

Wandsworth Older People's Forum

Report of Survey of Newsletter Readers 2018

Background

WOPF undertakes an annual survey of the readers of our newsletter. This year most questionnaires went to those members who receive the newsletter at home although a few people picked it up at other places. The survey has three main aims:

1. To get feedback on the newsletter to ensure that it meets readers' requirements
2. To collect the statistical information required by funders
3. To give us a snapshot of some aspects of the lives of older people and their views about help and support available to them.

Response Rate

The response rate this year was the highest it has been at 77 (64%). This year, 95% of respondents received the newsletter at home and the rest saw it in the library, at their sheltered housing complex or at an organization or club.

Respondent Characteristics

We learnt that 50% of respondents are over 80 years old with 25% reporting that they are over 85. 33% are between 72 and 80 years old and 15% between 66 and 71 years old while 2% are between 60 and 65 years old.

35% of respondents were male and 65% female. This is a larger proportion of men than in many older people groups.

65% of readers described themselves as white British, 10% were Asian British and 13% were black British. 8% were from other ethnic groups. 6% of respondents did not respond to this section. These percentages reflect the mix of the community in Wandsworth and are similar to last year.

Views about the newsletter

Views were generally positive with 95% saying they read the newsletter every quarter. 91% said the content was clear to see but 4 individuals said that they would find it easier in black and white with larger type and no thick type. 97%% found the content clear and easy to understand.

When asked about their preferred content for articles (and invited to check as many categories as were relevant), the most popular are articles about local issues 86%. and health, 83%. Activities are popular with 71% followed by Interest in transport 74%. Social care is of interest to 70% while national policy is important to 67% of readers 67% are keen to hear about crime prevention, 62% like to read personal stories and 44% enjoy the jokes, cartoons and quizzes.

Suggestions for possible material

Only 25% of readers put in suggestions about content they would like to see in the newsletter but, their ideas were useful. They suggested: readers' letters, obituaries, more about activities where and what, religion, day trips, better photos, more BME stories, LGBT stories, holiday info, story competition, visits to other groups in UK, anything about London, more light hearted pieces, achievements, more places for lunch and tea, local stories, home and garden help, where to find computer help. There were no negative comments but a number of positives such as : "excellent", "I'm happy", "balance feels right", "covers my requirements".

Readers` Connectedness

On Line?

Most statistics in this survey do not change very much from year to year but those reporting that they have internet access rose from 67% last year to 75% this year. The number having internet in their homes was 65% with 10% using the internet in the library or elsewhere. 18% of survey respondents said they would welcome help with computers etc.

Out and about?

71% of respondents said they live alone but 66% said that they get out and about as much as they would like and 90% said they socialise either informally through friends and family and/or at local groups. Of these, 46% socialised with both family and through groups, 17% only socialised with friends and family while 20% depended on groups and did not have family contact. A further 10%, a significant number when generalised to the wider population of older people in the borough are not getting out and socialising. The difficulties that prevent people getting out and about are mainly health conditions; although transport issues were also mentioned by some. Unsurprisingly, correlation of the data showed that the majority of those more likely to be stuck indoors on their own were over 80.

Do you Exercise?

86% of respondents, said they do exercise. The most popular forms of exercise are walking 54%, keep fit 29% and , swimming 9%. One or two people did Pilates, sport, dance, yoga and cycling.

Do you receive services at home?

Only 13% of readers receive services and they were divided in half as to whether they thought these services to be good or adequate, 19 people responded to a question asking what services would be helpful to them suggesting: Transport, libraries open, spa, help, cheaper more reliable transport with taxi card, shopping, computer tuition, cooked meals, help with stairs, exercise dance classes, downstairs toilet, lunch clubs, outings, help with home decorating & repair, friends.

Can you get a GP appointment?

Because we have heard concerns about problems with getting GP appointments, we asked readers about their experience. The response was mainly positive with 29% finding it easy to get an appointment, 41% saying it was not too bad and 21% saying it was difficult. 9% did not respond.

Do you come to Forum Meetings?

We were interested to know what proportion of our readers attend Forum meetings and how many are members simply to receive the newsletter. 50% said they had attended Forum meetings and most found them interesting. There were not many suggestions for topics for the meetings but these included how to get cheaper bills, experts who can help solve problems and how to generate new friends.

Are you Lonely?

36% of respondents said they never felt lonely and 48% said they sometimes feel lonely. However there were 9% of respondents who said they mostly or often feel lonely. (7% did not respond).

What are the important issues for older people?

Members were asked what they thought was the most important issue for older people in Wandsworth, Only 65% of respondents completed this section, The biggest concern expressed by 26% of respondents was loneliness and isolation; and the second most important issue was the cuts and reductions in availability of health and social care services. A concerning theme that linked a number of comments was Fear. People are afraid about not having enough money, of there not being good care homes if they need them, of GPs not coming to the home when they are unwell, that there is no way to get a cheap cooked meal, that they will not manage in unsuitable accommodation, that there are not enough police to make you feel secure, that everything is on the web or accessed by telephone pads which instruct you to press different numbers.

Forum related action following last year' survey

In response to last year's survey we

- made sure that the background colours were much paler to enable the print to stand out.
- organised a writing competition and although we only had 2 contestants, both their articles were published and one of them has become an occasional contributor

- introduced cartoons/quizzes/puzzles
- provided a list of useful contacts for a range of key services
- offered a workshop to help people with tablets and computers

Proposals for next year

If we receive funding to produce a paper copy next year we should

- Offer black and white large print copies for those with visual impairment
- Offer another technology workshop
- Continue to provide a list of useful contacts
- Give more detail about the different activities and clubs that we list

Reflections on responses to lifestyle questions

It depends on your age and your health

The survey offers a mixed picture that reflects larger scale research about the lives of older people. On the one hand, there is a majority of active older people, engaged with their families and communities and enjoying a range of pursuits. But there is a minority, small but significant, approximately 10%, who are isolated, in poor health, unable to get out, and without the help and support that they need. The active elderly, the majority of whom live alone, hold fears in the back of their minds about how suitable their accommodation will be, whether there will be good quality health and care services when they need them and whether they will become isolated when they are no longer as mobile as they are now.

Service quality and availability varies

In terms of services that are provided there seems to be an uneven quality with some people saying care is good and they can get GP appointments quite easily while a significant minority (around 20%) struggle to receive the primary care and social care they need. For example, it was concerning to see a number of comments about the need for 'hot meals'. Since meals on wheels and luncheon clubs have been cut, many older people have to survive on sandwiches or microwaved frozen meals and rarely enjoy freshly cooked food. While in surveys five years ago, good quality NHS and social care services were taken for granted, there is now serious concern that they are eroding.

Jenny Weinstein March 2018