



**LET YOUR
VOICE BE
HEARD!**

Hearing the voice of older people in North Somerset



Ago! Ame!



Race Equality North Somerset (RENS) is an award-winning, volunteer-run, community-focused charity advocating racial and cultural justice. We work with strategic partners, agencies and organisations to promote and support the rights, interests, welfare and wellbeing of racially minoritised ethnic communities in North Somerset.

Let Your Voice Be Heard was produced for an Ageing Well project, funded by Voluntary Action North Somerset.

The paper was authored by Alison Bancroft of Redport on behalf of RENS.

For further information contact either the publisher, Race Equality North Somerset (RENS) via office@rens.org.uk or the author, Alison Bancroft via alison@redportuk.com.

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Context (provided by Voluntary Action North Somerset, VANS)

The over 65 years population of North Somerset as of 2020 is estimated to be 52,003 people. There are 44,800 people between the ages of 50-64. The over 65s population has grown year on year and based on sub-national population projections is predicted to increase to over 60,747 people by 2030 and over 67,900 by 2040. The growth in this population group has increased in recent years and this is reflective of the fact that nationally there has been a fundamental change in the age structure of the population. The general fertility rate is decreasing (less children are being born) and people are living for longer. As of 2020 the current age profile in North Somerset is inverted. There are more residents aged over 65 years than aged under 19 years. Sub-national population projections suggest this inversion will continue to increase with fewer young people and more older people year on year. Considering the split by age bands within the over 65s population, North Somerset has a higher percentage of over 65s, over 75s, over 85s and over 90s compared to regional and national averages.

This being the case, it is vital that the needs, views, hopes and aspirations of older people are well understood by those developing and delivering services. (The definition of older people for this work is 50+).

The following themes were identified by VANS:

- What does a good older age look like?
- Ageing is often portrayed in a negative way – how can we change this narrative?
- How can we improve relationships between the generations in North Somerset?
- Older people have a lifetime of skills and experiences - how can older people be supported to share their knowledge and experience with their community e.g. as mentors or volunteers?
- How can we ensure the voice of older people is better heard by those responsible for planning and delivering services used by older people?

The knowledge and information gathered will feed into funding applications to benefit the VCSE sector in North Somerset as well as inform planning, policy, and service delivery in the Integrated Care Partnerships of Weston, Worle and Villages, and Woodspring.

Race Equality North Somerset (RENS)

RENS was particularly interested in contributing to this work in relation to the 'Seldom heard and minority groups of older people' strand, as the views of racially minoritised older people are frequently unheard. With an increasingly diverse population in North Somerset, it was considered particularly important that as many different voices as possible could be heard.

Approach

Many racially minoritised older people have little desire to engage with a system that has not served them well or listened to them in the past and we believed it was particularly important to:

- Be clear about why people are being asked for information.
- Be clear about the benefits of participation.

Additionally, our experience, through the work at The Other Place, is that generalised promotion does little to reach frequently marginalised and unheard communities and that communicating through trusted networks is an essential precursor to engagement.

- As part of our publicity materials, we explained the context of the research, shared the key themes listed in the Expression of Interest information document and explained that the information will be used to help target funding applications and inform policy and service delivery.
- We provided food at each session to make it into a social occasion.
- We offered a voucher to all participants, to thank them for their time.

Three Focus Groups

While individual experiences obviously vary widely, there are particular experiences, cultural norms, and patterns of exclusion that impact different communities in different ways. There are also conversations that are easier to have in a group where everyone has similar reference points and there is no opportunity for denial or questioning of particular perspectives from an outsider position.

Additionally, we believed that conversations would be richer if the majority of group members already knew and trusted one another. In discussion with our network, we therefore identified three focus groups:

- An African and Caribbean focus group, supported by Ago Ame
- A Refugee and migrant group, supported by Lowering the Bar
- A RENS group, for anyone from a racially minoritised community

A lead organiser for each group (who was directly involved with each group) then took responsibility for recruiting participants, arranging focus group details and facilitating discussions in the session.



LET YOUR VOICE BE HEARD!

Race Equality North Somerset (RENS) is working with Voluntary Action North Somerset (VANS) to explore the views, hopes and aspirations of people aged 50 and older in North Somerset. This research is particularly targeted at people who are frequently racially minoritised and who are often less well served by the systems in place.

A PANEL DISCUSSION EVENT

1) Introduction
An introduction to the issues and the reasons why these questions are being asked.

2) Refreshment break
Refreshments will be provided, including a cooked vegetarian or vegan meal.

3) Panel discussion
An open conversation around identified points for discussion and any other raised.

Participants will receive a £20 voucher as a thank you for their time and input.

POINTS FOR DISCUSSION

-  What does a good older age look like for you?
-  How can ageing be portrayed in a positive rather than a negative way?
-  How can we improve relations between the generations?
-  How can older people share their knowledge and experience?
-  How can we ensure the voices of older people continue to be heard?
-  Hopes and fears for the future, and what would help?


INFORMATION GATHERING AND FEEDBACK

Notes will be taken by an observer during the panel discussion. These will be circulated to participants for comment. Participants will also be asked to complete a feedback form, either individually or in discussion with one of the facilitators.

This information will be collated with feedback from the two other focus groups being run by RENS and used to prepare a report for VANS. All participants will receive a copy of the report. All comments will be welcome.

VANS will use the report to support funding applications that benefit the Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) Sector in North Somerset as well as helping to inform planning, policy and service delivery in the health care sector.



LET YOUR VOICE BE HEARD!

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Information sheets and focus group invites were prepared and three versions of each were produced for circulation, one for each group with the appropriate logos.

This promoted each group, recognised their contribution and highlighted session ownership.



LET YOUR VOICE BE HEARD!

You are invited to participate in a focus group to explore the views, hopes and aspirations of people aged 50 and older.

TUESDAY 05 SEPTEMBER

10.30am to 12.30pm

You will receive a £20 voucher as a thank you and your participation will also raise £20 for RENS. Food will be served at the end of the session.

Places are limited so please RSVP, and do let us know ASAP if you then can't attend so someone else can take your place.






LET YOUR VOICE BE HEARD!

You are invited to participate in a focus group to explore the views, hopes and aspirations of people aged 50 and older.

THURSDAY 07 SEPTEMBER

1.00pm to 3.00pm

You will receive a £20 voucher as a thank you and your participation will also raise £20 for Lowering the Bar. Food will be served at the end of the session.

Places are limited so please RSVP, and do let us know ASAP if you then can't attend so someone else can take your place.




LET YOUR VOICE BE HEARD!

You are invited to participate in a focus group to explore the views, hopes and aspirations of people aged 50 and older.

THURSDAY 07 SEPTEMBER

6.00pm to 8.00pm

You will receive a £20 voucher as a thank you and your participation will also raise £20 for Ago! Ame!. Food will be served at the end of the session.

Places are limited so please RSVP, and do let us know ASAP if you then can't attend so someone else can take your place.





LET YOUR VOICE BE HEARD! FEEDBACK FORM

Please tell us a little about yourself.

Nationality:

Heritage:

Please only answer questions you are comfortable with.

Length of time in the UK:

Mother tongue:

Other languages spoken:

Gender:

Sexuality:

Age: 50-64, over 65, over 75, over 85, over 90. Please circle.

Do you have any health conditions that affect you daily?

Any other information you think might be relevant?

Please turn over to the back of the sheet and tell us about today's discussion.
What were the most important points for you?
Is there anything else you'd like to tell us?



Session format (see Appendix for all Forms and Power Point):

Each focus group followed the same basic format. Participants were asked to leave contact details if they wanted a copy of the report and the session began with a brief Power Point presentation that provided context and general information, including:

- Why we were consulting
- Who is involved
- How we are consulting
- What will happen to the information gathered
- A safe space for open and honest conversation
- Points for discussion
- Feedback forms

The points for discussion were left on screen and the facilitator for each group then led a discussion around the key points. In addition to the points provided by VANS, a final question was added about Hopes and Fears for the future and what would help.

All discussions were free-flowing, with minimal interventions to move discussions on to a new area and to ensure everyone had a chance to speak. Notes were taken during the discussion and at the end all participants were asked to complete a feedback form with demographic information. They were also asked to say more about the discussions and highlight points that were considered of particular importance. As with information and invites, all forms were branded with the logo of the appropriate groups.

Reporting

Given the small sample size, the openness of the questions and the opportunity to miss questions, the demographic data received has been reported in note form rather than quantitatively analysed. Some small omissions have been made where information provided would directly identify a particular participant.

The notes from each group have been divided into broad themes using a method derived from discourse analysis. Where conversations circled back to the same points at different times these have been combined (unless they specifically supported additional points being made). The phrases used and the repetitions have been included, largely as spoken. Joining text has been kept to a minimum to try to give the best possible feel of the conversations that took place.

The comments made in the open text section of the feedback form have been added as written (with occasional minor spelling and grammar corrections for clarity).

The RENS Focus Group was held on Tuesday 05 September from 10.30am to 12.30pm, followed by lunch. There were seven participants.

Demographics

In terms of demographic information provided:

- The majority of the group listed British as their nationality.
- Four out of the seven participants listed English as their mother tongue. Other mother tongue languages were Turkish, Arabic/French, and Japanese.
- Other languages spoken included Sinhalese and Spanish.
- Time in the UK varied from 20 yrs to 70 yrs, with two out of the seven born in the UK.
- Five group members identified as female, two as male.
- All group members identified as heterosexual.
- Five participants were in the over 65 age bracket, one was in the 50-64 age bracket and one was over 90.
- Four participants noted health conditions that affected their daily lives. These included: physical aches and pains; old age mobility issues; lower back pain, sciatica, knee pain and foot cramps; and diabetes.

Discussion themes

Older age positives

These included having more time at retirement, doing things that are more rewarding that you want to do, reduced pressure, leisure, and freedom to enjoy life. One participant spoke about not wanting to go back to 30's or 40's and enjoying the 60's so much, with no children, no cleaning or cooking, being financially independent and able to travel for work and with friends. It was noted that when children don't need looking after any more it gives freedom to enjoy the 60's and 70's. It was felt that when you are older, there are less things to be stressed about, less negativity, more positivity and that a good older age is being surrounded by good people, love, and friends.

Older age challenges

The need to think more about what you are doing was raised, as things don't come so easily. Things like changing light bulbs and gardening become issues. A concern was also raised about whether there will be enough support when it's less possible to be independent.

Positive attitude, self care and support networks

It was felt that we all need to be positive, that being positive helps a lot, that there is a need to be healthy, but that being healthy needs a good environment. Some people were seen to be miserable, complaining all the time, and it was felt that while we cannot change what's outside, we can change what's inside to create a positive environment.

It was noted that Japanese teachings emphasise the spiritual. If we become sick and die, that's the life our soul chose, so there's no need to be afraid of sickness and death. It was suggested that we need more education about being spiritual beings, that there is too much fear, that there are lots of sick people who are positive and attract what they need because they are positive, and that being spiritually strong makes you healthy psychologically as well, with mind over matter.

It was felt that if you look miserable, you will seem like a horrible person, that you should be happy yourself, that inner peace is more likely for happy people and that it keeps you young in mind and spirit.

The importance of self-love and self respect was emphasised, that we need to look after ourselves, and that our souls will be happy if we are doing what we love to do. It was felt that some people give up and don't come out of the door. It was acknowledged that some people's health restricts them, but it was felt that it's not just about the physical but about the spiritual, and wellbeing and self-love.

It was felt that we need to build relationships with neighbours and friends, and that seeing people really helps. It was also noted that if you have no money, places to go are really important.

Asking for help when needed was also seen as very important, not staying quiet but coming out and saying here I am, please help me.

The role of the Council

Views on the role of the Council differed widely. There was frustration at the lack of response when the Council is asked for help and a feeling that they are not supporting older people, that they don't follow through, and that there is a need to do everything for oneself.

The fact that the Council can arrange help for little things like putting bins out, was raised and it was felt that people didn't know this, that there is a need to communicate better, but also that bin men are short staffed and this may be an issue.

Others felt that people in the UK rely on the Council too much, and that there is much more support than in other countries. The idea that it is the Council who do things and who take care of people was noted as only being heard after arrival in the UK. It was felt that it is 'down to us', that we can't rely on the Government and Council, that it was important not to become reliant on the Council. It was also felt that the Council is treated terribly by Central Government.

Health care

Health care was also a point of contention. Views expressed including the feeling that we are too reliant, that we are so lucky here compared to other countries and that we expect too much. It was suggested that lots of medication makes you less healthy, and that we need to help ourselves through diet and other things. It was noted that we pay our taxes and that things have to change, but also that we can't expect NHS to be completely free.

It was felt that if there is no family support when dealing with Doctors and Hospitals that you are taken for nothing, and there is no-one to witness what goes on behind the scenes. The need for communication and honesty was also strongly emphasised, telling patients and carers the truth. It was felt that electronic records help to hide things, like DNRs, and that things are being disguised so people don't know what is going on.

Employment and purpose

It was felt that finding employment when older is difficult, and there was speculation about whether particular names are a barrier. Another participant valued the opportunity to work with good people in older years, with no bullying or credit taken by others, following a working life that was hell with management. It was suggested that American management styles have been imported into the UK, and too many now think bullying is the way. Others noted that they shared the experience and that bullying is also seen everywhere, including in Government, and that the old ways needed to change.

It was noted that the people who run The Other Place are mostly over 50, and that this was a good study of how people can make a positive difference - the first time of not being scared, of people not being jealous. Experience is acknowledged with good colleagues, and it was felt that there was no difference between paid employment and voluntary work, that it is the quality of management that is key.

There was general agreement that it was important to still have a purpose in life, even if you are free to do what you want, and that if there is no purpose, then negativity sets in. It was felt that purpose is always inside your soul, something you carry with you, that everyone has their own perspective, and that we all need something to work on. The general view was to 'keep working, keep motivated, give advice, be positive and be happy'.

Relations between the generations

It was felt that relations between the generations are generally good and that it might not be a good question as there are much stronger relationships in other cultures, with love, peace and opportunity. Even when not physically close because of geographic separation, it's possible to still feel the love. It was noted that it is now possible to be a carer and give on ones own terms, to now be respected as an older person, someone people ask for advice. When surrounded by love and care, people are drawn to experience. Cross generational support was seen as important,

as parents are often busy but grandparents can help. A comment was also made about being impressed by school initiatives where children befriend older people.

Societal differences

It was felt that societal differences show in older age, that women who lose their partner can feel freedom, while men find it more difficult to lose their partner and older men become more miserable. It was suggested that men don't think about doing things together, while women collaborate and come together.

Fears

One participant spoke of the fear that the 'baddies', like Trump, will win and that this is something that needs to be solved by us. With factionalism and disagreements and growing community tensions, we need to be a voice for inclusion. Diversity is an issue, we need to walk with Refugees and lead on this fight against 'reactionary racist stuff'.

Another spoke about concerns about being sick and not having help, not only financially but emotionally. With no family in this country, there could be a fear of being alone, but this was countered with still feeling positive because surrounded by loving people. There was also a strong feeling in the group of 'no fears', that the Government doesn't do anything but we need good community, to help each other, and to stay in good relations with family and friends.

Feedback comments

What were the most important points in today's discussion for you? Is there anything else you'd like to tell us.

Five out of the seven participants left comments.

1. Community, health, wellbeing, communication.
2. Shared views and similarities.
3. Getting older in a positive community, surrounded by lovely people, and good national health insurance.
4. Having a sense of purpose is key to a good old age. Other important factors include enjoying rich relationships with family and friends. The implication is that life is what we make it for ourselves and that we should try to remain positive throughout.
5. It is all about how to be positive in life. But in order to do it, we need education - how to be positive, what is positive. Then so many problems can be solved.

Lowering the Bar Focus Group

The Lowering the Bar Focus Group was held on Thursday 05 September from 1pm to 3pm, and was preceded by lunch. There were ten participants.

Demographics

In terms of demographic information provided:

- Seven participants listed Ukrainian as their nationality, two listed Syrian and one listed Belgian.
- Five participants identified their heritage as Slavic, two as Syrian, one as Ukrainian, one as Western Occidental, and one as Greek Jewish Ukrainian.
- Five out of the ten participants listed Ukrainian as their mother tongue. Other mother tongue languages were Russian (2), Arabic (2), and French (1).
- Other languages spoken included Spanish, Flemish and Polish.
- Time in the UK varied from 12 yrs to 5 months. None of the participants were born in the UK.
- Eight group members identified as female, two as male.
- The majority of participants (6) did not complete the sexuality question, three identified as heterosexual.
- Six participants were in the 50-64 age bracket, two were over 65 and one was over 75.
- Four participants noted health conditions that affected their daily lives. These included: dental problems; problems with back and hearing; an injured leg from a bomb and rheumatoid arthritis.

Discussion themes

Older age positives

It was felt that every age is good as there are pluses and minuses for every age and that fifty isn't old, not feeling old – very young, 'maybe slowing down but older, wiser, sexier'. Children are grown up and no longer dependent and there are grandchildren. There's time for ourselves, we can make new friends and feel happy about achievements in life. With more knowledge and more relaxation, and a big family, can enjoy life. With more time, comes more ideas from different experiences.

It was noted that the pension in the UK makes it possible to enjoy life, that here old age is good and better than in the Ukraine, where life expectancy was shorter before the war. Pensions aren't high in Ukraine and people are given plots of land to grow food so they can try to survive. Working on the land means that is no rest for most people. In the UK it was seen as very different, people were seen to care and it was seen as disability friendly.

The importance of enjoying every moment was noted, having survived bombs we are alive. Life is very short and we should feel at ease.

Lowering the Bar Focus Group

Social groups

Friendship clubs, where it's possible to play music and dance were appreciated greatly, as was the opportunity provided by The Other Place to meet one another, in place where you can feel the warmth and friendliness.

Portrayals of older age

It was felt that ageing people should be portrayed with a positive smile and that the standard 'old people crossing' image is not good.

Keeping active

It was felt important to go into sports and to do exercise, cycle to Meadow Street, keep walking and being active, do yoga classes.

Relations between the generations

Various views were expressed. One participant felt that younger people should be made to study the bible. Others felt that there were no problems with the younger generation and that we shouldn't interfere, that we should let them go their way and give advice, but don't force them. It was suggested that children can be wiser and we should listen to them as they get older, particularly as the world has changed so much. We can give young people advice, but we said to our parents that they lived a different life and the best way we can share is by example, by discussing, listening and speaking to them, and respecting young people.

It was also noted that respect should be both ways and that both sides should have an openness to learning. The young don't always listen to the old, but there are changes and we should show our mistakes and others mistakes so they're not repeated. There are also times when behaviour is bad and needs to be corrected, but we should correct, not break.

Shared spaces where everyone can do things together or just hang out were seen as very important. The Marine Lake was cited as a place where there is a complete mix of people of all ages, all having fun and it was felt that the Council should take credit for Marine Lake. Crèches were also felt to be good, with different ages and the opportunity to learn from someone who isn't family, which is very interesting.

It was noted that Afghans and Syrians grew up in a big extended families, with a strong culture. It was felt that Western society has destroyed families, neighbours, and villages and that in Western society people are cut off from each other.

Making our voices heard

It was suggested that the Council should be invited to The Other Place to listen, but the importance of speaking up was also emphasised. There are a lot of problems and it is necessary for the authorities to hear us.

Uncertain futures

Building a future here and enjoying the day without thinking about tomorrow was seen as important but there is also so much uncertainty at the moment, with war, with house destroyed. There is the need to find where to live, visas run out in three years, but we have already lived here for 1.5 yrs and we have less than half left. How can we build a future here if we don't know what will happen to us next? All European countries have already extended the residence permits for Ukrainians. Only England does not yet give us a chance to build a future here.

As pensioners it's not possible to rent as the pension isn't enough even though hosts have been told to help. There are two months before some applications are needed, but there is a long wait and wondering about applying now to be more sure about receiving response in time. Visas are also an issue, working can prolong visas, but pensioners don't and can't work, so how can we stay longer?

Employment and volunteering

Fifty to state pension is a long time and we still need to work, good work not cleaning, but language barriers are preventing use of professional qualifications and decades of experience. There is also prejudice against employing older people. Volunteering in charity shops was raised and seen as good way to practice English, but the experience was of being 'pushed out the back' so this wasn't possible.

Learning English

The need for more conversation, more opportunity to practice English was raised, but also the need for basic learning before conversation. It was noted that differentiated groups are needed, but that it's also possible to come together and hear and learn.

Hopes and fears

It was felt important to have a positive outlook for the future, not fear, as there is no use worrying. Instead try to enjoy and not think about the future, to try and live for the today but plan for tomorrow.

It was felt to be different for Afghan community in terms of longer term security and housing, but knowledge of getting on housing list and work for the younger were seen as the biggest problems. One participant noted that they have a new flat and are very happy, and that secure housing makes a big difference.

In general it was felt that help was needed to feel more secure and supported.

Feedback comments

What were the most important points in today's discussion for you? Is there anything else you'd like to tell us.

Nine out of the ten participants left comments.

1. How to teach the younger generation to realise themselves in life. What is most important (first) in their life. I want to thank you for all the English courses. Thanks to them, living in the country became easier.
2. Relationships between parents and their children. My future staying in the UK (lodging, pension) as well Visa. Sharing of the experience. How and when to apply for Visa for the next period of staying here? I appreciate all your efforts to help and support us. Thank you very much!
3. I have dental problems. If I live in the family of my daughter who, when and how should apply for next Visa period? Thank you for your help and understanding.
4. I have problems renting a flat, because I don't have enough income. I need a guarantor. This discussion was very interesting and important for me. Thank you very much for this event. I also need some help in finding a job.
5. I need a job. I've looked [for] a job, but it was only cleaning. I have a degree and want to get a good job. I need own flat, but I can't get to it. Because I don't have a good job. I need a place for meeting with people like my age and got [get] conversation.
6. All useful: First time we have been in a group to talk about these things. Really important.
7. Our Future in England. The pensioner age in England.
8. The means by which older people's voices can be heard. Thank you very much.
9. Hopes for the future. Best regards.

The Ago Ame Focus Group was held on Thursday 05 September from 6pm to 8pm, and was followed by supper. There were ten participants.

Demographics

In terms of demographic information provided:

- Seven participants listed British and/or English as their nationality. Ghana, Dominica and African Jamaican were also listed.
- Three participants identified their heritage African or an African country, three participants identified as having a mixed heritage (Caribbean and white/English) and one as being of Caribbean heritage.
- Seven out of the ten participants listed English as their mother tongue, one with French Creole also as a mother tongue language. Other mother tongue languages were Guinea-Bissau Crioulo and Ewe.
- Other languages spoken included Krio, French, Spanish, and Portuguese.
- Time in the UK varied from birth to 34 years.
- Eight group members identified as male, two as female.
- Eight participants identified as heterosexual.
- Seven participants were in the 50-64 age bracket, two were over 65.
- Five participants noted health conditions that affected their daily lives. These included: eyesight and the need to wear glasses; a hip replacement, Diabetes type 2, and kidney problems but getting better; heart and asthma; stress and asthma; and Diabetes type 1.

Discussion themes

Older age positives

Retirement, doing a lot, golf, acting, keeping very active, quite busy and enjoying life, supporting a charity, trying to play the Sax (3 participants were learning the Saxophone). A shared allotment. A healthy, active life, financial stability and own place. Not having stresses and strains and pressures of earlier years.

A main want was good health and a good set of friends with enough money to pay the rent and bills, to eat well, treat self occasionally and live well, with no money worries, and no health worries. A decent holiday, and also the desire to travel was referenced, to at least 10 African countries to enjoy the peace and vibrations of Africa. Hoping to live to a good old age.

The opportunity to enjoy grandchildren was raised, to build a legacy and support them to grow while they are still young, being an elder and being cared for, even though still feeling quite young but grandchildren see as old.

Health and wellbeing

A number of health issues were referenced, enlarged prostate as a family issue. Lots of medication, all is working well but need to keep checking as black men are a higher risk group and it was agreed that all shared the prostate issue. Diabetes was also mentioned, but was also well managed.

One participant retired at 55 after working since 12/13yrs old, left London for health reasons, stress and anxiety and came to Weston for fresh air. Now looking after self, keeping fit, growing food and cooking.

Another spoke about being passionate about making sure they stayed healthy, by understanding why to eat certain food, by working with jewellery and crystals, and focussing on the more metaphysical side. It was felt to be the best time of life so far, becoming more confident and coming out of self.

A third spoke about a heart attack and reduced heart function but still working out at the gym, about not seeing age and feeling the same as at 16 and still being able to do the same things. Not taking on problems and worries was seen as important, as was accepting self and accepting illness, 'no one's going to tell me I have to stop', will continue to pass on knowledge and will never stop.

The experience of working in an old people's home was shared, how people would go in and deteriorate after just 2 months. No one would be talking and there would be no one to listen, when there is so much of value in people's heads.

It was felt that now is the time to have a positive manner, positive thinking, to be interested in what's happening about you, to learn and continue living rather than start dying when retired - which people do.

Friends helping one another, and keeping fit were seen as important. Learning saxophone was identified as a dementia prevention plan. Everyone agreed about staying active, and it was noted that there needed to be things in place that we would want to do. It was noted that 50+ groups weren't wanted at the gym and other places.

Employment and purpose

It was felt that much depended on what someone wanted to do with life. If their purpose is for self fulfilment, that goes beyond retirement age. The Western mode of work, of being a cog in machine then left out to pasture was raised, but it was felt that this could be changed and it was possible to change activities not just work, stop, and be no longer relevant to society.

Employment experiences over the years were not viewed positively and it was felt that health

and wealth is being able to be in control, physically and mentally, to be able to choose your path, choose when to stop work and what to do in a social sense. To be able to do things and not be told that we're too old by the Government or anyone, to carry on and not be locked out at a particular age milestone. It was pointed out that people jump out of planes at 97!

With an ageing population it was acknowledged that we all are going to have to keep working longer. It was felt that our parents worked, retired and then gave up and that it is really important to carry on and not give up, to find new passions and stay active.

Portrayals of older age

It was felt that a lot was to do with how society across the board celebrates youth, there's a long working life, but all is geared towards the young. Staying active physically, but also speaking up, staying engaged and staying visible were seen as important

One participant spoke of Sidney Poitier's book, with letters to his great granddaughter and wanted to do the same, to write letters to children and grandchildren, to be a good example of positive rather than negative

It was considered a mistake to put everyone 50+ in the same group, as people are very different, that there is still a lot to learn and huge expertise in our parents generation that we can learn from by interacting with our elders. One of the Sax players spoke about a band where there are musicians in their 80's and 90's, who have been playing since small and have so much to teach.

It was also felt that we have the knowledge and need to step up, not rely on the Government and that if we behave positively, people will see and respond positively.

Relations between the generations

It was felt that it can be very hard because the young don't want to listen to an older person, if they're told don't, then they go and do. We didn't listen and it was suggested that we need to relate in a different way, don't tell young people what to do, but use experience to understand them better. More is learnt by mistakes.

Engaging with things that young people enjoy was seen as positive, such as music and cultural stories, find their interests, get their minds, guide, connect with what they find important in old and new and be supportive, show them something different. If the relationship is positive they will enjoy, rather than resist.

The younger generation have older people as idols. In music, old musicians will suddenly play with young musicians with a 30-40 yr age difference, and put out tracks together.

One participant spoke of the huge resentment Gen Z have for baby boomers, we could buy

property, we all benefited from free education, they leave university with huge debts. There is the gap between the cost of living and wages, and young people have a different notion of work and want to have rights. It was felt that these are resentments that we as an older group need to address, and it's right young people blame us directly.

A question was asked about how do you create bridges so values can be shared between generations. Climate change was identified as a classic example.

Sharing knowledge and experience and being transparent not dormant was seen as important, and opportunities to share online through Tik Tok, You Tube and social media were welcomed. Building knowledge banks was discussed, with information such as how to do an allotment and cooking skills.

There's also a lot of word of mouth and it was considered important to 'pick elders brains' while they're still alive, because when they are gone then the knowledge is gone. We need projects we can engage with that help us capture and share those stories.

A question was asked about whether there is any scope for training on how to engage with the younger generation. They have a new wealth of knowledge and experience, and we need to understand the ways we can share, and their subcultures. Then we don't tell, we ask, we come alongside.

It was noted that some parents still hit kids and need to be trained differently, including people from abroad where such behaviours are more normal. It was also suggested that children could never touch a teacher in the past, but will now punch a teacher. It was felt that abuse at home leads to children becoming bullies, and it was important not to create a 'mini-me' with bullying. As we begin to understand child development, we have to understand the rationale, why children behave the way they do. Us as older people can have a better understanding of what they are dealing with, even with the cultural difference between age groups.

Being heard

What we're doing right now is really important, more than just hope, sitting down with other black men and talking. One participant spoke about coming to Weston, after playing professional football, at a time when there were no other black men and not being able to speak English, which was hard. Others noted the difference between London, where people from all backgrounds talk, and Weston where people back off when there is a different culture and are frightened to look at one another. Making a point of saying 'hello' to other black people on the street was noted.

It was suggested that it takes self-confidence to speak out and things like this were really good in helping with self expression.

The racial tensions of the 70's were raised and hope was seen that the growing diversity would make it easier to see people. Helping young people to feel more connected was also seen as important.

It was emphasised that there is a need to find more places and space to have conversations, and that conversations needed to be listened to, to feed into structures. It was also suggested that young people should be part of conversations like this, and there should be things that bring the generations together for good conversations.

It was felt that the next stage would be finding out what young people think, to know and understand what they want, to listen to them and understand what are their fears. They might talk to friends but are often embarrassed with parents.

Hopes and fears

There was some pessimism around the collapsing health care system and health, and also of being labelled as too old and being prevented from doing things that we still want to do. There was agreement about still wanting to give, whatever that means for each individual, and hopes for remaining mentally and physically fit.

It was suggested that older people should be able to access university courses for free, just to sit or to do a Ph.D.. It was also felt that you should be able to keep working after getting your pension and that older people should be employed if they're still able to do the work, so people can continue to do whatever they feel they want to do. Although it was also noted that people recruit others of their own age, and it was felt that there are mental blocks to employing older people.

Feedback comments

What were the most important points in today's discussion for you? Is there anything else you'd like to tell us.

Seven out of the ten participants left comments.

1. I like all we talked about.
2. Good to get a different range of opinions and how the conversations can be felt with full feeling and emotions. Be good to have further conversations that include younger generations as well.
3. Pleasantly surprised - Well organised event. What does a good old age look like? Health, Active, Financially stable.
4. Thank you for giving people the opportunity.
5. Every question had its quality.
6. I was very happy to introduce myself to everyone. I find very helpful today meeting and good to be with my people.
7. Points concerning need to not equate 'old' with 'redundant'. 'Retired' does not equal 'redundant'. Acknowledgement of 'experience' as being of value in society. Need to keep learning, developing, growing on a personal basis not matched or recognised by educational institutions or employers. Emphasis on increasing awareness of potential health issues.

Demographics

Although group sizes were small, there were some patterns that emerged:

- Two of the three groups were predominantly female, the third predominantly male and this was reflected to some extent in the focus and flow of the conversation.
- Time in the UK and cultural background noticeably affected perspectives and the views expressed.
- The majority of participants were in the lower age brackets. Of those who answered the question, ten were in the 50-64 age bracket, nine were 65+ and six were 75+. One was over 90. However, this had little obvious impact on views expressed other than some comments in direct relation to employment and pensions.

In future work, it will be interesting to see if intersections between gender representation and cultural background are repeated, or if this was simply a consequence of the invitation process in this case.

Themes

A number of themes emerged across all groups:

- Older age was generally viewed as bringing many benefits and opportunities to have less stress and enjoy life more.
- Some practical concerns were raised (such as housing, being able to pay the bills, and concern about the failing health care system) but it would not be unreasonable to suggest that these issues would be shared by people of all ages and there was no particular emphasis on age related considerations in reference to these points.
- The lack of expectations that the Council would provide help and support was notable.
- The need for a positive attitude, of not giving up at retirement, of continuing to be interested in life and taking responsibility for one's own health and wellbeing was repeatedly emphasised. This included staying active, both physically and mentally, and being willing to explore new activities.
- Being surrounded by a good community with supportive and caring relationships with family, neighbours and friends and places to socialise was also a recurrent theme. It was felt that Western society had destroyed many of these things.
- The importance of having a purpose was equally emphasised, and it was felt that this should be defined by each individual. There was strong desire to be able to be in control and to be able to make one's own choices about what is best.

- The difficulties of finding employment at older ages were raised, particularly the difficulty of finding good jobs.
- There was reluctance to be defined by age (including activities that are targeted specifically at over 50's) and objections voiced about being limited by others (including being made to stop work and retire).
- Being able to share experience and learn from others (both younger and older) was valued, and projects that increased understanding and that allowed the knowledge and experience of elders to be captured and shared were suggested.
- Views on relations between the generations varied and were noticeably influenced by cultural background. It was felt that there is no problem for many societies. There was also strong desire to respect and understand the experiences of younger people, to stand alongside and provide support. Multi-generational spaces and activities were seen as very important and directly including younger people in the conversation was suggested.
- Comments that were made and the ways that views were expressed suggested that gender differences in terms of experiences and perspectives, together with cultural differences, are worth further consideration.

Next steps

The focus group conversations were warmly welcomed by all and there was a strong desire to continue to have similar and expanded conversations.

The themes that emerged were clearly just the beginning of such conversations and there is a need to reflect on the issues raised, both with the groups themselves and through expanding the conversations to include a variety of others.

Using the themes as a starting point could provide a valuable opportunity for deeper exploration, and would also allow for practical actions to emerge from ongoing discussions. Using a Complex Systems, safe-to-fail experimentation methodology would open up opportunities for suggestions to be tested using a 'by us and for us' approach.

Given the groups were inevitably composed of people who are already active and engaged, there is also a clear need to seek advice on how it might be possible to reach older people who are feeling isolated and depressed, and to explore whether there are possibilities for developing peer support networks and projects that help to engage and include those who are most struggling.

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LET YOUR VOICE BE HEARD!

Race Equality North Somerset (RENS) is working with Voluntary Action North Somerset (VANS) to explore the views, hopes and aspirations of people aged 50 and older in North Somerset. This research is particularly targeted at people who are frequently racially minoritised and who are often less well served by the systems in place.



A PANEL DISCUSSION EVENT

1) Introduction

An introduction to the issues and the reasons why these questions are being asked.

2) Refreshment break

Refreshments will be provided, including a cooked vegetarian or vegan meal.

3) Panel discussion

An open conversation around identified points for discussion and any other raised.

Participants will receive a £20 voucher as a thank you for their time and input.

POINTS FOR DISCUSSION

-  What does a good older age look like for you?
-  How can ageing be portrayed in a positive rather than a negative way?
-  How can we improve relations between the generations?
-  How can older people share their knowledge and experience?
-  How can we ensure the voices of older people continue to be heard?
-  Hopes and fears for the future, and what would help?

INFORMATION GATHERING AND FEEDBACK

Notes will be taken by an observer during the panel discussion. These will be circulated to participants for comment. Participants will also be asked to complete a feedback form, either individually or in discussion with one of the facilitators.

This information will be collated with feedback from the two other focus groups being run by RENS and used to prepare a report for VANS. All participants will receive a copy of the report. All comments will be welcome.

VANS will use the report to support funding applications that benefit the Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) Sector in North Somerset as well as helping to inform planning, policy and service delivery in the health care sector.

LET YOUR VOICE BE HEARD!

RENS is working with Lowering the Bar and Voluntary Action North Somerset (VANS) to explore the views, hopes and aspirations of people aged 50 and older in North Somerset. This research is particularly targetted at people who are frequently racially minoritised and who are often less well served by the systems in place.



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RENS is working with Ago Ame and Voluntary Action North Somerset (VANS) to explore the views, hopes and aspirations of people aged 50 and older in North Somerset. This research is particularly targetted at people who are frequently racially minoritised and who are often less well served by the systems in place.



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An introduction to the issues and the reasons why these questions are being asked.

2) Refreshment break






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LET YOUR VOICE BE HEARD!

You are invited to participate in a focus group to explore the views, hopes and aspirations of people aged 50 and older.

TUESDAY 05 SEPTEMBER
10.30am to 12.30pm

You will receive a £20 voucher as a thank you and your participation will also raise £20 for RENS. Food will be served at the end of the session.

Places are limited so please RSVP, and do let us know ASAP if you then can't attend so someone else can take your place.





LET YOUR VOICE BE HEARD!

You are invited to participate in a focus group to explore the views, hopes and aspirations of people aged 50 and older.

THURSDAY 07 SEPTEMBER
1.00pm to 3.00pm

You will receive a £20 voucher as a thank you and your participation will also raise £20 for Lowering the Bar. Food will be served at the end of the session.

Places are limited so please RSVP, and do let us know ASAP if you then can't attend so someone else can take your place.





LET YOUR VOICE BE HEARD!

You are invited to participate in a focus group to explore the views, hopes and aspirations of people aged 50 and older.

THURSDAY 07 SEPTEMBER
6.00pm to 8.00pm

You will receive a £20 voucher as a thank you and your participation will also raise £20 for Ago Ame. Food will be served at the end of the session.

Places are limited so please RSVP, and do let us know ASAP if you then can't attend so someone else can take your place.





LET YOUR VOICE BE HEARD

A consultation by, with and for people who are from racially and ethnically minoritised communities, and who are over 50.



Why consult?

- The over 65 years population of North Somerset as of 2020 is estimated to be 52,000 people, and there are 44,800 people between the ages of 50-64.
- There are more residents aged over 65 years than aged under 19 years and North Somerset has a higher percentage of over 65s, over 75s, over 85s and over 90s compared to regional and national averages.

It is vital that the needs, views, hopes and aspirations of older people are well understood by those developing and delivering services.

Who is involved?

- VANS are funding local charities and community groups to explore the views of people over 50 about ageing well, so diverse voices can be heard.
- The knowledge and information gathered will feed into funding applications to benefit the VCSE sector in North Somerset as well as inform planning, policy, and service delivery in the Integrated Care Partnerships of Weston, Worle and Villages, and Woodspring.

RENS are working with VANS to help ensure the voices of people from racially and ethnically minoritised communities are heard.

How are we consulting?

- The grant from VANS is specifically to support three focus groups, with an attendance of 8-10 people per group.
- RENS is working with Lowering the Bar and Ago Ame to hold focus groups that specifically explore the views of people within the Refugee and African & Caribbean communities. The third group is for anyone who meets the core criteria.

Notes will be taken by an observer during the focus group discussion. These will be circulated to participants for comment.

Participants will also be asked to complete a feedback form.

What will happen to the information gathered?

- The meeting notes and feedback forms from all three groups will be collated and used to prepare a final report.
- The report will be submitted to VANS by 15 September, All participants will receive a copy of the report.

As this information will be used to inform strategy and service delivery, and support funding applications, please do think creatively!

A safe space for open and honest conversation

- Try to make sure everyone gets chance to speak.
- Listen with respect and try to understand that people have different experiences and different perspectives on life from your own.
- Share ideas and thoughts with generosity, to promote understanding and to help things move forward positively. Try to avoid scoring points, criticising people, or making comments that put people down.
- If a conversation becomes too upsetting, take a break.
- If there is anything you need to discuss separately, please speak to one of the facilitators.

Points for discussion

- What does a good older age look like for you?
- How can ageing be portrayed in a positive rather than a negative way?
- How can we improve relations between the generations?
- How can older people share their knowledge and experience?
- How can we ensure the voices of older people continue to be heard?
- Hopes and fears for the future, and what would help?

If you think there are other important questions for the group, please do say!

Feedback forms

There are two feedback forms that are helpful

1. The online form from VANS. This information will be submitted directly to VANS. Please do share this with all your contacts. There are no restrictions on who can respond. You can access the survey at bit.ly/VANS-AW-survey
2. The RENS feedback form. This is specific to the session. You will notice we have asked for detailed demographic information. While not statistically significant, this will help highlight the need to consider different life experiences and perspectives. **No names will be included in the report and all information will be anonymised.**

Many thanks to all participants.

**Please don't forget to collect your
voucher before leaving!**



LET YOUR VOICE BE HEARD! FEEDBACK FORM

Please tell us a little about yourself.	Nationality:
	Heritage:
Please only answer questions you are comfortable with.	Length of time in the UK:
	Mother tongue:
	Other languages spoken:
	Gender:
	Sexuality:
	Age: 50-64, over 65, over 75, over 85, over 90. Please circle.
	Do you have any health conditions that affect you daily?
Any other information you think might be relevant?	

Please turn over to the back of the sheet and tell us about today's discussion.
What were the most important points for you?
Is there anything else you'd like to tell us?

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Is there anything else you'd like to tell us?



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**LET YOUR
VOICE BE
HEARD!**

Hearing the voice of older people in North Somerset



Ago! Ame!

