to be recommended.

**Public transport is an ongoing huge problem** and the reliability of buses is of great concern. For people living in the Stockwood area and many areas of Bristol, it is difficult or sometimes impossible for some people to walk to a bus stop. Even after reaching the bus stop, it could mean a long wait for a bus with no shelter to protect from cold and rain. Once on a bus, for people using public transport who are visually impaired it is useful if the audio system that announces the next bus stop is working. Just alighting from a bus for some older people is not safe because kerbs are too low and need to be raised. Therefore, **many issues around public transport need to be considered, not just the frequency of buses** to make public transport safe, comfortable and more user friendly for older people.

**Steering groups take a lot of commitment** on the part of the development workers and leaders. It also **takes time, not just to get a group off the ground, but also for members to become confident in making important decisions** affecting the community. Finding volunteer community members who are prepared to dedicate their time to the group and weather the storms that may occur over differences of opinion is perhaps another key to sustainability. This may entail training and the support of the whole community.

**Further BAB learning resources including the full CDOP Stockwood evaluation report (available Spring 2021) can be found at:**

<http://bristolageingbetter.org.uk/learning-and-evaluation-hub/>

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