

Project: **Wednesbury Older People's Champion**

A real champion for older people



Wednesbury and West Bromwich 
Primary Care Trust



Neighbourhood
Renewal Unit

Funded by:

The Wednesbury Older People's Champion post was created in 2004 through NRF funding. In 2005, Wednesbury & West Bromwich PCT and Wednesbury Town Team agreed to joint fund the post, which is managed by Agewell. It is now hoped to be mainstreamed in the future.

Background:

The Borough of Sandwell has a higher percentage of older people than the national average, with one in three people aged 50 or over and one in five people aged 65 or over. Within the Borough, Wednesbury has one of the highest percentages of older people.

Agewell is a Sandwell-wide organisation which looks at all aspects of the current and future needs of older people and addresses them positively. The

organisation chose Wednesbury as the first town in Sandwell to have its own Champion to look after the needs and aspirations of older people. There are now three Older People's Champions in Sandwell and the aim is to have one in every town in the Borough.

“Sandwell is a Borough with high levels of deprivation and need, and we have an ageing population,” explains Jayne Salter-Scott, Service Development Manager for Sandwell PCTs.

Jayne, who has overall responsibility



One of the regular groups that meets at the Wesley Centre in Wednesbury every week.

for Agewell, sees the role of the Older People's Champion as both vital and valuable. "It's vital in that it establishes links with the most vulnerable and isolated older people in our communities, and valuable in that it provides organisations such as the PCT and the local authority with a link to those who are deemed most at risk."

Purpose:

The role of the Older People's Champion is to promote positive images of older people, challenge 'ageism', and enable older people to exercise choice and live with dignity and esteem.

One of the key aims is to reduce the number of isolated and vulnerable people in Wednesbury. It was important to recruit a local person to the post who knows the Wednesbury area well and understands local difficulties and problems which older people may encounter.

Continued consultation carried out by Agewell with older people has shown that they want clearer information about the support and services available and greater involvement with what happens around them. This feedback formed the basis for the Older People's Champion's role which includes:

- Making contact with older people in the area and discussing issues about

their health and well being.

- Establishing and supporting a local Agewell Panel or older people's forum which feeds into Agewell to ensure a co-ordinated approach to acting on the needs of older people.
- Working with local groups of older people and holding discussion groups, events and activities to gain their views.
- Becoming a referral point for local agencies.

The Champion:

Edna Barker, a local older person, was recruited to the post in 2004. Edna has lived in the area all her life. Following a career in export, Edna was set to enjoy retirement with her husband until his sudden death left her devastated. It made her realise she had to make a new life for herself and she's steadily built her confidence, self-esteem and skills to become the first Older People's Champion.

Edna was involved with the British Heart Foundation, before joining Agewell's Lay Group and becoming an Agewell volunteer. She also completed a 12 month Cruse Bereavement Care counselling course and an NVQ Level 4 in Development Work.

Edna's now well known throughout the area and sits on Wednesbury Housing Panel and the Older People's Strategic

Planning Group, is Vice Chair of Governors at Mesty Croft Primary School in Wednesbury and Chair of Governors at Wednesbury Oak Primary in Tipton. “I’m used to using my brain and always need to feel stimulated,” Edna says. “I’m a firm believer that if you don’t use it, you lose it, which is why I really enjoy being an Older People’s Champion.”

Champion in Action:

In her two years as Champion, Edna has made a big difference to local older people. She has targets to achieve each year which are closely monitored, such as engaging with 100-150 older people, engaging with 12-15 local groups and encouraging 100 older people to be immunised against flu.

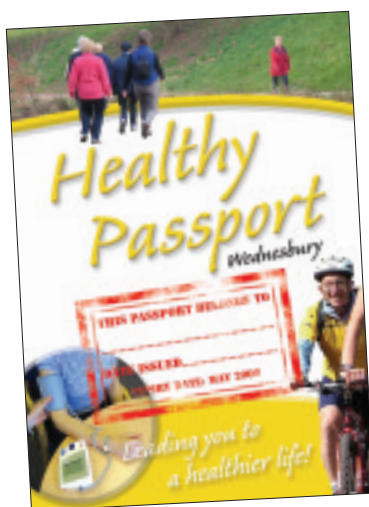
Edna is part of the Steering Group which measures her performance. The Group comprises older people, the Manager of Agewell, and representatives from Wednesbury Town Team and Wednesbury & West Bromwich PCT.

“One of my targets was to create older people’s forums and I’ve achieved this by holding themed events which bring local older people together,” she says.

“Each event usually attracts about 30 older people and are held in different

community venues to encourage new people to come along. I’ve organised events about healthy living with speakers from the PCT, events about celebrating Christmas safely with representatives from the Police and Fire Service, and events about giving older people a voice where we discussed with local organisations what people like and dislike about their lives in Wednesbury. I try to make them fun but informative.”

Seeing local older people’s interest in healthy living led Edna to run a series of Extend gentle exercise taster sessions in local venues which have proved popular.



Then in 2005, Edna launched the Wednesbury Healthy Passport scheme to encourage older people to become fitter and healthier by taking part in activities which earn them points towards prizes. These include having an accident prevention assessment in the

home, getting a flu and pneumonia vaccination, or being active by walking or swimming. More than 60 people have since signed up and the idea has proved so successful, that it’s now being rolled out in other parts of Sandwell.

A major part of Edna’s work is networking as she believes that “personal contact is the way forward”. She works with all local older people’s

groups and is constantly identifying new groups who need help to develop and grow. She also networks with health centres and GP surgeries and is always building on her links with Wednesbury Town Team. Recently, she's started working with residential and nursing home staff to try to stop residents feeling isolated.

"I've visited the local surgeries to make the practice managers aware I'm here to help and am offering support to Wednesbury Nursing Team," Edna says. "Last week I visited a 92 year old who feels very isolated. I can put people in contact with others, explain the services available or even accompany them to a club for the first time if they don't want to go alone."

Edna was presented with one of the first Sandwell Lifelong Learning Awards

in 2005. She received the Citizen of Wednesbury Award which recognised her work in 'championing the causes of older people'.

She says that she just enjoys doing what she's doing. "I'm a people person," Edna explains. "I like meeting people and talking – whether it's a Chief Executive or a local older person. I think I've come a long way, but my challenge now is to go on and make life even better for local older people."

Achievements:

The fact that Edna is accepted by older people in Wednesbury as their Champion is an excellent endorsement for her achievements. "People now know they can find me at the Old Post Office in Holyhead Road and call in," she explains.



Older People's Champion, Edna Barker, supports local resident John Allen during his health assessment towards his Healthy Passport.

Local people find Edna's work invaluable

New Initiatives

Local residents, Valerie and John Allen joined the Wednesbury Healthy Passport Scheme in 2005.

“A couple of people were talking about it on the health walks we do so we decided to get our own passports,” explains Valerie. “I’ve done a few keep fit classes, had a health assessment, an eye test and an energy test and I’ve gathered enough points for my free voucher now.

“I think the Healthy Passport brings people together and gets them doing

things. People have said to me, ‘I wish we had the healthy passport in our area’.”

Husband John adds: “It’s definitely a good idea as it’s encouraging older people to stay healthier and fitter and you even get rewards at the end!”

Club Support

Ivy Clews, aged 85 is Secretary and Treasurer of the Darby & Joan Club for over 55s in Wednesbury. She says: “Edna is always on hand to help out, whether it’s filling in forms or applying for funding. She also helped the club

Agency Networking

“Edna has such a passion to work with people and engage in community development activities that she’s had quite an impact,” says Wednesbury Town Team Community Development Officer, Imran Dean.



“She provides a very good link between the older people of Wednesbury and the Town Team and other service providers and we engage Edna in a lot of consultations that we do with residents. She’s a real voice for older people.”

to find its current base at St Bartholomew's in Little Hill.

“Edna helps me in quite a lot of ways and I'm very grateful. I think having an Older People's Champion is a good idea. If I'm in trouble with my club I just phone Edna and she comes along.”

Help & Support

District nurses in Wednesbury are now referring people aged over 55 to Edna so that she can help with accessing transport and social activities or sorting out building work and home adaptations.

Julie Webber, Locality Matron for Primary Care, says Edna is someone older people can relate to and is acting as a vital link between the services which can help them. “Edna has got involved with local district nurses and it's been really worthwhile.

“She's very open, very approachable and very friendly. She can speak to staff at all levels and I think older people opening the door to her would accept her. She's very knowledgeable and has a wealth of experience which it's great to utilise.”



Local residents enjoying some gentle exercise as part of Edna's Healthy Living Forum.

Making a real difference

During 2004/05, Edna...

- Set up eight older people's forums which focused on specific issues such as growing old in Wednesbury, eating healthily, staying safe and keeping active.
- Encouraged more than 100 older people to get their flu jab.
- Helped approximately 70 older people have a health assessment.
- Signed up more than 60 older people to the Healthy Passport scheme to help them become fitter and healthier.
- Sourced information about 28 local older people's groups in Wednesbury and created a database so that people can easily find out which groups are running in their area.
- Engaged with more than 150 older people so that they can enjoy a better quality of life.

Edna Barker,
Wednesbury Older People's Champion,
can be contacted on 0121 505 3269
or 0121 525 7605.



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