



Meet Our Members

Our Older People's Advisory Group meet monthly to help shape the Ageing Better in Camden partnership.

Meetings are open to all older people in the borough. Every month they discuss topics relating to older people and meet with decision makers to give their views on things happening across the borough from transport to counselling.

BASIL

"I do a bit of good". Basil talks about the support he got from Age UK Camden, and how he got involved with OPAG to find out how he can support older people in the community.



Basil Keens-Douglas, 75

Basil came to the UK from Grenada and worked for British Telecoms (BT) for many years. Basil is a guitarist and played in bands across London, and toured around the country. He has a massive record collection.

"I lived on the ground floor and someone rung the buzzer and said, can you let me in? He had come to see

someone in the building. Then he knocked on my door. His name was Chris. So Chris came and he listened to my story, and he pointed me in the direction of Tavis House. I came down.

They listened to me.

I was introduced to some people who came and visited me. They helped me with my housing. I started to attend the IT class then joined Ageing Better.

I was concerned about... there's a lot of people who have no one. I know how it feels. You can imagine, some people alone in the house. I have met new friends in the coffee morning, and have started to visit them. I do a bit of good for them. All of that drew me to Ageing Better in Camden. You hear about suicide rates and all that. I want to help other people.

If I hadn't answered the doorbell that evening I wouldn't have known of Age UK.

I no longer take life for granted."

PHYLIS

"To me it's like a stew, it all comes together and it makes something very nice". Many older people come to OPAG representing various groups around Camden. Phyllis talks about the importance of sharing information and views across these groups.



Phyllis Young

Phyllis spends as much time singing as speaking. Phyllis has always been creative, drawing, singing and travelling. She's was born and raised in North London, and has lived in Camden since the 1950s. During the war when her family were evacuated to Scotland, Phyllis stayed as a teenager in London and kept on at school. She's travelled the world with

various choirs, including singing in Romania just after the fall of communism and in New York on the 10th Anniversary of 9/11. She has taken a boat to Russia and explored from Hong Kong to Bali.

She's very involved with Kilburn Older Voices exchange and helped create a book of bench-to-bench walks, and made films about the local area, and campaigned to get more benches, toilets and improved crossings in the area.

For Phyllis, OPAG is a beautiful stew, a mix of different people and groups all coming together to share information and learn from one another.

"To me it's like a stew... here's carrots, here's onions, so that's how I sort of see it... but it all comes together and it makes something very nice.

She explains why the group is important for her and for KOVE. "Well, I think it's spreading the word, because it's a mixed bunch, and we're from all different groups so we're all passing information on, which is useful, and all expressing a range of opinions. That's how talking shops work, and we get things done."

FRANCES

**"Some people are quite alone, and this is the only platform they have to get their voice heard".
Frances talks about the importance of OPAG as a platform for everyone to have their voice heard.**



Frances Eley, 91

Frances is very involved in community organisations around our borough, including Kilburn Older Voices Exchange (KOVE) and St. Pancras Community Association. She is a long-standing member of the Camden Intergenerational Network and was part of the panel that appointed Age UK Camden to take the lead on Ageing Better in

Camden. Frances is currently writing her life story.

"I was on the panel that appointed Age UK Camden to be the leader of Ageing Better in Camden; I was on the board of St. Pancras Community Association and KOVE at the time.

I am involved because you get to know about what other areas are doing, and it's nice to meet people of our own age who are in the same boat. Some people are quite lonely, quite alone, and this is the only platform they have to get their voice heard. And that is the idea – that everyone has a say.

Before this group, a lot of older people had ideas that they couldn't express. There are a lot of lonely people, there still are. We've all learnt a lot of new things.

It would be a great pity if the group didn't continue and a lot of people would be lost without it. We learn about things going on and get co-opted into other groups and meetings. Lots of other things I wouldn't have been involved in without this group."

SHAHANA

“What I wanted is, I should be active, to participate. I also want to help other people.” After joining OPAG and Vocus, Shahana has become very involved in local consultations, cultural events and volunteering in Camden.



Shahana worked as a GP until her retirement, when she moved to Camden. She did not know the area well. She attended the computer drop-ins at Age UK Camden and was invited by Andrew, an OPAG member, to join OPAG. “I was very happy that there was a familiar face. I had lost a bit of confidence with going out.”

Shahana has since gone on to become very involved with ABC, volunteering, attending consultations and focus groups, and getting involved in cultural events in the borough.

“Elizabeth Ann and I went to an exhibition at the British Museum about Islamic Art with tickets from OPAG. We met at the bus stop and went together. We really enjoyed it.”

She volunteered with the Outreach Team at a pop-up in a sheltered housing block where she met other older people and was able to offer advice. “I advised one woman about hospital transport. She was very happy and I gave her the number. She is now able to get to her appointments.”

With Vocus, Shahana has attended CCG meetings, visited the new Greenwood site, Henderson Court, and offered professional insights at a focus group on the Health and Social Care Green paper. “That was very interesting for me, that’s the type of thing I would like to get involved in more.”

“What I wanted is, I should be active, to participate. I also want to help other people.”

ELIZABETH ANN

"By being consulted on things, I feel, even though I'm not working anymore I'm not useless". Many organisations, including Camden Council, come to consult with OPAG on their views on various issues, plans and programmes. Elizabeth Ann talks about her views being valued.



Elizabeth Ann became a photojournalist at aged 14 when her mother, who worked on Fleet Street, sent her out with the photographers. Since then she has been a photographer, journalist, and public relations professional.

"In the holidays, she would send me out with the photographers just to get rid of me, you know. And the photographers didn't like it, because they had this little girl with them. So they bullied me, hoping I would go home.

But, they were bullying in a very helpful way. And they would say, "Can't you see that if we're using this kind of a lens that that piece of paper

would be in focus", "Can't you see that there's a shadow there?" "Do something about it!" And the more they did it, the more I was being trained, the more I liked it!"

"My parents were divorced before I was born, but stayed very friendly, so my time was split between the two and it was always in a different country when I went to my father.

Therefore, I travelled on trips which took about 6 weeks to get to South Africa or New Zealand or all the different places. And I had two suitcases always, one had on it a snow scene, and one had on it a tropical scene, so I knew where my winter clothes were and where my summer clothes were.

So I've always been very independent. But now, in the last few years as I get older and get arthritis, and I've got dementia, I'm not so independent. But Age UK Camden is sort of my... guide. It's something that takes the worry off and I can rely on it.

And also, the other thing that I like very much about it is that by being consulted on things, like Ageing Better, I feel, even though I'm not working anymore I'm not useless.

The thing I enjoy most are the people that come... we have had things from dentists to transport. Those are very useful and I hate missing those meetings!

COSTAS

"Without this group, we won't have a way of being inclusive, of getting together". Costas discusses loneliness, re-connection, and why OPAG is an essential part of bringing older people in our borough together.



Costas, 78

Costas contributes a lot of time to supporting other people, including young people with autism and bipolar, unemployed young people and offenders, and Age UK Camden's Dementia Befriending team. He speaks Greek, Arabic, French, English, German and some Polish and Italian and has used his skills to support destitute asylum seekers. Since he was younger,

he has been a carer for his sons, and is on the board of Camden Carers.

"Joining a group like OPAG is the best way for people my age to get together. It helps me to reconnect with people I know within the community. My advice to people my age is to join our group and to enjoy an informative meeting over a cup of tea or coffee with friends and like-minded people.

Without this group, we won't have a way of being inclusive, of getting together, and this is one of the biggest problems we face now, being lonely.

I believe that elderly people with their accumulated knowledge can contribute and make a difference and improve the life of other elderly people by helping them cope with loneliness, depression. And by joining a group like Ageing Better in Camden, it's a great opportunity to share this accumulated knowledge and experience, to make friends, and become better informed.

People read books and learn a lot and they take it to their graves. And nobody benefits from it. It's about time people join groups like ABC and can share and contribute, and this is the beauty of it. So I would like to say to people that they are most welcome to have tea and coffee with us, and to exchange ideas and share their experience with us."

BARBARA

"A lot of sensible things come out of those discussions". Barbara tells us why bringing together different generations of 'older people' at OPAG is essential.



Barbara was a Councillor in Camden for many years, and was elected Mayor of Camden three times running. She is a Justice of the Peace, and served on the Children's Panel in neighbouring boroughs while working first for the Post Office and then for British Telecoms as a telephonist and union officer.

"Well, I was a trustee at Age UK Camden when they were going for

the Big Lottery money. Now, in the group, there is a good mixture of people from the community in Camden, I feel.

I find these meetings extremely interesting and there are many offshoots that come from them which I have also found very interesting. One of these was going to visit older people from other boroughs to discuss transport issues. That was after Transport for London came to speak at one of our meetings. I would like to do more of that, particularly meeting older people from other London boroughs and hearing about the issues they face. A lot of sensible things come out of those discussions.

There are older-older people and younger-older people in the group, that's an interesting aspect of the group and I will often think – how can we work with that? There are people of my son's generation and we probably have different experiences and views.

I would like to see these meetings go on."

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