



JULY 2014

The Scottish Older People's Assembly is a 'voice' for older people.

Welcome

The sixth newsletter from the SOPA Committee highlights developments in the way in which SOPA has attempted to reach people in their own communities. SOPA also has created its own website at www.scotopa.org.uk as a not-for-profit enterprise, to disseminate information and gather opinions from across Scotland. We welcome your views.



Message from Chair Tom Berney

The Scottish Government has appointed Shona Robison as Cabinet

Secretary for Pensioners Rights. When we met she explained her role as a conduit to the Cabinet for the voice of older people. She has agreed to meet SOPA regularly and suggests we should develop a two-way process. She will bring issues to us as well as listening to our issues. We welcome this. Obviously, the outcome of the Independence Referendum might augment the range of older people's issues over which the Scottish Government has authority but, either way, we look forward to building a positive relationship.

We are conscious of the need to build a similar two-way communication with as wide a spectrum as possible of older people. To that end we have been holding a series of SOPA events around the country in collaboration with local groups. Those in South Lanarkshire, Dumfries, Edinburgh and Kirkcaldy have gone well, with others in the pipeline at Dundee, Ayr, Glasgow, Pencuik and Stirling. See the SOPA

website for details [under events](#). Contact us if you would like to organise an event with SOPA input. We aim to gather feedback about people's concerns and include these for discussion or progress at our Assembly in the Scottish Parliament in October.

Our approach is to establish rights to representation, services and support and to ensure that all are aware of these. In this issue we highlight key messages from the Scottish Human Rights Commission and the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Bill. Not everyone will come to events or the Assembly, but do leave a comment on the website. Or simply go there and catch up with developments!



SOPA meeting at Holyrood in April

L to R: Mike Liddle (Scottish Govt.), Cathy Hewit (Scottish Govt.), Helen Biggins (SOPA), Shona Robison (Cabinet Secretary, Commonwealth Games, Sport, Equality and Pensioners Rights), Tom Berney (SOPA), Margaret Murdoch (SOPA) and Glenda Watt (SOPA Co-ordinator).

Visit the new SOPA website at
www.scotopa.org.uk

Leave a comment on the Guest Book page or through [our Facebook site](#). Let us know the main issue that concerns you about your own situation or about others.

SOPA Committee Workshop

Scottish Human Rights

and Community Empowerment

19 members of the SOPA Committee attended a workshop in Edinburgh in July to hear from Deirdre Flanigan of the Scottish Human Rights Commission and from Ian Grant of the Scottish Government. Deirdre drew attention to the work of the SHRC and that it is an accountable public body independent of the Scottish and UK governments, although it was established by an Act of the Scottish Parliament. Its vision is of a modern, outward-looking and fairer Scotland with human dignity, equality and participation guaranteed for all.



Deirdre Flanigan,
Communications and Outreach,
SHRC

With degrees in International Human Rights, Scottish Law, and experience as a researcher and consultant, Deirdre is well placed to argue the case for human rights.

She noted that there are currently opportunities and goodwill to advance human rights through the health and social care integration. On the down side, there are on-going investigations in Edinburgh alone, into preventable deaths in care homes. This highlights that not enough checks and balances are in place for some people – a 'right to life' issue. Also, there are thousands of carers - including low-paid and unpaid kinship carers (some grandparents) - performing an incredible public service, often at cost to their own health or living standards. Finally, we have both risks and opportunities linked to moves towards self-directed support, at a time when care budgets generally are reducing. The foundation of human rights is the [Universal Declaration of Human Rights](#) (UDHR) adopted in 1948 by the United Nations General Assembly. Over time, these have been integrated into national laws and international treaties, such as the European Convention on Human Rights, which became incorporated in Scottish law in 1998.



The [Scottish Human Rights Commission](#) has developed training and awareness-raising resources relating to older people's care. The aim is to ensure those in care understand their human rights, and that those providing care can respect, protect and fulfil those rights.

The core values of human dignity, fairness, equality and non-discrimination apply to everyone, everywhere. However, a glance down the list of civil, political, economic and social rights below, shows that many countries do not come close to implementing these rights and their citizens are persecuted for fighting for them. When considering the failings in our current system, it is important to remember how far Scottish society has progressed compared to some nations.

Some civil and political rights

- right to freedom of expression
- right to freedom of religion or conscience
- property rights
- right to freedom of assembly
- privacy rights
- voting rights

Some economic and social rights

- right to an adequate standard of living
- right to adequate food, housing, water and sanitation
- rights at work
- right to education.

SOPA Committee Workshop

(Continued)



Ian Turner of the Scottish Government provided an overview of the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Bill. On 11th June the Bill was introduced to the Scottish Parliament and now it is published. [Click here](#) for a link to the Government website where you can access full explanatory notes.

Community Empowerment (Scotland) Bill

Ian explained that certain aspects of the Bill were more relevant to SOPA than others. One important aim is to support community groups to move projects forward with less bureaucratic hindrance, and for people to be heard in the planning and delivery of local services. It is important older citizens are involved in these processes as they embrace the concepts of empowerment, engagement and participation. It is hoped this Bill will make a real difference to communities and have the following impact:



- boost local democratic participation
- grow confidence and skills
- generate more local volunteering
- improve the quality of community life

A good example is taking over a building that has been closed for years which, if developed, could become a valuable hub for local people. This Bill should remove the barriers to allow a community group to start the ball rolling and maintain momentum. The meeting heard of some good examples of this type of project from Committee members, involving local people of all ages collaborating together for the greater good of all.

Member Profile

A regular item profiling committee members and their contribution to SOPA.



Val Bissland is a psychology tutor in the Learning in Later Life programme at Strathclyde University, and during her 23 years there she has been challenging ageism and championing opportunity in later life.

“Change in life expectancy has implications for policy as we enter an unprecedented era. Scotland should benefit from more older adults, and this ‘longevity dividend’, as it is called sometimes, presents a vision in which all generations can influence the future. I think learning is so important because it contributes to an active social life which leads to better health, wellbeing and keeps the brain cells firing. Yes, memory changes as we age, but ‘Use it or lose it’. In the same way as we need to be physically and socially active, we need mental challenges. That’s why I like the sound of this new Bill. What better way of spending your later years than working with others to leave your community in better shape. Beats crossword puzzles any day!”

“The idea that most older people need care and their brains are in irreversible decline are two ageing myths. Decline is certainly the case towards the end of life for some because degenerative diseases are a reality and it is right that every effort is made to do the very best for people who develop such illnesses. However, evidence is building that lifestyle and attitude can make a significant difference to how you age.

“Most older people in my circle are very much alive and kicking! They’re not receiving care but giving it, volunteering, working, developing their intellect, playing sport, campaigning or booking lessons - like my 95 year old friend who is planning a session with a golf pro - a present from her grandchildren. ‘I know I can improve!’, she says. What a great role model!”

Val also produces the SOPA newsletters and has built and updates the new [website](#).

Committee discussions concerning the Assembly in the Scottish Parliament in October.



Holding the Assembly in the prestigious debating Chamber of the Scottish Parliament is exciting but it poses many challenges, not least to create opportunities for people to be actively engaged. At the July Workshop after the speakers input was over the Committee deliberated on how to achieve participation. It was agreed that break-out groups will move to meeting rooms with facilitators to take forward issues that have been identified as important. The number that the chamber can comfortably hold will affect the places available. Invitations will be issued nearer the time of the Assembly (31st October) and there is the possibility that some places will be reserved in the public gallery for anyone wishing to attend on the day. More information to come in due course.

SOPA's [Facebook](#) site is now active and the latest information can be checked there or on the website. Have a look and give us the thumbs up!



Getting the Message Across



Are you happy with the way doctors and health professionals communicate with you? Is it a satisfying two-way process or a

hurdle to jump? There is growing concern that, as modern health care becomes increasingly complex, many people are unclear about their options, and are often too polite or overwhelmed to say so. With the focus moving to person-centred care, prevention and self management, the ability to have a constructive dialogue with medical people is critical or this reform will stall. This ability carries the tag of **'health literacy'** and [NHS Scotland has a website](#) all about it. Clear jargon-free communication between medical teams and patient is crucial, but it demands new skills on both sides. It was an issue that was role-played at the [2012 Assembly](#). On this Links page click on 'Highlights of 2012 Assembly', then on 'The Voice of Older People in Care Settings' (6th item) to watch a video role-play of a bad experience in a doctor's surgery!

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The Scottish Older People's Assembly is a collaborative way to promote concerns to the Scottish and Westminster Governments. The Assembly supports or challenges legislation and policies and their implementation which have a bearing on the quality of later life in Scotland.