

# Mearns and Coastal Healthy Living Network

## Summary

Mearns and Coastal Healthy Living Network uses a practical, hands on approach, focusing resources on the things that older people themselves say are important.

## The Community

Mearns/South Aberdeenshire is typical of many Scottish rural locations in that:

- many older people live alone and in isolation from friends and family;
- many are retired and have little in the way of mainstream facilities nearby;
- for some older people, accessing information, whether mainstream health services, social care or general day to day household questions, can be stressful

This combination of factors can lead to reduced social participation and, over time, can lead towards depression, inability or unwillingness to self care, and even malnutrition. As a result many older people feel extremely vulnerable.



## The Approach

Established in 2002, the Mearns and Coastal Healthy Living Network uses a practical, hands on approach, focusing resources on the things that older people themselves say are important. Sometimes that means the most fundamental of services, for example, helping an older person head out to the shops with a volunteer and choose their own fruit and vegetables or meeting new friends at a tea dance. As in the case of one person, assistance can be as simple (yet vital) as having somebody change the light bulb in her house. In addition, because of the social connections made, the Network acts as an information service.

## How it works

- Address issues for older people by involving older people themselves – supported by trained staff.
- Activities and events are delivered with help from the Network's team of 80 volunteers, the majority of whom are older people themselves. These activities include exercise, computer classes and a range of other adult education courses.
- Through the support of staff and volunteers, the needs of 200 older people are met on a weekly basis.
- There is a strong emphasis on community, collaboration and partnership
- An Older People's Network meets every six weeks in order to support and advise the project, and to represent service users in consultations

## Results

- The number of independently constituted or 'offspring' groups that have been set up as a result of the Network is increasing. These groups are run and attended by the older people.
- Mearns and Coastal Healthy Living Network have conducted a Social Return on Investment exercise showing that for every pound invested over £8.00 worth of social value is generated (Nelson, D. 2010, Social Enterprise Activity within the Mearns, p19).
- Volunteers state that they get much more back from volunteering – in terms of community involvement, wellbeing and learning – than they put in.

## Contact

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