



NEWSLETTER 5

by *Jim Soulsby, May 2013*, jim.soulsby@btinternet.com

Part of the ForAge network's mission is to explore issues, it and others, feel are important.

In our first year part of our work was to highlight three issues for further discussion. We are seeking opinion on the following issues which we feel are currently topical and relevant. These were determined through surveying the whole partnership and discussing them at our first European consultative event in Cyprus in October 2012.

The issues, and our latest summary of opinion and any unresolved questions, are set out below. Discussion around the issues will continue for another 2 months through our website and we invite you to get involved. We will then produce a summary of the debates and create some fresh discussions.

www.foragenetwork.eu

Involving stakeholders in later life learning

- Funding for learning is decreasing across Europe – for all adults not just older people. Funding where it does exist is often provided by a range of agencies but is often short term and vested in those who provide the educational opportunities.

- Later life learning is the responsibility of a wide range of agencies, not just those in the education sector. The Grundtvig programme, amongst others, indicates that later life learning is facilitated by a wide range of sectors but there

is little evidence of collaboration of progression across these sectors and agencies.

- There has to be a constant re-iteration of the very wide benefits of later life learning not just to the individual but to all sectors of society. These benefits are economic, social, health related, family and community. The research evidenced that is emerging needs much better dissemination alongside the evidence (testimonies) of older learners of the benefits they feel they have gained.

Gender issues: learning for men and women

- If learning was oriented to the individual needs of the prospective learner then there would be less need to consider gender issues. These individual needs must also reflect cultural, national, class, race, gender issues and early school experiences (success/failure, gender segregation, age of leaving, extended opportunity, etc).

- The changes in our communities across Europe have had a detrimental effect on the provision of 'locations' for working class men to engage with others within their communities.

- When gender specific learning opportunities are created then they should be based on the locations where men/women gather - cafes, sports facilities, etc. However these opportunities should only be seen as first steps to encourage (not coerce) people into other forms and locations for learning and/or other community activity.

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This publication reflects the views only of the authors and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.

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Giving older people a voice through learning

- Older people become involved in learning for many reasons. Most probably because they have always been involved in learning through educational activities but the others because of personal reasons – some changes in their lives like health, leaving employment etc; others because of social or political changes in their world.

- There are strong testimonies from older learners of the difference their later life learning has brought in terms of confidence, being able to access required information to help making decisions and in decision making itself.

- Research evidence also shows that engagement in learning (at all ages and stages of adult life) can engender feelings of well being and feeling healthy.

- Much of the educational opportunities offered to older people today are framed by teachers and other professionals who tend to approach education from their curriculum standpoint and not necessarily fully understanding the needs, stage of life and perspective of their prospective older learner.

- There are many surveys of the needs, aspirations, successes and progression routes of older learners but they do not necessarily give us a perspective of the needs of 'non learners' who far outnumber the older learners.

- Any learning offer has to be geared to the needs of the individual and many of those may be associated with their age or stage of life.

- There are strong movements towards empowering older people and encouraging their healthy ageing but they do not usually utilise the power and potential of education to help older people manage their own lives, create their own empowerment agenda in terms of the issues they need to address or define for themselves their own healthy lifestyle.

- Education and learning for older people needs to much more closely aligned to the other aspects of political, social and economic life which wish to create for older people a much more positive and productive society in which they feel valued.

Please join our discussions. If you feel that there are other, equally or more, important issues to raise please contact us through our website.

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