



OXFORDSHIRE
CITY & COUNTY

Roots and Circles

Ideas for personalising day care

by

**Lorna Easterbrook
with Penny Thewlis**

September 2008

Registered Charity No. 1091529

Contents	Page
Introduction	3
Overall Purpose	4
Background	5
Rural Grassroots Realities project	5
Circles of Support project	6
Information & Advice service	7
Session One – introducing the approach	8
Session Two – where you live	13
Session Three – paid and unpaid jobs and roles	15
Session Four – hobbies and interests	17
Sessions Five and Six – trying some things out	18
Session Seven – the exhibition	21
Hints and Tips	22
Frequency	22
Staff and volunteer ratios	22
During the sessions	22
Numbers	23
Mixing small and large groups	23
Exhibition	24
Working with people new to day centres or clubs	25
Having semi-structured conversations	25
Reluctance to ask	26
Involving people with memory, communication or physical difficulties	27
Next steps	28
Keeping the momentum going	28
Trying this approach with others	29
Outputs and outcomes	29
About the Authors	30

Introduction

This approach to personalising older people's experiences in day centres or other clubs and group settings was trialled by Age Concern Oxfordshire with two social services' day centres for older people during the summer of 2007. Our aim here is to share these tried-and-tested ideas for others interested in using this approach.

We call this approach **Roots and Circles**. It uses a combination of:

1. Asking older people to take and share photographs of what is important to them in their lives now, *and*
2. Talking about these photos, and about their broader life history (**Roots**) and current social networks (**Circles**); *and*
3. Recording this information in scrapbooks; *and*
4. Finding out what is available locally to do, or to see, or to belong to that fits with their interests; *and*
5. Supporting people to pursue these interests in their daily life.

By combining this information you can find out:

- what people are interested in now
- whether there are things they used to do that they might like to try again
- how they might pursue all those interests now – both during time spent at day care or clubs, and in their day to day lives.

You can try this approach with anyone - whether or not they have good verbal communication skills or an intact memory. The important thing is to tailor the way you communicate so that people are able to share with you something about their stories and interests. Not everything has to be spoken – alternatives include drawings, pictures, writing stories or poems, mime and dance. Not all memories will be accurate or up to date – people will share as much as they can and want.

Roots and Circles builds information over a period of time using a series of semi-structured exchanges. It is straightforward, relatively cheap (materials cost less than £20 per head), and can achieve significant, positive change to people's lives by:

- Improving people's confidence by positively reflecting on their skills, abilities and achievements to date – and encouraging them to think what they might like to do next
- Finding out more about ordinary local (and national) facilities and activities, as well as how to support people to overcome real or perceived barriers and to access these
- Expanding people's personal circles or networks outside day centres or clubs
- Strengthening people's relationships and friendships within day centres
- Increasing the activities in which people take part - in day care, at home or in the wider community

- Improving people's feelings about the quality of their lives
- Discovering – and supporting – previously unknown concerns and issues
- Making stronger links between day care and local community activities
- Focusing on people's aspirations and wants rather than their needs
- Taking clear steps towards personalising group services.

It is an approach whose success depends on staff and volunteers:

- Being willing to have slightly different conversations with older people
- Being able to use these conversations as the building blocks for finding out what is possible, and encouraging people to pursue what interests them
- Being open-minded about the skills, interests and potential of older people
- Being able to think laterally, and make connections.

Overall Purpose

It is essential to keep the purpose of **Roots and Circles** in mind at all times. It is:

- finding out about people's lives – especially their interests and skills; *and*
- helping people regain their confidence by bringing to the fore what they have achieved to date; *and*
- encouraging them to think about what interests them now; *and*
- together, finding ways to expand the range of things and people in their lives.

Some who tried this found **alternatives and additions to day care**; they:

- joined other interest clubs, receiving day care staff support for their first few times of attending
- become local volunteers, including for AC Oxfordshire
- started to socialise with others they got to know at this group ('Scrapbook Group', 'Circles Group', 'Photographs Group' – whatever you decide to call yourselves) outside the sessions at the centre
- helped to run similar sessions with new groups of older people.

Others who **chose to keep attending day care, to be part of a larger group**, said:

"Your encouragement has worked wonders in our understanding of each other."

"I like it when they come here; they have different ideas for what we could do."

"I stopped writing after my stroke, but I wanted to do the scrapbooks so I made myself practice at home and now I am writing again. Last weekend I decided if I could learn to write again I could learn to knit again. So I knitted all last weekend, listening to Class FM in the background. It was the best weekend in ages."

"Last winter I felt so low I thought about moving into a nursing home. Now I feel there are people at the day centre I could talk to if that happened again."

Background

Roots and Circles combines the skills and experience from two projects, and an existing service:

1. The Rural Grassroots Realities project
2. Circles of Support project
3. Information & Advice service.

1. The Rural Grassroots Realities project

This was a 3-year joint undertaking between Age Concern Oxfordshire and Oxford Brookes University. The aim was to understand more about the day-to-day lives of older people in rural communities and to influence policy and planning. Thirty five older people living in West Oxfordshire took part. They took photographs of their lives and talked about these photographs to volunteer researchers – themselves retired. These interviews were written up as case studies and used to demonstrate the opportunities for preventive interventions to improve lives. The project concluded in 2007. This methodology proved particularly effective in enabling valuable conversations to take place.

What we used from the project

We used this methodology for the **Roots and Circles** approach. Some of the photographs from the Grassroots project were enlarged and reproduced on boards for exhibition purposes. We took some of these photos with us to the first session at each day centre, to introduce the idea of the project. We talked with older people as a group about the photographs, the reasons people had given for taking them, and how interesting we all found it to discover more about people's lives this way.

Another way of doing this would be

- a) for staff and volunteers to use 'throwaway' cameras to take and develop photographs of what is important in their lives; develop a small number of interesting examples to a larger size; bring these to the first session (see below) as a starting point to introduce:

The sorts of things people might choose to photograph, and why; *and*

- b) The (surprisingly good) quality of photographs from the cheap cameras.

Photographs that staff, volunteers and older people shared of things that were important in their lives included:

- Pets
- Their garden
- Car/mobility vehicle
- Books
- Favourite painting
- Photos of family photos
- Music (CDs, piano, radio)
- Family and neighbours
- Shoes and handbags
- Bottle of wine

- Furniture and ornaments
- Television set/ films
- Plate of food
- People at the day centre.

2. Circles of Support

This project was led for the Older People's Programme by Lorna Easterbrook. It explored how the learning disability 'model' of Circles of Support might be used with older people. AC Oxfordshire took part in this project between 2004 and 2005, as one of a two-site project funded by the Department of Health under a section 64 grant (see:

http://icn.csip.org.uk/library/Resources/Personalisation/Personalisation_advice/Person_Centred_Thinking_and_SDS_for_older_people.pdf).

The 'Circles' project was based on two elements. Firstly, it was used as a tool in the rediscovery of older people's 'ordinary lives' - aspects that may become overlooked in situations where care services and poor health are the major focus and people become more reliant on formal support. Secondly, it reflected the increasingly prevalent national agenda focusing on person-centred or personalised care, and on older people's quality of life. The Circles approach offered a way of supporting such aims within existing resources, by having focused conversation(s) about:

- What people would like to do or have in their lives (ie their wishes);
- Working out with them how they might achieve those aspirations (including the role they and others would play);
- Using and expanding their circles (or social networks) to do so.

Those supporting this approach needed to offer:

- A bit of practical help
- A bit of encouragement
- A bit of interest.

This approach also provided an opportunity for people to strengthen their existing relationships and Circles (or networks) – including any friendships they have formed through the day centre or group. This was important in terms of tackling feelings of isolation and loneliness since it emphasised that the *quality* of relationships (in particular, feeling emotionally close to others) was perhaps as important as the *number* of people in someone's circle. For this reason, in learning disabilities this approach is now often called 'Circles of Friends'.

What we used from this project

We used two critical elements: firstly, supporting people to talk about their wishes; secondly, supporting each older person to play as big a role as possible in achieving these wishes or goals.

Staff and volunteers who are naturally good at this way of spending time with older people often need their skills positively reinforcing so that others are encouraged to follow their lead.

3. AC Oxfordshire's Information and Advice service

The critical element here is not so much the service, more the skills held by those working or volunteering within I&A - in particular, people who are:

- able to find out what is available in an area using every source of information - including what older people know exists, more traditional sources such as Tourist Information Centres, and national sources;
- able to identify alternatives – if what someone would like does not exist precisely as they have described, is there something else you could find that would be close enough to be acceptable to them?

Session One – introducing the approach

This session introduces three elements:

- The photographs
- The scrapbooks
- What there is to do locally.

The **Hints and Tips** section, below, gives some ideas about trying this with both small and large groups.

The first session involves:

1. Explaining to everyone the purpose of this approach
2. Sharing the photographs and scrapbooks idea with everyone
3. Taking to one side those more interested in doing the scrapbooks and photographs themselves
4. Starting discussions with the remaining larger group on what there is to do locally.

The first session will probably take around 1 – 1 ½ hours in total. But you can change how you approach this depending on factors such as:

- The length of time over which people usually meet
- How easy it is for people to move from a large group, to a smaller group
- The length of time over which people generally want discussions or particular sessions to last.

What you need on the day

- Photographs to discuss – large sizes work better; certainly at least 8-10 inches. If you don't already have something you could use, ask several staff and volunteers to bring in a photo of what is important in their life (make these as varied as possible) and have these enlarged ready to use in the discussion
- Enough 'throwaway' cameras for everyone who wants to have one; plus a spare to practice on
- Small sticky labels for people to write their names on (for the cameras)
- Flip chart (or large sheets of) paper; marker pens

Optional

- A scrapbook that has already been put together (see below)
- Some leaflets on what there is to do locally – perhaps from local Tourist Information Centres, museums or libraries; the local newspaper.

Starting the session

It is worth starting with a very short introduction that explains this is about working with people to:

- Find out a bit more about the sorts of things you like doing/ used to do/ would like to do now
- Find out what's available locally, and work out how you might try these things
- The overall aim is to support people's quality of life.

This introduction takes around 5-10 minutes. Next, go on to share and discuss the photographs as a way of beginning to find out what's important in people's lives.

The photographs

When we did this we used existing, large, photographs from the GrassRoots project – photographs of what was important to those people. This is intended to get the discussions going, start the session, and invite people to take part. The discussion is focused on why those particular photos had been taken – what was important about what had been photographed. We explained we wanted as many people as possible to have a camera and take photos of what was important to them, as part of finding out more about people's lives. The cost of this would be met by the centre.

This discussion and sharing of the photos took around 20-30 minutes.

The scrapbooks

We went on to explain that another way we wanted to explore people's lives was by asking people to record things about their life history in a scrapbook – which they would also use to put in the photographs they would take.

You might find it helpful to have an example to share, to show people what a scrapbook might contain. We didn't have an example to start with, but as people began to put their scrapbooks together they did show others in the larger group what they were doing. This encouraged some others to join in with the scrapbooks at a later stage, once they could see what was involved.

In one centre, those attending particularly enjoyed looking at a scrapbook put together by a member of staff. This included copies of photographs of past events and items that were important to her – such as her first car, bringing her babies home from hospital, and a particularly special Christmas. The member of staff had not put anything in the scrapbook that she was not happy to share: this is an essential rule to make clear to everyone taking part.

This staff scrapbook had an important, if subtle, effect, by very slightly changing the dynamics between the staff and the older attendees. It seemed to make it easier for the staff, volunteers and older people to work together on this as equal adults.

If you have a scrapbook to share, you might want to encourage people to look at on the day when you run these introductory sessions.

Introducing the scrapbook example takes around 10 minutes.

Next steps: the photography group

All those interested in taking their own photos (and putting these in a scrapbook) were then invited to a quiet corner. As a small group we agreed that:

- We would fund the cost of the cameras, developing the photos, and the scrapbooks;
- They would take photos and bring the cameras back by a certain date, so the photos could be developed
- A member of staff or volunteer from the centre would sort out getting the photos developed
- Photos could be of anything that was important to people: we talked about ideas as a group, and people made suggestions.

We agreed that, if there were people who were important to you but that you weren't going to see in the time you had the camera, instead you could take a photo of any existing photographs you had of them (this worked very well – the 'photos of photos' came out very clearly).

Everyone was given their own 'throwaway camera', and wrote their name on it.

We had one, shared, camera that everyone practiced on. Even those with limited hand control (in the case of one person with cerebral palsy) or the use only of one hand (in the case of someone who had had a stroke) found they could use it, as there was only one button to push. We made sure that when people took trial photos they did not put their thumb over the camera lens.

This part of the session took a further 30 minutes. It's important to keep reminding people in the larger group that they can choose to join the 'Scrapbook group' at any stage.

Whilst this initial small group practiced with a camera, and chose a scrapbook, the remaining larger group had their own discussion – what is there to do locally?

Next steps: What is there to do locally?

We ran this as a larger group discussion, asking people what they knew existed locally. In our work, the person running the discussion did not know the towns in question at all. So she asked the question: if I were thinking of moving to live here, or if my mum was, what would you (or an estate agent, or tourist information officer, or anyone else) tell me was good about the town and why I/she should move here?

In the discussion we made sure we covered:

- What is the shopping like?
- Is there public transport? What, where, and when?
- Are there nice walks? Parks? Places of interest to visit?
- What are the leisure facilities like?
- What happens at Christmas? Are there markets, fairs, or any festivals?
- What about 'special' interests – like sport (eg is there a football club to support?), archaeology and local history (eg are there any societies to join?) and theatre (eg where would you go to see a pantomime?).

We also asked:

- How do you spend your time?

We deliberately asked about 'ordinary' facilities, activities and events. When suitable moments arose in the conversation, we asked people if there were local facilities they would like to use but didn't; why they didn't use particular facilities; and what would help them to do so (eg transport; someone to go with). We wrote their views on a flip chart.

In much bigger groups (of 20-30 people), it is helpful to use several people each to lead this conversation with smaller numbers. Divide people up according to where they are sitting. This should mean no group is larger than 8-10 people, making it easier for everyone to hear what is being said, have a chance to have their say, and to record the information.

We used the ideas from this discussion as the basis of pulling together the Information Folder about what was available locally – which needs to have been developed for use in time for Sessions 5 and 6. We also used the information people gave about what they would like to do but can't as the basis for further discussing, in future sessions, possible local solutions – which we asked the I&A service to explore.

This part of the session took around 40 minutes. It is important, however, to keep returning to this subject throughout the next few weeks, especially:

- Asking people to bring in any details of clubs or activities they belong to

- Asking people if there's anything they'd like to add to the list.

What you need on the day

- An A4 ring folder, and clear plastic 'wallets' to put leaflets in
 - Street map of the town or village
 - Map of the local area
- Optional*
- Some leaflets to get discussions going.

The Information Folder

Your Information Folder will begin to come into its own by sessions 5 & 6, when you invite people to look through this to see if anything sparks an interest. This involves pulling together any information (eg leaflets and cuttings from the local paper) about what is available – such as interest clubs, theatre and cinema details, indoor bowls, markets, shopping centres, museums, libraries, leisure classes, further education, local beauty spots, train and bus timetables. We put everything in one A4 ring folder.

It's a very good idea to include a local map – in particular a street map of the town or village, as well as a map of the wider area. People often have no idea where something is – this can encourage people automatically to believe they won't be able to get to somewhere, when facilities are often closer to where they live (or to the day centre) than they think. If someone is new to the area, they really do need to see a street map – and one for the wider area – to get their bearings and begin to decide what might be possible for them to try.

A good starting point is to ask everyone what they know is available in the area, and make a list. You can do this as a short discussion in the first session – and involve everyone. A useful approach is to imagine you don't know the area but are thinking of moving there – what is there locally that would be interesting for someone to see or do or join? People will tell you about specialist societies (such as local Parkinson's Disease or Alzheimer's Society branches) but do make sure you discuss *everything* there might be to do – especially all the 'ordinary' things like shopping, cafes, markets, etc. Ask people to bring any details they have of clubs they belong to, churches or religious establishments they attend, or other facilities they use. For example, one man regularly went to a large local car boot sale on a Sunday, but others did not know it existed. Local newspapers are a good source of information.

It is really important not to get too bogged down in worrying how to keep your Information Folder up to date. You could ask those using the club or centre for help in doing this; add the date to leaflets (and discard 'old' versions); and get your centre or club put on as many regular mailing lists as possible.

Session Two – where you live

We found that asking questions about where people have lived, and marking these on maps, felt very easy and 'safe' for people to do as a starting point for taking part.

What you need on the day

- A scrapbook for each person (and a label to write their name on theirs)
- Glue and sticky tape
- Scissors
- Pens
- A4 photocopies of maps – local street maps, town or area maps, county maps, UK maps, maps of Europe, and world maps. It seems to work better if some of the maps are coloured copies – especially the maps of Europe and the world
- Different coloured sticky 'dots'
- Handwritten 'where you live' sheets of paper
- Someone who is good at finding places on a map
- A box (or something similar) to keep the scrapbooks together afterwards.

'Where you live' sheets of paper

We hand wrote the four main questions on an A4 sheet, leaving a gap underneath each question for the person (with or without support) to record their answers. The four main questions we used were:

- Where were you born?
- Where else have you lived?
- Where did you live when you first left the family home? (this includes the 'family home' being a local children's home, as was one person's experience)
- Where do you live now? When did you move there?

People then translated their written answers on to the maps using coloured dots. The sheets and maps were then stuck in their scrapbooks.

Get scrapbooks with quite a lot of pages so you don't need to be 'mean' about how you stick these in. If the paper in the scrapbooks is quite thin, it's a good idea to only use one side of each page.

Whatever you do, don't refer to the sheets with questions as 'forms'. This is guaranteed to put people off. You don't have to give everyone a handwritten sheet of questions – just make sure everyone knows the initial questions.

Because these are starting points only, you may need to encourage people to share and record a bit more by asking follow up questions. For example, if they moved

around a lot as a child, ask why was that? (answers might include – because of being evacuated during the war, or because father was in the armed forces, or something else). You could ask, of all the places they've lived in, which was their favourite place and why? If someone has stayed in the same place all their life, you could plot on the local street map which roads they lived in. You could ask - is there anywhere else you would have liked to live? Are you planning to go and live somewhere new now? These are only suggestions.

We used different coloured dots to show places people had been born, where they lived now, etc. This helped make sense of people's maps, if they used (for example) one map to record all the relevant places. Alternatively, people could use a separate map for each stage of life (birth; childhood; as a younger adult; now).

As the session continues, start encouraging people to share their information with each other – especially the maps. People are interested to know where others were born, and are especially interested in finding out who lives near to them now.

In larger groups

In larger groups you can have the same conversations – but it is a good idea to record these on a larger scale so everyone can easily see it. It doesn't necessarily matter if people can't remember every place they have lived. Our experience is that everyone remembers one place at least (although they may tell you it is not where it is shown on the map, such as the person who told us very firmly that Chipping Norton - in West Oxfordshire – is, in fact, near Glasgow).

You could write down the answers on flip charts (dividing up the conversation as above), and then see who would help 'translate' those answers by putting dots onto maps. In this case, A3 or larger size maps will be more effective. You're not naming who lives where, though, just recording the places, so people's privacy is respected.

Afterwards, stick the maps up for everyone to see and keep drawing people's attention to them. There is likely to be a lot of interest in finding out who has lived in 'exotic' places overseas, and who lives near to where you live now. You can keep adding to these maps in future weeks and sessions; and use these in any exhibition.

What you need on the day

- Flip chart paper, stands and paper, and blu-tack
- A3 or larger size maps – list as above (but only one copy of each map)
- Different coloured sticky dots
- Someone who is good at finding places on maps.

Session Three – paid and unpaid jobs and roles

This session concentrates in paid and unpaid jobs (and roles). You may well find that some of this information has already started to come out from session two, above, as people began to explain why they lived in different places.

The starting point for these discussions is:

- What paid jobs have you had? – which can be broken down into:
 - What was your first paid job?
 - What was your last paid job?
 - What did you do in between?

and

- What unpaid jobs (roles) have you had? (eg mum, daughter, husband, university student, school governor, doing the church flowers, volunteer at local Oxfam shop, etc)

It is helpful if staff and volunteers have already thought about their own answers to the above questions – and to think how other people you know might answer these questions – because it will give you ideas about different prompts you might give.

You may find that people come back to these questions in later sessions, especially if they are concerned to put in the right dates. You can also expand these discussions by asking people what paid and unpaid roles they have now – such as:

- Looking after grandchildren
- Helping lay the tables at the centre
- Tenants Association committee member
- Selling own paintings occasionally, at local exhibitions.

It's helpful if people explain what particular jobs or roles actually involved, as one thing you should be beginning to look for by now is what these answers might reveal about someone's skills and abilities – eg organising, practical skills, scientific knowledge, good with animals, reliable etc. This will help inform the conversations you have with people during Session 4; but you can start to prompt that thinking in those taking part now, by reflecting positively on what they have done to date.

People can write directly into their scrapbooks – or write the responses on sheets of paper and stick these in. You may find some people have a CV they would like to add, perhaps something they might bring from home. Some people might also want to record their educational achievements; or any awards they have gained. It is up to each person – the questions are just the starting point.

If you are keeping an eye on what is being recorded, you may find some common elements – such as people who've had similar jobs or roles; even people (as we found) who'd worked at the same factory – albeit at different times. It's important to begin to make – and point out - those connections between people.

In the larger groups

You can ask the same basic questions, record these on a flip chart, and use these answers as part of the exhibition.

You can also use this as the basis for a broader discussion about:

- How jobs have changed
- If they were starting adult life now, what sort of job would they look for?
- What do they think about how working life has changed - what about non-working life, such as being a parent?

Each session, find some way you can bring out the Information Folder, ask if anyone has anything to add – and ask if, having looked at it, anything else has occurred to them about what they might like to do (and the reasons why they aren't doing it).

Some people will want to have those conversations quietly – but others may be willing to share. If the I&A service has found out any suggestions that can be shared, do so. You may find it helpful to ask someone from I&A to come to one or two sessions – this may prompt people to ask about other issues, such as benefits, making a Will, or adaptations. One man revealed he needed grab rails but did not know who to ask; one woman that her walking frame was no longer suitable. **Record all these outcomes – they are all part and parcel of personalisation.**

It's important also to ask those present whether they have any ideas that might help.

One man we worked with said he'd recently been to see Peter Pan on Ice at a venue in the next county, organised by the Parkinson's Disease Society to which he belongs. A woman said she had used to go to these events with her husband who'd had Parkinson's, and that she missed the group now he'd died. The man said she could belong as a Friend, and still come on the outings. A staff member suggested she ring the Society, and ask about becoming a Friend (the woman still had the telephone number at home). Next time she attended, the member of staff asked how she'd got on, and was pleased to learn she'd re-joined; the woman was pleased someone had taken enough interest to ask her; the man was pleased that his suggestion had worked. Others in the group began to think about how they might help each other.

Session Four – hobbies and interests

This session is pretty self explanatory – but it can throw up some difficulties and some challenging conversations. On the other hand, you may find out far more about people than ever before.

The starting point for the questions is:

- Who do you spend time with? What do you do together?
- What are your current interests and hobbies?
- What about hobbies and interests you used to do?
- What are you good at (eg singing, friendships, making things)?

You can go on to ask people:

- What would be your 'best' evening? What would you do? What would be your 'best' weekend?

Some people may find this last set of questions difficult to ask, or difficult to answer, if they believe it is not possible to have a good time *at this stage in their lives* - generally because of the impact of disability and illness. This applies to staff and volunteers just as much as to older people. If you fall into this group, you may feel it is 'cruel' to be asked to imagine something happening that you feel no longer applies. But although people may initially be upset, we found if they thought about it for a while they gained a different understanding of **why** they were being asked to tell you a bit more about themselves. An example from an older woman we worked with who found this question difficult initially was:

- *Best evening* – having a meal out with someone I like, where I can dress up, and there is a live jazz band playing; and being taken there and brought home, door to door
- *Best weekend* – Saturday: staying in a nice hotel, waking up to breakfast in bed, then visiting a stately home, and being taken home again; Sunday – going to church, having a nice Sunday lunch, watching a good film in the afternoon, having a good dinner, and a good night's sleep in clean sheets.

On reflection, the person who came up with this 'recipe' for a good evening and weekend thought they could achieve a great deal of both straightaway.

Those who find this much easier to ask and answer are those who feel that it is possible to find and have a good time at any stage in life – it might not quite be what you originally had in mind (since there may be things that you feel are now ruled out), but there is still plenty to try. This group tend to think: they might not have what they used to have, but they could have something else instead – and they're keen to explore what this might be.

Session Five/Session Six – trying some things out

You may prefer to run this over two (perhaps more) sessions.

In the first of these sessions, look with those in the scrapbook group at what they have shared so far – and ask each of them also to look through the Information Folder.

The questions you are exploring with each person are:

- What is there in the Information Folder that grabs his or her interest?
- What is there revealed in the scrapbooks that they would like to explore, but which isn't in the folder?

One man we worked with said his goal had always been to go to an auction. He was sure there was an auction house near to the day centre – and the person running the session looked on the internet – and found it, and details (dates and times) of the next auction. It was a few minutes' walk away.

We then asked him – did he want to go, and who would he like to go with? (at this point every member of staff volunteered to go with him!)

He said he would like to go with one particular member of staff to begin with, just so he could look round and get a handle on how it all worked. Then he thought he would like to ask a friend from the centre to go with him, another time. He walked slowly (and not easily), but could see on a map how far it was and was certain he could walk there (and back).

The auction house was open for viewings from 11am on the day of the sale, to see what was up for auction. He would come to the day centre by the usual minibus, have a cup of tea, then walk to the auction house and look round for an hour or so.

On his return to the centre, everyone wanted to know what it was like; had he bought anything? Was it accessible? Could they go – when was the next auction?

This example also illustrates some of what this approach is not:

- It is **not** an opportunity to discover outings the whole group goes on
- It does **not** require staff or volunteers to 'do' everything for the person.

It is really important the person has as much control over this as possible; it's their idea, and whilst they may need support to make it happen, it is essential that staff and volunteers do not inadvertently 'take over'. The more the person can do for themselves to make this happen, the more likely they are to try it – or something else

– again. In this case, the man went on to go fishing locally with the husband of a member of staff (himself keen to find a fishing partner) – another of his wishes.

It also encouraged a lot of others at the centre to think what they might like to do, using the day centre as their starting point - in other words, they were already brought into the centre, and at the centre they were making friends with whom they might like to go off from the centre on those particular days to do additional things, whether from time to time (such as going to an auction), or more regularly.

It's worth thinking about doing this over two sessions – perhaps more sessions – because this gives everyone:

- Time to think about what they might like to try
- Time to research how to achieve this (or, achieve something sufficiently similar as to be acceptable – ‘close enough’, or ‘near enough’)
- Time to plan
- Time to ‘report back’ to the group
- Time to reflect on whether – and how – they feel their lives might be changing
- Time to think what else they might like to explore.

While some people are trying things out, others in the group might help get materials together for the exhibition, or gather together more information, or do some research of their own.

Larger group

You can have similar discussions with the larger group. These are focused on asking people what they might like to try, or do, and whether there are day centre friends they might like to try things out with. They should be building on the earlier problem-solving discussions and ideas that have been emerging in recent weeks.

Again, this is about everyone pooling their ideas and their resources (such as knowledge; time; energy) to see what's possible – and then deciding how and when to give it a try. This may mean trying something on another day or at a different time, not when they were usually at the centre or club – so part of the problem solving is about asking who they know who might support them to do this.

<p>One woman we worked with wanted to join a needlework group as she enjoyed making tapestry. I&A found an evening embroidery group that would be happy for her to join: they met every week. She would ask her daughter-in-law for a lift, as she kept offering - but the woman hadn't been able to think before where to ask to go.</p>

It is also important to reflect back to people that ‘who they know’ includes everyone at the day centre or club.

A second woman, new to the town at the age of 87, wanted to meet other people. Another woman belonged to a group that met for day time talks, getting a lift there from a neighbour. When she told her neighbour about this lady, the neighbour offered to take both of them each week. The member was pleased to introduce the woman to other local people. For this to happen:

- the initial discussion – that the woman wanted to meet people – had to take place
- this had to be shared with others at the centre, for possible solutions to be aired
- another person had to offer practical help
- the woman had to be willing to try it out.

Supporting people to achieve their wishes or goals may involve the input of staff or volunteers. But it is essential that you do not see these individual wishes as something that ‘the whole group’ could do. This is **not** about finding new ideas for group outings. This is why it’s important to ask the person with the wish who (if anyone) they would like to try something with – it should be up to them who they invite to go with them. Equally, people need to do as much as they can towards achieving their wish, with support and encouragement from staff and volunteers as needed.

Getting this balance right isn’t always straight forward. You may find someone who would like to do something but there is no possibility of transport, or they would like someone to go with them but don’t know anyone they want to ask.

One woman we worked with wanted to join a folk dance society that met weekly in the evening. She wanted someone to go with her for the first time; and she would need some support to arrange a taxi each time, as she had short term memory difficulties. What we did initially was ask around all the people we knew locally to see if anyone already went to that group or would be interested in going and taking this lady. We found a personal contact of another AC Oxfordshire staff member who agreed to do this initially; the society seemed very welcoming and as our involvement ended it looked as if other members there would provide lifts for her.

Session Six/Session Seven – the exhibition

How you put this exhibition together is entirely up to you and the people who've taken part. It is a good opportunity for people to help put materials together, so you may want to run this over two sessions – or overlap doing this as part of any additional session as set out above.

It is a good idea to include photographs as people really enjoy this; and you may well find a benefit from actively taking people round the exhibition - 'manning' the stands and talking with people about what has been discovered.

It is likely that doing this will uncover further opportunities to discuss what people are good at and interested in, and how anything they would like to do could be achieved.

It's also a very nice way of saying thank you to everyone for taking part and for their hard work.

At the end of the exhibition, you should also have a range of materials that you can use to illustrate what you have done with other groups attending on different days; with funders; and for open days or publicity purposes.

We asked everyone who'd completed a scrapbook if they would like to keep their copy, and they all did. This is another reason why it's a good idea if (at least some) staff and volunteers also make a scrapbook, as these could be kept at the centre or club as a resource (and as examples).

Above all, the exhibition should be a very interesting and enjoyable session – and you may well want to invite local dignitaries or newspapers, or funding or regulatory bodies, to attend – and ask people (staff, volunteers, and older people) if there is anyone they would like to invite to attend – such as family, friends or neighbours.

It's also important to stress that the exhibition isn't the end of matters, but marks the beginning of the next stages of ensuring older people have enjoyable and fulfilled lives - as defined by them.

Hints and Tips

Frequency

We worked with older people in the mornings, once a fortnight. You could choose instead to run these as weekly sessions, so long as you make sure there is enough time for people to take their photographs and have these developed. Each session tended to last around 1 – 1 ½ hours.

Staff and volunteer ratio

In the larger group discussions, we found using one member of staff (or one volunteer) to work with a group of around 10 older people worked well. When we were holding the same discussion with 30 or more older day centre attendees, we simply sub-divided this group into three groups of 10, each supported by a volunteer or staff member; one person then fed back to the whole group.

Two people (sometimes one) supported the smaller groups of (typically) 5-6 people taking photographs and completing scrapbooks. We found this higher ratio helped everyone feel included and listened to (and to support those without sufficient literacy skills to record what was said).

Whether these ratios work for you will depend on the specifics of your service.

During the sessions

People work at very different speeds, so it is important not to try to run this as a 'class' where everyone must reach the next stage at the same time. If someone is working more or less quickly, help them work at the speed that suits him or her best – and apply this same principle to everyone.

This may mean that, at session 3, you have two people already covering session 4's subjects; one person still at session 2; someone who has decided to join in that day and wants to start at the beginning; someone who is ill and not coming that day; and two others doing what session 3 is meant to involve. This certainly reflected some of our experiences.

It does become a bit of a juggling act, but is still perfectly possible to do. The key seems to be to have one person (member of staff, or volunteer) who takes an overview of the whole process; knows what is coming next; and can support other staff and volunteers working across a group operating at diverse speeds. This ability is, however, part and parcel of what personalising services involves. Following this approach makes it easier for people to join in with these group activities at later stages (ie you don't have to 'start' everyone at the same time).

Numbers

You could decide to try this with everyone in one go – but the chances are that some people will not want to take part; or, they may only be interested in one element; or, the numbers in the group may make this logistically difficult.

In one day centre, one person was interested in taking photographs, talking about these, and putting them into a scrapbook - but didn't want to be involved in the broader life history work. There were others who wanted to explore the life history element much more – adding other photos from home to their scrapbooks, and drawing their family tree.

All these different responses are fine. The key is to take what people are willing to offer in terms of information about themselves, and work from this. A great deal can often be garnered from what, at first glance, appears to be very little.

From the person who only wanted to take photos we found out he:

- wanted to visit a local church, which has a well known graveyard and small museum attached (*and went with another person, and a member of staff – both of whom wanted to see the graveyard*);
- wanted to know if stories about tunnels under a local hotel were true (*together, we rang the hotel from the day centre – the tunnels did exist, but were not open to the public*);
- was concerned that his wife, an amputee who used a wheelchair, could not find any day trips she could physically go on because the coaches were not accessible – (*the I&A service found some local alternatives for them to try*).

You might prefer to work more in-depth with a smaller group (perhaps 4-6 people), and have similar, but broader, discussions with the remaining larger group. We started in both day centres by working with one set of people attending on one particular day, and found it was really helpful to start small in this way: so you may choose to try this with one group on one day at any one time. If people attend more than one day each week, you will likely find they share what they're doing with others – this can result in some very interesting changes in itself:

One man talked to people on the other day he attended, about the scrapbooks, the photographs, and the ideas of trying things out in the town. He and two of these 'Thursday ladies' told the manager they would like to go swimming together. One of these ladies revealed she had been a champion swimmer in her youth, and brought in her swimming medals, certificates and photographs to share.

Mixing small and large groups

The advantage of trying both a small and a large group approach *at the same time* is that no one feels left out. This is an important consideration if your club or

centre has tended to run activities that everyone always takes part in and so aren't used to this larger group 'sub-dividing' into doing different activities.

The disadvantage is that you need more than one person each to be 'running' the different approaches at the same time; and you may well need to find a quieter space for the smaller, in-depth group, away from the broader group discussions. You may need more than one person to support this small group, depending on their current literacy skills. You may also need several people to 'run' the larger group discussions, as bigger groups may need to be split up so everyone can have a say and hear what is said.

In larger group discussions, you can ask the same questions – such as where have you lived? – as are being asked of the 'scrapbook group'; but in this case you are asking people to share answers in the group, rather than in their individual scrapbooks. It's a good idea to record what people call out, using flip charts. Use what people tell you at the time to have a broader discussion about what they have shared – such as that people have always moved around the country a lot (this really isn't a modern phenomenon), the huge range of work people have carried out, and the interests they have pursued.

You can share all this information as part of the larger exhibition, in Session Seven, if you and the participants wish.

Exhibition

With permission, we displayed people's scrapbooks at the exhibition in Session Seven. We also asked those who completed scrapbooks to choose one photo as their favourite, which we then had enlarged – these were also displayed, and we gave a smaller, framed, copy to the person involved (using frames that cost less than £1.20 each), as a thank you.

The large, and the framed, photos were very popular.

We also used the information people had shared in the larger groups about where they had lived and marked where these were – roughly – on a hand drawn map of the UK on flip chart paper. This was a representation of the UK only – we wanted to show in an easy, visual way, where people had lived. In one day centre we also used a colour photocopy of a world map, taken from an old (out of copyright) atlas that showed the relevant countries where people had lived.

We listed the jobs people had had (paid and unpaid), and their hobbies and interests, and used very simple materials for all these displays.

The exhibition sparked a lot of interest and more conversations. People wanted to know who had also lived in the same place they had lived – and who had worked at that particular factory because they had also worked there. They wanted to know who else was listed as liking football, and which team they supported.

It also encouraged some of the people from the broader group discussions who had not yet done so, to look through the Information Folder and begin to identify what else interested them.

Working with people new to day care or clubs

The above approaches are particularly useful when working with people who have been attending a centre or club for some time.

But you might choose also to try this with people who are either new to day care, or even those who might be on some kind of 'waiting list'.

In this case, you might find it better to meet as a small group in a different venue, rather than at the centre's premises. Alternatives include – meeting rooms at a local library, church hall, community centre or museum. A significant proportion of people who have tried this approach whilst waiting for a day centre place have not taken up their day centre place. Instead, they have:

- joined other interest clubs, receiving day care staff support for their first few times of attending
- become local volunteers, including for Age Concern
- started to socialise with others they have met at this group ('Scrapbook Group', 'Circles Group', 'Photographs Group' – whatever you decide to call yourselves)
- helped to run similar sessions with new groups of older people.

Having semi-structured conversations

We used semi-structured conversations - having some initial questions that we knew we wanted to ask as a starting point, and building on these as the conversation progressed. Having some kind of 'script' is useful so long as you also *respond* to what people then go on tell you. This is not a 'tick list' of questions to use as some kind of assessment.

We found it really important to keep reflecting back to people that what they were telling us was very interesting. This wasn't difficult - it was genuinely interesting. People's lives are so varied – even those who think their life is boring have often shown huge fortitude (such as being widowed early with young children); or they have witnessed huge changes (often very clearly seen by those who have lived in the same place). But they may not 'know' that unless you tell them.

Others had had more unusual experiences – such as working abroad, or being a female haulage driver in the 1950s (as one woman had been). Or they may tell you about the experiences of their families and friends: one daughter had been a Miss Great Britain in the 1980s, and her mother showed us the programme from the Miss World event in which her daughter had competed.

Reflecting positively back to everyone (but not so as to make one person feel their life has been more ‘special’ than another’s) has a remarkably positive impact on people’s confidence. Once people began to recollect what they had done and achieved up to date (and that this was all interesting, and very varied), it opened up to them the distinct possibility of having an interesting and full life now.

Reluctance to ask

Sometimes staff and volunteers were reluctant to have conversations about people’s lives in case it was upsetting to talk about difficult times. Perhaps the only rule to use is to say to people in advance (and to keep saying this) not to tell you anything they don’t want to share. If someone does become upset, it is important to be a sympathetic but active listener – let the person say what they need to say in the way they need to say it. If you feel it is appropriate you might, when they have finished, reflect back in a supportive way on the conversation - such as reflecting what handling difficulties or trauma says about their character.

We also found staff and volunteers were sometimes unhappy about asking questions they thought would upset people – such as asking what people used to do because they might not be able to do it now (perhaps due to disability, or lack of money). It is helpful to talk through this possibility first, so staff and volunteers feel better equipped to tackle this. We found if we asked people what they used to do as children, and then went on to ask what they used to do as adults, we could introduce the idea that there are things we *all* used to do that we don’t do any more (such as – belong to the Brownies, do handstands). Using this direct approach meant no one was upset.

We found some reluctance at first to ask a woman with learning disabilities about ‘paid work’, because of fears that her disability would have prevented her having a job, and so she might feel left out of that discussion. We resolved that concern by first talking together about the sort of things *anyone* might have done that they might have received money for – such as doing household chores in order to ‘earn’ pocket money. We also discussed how some people – particularly older women – may have brought up families (unpaid work) rather than being in paid work. By asking people about their experiences of both paid *and* unpaid work, we were simply trying to avoid making assumptions: some people might have experience of both, where others have only been in either paid or unpaid work.

In fact, when asked, the woman with learning disabilities proudly told of the paid babysitting she had done when her niece was a young child.

Involving people with memory, communication or physical difficulties

A few people we worked with had memory, physical or communication difficulties; they took part in both the photographs and scrapbooks, and the larger group discussions. Here are some of our experiences:

- One person found taking the photographs too confusing, so we thanked her for trying, and she filled in the other parts of the scrapbook
- One man needed to have two 'go's' at the photographs as he had misunderstood the nature of the task the first time round. We gave him a second camera and reassured him this was not a problem – second time round, he took photos he was very happy to use for his scrapbook
- One woman with short term memory problems took some photos but was uncertain about them. She didn't think they said enough about her. She decided to bring in some of her existing photos and put these in her scrapbook as well
- One man with severe cerebral palsy was very patient with us when we misheard what he said. He needed someone to write down his answers as he was unable to do this himself, but took a large number of photographs of his home, family and garden with which he was very pleased
- One man who, since his stroke, had only been able to use his left arm (he was right handed) was very pleased to be able to use the throwaway cameras as he found he could easily hold this and 'click' with his one hand
- One woman found it difficult to remember the names of places she had lived until she was shown a map of the UK, when she was able to point out lots of places and explain some of the stories behind her moves
- One man did not want to talk about his family, but enjoyed talking about his love of racing cars, and shared photos of the Morgan he had once owned
- One woman told us the same story several times – each time we checked over the written version with her, and added tiny new details as she remembered them
- One woman couldn't remember anything except the layout of her childhood home, so we asked her to 'talk us through the house' - 'you go in the front door, then the sitting room door is on the right, there's a fireplace' etc. [we didn't – but you could – draw this out as a floor plan of the house, and add this drawing to the scrapbook]
- One woman couldn't think whether she'd had any paid work, but a member of staff shared her own childhood memory of the woman making dresses and showed her a needle and thread, prompting the woman to remember a story about making a purple dress.

Next steps

Having tried this approach with people attending on one day, there will no doubt be aspects that you decide should be done differently another time. There are two important 'next steps':

- not to lose the momentum with the group of people you have tried this with;
- trying this approach with other groups attending on other days.

Keeping the momentum going

It is possible that some of the people you try this with will find alternative ways to spend their time instead of coming to the centre or club. This may well be one of the outcomes of the approach – and it is important to note the role played by the centre or club in achieving this.

Others may very much want to come together as a larger group, but some may want to start using that time differently so that the larger group comes together at (for example) lunchtime, but is otherwise engaged in diverse activities – and activities that may not always happen every week. Although this may raise some challenges for staff, volunteers and those attending, it's important to use the same 'problem-solving' skills that everyone has been using throughout this project. Bringing people together in groups is still an essential part of support for those who feel they no longer know enough people, or even have no friends surviving; so this becomes more a question of how the overall resources in the centre or club – staff and volunteer time and energy; cost of lunch and snacks; transport to and from home; access to local facilities from the centre – might be used slightly (or very) differently.

One possibility is to begin to pull together, not just the experiences of those you have tried this with, but also experiences from across other day centres. Maybe there are people attending different centres or clubs who might enjoy being introduced to and get to know each other, perhaps because they have common interests or experiences, or knew each other in the past, or are simply like-minded individuals? Perhaps there are a few people who have a very particular interest they would like to explore together – this might create some logistical difficulties, but there might be some very interesting answers!

If there are barriers to change because of the way contracts are set up, or centres and clubs supported (for example, by a central transport service that collects - and returns home - everyone at the same time), then the funding body needs to know. All councils (and, increasingly, Primary Care Trusts) have to deliver 'personalised' support – so it's important to be able to spell out how things need to change to deliver what older people are telling you they would like, which is fundamentally what this approach is about.

Trying this approach with others

Having tried this approach with one group of people, you may well want to go on to try it with others. You may find, as we did, that 'news' of this approach has already spread – and some who attend on other days may already have begun to talk about their lives, and about what they would like to do – such as the ladies who wanted to go swimming.

You may have already decided you could try this approach differently, based on your experiences so far – that's fine. Do record what you change and why – and share this with other centres and clubs. You may in any case find another group responds very differently. One of the important aspects of this approach is to be ready for the unexpected – which means being pretty flexible, and open.

Outputs and outcomes

One aspect that all organisations are increasingly being expected is to measure outcomes – in other words, what happened when you tried something out? What changed? Was this change better, or worse – and by whose definition? The outputs and outcomes you might find include:

- joining an embroidery group
- finding a regular chess partner at the centre
- going fishing with the husband of a member of staff
- walking to a local auction house from the day centre, to see an auction
- visiting the local museum with a day centre friend
- people 'problem solving' for each other, and sharing information and ideas about what is possible
- introducing people to others living locally - sharing social networks
- increased confidence
- feeling more positive about life.

Age Concern Oxfordshire has already developed a series of Evaluation Tools, which could be used as the basis for monitoring outcomes using the above approach. You could use two of these Tools in particular:

- for *qualitative outcomes*, recording people's personal stories (based on the One-Off Outcomes sheet). This is focused on recording how people feel about having tried this out and about any changes they have noticed in themselves and their lives.

Staff and volunteers could also separately record stories that you feel are good illustrations of what can be achieved;

- for *quantitative outcomes*, asking people what exactly has changed for them over the time they have been involved with this approach (based on the Three Month Review/Impact Tool) – looking at aspects such as are they now doing more things (what? How many?), with more people (who? How many?), any other changes (eg adaptations sorted out; benefit applications made)?

Lots of organisations are working to develop outcome measures – the Personal Social Services Research Unit (PSSRU – www.pssru.ac.uk); InControl; CSCI (and CSIP). There will probably be quite a lot published during 2008 and 2009, so it is worth being aware that these different models exist.

About the Authors

Lorna Easterbrook has been an independent consultant specialising in health, housing and social care for older people, since 2000. Before this, she worked with a Home Improvement Agency, Age Concern England, and the King's Fund; and began her work with older people as a professional theatre stage manager, taking plays into care homes, hospital wards and other community venues including village halls, schools and arts centres. Lorna's recent publications include *Your Rights to Health Care* (Age Concern Books, 2007), and *Living on the Edge: enabling older owner occupiers with moderate learning disabilities to live independently* (Care & Repair England, 2008). A new report, about End of Life care for older people living in Extra Care Housing schemes, will be published later in 2008 by Housing 21.

Penny Thewlis is Deputy Chief Executive at Age Concern Oxfordshire. Trained as a teacher of Drama and English, she has worked in the disability field and for 10 years as Chief Officer of Oxfordshire Community Health Council, where she developed a passionate interest in making public participation work, particularly for excluded groups and individuals. Her involvement with Age Concern Oxfordshire began in 2000 when she undertook a freelance study of the needs and aspirations of older people in rural areas, *Lilac from the garden*. Penny now leads for the organisation on community development and involving older people.