

# HELPING OLDER PEOPLE STAY HEALTHY & SAFE

**FUNDED BY:** The Healthier & Safer Older Age project is sponsored by Sandwell PCTs and funded by Greets Green Partnership until March 2007. It is supported by Sandwell Council's Adult Services and Health Department, and Agewell, the Sandwell organisation that works to ensure the needs and aspirations of older people are put at the top of the agenda.

**PROJECT BACKGROUND:** The project commenced in 2003 as a nursing pilot called Enhanced Nursing Services but was extended in August 2004 to create a multi-agency team to support older people. In April 2005, the nursing posts were mainstreamed by the PCT and the remaining posts funded by Greets Green Partnership to create the Healthier & Safer Older Age Project. Approximately 21 per cent of residents living in the Greets Green Partnership area are aged over 65 years. As the focus of the project is about early preventative work, it was decided to extend the target group to anyone over the age of 50 years in line with the work of Agewell.

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*The Falls Prevention programme in action.*

The Healthier & Safer Older Age team now comprises a Co-ordinator for Older People; two part-time Social Workers; two Occupational Therapists; a Physiotherapist; an Administrative Assistant; specialist support commissioned from Agewell, including the appointment of an Older People's Champion and the organisation of community events and the services of a Community Pharmacist, brought in on a sessional basis when needed.



*Members of the Healthier & Safer Older Age team.*

The team is based at Wood Lane Community Centre in the heart of Greet Green. The team receives referrals from health professionals, housing teams, community organisations and concerned neighbours, but older residents and carers can access the team directly for help, making a real difference to their lives.

**PROJECT IN ACTION:** The Healthier & Safer Older Age project aims to develop services which help increase the life expectancy, independence and mobility of older people, and enable them to stay healthy. Having a multi-disciplinary team means that a quick and flexible response can be provided.

The team takes a holistic approach in that it looks after the whole person and aims to improve quality of life and health by looking at both body and mind. It has introduced new ways of working by:

- intervening early to help older people maintain their health and independence and prevent them being admitted or re-admitted to hospital
- focusing on social and emotional support as well as physical health
- improving access to good quality services and information
- creating support groups to increase the skills and confidence of older people to look after themselves
- raising awareness of the needs of older people

Completely client-centred, the team links with other agencies and initiatives across the area, providing a single point of contact for local older people. The team actively signposts clients and their carers to other services and



information and works closely with other local professionals and agencies, for example, the Fire Service, Greets Green Neighbourhood Wardens, housing departments, crime and community safety initiatives, the Home Accident Prevention Scheme, GPs and district nursing teams.

## Four Areas of Focus

The Healthier & Safer Older Age project focuses on the four key areas of Falls Prevention, Healthy Minds, Support to Carers and Maintaining Good Health and Independence.

## Falls Prevention

The team offers support to older people who have had a fall or are worried about falling. Home visits are undertaken to look at how to prevent falls in the future and residents are referred to the 20-week Falls Prevention programme. Here they enjoy an hour of EXTEND gentle exercise each week plus an hour's talk from a guest speaker. These have included a physiotherapist talking about posture and co-ordination, an occupational therapist looking at equipment and adaptations to the home and a pharmacist talking about managing medicines.

Occupational Therapist, Caroline Elliott, who co-ordinates the Falls Group with Physiotherapist, Emily Hoffmann, says: "We do focus on the physical and educational side of things but we're also trying to make it quite a social event for people. Everyone tells us that they feel their confidence and their balance have improved, but the other big thing we found was the social benefits. One lady said 'it's a light in the darkness'. They all really enjoy the social aspect of the course."

Mr. Tony Griffiths, a local resident, was one of the first to take part in the Falls Prevention programme and found it so good that he wrote a poem



*Exercise is good for you ... and fun too!*

"We're a proactive team which can deal with anything and everything relating to older people. Our aim is to reach out to as many older people as possible in Greets Green."

Terry Chikurunhe,  
Co-ordinator for Older People





*Physiotherapist Emily Hoffman (centre) demonstrates how to do the exercise.*

and a letter about it, on behalf of the group members, which they sent to managers at Sandwell PCTs. He wrote: "The course has given us more confidence, mobility and co-ordination and was presented in a very pleasant atmosphere. The team made the sessions a joy to attend and something we can look forward to." This group of new friends has continued meeting up since the Falls Prevention programme came to an end.

## Healthy Minds

The team helps people with their mental well-being as well as their physical health. This includes offering support and information to help people combat stress, anxiety or depression. One-to-one home visits and talks to groups are arranged, along with talks and group sessions. The team also works to improve people's confidence in getting out and about. A key role is to signpost people to other services which can help, such as GPs, voluntary help, social or support groups, counselling or day centres.

The team identified an under representation from black and minority ethnic groups, and is actively going out and making contact with people from these communities, giving talks and raising awareness about the services available to help.

Social Worker, Janice Moore, says: "The talks include looking at anxiety, stress and 'beating the blues'. Our aim is to increase people's awareness of mental health and support that may be available."



*Exercising together is part of the fun.*



## Support for Carers

Support is provided to carers, such as home visits and talks on carers' issues. A weekly Carers' Support Group is run by Social Workers, Angela Chick and Janice Moore, to provide somewhere carers can meet each other and benefit from finding out about services which can help them.

Sessions have included gentle exercise and talks covering issues such as home accident prevention, medication, healthy eating, and lifting and handling techniques. Following positive feedback from those taking part in early sessions, the group is set to continue in the future.

Angela says: "One of the things we're hoping is that people will bond and get support from each other, and share their experiences as carers. Isolation is a major problem for carers, who can find it difficult to get out and about to meet other people."

The group is for anyone who has a caring responsibility, whether it's for an older person, a disabled person, a friend, neighbour or family member, where either the carer or the person being looked after is aged over 50 and lives in the Greet's Green area.

## Maintaining Good Health and Independence

Agewell was commissioned by the Healthier & Safer Older Age project to provide specialist support for this area of focus. A Directory of Older People's Services in Greet's Green has been created, which details the many services available locally, and nearly 4000 copies have been distributed to local older people and community groups.

In addition, the innovative 'Passport to Health' scheme has been launched and has proved a huge success with more than 140 people signing up in Greet's Green. The scheme has encouraged older people to become fitter and healthier by taking part in healthy activities which earn them points towards prizes. Grandmother Ruby Francis, aged 82, earned enough points for a free pair of non-slip slippers. She took part in a range of activities including



*Older People's Champion Maggie Turner (left) helps local resident, Ruby Francis, decide what to do next on her healthy passport.*



attending a Falls Prevention Group, getting her flu and pneumonia jabs, and having someone assess safety in her home. "I'm trying to do everything on the Passport," she said. "I think it's a marvellous idea! I'm going to carry on and see how many points I can get to make me feel better in myself. I want to feel I've achieved something."

**ACHIEVEMENTS:** The Healthier & Safer Older Age project is different because the team acts as a single point of contact for local older people, providing co-ordinated services which respond to the diverse needs of vulnerable older residents and their carers.

Thanks to the team, older people can enjoy more confidence, practical support and increased mobility and ability. "Older people in Greets Green want to make the most of their retirement years," says Terry Chikurunhe. "They really value the support of the Healthier & Safer Older Age team because we're based in their local community."

An external evaluation of the project was undertaken in Spring 2006 and highlighted a wide range of benefits for local service users and carers:

- Practical support (e.g. equipment and adaptations, advice and support) leading to increased mobility and ability
- Increasing the confidence of individual clients which had helped them to walk and go upstairs again, as well as to undertake everyday activities such as preparing meals and going to the shops
- Support which gave carers the opportunity and the confidence to take a break. For one carer, this was particularly significant as she had previously been sleeping on her father's settee at night for several weeks and the support received had given her the confidence to leave him at night
- Having someone to provide support in the housing clearance process - one service user and their carer identified the help and reassurance they had received as a real benefit from the team: "If we hadn't had their help we'd have been in trouble. It's our first move - we've been here 33 years. We've never moved before. We couldn't have coped on our own with all the paperwork."

The evaluation identified new ways of working and successful outcomes that the project had achieved in a relatively short time:

- The multi-disciplinary team approach leading to more flexible responses, facilitating joint working, providing a model of what is possible
- The team as a single point of contact using a single assessment process for direct assistance, advice and support and for signposting to other services



- Using a neighbourhood approach, based locally and focused on a small geographical area, being more able to respond appropriately and direct and refer people to local services
- Focusing on prevention, social and emotional support - before reaching crisis level; providing access to services at an earlier stage and with less waiting, rather than when people have lost their independence and confidence and don't feel they can carry on alone
- Improved and quicker access to services and reduction in waiting times – often through challenging and troubleshooting bottlenecks in mainstream services
- Recognising the needs of carers
- Promoting the health and well-being of older people in a holistic way, reducing isolation and stigma, increasing confidence through outreach work, community events and the 'Passport to Health' model.

“We can cross the interface between physical and mental health; and between hospital and community care. We can do it better and this project is starting to provide evidence for this. We can demonstrate it to other staff. This is crucial. We've had permission to do things differently.”

Members of the Healthier & Safer  
Older Age Team

## How They've Helped Me

Over the past year, the team has made a huge impact in the local area and is making a real difference to the lives of older people in Greets Green. Here are just a few examples...

### New Lease of Life

Among the Greets Green residents to have benefited from the Healthier & Safer Older Age team is Gillian Cotterill, aged 59, who was losing her confidence and finding it hard to get out after the death of her husband, Brian, two years ago. The team put her in touch with the Spring Chicks Group for older ladies, which meets each week at SWAN (Sandwell Women's Agency Network) for activities such as exercise, arts and crafts, and trips out.

“We're old in body but certainly not in mind and I love it there,” says Gillian. “And it has given me the confidence to go and join other things.”

Gillian is also now involved with the Community Health Forum, the Patient and Public Involvement Group which visits and reviews local health services, the Older People's Health and Safety Forum, the University of the Third Age, and Agewell. “I don't think people realise what's out there,” she says. “It's hard to take that first step but I'm glad I did.”



## Out and About Again

Older people are valued in Greets Green and the contribution they can make is recognised, both within and outside of the project. The newest recruit to the Healthier & Safer Older Age team, is Maggie Turner, the Older People's Champion, who is a local resident and is very proud to declare she is in her 70s!

Travelling around the neighbourhood on her scooter, she engages older people in decision making, encourages them to take part in health related activities, signposting them to services, listening to their concerns and feeding back their views to agencies.

When a local 75 year old lady became widowed in February 2005, she was unable to go out on her own and had mobility problems restricting walking to a few paces. As she began missing her husband and their outings together, she became very depressed. Maggie visited her and offered support and her life turned around.

After a while, she agreed to ride a mobility scooter and do some shopping with Maggie's help. She joined the Ring & Ride service and went to Shop Mobility to train on a scooter and now heads out on regular shopping trips.

Thanks to Maggie, she's met old friends and relatives and has started taking an interest in life again.

**To find out more about the Greets Green Healthier & Safer Older Age Project, call the team on 0121 601 2208.**

Greets Green Partnership was awarded £56 million in 2000 to deliver a 10 year regeneration programme under the Government's New Deal for Communities (NDC) initiative. It is currently funding more than 100 projects throughout the area, covering community empowerment, crime & community safety, education & lifelong learning, health, housing & urban form, jobs & enterprise and neighbourhood management. The Partnership area, which is adjacent to West Bromwich Town Centre, is home to just over 12,400 residents living in 4,900 households.

**To find out more, call Greets Green Partnership on freephone 0800 953 0215.**



*Maggie is a familiar sight in Greets Green on her scooter.*



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