



RETAINING AND REGAINING INDEPENDENCE AND INCLUSION IN LATER LIFE. NOTES AND PRACTICE EXAMPLES FROM ESN'S AUTUMN SEMINAR 2012

LISA SCHÖNENBERG
POLICY OFFICER, EUROPEAN SOCIAL NETWORK

The European Social Network (ESN) is a network organisation that brings together people who design, manage and deliver social services in public authorities across Europe. The 2012 Autumn Seminar "Retaining and regaining independence in later life: the role of social services", took place in Stuttgart, Germany, on 24-25 October, and was organised by ESN in cooperation with the City of Stuttgart and the German Association for Public and Private Welfare. The seminar, which focused on prevention and rehabilitation in social services for older people, brought together 60 ESN members from 20 different countries, including managers, senior professionals and researchers from public social services.

Promoting prevention and rehabilitation

The number of people aged 60 and above in Europe is increasing and there is consequently a growing demand for care. The seminar delegates discussed two key questions in order to consider the issues raised by this demographic change: Firstly, how can social services prevent the

loss of independence and social or family links amongst older people? Secondly, how can these services support older people to regain independence and social/family links as quickly as possible following illness, health problems or bereavement? With this article, we would like to share the outcomes of the seminar and present local practice examples that are relevant to independence and inclusion in later life.

The approach of prevention and rehabilitation in social services for older people is important as it both enhances older people's quality of life and reduces the burden of long-term care and health expenditure. However, it has proven difficult to reform systems that are focused on dealing with severe care needs when they arise, often at hospital in the first instance. A stronger focus on person-oriented approaches, which embed prevention, in disease and crisis-oriented long-term care systems is needed. The seminar addressed how to design social and health services which assist older people in retaining and regaining independence, and inclusion in later life. Speakers and delegates also

stressed the importance of factors beyond social and health care that influence older people's quality of life. Measures which enable older people to remain at home and participate actively in their local community, such as health promotion, volunteering and life-long learning opportunities, and the contribution of family carers were examined.

Design social and health services that favour prevention and rehabilitation

The main focus of the seminar was how to transform services to promote prevention and rehabilitation. Opening the seminar, ESN's vice-chair, Christian Fillet observed that the EU tends to speak about 'long-term care', noting, "Perhaps we ought to be talking more about short-term care: a quick short burst of care, support, training to help a person regain independence and inclusion after an illness or a fall." Among the examples presented, the municipality of Fredericia, Denmark, supports people with potential care needs by focusing on the essential tasks of daily life under the heading 'life-long living'. When an older person applies for personal care and practical help, they are offered 72 hours of intensive training over 31 days, focusing on the essential tasks of daily life. Older people no longer see themselves as 'patients' but as happy and independent, whilst the municipality saves approximately 20,000 Euros per person each year. Prevention and rehabilitation strategies from Portugal and the Netherlands were also presented. The Portuguese National Network of Integrated Continuous Care focuses on developing integrated social and health care with a focus on short-term

care and rehabilitation. The Dutch region of Noord-Brabant has developed ICT solutions in cooperation with local businesses which enable older people to remain at home for longer and meet their real needs.

In order to design social services that promote independence in later life, the delegates stressed that:

- A shift from intervention to early prevention and health promotion is needed. This should be achieved by integrated local services promoting prevention, active ageing and an age-friendly environment.
- Structural reforms at national and local level, alongside financial support, would promote integrated services which identify the needs of older people, help older people achieve social inclusion and build trust amongst older people.
- The role of older people with care needs has to change from passive recipient/'patient' to empowered participant by involving service users in the planning and delivery of services.
- Stronger case management is needed to support older people as individuals. Health and social services should work together closely and cooperate with public, private and family carers to work in a network around older people.

Working together with other sectors to promote independence in later life

"It's about livable communities for all ages," said Daniel López Muñoz, in his report on a project conducted in a number of European regions about 'declining,

ageing and regional transformation' (DART). He emphasised the factors beyond social and health care that influence older people's quality of life. The valuable contribution made by volunteering and health promotion completed this session on adapting to demographic change. Carolyn Akintola, herself a wheelchair user with chronic health problems, shared a moving testimony of caring for her elderly mother "with a total of six hours help a week". She admits it is hard at times, but "I wouldn't have it any other way." She concluded: "Nothing that's worthwhile is ever easy. She's my mum, and I should look after her."

Social and health care services should also work together more closely with other sectors in order to:

- Provide more support to allow older people to remain at home and active in their local community longer, whilst preventing social exclusion, especially in rural areas. Measures could include barrier-free housing, ICT solutions, intergenerational volunteering projects, public transport and meeting places in the community.
- Develop and deliver universal product and service design for all when approaching age-friendly products and services.
- Involve employers in promoting both intergenerational learning amongst older and younger workers and age friendly work places that focus on healthy ageing.

- Acknowledge the contribution of informal/family carers towards the welfare state, for example, by offering leave and relief programmes to carers.

What role is the EU playing?

ESN's aim is to connect and inform our members, who act at local or regional levels, with the initiatives of social policy at European level. The European Union is actively playing a role in a number of ways, not least through the European Year of Active Ageing and Solidarity between the Generations in 2012. This has brought political attention to the approach of active ageing based on longer and more flexible working lives, and solidarity and understanding between young and old. Many local, regional and national initiatives promoted the contribution of older people within society.

The European Innovation Partnership on Active & Healthy Ageing brings greater attention to prevention, screening and early diagnosis, care and cure, active ageing and independent living. The overall aim of the project is to add two healthy years to the life of every EU citizen by 2020. The European Innovation Partnership brings together actors from all levels and sectors to exchange knowledge, whilst mobilising available resources and expertise, and providing an open platform for innovative ideas. A consultation by the European Commission on personal and household services in 2012, and a conference focusing on the job creation potential of care services in January 2013, have drawn attention to the employment potential of the sector. Alongside the challenges

of demographic change, there is a focus on the opportunities brought about by this period of transition. In October 2012, the EU held a peer review on age friendly products and services. The WHO's age-friendly cities and communities programme compliments EU efforts on active & healthy ageing. The WeDO project (Wellbeing and Dignity of Older people) involves 18 partners from 12 countries, and a number of European stakeholders, including ESN. The programme aims to develop a lasting and growing partnership of organisations at all levels, in order to promote the wellbeing and dignity of vulnerable and disabled older people. The project also seeks to prevent elder abuse at all levels and in all settings through the promotion of quality long-term care. The project has developed a European Quality Framework for long-term care services.

In the final session, delegates of the seminar stressed that they would like to work with the EU in order to:

- Help to promote a positive image of older people and raise awareness of their social contribution.
- Invest in collaboration, knowledge and idea exchange, and provide better access to mutual learning opportunities and their results for all stakeholders.
- Provide financial support for local and regional policies, including the use of structural funds to promote independence and inclusion in later life, and which recognises the specific challenges of rural regions.

Overall, delegates felt strongly that the image of 'being old' has to change in order that older people and their contribution to society is valued more highly, and that this would underpin better policy-making in many areas. Everyone with an interest in the dignity and wellbeing of older people should contribute to this cultural change within society.

About the Organisation

The European Social Network (ESN) brings together people who design, manage and deliver social services in public authorities across Europe. We support the development of effective social policy and social care practice through the exchange of knowledge and experience. ESN is a network of Member organisations which are associations of directors of social services; regions, provinces, counties and municipalities; funding and regulatory agencies, universities, research & development bodies working closely with public authorities in the development of social services. We believe that social services should: protect and support vulnerable people, respect the dignity and independence of people using services, pursue excellence in social work and care practice, listen to service users and respond to their needs, promote solidarity with disadvantaged people and communities and promote equality and non-discrimination.

www.esn-eu.org/home/index.html