

# **“Age Don’t Count Here”: An Evaluation of Age Concern Liverpool’s Active Living Programme**



**Executive Summary**  
Dr Gary Kitchen

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**Get Heard**  
12 Arnside Road  
Southport PR9 0QX  
Tel: 01704 530 028  
E-mail: [info@getheard.org.uk](mailto:info@getheard.org.uk)

## An Evaluation of Age Concern Liverpool's Active Age Centre: Executive Summary

### Background

- Get Heard was commissioned in September 2005 to review the Active Living Programme of Age Concern Liverpool, comprising the Active Age Centre in north Liverpool, Stay Active Stay Healthy, and the Older People's Programme in Tuebrook/Clubmoor (two other elements of the Active Living Programme, Action for Life and HABIT, were evaluated separately).
- Eight out of ten people in Liverpool think they are active enough already to benefit their health but only two in ten really are.
- Many older people live on low incomes and experience age discrimination and public services that are not always sufficiently responsive to their needs.
- In spite of advances such as the NSF for Older People, the "deficit model" persists in which old age is seen as a time of inevitable decline.
- Older people in Liverpool face high levels of deprivation. Almost half of older people in NRF areas are affected by poverty.
- Liverpool has much higher than average mortality levels and early deaths.
- The Active Living Programme aims to promote healthier, more active lifestyles amongst older people.
- Evidence suggests that physical, mental and social activities can play an important part in helping older people stay healthy.
- The biggest challenge to the Active Living Programme as a whole is the uncertainty of future funding, which makes forward planning difficult.
- The Active Living Programme has achieved a great deal. Management by Age Concern Liverpool is widely perceived to be effective and activities have clear positive benefits to older people's well being.
- The Active Age Centre is widely regarded as a centre of excellence, but may find itself under threat of closure if long-term funding is not found in the near future.
- SASH has succeeded in delivering a community-based and needs-led programme of health activities to some of the most vulnerable older people in Liverpool. This work is hugely valuable but will need to be drastically reduced if further development funding is not available.
- The Older People's Programme has achieved a considerable amount in a limited timescale. The knowledge developed through the Programme can be taken forward in the Active Living Programme as a whole.
- The evaluation demonstrates the effectiveness of the "hub" and "spoke" model, in which the work of the Active Age Centre is used to inform and support "outreach" activity such as SASH and the Older People's Programme.
- This work is much admired. Now partner agencies need to support the Active Living Programme financially as well as verbally if it is to continue its ground-breaking work.

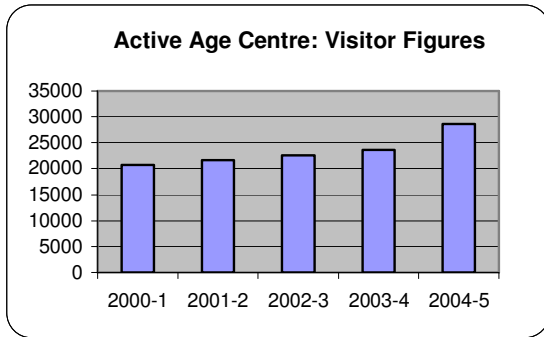
### Key Findings

- Through the Active Age Centre, SASH and the Older People's Programme, Age Concern Liverpool is providing an innovative range of activities aimed at promoting health improvement amongst the older population in Liverpool.

### Active Age Centre

- The Active Age Centre in Clubmoor was opened in October 1999 and sets out to challenge outmoded stereotypes of old age. The Centre is purpose-built, fully accessible and open to people aged over 49.
- Visitors to the Centre rose by 28% over the first five years to 28,636 visitors in 2004-5.

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- The Centre already enjoys wide respect both in the city and elsewhere. It has been described by the chair of Central Liverpool Primary Care Trust as a “model of excellence for the whole of Liverpool”.
- The Centre was specifically commended by the external Joint Inspection of older people’s services in Liverpool as “a positive and innovative partnership development that offers a range of leisure and health promotion activities”.
- The Centre is exceptionally clean, bright and welcoming. It was “designed by older people for older people” with a key part being played by service users.
- Researchers were impressed that telephone calls to the Centre were answered promptly by friendly volunteers.
- The Centre appears to make good use of its facilities with an extensive programme of activities and events.
- Interviews with partner organisations confirmed that the Centre is very highly regarded in Liverpool. There was a strong overall view that it was performing effectively. The Centre supports a range of organisations to reach statutory targets and helps fulfil the requirements of the NSF for Older People.
- Focus Groups with service users revealed a very positive view of the Centre, which was thought to be very beneficial to the health and well being of those attending. Service users were very positive about the classes and activities available.

- Volunteers were aware of the key role played by themselves and their colleagues in helping the Centre to operate.
- Users reported they felt more comfortable using the gym at the Centre rather than mainstream leisure facilities. The instructors were patient and the system easy to operate.
- The computer suite and its system of peer-support were very much appreciated by service users.
- However service users thought that not enough people were aware of the Centre.
- Transport was perceived to be one of the key barriers to attendance at the Centre.
- Most service users appeared to think some form of charging was acceptable.
- Service users felt their views were listened to but nonetheless they felt that the Centre could engage with them more fully.
- This report provides powerful evidence that funding to continue the Centre’s excellent work is justified.

### Recommendations for the Active Age Centre

- Address barriers to attendance.
- Explore ways of involving service users in the development and direction of the Centre.
- Look at meeting the needs of male service users through new approaches, consultation and research into unmet need.
- Redesign data collection systems to meet Age Concern Liverpool’s own strategic needs.
- Promote empowerment skills as well as activities.
- Consider the existing use of space to ensure it is used as effectively as possible in promoting active living.

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- Review the use of the outdoor area.
- Review management arrangements.
- Include more healthy eating options on the café menu.
- Review opening hours and test demand for evening or weekend opening.
- Continue to monitor support arrangements for volunteers.
- Carry out a regular random survey of registered users to actively assess the Centre's performance and ascertain the extent to which it has helped to improve health and well being.
- This rapid expansion of activities was built on the foundations of what had been achieved in the first two years.
- As a result of its location within housing projects, day centres and community centres, SASH has been extraordinarily successful in reaching older people suffering from long-standing illness and disability.
- SASH has not fully achieved its goal of providing evidence-based health data, though this remains a promising area for development (and it is perhaps understandable that Age Concern Liverpool needed to focus its attention on developing activities). The SASH team has however had some success in working in partnership to produce a range of recipes for older people aimed at promoting healthier eating.

### Stay Active Stay Healthy

- Stay Active Stay Healthy (SASH) is a Healthy Living Initiative funded by the Big Lottery. SASH commenced in July 2003 and runs until June 2006.
- Age Concern Liverpool took over management from the Housing Action Trust in June 2005.
- The core work of SASH focuses on a number of former Housing Action Trust neighbourhoods across Liverpool. More than half of tenants were over 60 when the Trust was established in 1993.
- SASH aimed to work with older people to provide evidence-based health data, increase social inclusion, improve mental and physical health, and strengthen links between agencies to improve the quality of support to older people.
- Interviewees acknowledged that SASH got off to a "slow start". Expenditure on activities was just one fifth of the available budget when Age Concern Liverpool took over management, with just 11 regular activities across all sites. This increased to 72 activities by December 2005.
- Interviews with Community Associations and other partner organisations confirmed that SASH has been effective in promoting social inclusion. There is promising evidence that SASH has helped people take part in physical activity through initiatives such as chair-based exercise who otherwise may well not have done so.
- SASH service users took part in a "listening event" carried out by King's College London, which fed into the influential Joint Inspection Report in 2005.
- SASH has had its biggest impact in promoting mental and physical health. The programme of activities gives a clear indication of the diversity of these activities. There is some evidence that frail older people can derive such benefit from these classes that they are able to progress to slightly more demanding activities.
- The activities provided by SASH in the community form a natural "outreach" complement to the work of the Active Age Centre. It appears to be very beneficial to older people to have activities provided near to the home environment

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- The flexibility of SASH-type activities offers the potential to reach out to black and minority ethnic communities.
- Without exception it appears that successful relationships have been built between SASH and Registered Social Landlords (RSLs) and Community Associations. There is also some evidence that successful partnerships have been built with sites where day care services or Extra Care Schemes are in place.
- SASH appears to have been much less successful in forging links with health staff.
- Many Community Associations noticed there had been a positive difference in the SASH project following the takeover of management by Age Concern Liverpool.
- Most Community Associations have deep misgivings about their ability to continue SASH activities once funding ceases. SASH activities take place on four out of five days per week in some places and the potential impact of loss of funding is likely to be devastating.
- There are big differences across the sites regarding levels of activity and the capacity of committee members to organise and fundraise.
- Several of the Community Associations felt that perhaps volunteers or existing staff could be trained to offer classes such as chair-based exercise.
- SASH is a very well regarded project amongst community associations, older people and partner agencies. The findings show that SASH has added significantly to the quality of life of many of the residents of the housing projects. It has succeeded in reaching the frail elderly and those who are otherwise socially isolated.
- SASH appears to be in a key position to work with Community Associations to help represent the views of the “frail older person” in the strategic development of older people’s services in Liverpool.
- SASH has substantially achieved the objectives set out in the original application. There is scope to continue to develop these objectives if the project continues.
- Age Concern’s management of SASH has made a positive difference to the success of the project.
- If SASH funding is discontinued, even temporarily, it may prove very difficult in future to rekindle the relationships that have been developed with the Associations and with RSLs.
- SASH has overcome tentative beginnings and emerged as an interesting and innovative project providing active living services to a group of older people who are able to derive great benefit from them.

### Recommendations for SASH

- Bring together interested parties to look at the future of the SASH.
- Open up discussion with Community Associations over charging and sustainability.
- Consider carefully any potential changes to costs of SASH activities to service users.
- Review employment arrangements of SASH staff with PCT.
- Continue with “hub” and “spoke” model, in which SASH is regarded as outreach from the Active Age Centre (or hub), but interpret this flexibly.
- Carry out a cost comparison of the Active Age Centre and SASH.
- Encourage freelance tutors to cross-promote activities.
- Ensure that service user records are properly catalogued onto a database.
- Consider further research or consultation to uncover barriers to attendance by men.

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- Monitor user satisfaction.

### Older People's Programme

- The Older People's Programme in Tuebrook/Clubmoor is funded by the Neighbourhood Renewal Fund (NRF) until March 2006. It was originally managed by North Liverpool Primary Care Trust and was taken over by Age Concern Liverpool in December 2004.
- The Older People's Programme has just one full-time member of staff, the Coordinator, together with a small amount of administrative support.
- The Programme aimed to coordinate and develop services for older people in the renewal area of Tuebrook/Clubmoor, to widen access and participation, and support NSF objectives of reducing falls and promoting active ageing.
- The decision in the early stages of the project to commission a piece of research to look at the needs and aspirations of older people in Tuebrook/Clubmoor helped give clearer focus to the work.
- The overall perspective that emerged from interviewees is that the Programme has managed to achieve a considerable amount in a restricted timescale.
- The Older People's Programme has clearly achieved the majority of outputs required by the Project Brief. Some of this work has been innovative, such as the mobile phone training and welfare rights campaign.
- The anti-ageism campaign appears to be the only output in the Brief which has not been fully achieved.
- The work has further developed links between Age Concern Liverpool and outside agencies and provided an important "outreach" element to the work of the Active Age Centre.

- The evidence we have seen indicates that the Programme's work has been positively received both by older people and partner organisations.
- The Programme has succeeded in raising the profile of Age Concern Liverpool and showing how the organisation can turn around projects that appear to be floundering.
- Many of the activities undertaken by the Programme require further funding for longer-term sustainability.

### Recommendations for the Older People's Programme

- We recommend that the Baseline research should continue to be utilised to inform Age Concern Liverpool's work, in particular the development of the Active Living Programme.
- We recommend that Age Concern Liverpool explores the use of childcare to attract grandparents to events.
- The Programme confirms the earlier recommendation that Age Concern Liverpool should carry out research to look at men's health needs and barriers to participation they may encounter.
- We suggest that the mobile phone training should continue in some form and be linked to existing activities such as computer training.
- The Active Living Programme should put more emphasis on working with the media (in much the same way as the Older People's Programme) to reach out beyond existing networks to isolated older people.
- We recommend that funding is sought to continue vital services such as the Handyperson service which is very much needed by older people.