



Rural Wisdom Evaluation

Key findings, January 2020



What is Rural Wisdom

Rural Wisdom is a five-year National Lottery funded project exploring the impact of community-based activities that are led by older people living in rural areas in Scotland and Wales.

As part of the project ambitions, the Rural Wisdom partners, Outside the Box, Volunteering Matters Cymru and the National Development Team for Inclusion (NDTi) are sharing the learning to enable people living and working in rural areas to apply and benefit from, what works.

About this document

This document shares the key findings from the five original communities, at the end of Stage 1 of Rural Wisdom. In this first stage Development Workers have been working closely with older people and the community to identify and address the key issues, achieve the project outcomes and create sustainable change. In Stage 2, Development Workers introduce Rural Wisdom to new, rural communities in Wales and Scotland applying the learning from Stage 1 to address local priorities and achieve the same overarching project outcomes.

The Rural Wisdom Communities

Scotland:

Stage 1

Eaglesham
Highland Perthshire
North Angus

Stage 2

Moray
Scottish Borders

Wales:

Stage 1

Leeswood & Pontblyddyn
Milford Haven

Stage 2

Holywell
Dale Peninsula

Further Reading:

www.ruralwisdom.org

Project Outcomes

1. More older people in rural areas are having a voice and leading change in their local communities.
2. More older people get the support they want, which works well for them, through a wider range of community-based services.
3. Policies in Scotland and Wales support older people to continue to live in the rural communities they know and encourage older people's contribution to their communities.
4. The experience of older people in rural areas, and of their communities, contribute to the growth of communities across the UK that value, include and support older people.



The Evaluation

Between May and September 2019, the NDTi Evaluation Team visited the Stage 1 Rural Wisdom communities. Development Workers were coming to the end of their time with these five communities having spent more than two years working with them, helping to ensure what had been set up was sustainable. NDTi went along to find out what had been happening, what had changed and what was being sustained through the work of Rural Wisdom. This involved interviews and focus groups with a variety of stakeholders, including:

Older people who are residents in these communities

National stakeholders

Rural Wisdom staff members

Volunteers of community groups

People working in public or voluntary sectors

Key lessons from across Rural Wisdom



What are we learning about older people leading change and having a voice?

- Older people are more likely to be motivated to use their skills and experience to lead change if they feel the activity is one that is wanted by the community and they can see results for their time and effort.
- Development Workers are a vehicle for change – they are engaged with their community and so are aware of issues and needs and can facilitate contact with public services or organisations so older people can engage directly to influence provision.

What are we learning about older people getting the right support in their community?

- Older people need links to people running all sorts of services to be able to voice their views and ideas directly on what support they want and need for day-to-day living, and how this can be brought into their community.
- Transport is vital for many older people to be able to get to health services and activities in their community.
- It's important that older people know where to get information on community activities and public services.
- Being made to feel welcome is important for people who want to join a group or activity.
- People may need encouragement to 'get involved' as confidence, self-esteem and motivation can play a key part in getting support or joining activities.

Key lessons from across Rural Wisdom (continued)



What are we learning about groups based on socialising, hobbies and interests?

- Older people have to have a genuine interest or need for a group or activity for it to be well supported and likely to be sustained.
- It's important that assumptions aren't made about the type of activities that older people will enjoy or be interested in.
- Older people want activities and groups that involve the whole community.
- Development Workers have shown that being flexible in order to make things happen is key and to persist with ideas and activities when they are worth pursuing.

What are we learning about how older people contribute to rural communities?

Older people are contributing to rural communities in a variety of ways:

- Through volunteering both formally and informally.
- By building connections with others in the community and participating socially.
- Through having a voice and actively campaigning for change or improvements.
- By caring for other people. This can be in multiple ways, for partners, family and friends and across multiple generations.
- Through imparting their knowledge and experiences to help improve services or passing on their skills and expertise to others in the community.

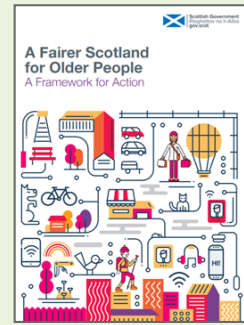
How Rural Wisdom is influencing national and UK strategies and programmes?

Through Rural Wisdom, older people were invited and encouraged to contribute to national government strategy consultations, for example 'A Connected Scotland' and 'Connected Communities' (Wales).

The learning from, and examples of, Rural Wisdom has also fed into the Scottish Strategy: A Fairer Scotland for Older People. In Wales, it's contributing to the work on the Ageing Well in Wales Programme which is hosted by the Older People's Commissioner for Wales. This includes Age Friendly Communities, dementia supportive communities and work around loneliness and isolation.

More information about how Rural Wisdom is influencing a range of policy issues to support older people to continue to live in rural communities can be found here:

www.ndti.org.uk/news/rural-wisdom-evaluation



How Rural Wisdom is influencing the growth of communities that value older people

- There has been learning between the two nations around solutions to some of the shared issues: e.g. transport (Wales to Scotland) and community models of health and social care (Scotland to Wales).
- The Ageing Well in Wales Network has shared examples of Rural Wisdom activities to demonstrate what can be done and how, to create Age Friendly Communities. Getting views of older people is part of the solution.
- Rural Wisdom in Scotland has been changing attitudes of public officials about older people making a contribution, not just being passive service users.



Key lessons about the sustainability from the Stage 1 sites

There are multiple factors that have been important for the sustainability of activities and initiatives set up by Rural Wisdom in the Stage 1 sites across Scotland and Wales.

Supportive local infrastructure

People involved in activities and groups need reassurance to know that there is the availability of local facilities (e.g. venues, information channels) and helpful local partners (councils and third sector) to support them should they need it in future.

Managing expectations

Where leadership or co-ordination of groups or activities cannot be sustained through a paid position in the long term, people need to be made aware early on and supported to consider what that might mean for the group, activity or initiative.

People involved in every way

The contribution of people (of all ages) whether they are in a leadership or co-ordinator role, supporting as volunteers or participating in activities, their attendance and contribution is essential to the longevity of the activity or group.

Meeting an unmet need

It's important that the activity or initiative is helping address an gap in what is available.

Keeping the community informed and engaged

Activities, groups or initiatives need to be regularly promoted and publicised across the community so people know what's happening and how they can get involved.

Access to funding

As well as paying for costs, knowing what funding is available and getting support in applying for it, is important.

Making a difference

It's important that whatever is happening, it's making a positive difference and people can see the value this brings. Building confidence and pride in being part of something is also important to the sustainability of groups or initiatives.

Investing time

The pace of development of activities or initiatives is dependent on the people involved so it's important to give people time and ensure they are ready, able and confident to either participate, support or lead.

Examples of sustainability in Stage 1 sites

Here are some examples of what is being sustained through the work of Rural Wisdom in the Stage 1 sites:



- Singing group (Brechin, Angus),
- Intergenerational work in Eaglesham, Edzell and Leeswood,
- Community Café in Leeswood ,
- Social Group and Luncheon club in Milford Haven,
- Luncheon club,
- 'Talking Point' to continue in Eaglesham through East Renfrewshire's Community Led Support.



- Support Choices – independent information and advice about community care in Highland Perthshire,
- Upper Tay Transport Group applied and received funding from the Council's Communities Transport Fund to continue activities - funding the group to employ a Development Worker,
- 'What's On' in Milford Haven is being led by Youth Matters who are sourcing funding to continue the publication that provides information about what's happening in the community,
- Outside the Box have been awarded funding from the Connected Communities Programme (EU Leader funding). This pays for a part-time Development Worker in both Eaglesham and Angus to build on the connecting communities part of Rural Wisdom.

Case Studies of what works

At the start of Rural Wisdom each community came together to discuss the key issues for older people living there and how Rural Wisdom could help. These issues helped inform the priorities for the Development Workers, their engagement with older people and work with organisations.

The following five case studies highlight some of the different activities that Rural Wisdom has delivered and what has been achieved and sustained in these communities by older people as a result.

Sustaining 'What's On' through Rural Wisdom: Milford Haven. 01

Older people in the Welsh community of Milford Haven raised the issue that they often didn't know what was available to them in their community. The 'What's On' publication was produced in response to this need and has become a valued resource for people in Milford Haven. This monthly publication provides information about community groups and activities and is now being co-ordinated and produced by Youth Matters. Read more: www.ndti.org.uk/uploads/files/RW_Case_Study_1_Sustaining_Whats_on_Milford_Haven_Jan_20_final.pdf

Improving local transport through Rural Wisdom: Upper Tay Area. 02

The Upper Tay Transport Group has been led by older people in response to a common issue that was raised across local communities: lack of transport. They have worked with the bus company to improve and publicise the timetable and been successful in a bid to the council to fund a part-time worker to support the group for another two years. This work has been shared with other parts of Scotland. Read more: www.ndti.org.uk/uploads/files/RW_Case_Study_2_Upper_Tay_Transport_Group_final_Jan_20.pdf

Case Studies of what works (continued)

Intergenerational activity through Rural Wisdom – Montgomerie Court and Eaglesham Primary School 03

Older people wanted activities for all ages. In Eaglesham the Development Worker, having heard from residents of a local sheltered housing complex talking about getting out to link with a local school, created opportunities for residents to go in and do activities with the children. This has built valued connections and led to an exchange of skills and talents amongst older people and children. They now organise the joint activities themselves. Read more: www.ndti.org.uk/uploads/files/RW_Case_Study_3_Intergenerational_activity_final_Jan_20.pdf

Bringing the community together through Rural Wisdom - Leeswood Community Cafe 04

The Leeswood Community Café opens every Thursday morning. Once a disused room in a community centre, volunteers from the community, under the co-ordination of the Development Worker, transformed the room to a lively café where older people gather to catch up with friends and young parents can stop by for a mid-morning break. The café was set up in response to a number of issues about lack of opportunities for men, the desire for community spirit and something that was available for younger people. The café is now led and supported by volunteers in the community as part of the council's Age Friendly Community programme. Read more: www.ndti.org.uk/uploads/files/RW_Case_Study_4_Leeswood_Cafe_Jan_20_final.pdf

Community activities through Rural Wisdom – Singing Group in Brechin 05

Older people told us that they wanted more community activities for people living in and around Brechin, so, the Development Worker started a singing group which has been running every two weeks since April 2018. Members of the group stress how it has helped them make connections and find out about other activities. They now take responsibility for running the group themselves. Read more: www.ndti.org.uk/uploads/files/RW_Case_Study_5_Singing_Group_Jan_20_final.pdf

Questions for the evaluation

The lessons from the evaluation to date has led to several important questions below. The evaluation team will be working with a range of stakeholders across the original and new communities to explore these in the coming year.

01 Where Development Workers have invested time and energy to pursue an opportunity with positive results, what can we learn about the characteristics of these opportunities that are worth pursuing in a specific community?

03 What can we still learn about sustainability? And how can we use this to inform the newer sites?

05 How do we first influence policy and then work with the Government and local authorities to make sure it works in practice for people of all ages in rural communities?

02 How do we share learning to make change happen with and for older people in rural communities? How do we identify the impact of this in other places?

04 What are we learning from the new sites and is anything different happening, why?

Resources

A useful guide '**Tips for getting people involved**' can be found here: ruralwisdom.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/Tipsforgettingpeopleinvolvedfinal.pdf

The website provides regular blogs from the communities and publications. including soon to be released '**Tips on Multigenerational Communities**' and '**Having a Voice and Being Heard**'.

www.ruralwisdom.org

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www.ndti.org.uk/news/rural-wisdom-evaluation