

'Thank you for getting me up to dance'

A report on Senior Games Week

Newcastle upon Tyne
21-25 August 2006



quality of life
partnership



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1. Introduction

'Thank you for getting me up to dance' captures the spirit of Senior Games – a week of fun and companionship; of older people trying out activities they had never done before or doing something they had not done for a very long time.

Senior Games Week was organised by the Quality of Life Partnership's Active Ageing programme¹. The impetus for organising the event was to ensure that older people featured in Newcastle City Council's Year of Exercise and Sport. The inspiration for the week came from the accounts of a group of older people from Newcastle who had attended an Elderly Gathering held in Copenhagen in 1992 and a Senior Games event in 1996. Their enthusiasm for these events and sharing ideas with senior citizens from other European countries had spurred them on to do new things (e.g. forming the Old Spice drama group). This gave us the idea for Newcastle's Senior Games Week – an ambitious week of fun, activity and challenges.

¹ See Appendix one for more information about Quality of Life Partnership

2. Why Senior Games Week?

The week had several aims:

- To create opportunities for older people in Newcastle to engage in physical activity.
- To demonstrate that age is just a number and that older people are enthusiastic and able to take part in a range of challenging and fun activities.
- To hold a high-profile event for older people as part of Newcastle's Year of Exercise and Sport.
- To build relationships with older people from other European cities as part of the Quality of Life Partnership's engagement in the World Health Organisation's Healthy Ageing programme.

A small planning group made up of older people, staff from Leisure Services, voluntary organisations and the Quality of Life Partnership team first came together to plan the event in June 2005.

A programme was put together which sought to:

- offer opportunities for older people in Newcastle to be a part of the Year of Exercise and Sport;
- offer a range of activity for older people from the most active to the more frail;
- provide a varied and interesting programme for visitors from other European cities.



3. Planning Senior Games Week

Despite its name, it was never intended that Senior Games week should be competitive. The emphasis was to be on having fun and perhaps trying out something you had never done before.

Funding for the programme was obtained by the Year of Exercise and Sport team from Culture 10 and formed part of NewcastleGateshead's world-class festivals and events programme.

Comments received from participants:

“All the organisers and helpers had a tough job to do and all did a superb job.”

“The people of Newcastle opened their hearts and minds and showed true friendship.”

“Thanks to the people of Newcastle for their energy and drive.”

3.1 Pre-work in Newcastle

Our intention was that Senior Games week should not be just for a select group of people and for our European guests. We wanted to give older people in Newcastle every opportunity to be a part of the week. With this in mind, we tried to offer activities which were not particularly out of the ordinary and which we knew we could offer on an ongoing basis. We also engaged local older people in testing out ideas and in helping us to host the event. For example, the Nifty Fifties group at the Lightfoot Centre demonstrated that they could hold successful open days with a range of activities; older people took part in several trial days at Newburn Leisure Centre; Bishop's Court Sheltered Housing was invited to host an open day; the Wonderwalks group from Benwell was invited to host a walk and a boat ride at Kielder; the East End cycling group planned a day out at Kielder; and the user groups in Exhibition Park (model engineers, croquet, bowls) were invited to hold an open afternoon.

Members of the Elders Council of Newcastle were also invited to volunteer to be hosts during the week. Their duties included accompanying our guests to the activity of their choice, usually on public transport; being on hand to answer any queries or alert the planning team to any problems; taking part with enthusiasm; and encouraging others to do the same. Nineteen members of the Elders Council volunteered and gave generously of their time and energy throughout the week, making the guests feel very welcome.

3.2 Our European guests

A considerable amount of networking was required to make contact with senior citizens from other European cities and invite them to the event. The main networks used were the World Health Organisation Healthy Cities network (of which Newcastle is a member) and Newcastle City Council's European team.

After a slow start, responses were received from Austria, Denmark, France, Ireland, Scotland and Turkey. Unfortunately, due to the terrorist alert and air travel chaos the week before the event, the group from France were unable to attend. In the end, 38 European visitors joined us for the week.

The group from Turkey were members of the Sword and Shield Dance organisation in Bursa, who gave two spectacular performances at The Sage Gateshead and Dance City in Newcastle.

European visitors paid for their own travel expenses, but the accommodation in Newcastle and all the activities and local travel were provided free. The visitors stayed at the University of Northumbria Halls of Residence and were very satisfied with the quality of the accommodation and the food provided.

“First class and so were all the staff.”

“Food very good and plenty of it.”

The programme did not allow for much time to exchange ideas with our European visitors about the quality of life of older people in other European cities. However, some new ideas were gleaned, particularly from the Irish group with their telephone befriending scheme and Chinese exercise equipment. Stronger links have also been established with the Scottish Better Government for Older People network.





4. Senior Games Week

A full and varied programme² was planned for Senior Games Week. The planning group had anticipated that people might pick and choose and not take part every day, but everyone joined in all the activities with great enthusiasm. For some the programme was well balanced – *“Very good, there was time for everything.”* *“Grand.”* *“Super.”* For others a bit more free time would have been welcomed – *“There could have been a little bit more free time.”* *“We did not get enough free time for people older than me.”* *“Not as much free time as I hoped but I enjoyed every minute.”*

Over the course of the week over 200 older people took part in activities at 13 different venues.

For many people it was an opportunity to try something for the first time:

A Week of Firsts – my first time:

in an aeroplane
 in a boat
 on the Metro
 swimming
 riding on a model railway
 canoeing
 doing Tai Chi
 walking across the Millennium Bridge
 doing an abseil and the zip wire
 going on a climbing wall
 getting stuck in a lift
 learning a new dance
 seeing a Turkish dance group.
(Senior Games hosts and participants)

For others it was a chance to do something they had not done for a very long time:

It’s a long time since I’ve:

cycled – must be 30 years since I’ve been on a bike
 danced
 walked such a long way
 walked every day
 abseiled
 sung in a group
 been on a boat trip
 spoken German.
(Senior Games hosts and planning team)

The week was not only about taking part in physical activity; there were moments of socialising too. The Elders Council hosted a social evening at the Ouseburn Regeneration Centre, with entertainment from the Old Spice Drama Group. The week ended with a ceilidh at Dance City and a presentation by the Lord Mayor of Newcastle, Cllr Diane Packham.

The atmosphere throughout the week was buzzing, with many happy moments and memories:

Highlights of Senior Games Week

Cycling along the Quayside
 Singing the Blaydon Races outside Balmbras
 Anatomical Release at Dance City
 The day at Dance City, especially the ceilidh
 Bellboating at Newburn
 ‘Little Mary’ from Ireland
 The Elders Council Reception – a lovely evening with a good friendly atmosphere
 Abseiling at Kielder
 Climbing Wall at Newburn
 Walking from Cullercoats to Tynemouth

² See Appendix two for full programme

East End Pool
The Sword and Shield Dance Group at
The Sage
Friday night at Luckie's Bar
Camaraderie.
(Comments from Senior Games hosts)

The week was a huge success with very positive feedback from visitors and hosts.
*"First class. Couldn't have been better."
"Amazing what was achieved." "I think it was an excellent week." "I felt valued. Well done."*

However there are always lessons to learn:

- More robust contingency plans for poor weather – although for the most part the weather was good, despite threatening forecasts;
- Finding out more information about our visitors before their arrival e.g. more information about travel plans so that we did not organise such an ambitious afternoon when people had been travelling for hours; knowledge of languages/need for interpreters/translated materials;
- More publicity for public events so that more local people can get involved;
- More media coverage for the event. We had very little media coverage, which was a missed opportunity for promoting positive images of older people. The Planning Group did engage Newcastle City Council's press office early in the planning process and press releases were issued, but the response was disappointing. Better media coverage of older people is a key issue for the Quality of Life Partnership and its future work.

5. The lessons

There were two key lessons from organising Senior Games:

- Senior Games proved that older people are eager to take part in activity (and often very challenging activity) if they are given the opportunity and the context in which it takes place is appropriate. 'Having a go' in a relaxed, social group is more conducive to people taking part than a more formal environment.
- Senior Games also demonstrated how older people and staff from agencies can work together very successfully to plan and deliver a complex programme of activity for a range of different people.





6. The legacy

To build on the success of the games and ensure that it leaves a lasting legacy for older people in Newcastle, we propose to:

- engage older people in the planning and delivery of events and services. The hosts group have indicated they would be willing to be engaged in future events.
- continue to work with Leisure Services to ensure that a range of opportunities to engage in physical activity are made available to older people and are provided in ways that will encourage older people to take part.
- hold annual older people's activity events (e.g. a day in Exhibition Park; a cycling week on the Quayside; older people's day at Dance City; performing a show).
- improve media coverage of older people, challenging perceptions of what people aged 50+ can and will do.

7. Impressions of Senior Games

The following impressions of Senior Games are based on a very brief creative writing session by the hosts and members of the planning team:

Senior Games looked like a colourful carousel.

It sounded like a symphony with notes of harmony, occasional discord, and many soloists combining into a chorus.

The week felt like friendship made real, ease and comfort and the suspension of embarrassment.

It smelled like chlorine in the hair, flowers in the park, the glorious outdoors and wearing the same YES T-shirt all week.

Senior Games tasted like a chocolate whirl – soft and creamy on the outside but a tough nut on the inside.

"Thank you for getting me up to dance, I'm not a dancer and I really enjoyed it."

Senior Games:

looked like a huge mountain to climb;

sounded like school children going on trip;

felt like setting free a wound-up toy;

tasted like overeating;

smelt like a perfume of flowers, food and human spices;

"Thankyou, thankyou, thankyou – you did a good job!"

8. Acknowledgements

Many individuals and organisations helped to make Senior Games possible.

We would like to thank:

Planning Team

Vera Bolter	Elders Council of Newcastle
Raul Calderon	Dance City
Maggy Crane	Search Project
Barbara Douglas	Quality of Life Partnership
Janet Heal	Age Concern Newcastle
Rosie Milne	Newcastle City Council
Betty Parvin	Elders Council of Newcastle
Anne Richardson	Quality of Life Partnership
Julie Tait	Quality of Life Partnership
Pauline Taylor	Age Concern Newcastle
Linda Ward	Quality of Life Partnership
Clive Wright	Newcastle City Council
Neil Ramshaw	YES Co-ordinator

The Hosts

Vera Bolter; Susan Chan; Billie Cummings; Eileen De-Voy; Mary Dodds; Beryl Downes; Bronwen Fitchett; Rose Holmes; Bill Ions; Sarah Kenny; Patricia Humble; Sheila Manley; Betty Parvin; Shireen Robinson; Lesley Robson; Betty Shotton; Pam Smith; Roger Stobbart; Bob Weiner.

Staff, volunteers and older people from the following organisations

who generously gave time and resources to make the event a success:

Age Concern Newcastle
Bishops Court Sheltered Housing (Anchor Trust)
Calvert Trust and 'Better Than You Know' course leader Dave Hand

Dance City
East End Pool and the East End Cycling Group
Elders Council of Newcastle
Exhibition and Brandling Parks Trust and the park user groups
Lightfoot Centre
Newburn Leisure Centre
Newcastle City Council Physical Activity and Sports Development Teams
Newcastle City Council Press Office
Newcastle City Council YES team
Nexus
Northumbria University
Ouseburn Regeneration Centre
Quality of Life Partnership core team
Quayside Bikes
Sage Gateshead
Stagecoach

The following councillors who supported the event

The Lord Mayor of Newcastle,
Cllr Diane Packham
Cllr David Faulkner
Cllr Doreen Huddart

For their financial support

Culture 10
Action for Health – Senior Citizens in Newcastle
Elders Council of Newcastle





Appendix one

Quality of Life Partnership

The Quality of Life Partnership brings together older people and agencies to improve the wellbeing of older people in Newcastle. Working with Newcastle City Council, health services, transport providers and many voluntary and community organisations, we are developing a long-term plan which recognises and values the growing number of older people in Newcastle – *Strategy for Older People and an Ageing Population*.

Active Ageing Group

Having something interesting to do, keeping physically active and having opportunities to socialise are all very important to the quality of life of older people. The Active Ageing Group brings together older people and agencies with a particular interest in ensuring that older people have the opportunity to take part in a variety of different activities.



Appendix two – Senior Games Week Programme

Day 1 Monday 21 August 2006

14.00 hours – Welcome reception in the Pandon Room at the Civic Centre, Newcastle upon Tyne

Councillor David Faulkner and members of the Elders Council will welcome visitors to Newcastle with a short reception at Newcastle's Civic Centre.

15.00 hours – Walk through Newcastle to The Sage Gateshead

Visitors will be taken on a guided walk through historic Newcastle down to the Quayside, where we will cross the world-renowned Gateshead Millennium Bridge onto Gateshead Quays. Here visitors can take the opportunity to visit the BALTIC Centre for Contemporary Art (formerly a disused 1950s grain warehouse) [www.balticmill.com] or enjoy a guided tour of The Sage Gateshead, an architectural wonder designed by Foster and Partners [www.thesagegateshead.org].

16.00 hours – Afternoon tea

17.00 hours – Settling in at the University Halls of Residence (Claude Gibb)

An opportunity for visitors to settle into their rooms at the University Halls of Residence.

18.00 hours – An evening at the coast

A ride on the Metro to the coast at Tynemouth for a stroll along the beach and a traditional English fish and chip supper.

Day 2 Tuesday 22 August 2006

Either

Programme A

A day at Newburn Leisure Centre

For those visitors who enjoy outdoor activities, a day at Newburn Leisure Centre, a newly refurbished leisure centre near the River Tyne. The day will include cycle rides, watersports (bellboats), archery and a climbing wall. These activities are suitable for beginners as well as the more experienced.

Or

Programme B

A morning at a sheltered housing complex

For those who would like the opportunity to visit a sheltered housing complex for older people, there is a morning of activities including gentle exercise, Rookie golf and arts and crafts. It may also include a performance by the Sword and Shield Dance Group from Turkey.

An afternoon at Age Concern's Leisure and Learning Unit

Age Concern Newcastle is one of the most important older people's organisations in the city. It offers information and advice; care services for older people and a very vibrant Leisure and Learning Unit which provides a wide range of classes (e.g. dance, photography, arts, languages) to over 1,000 older people a week. This visit will be an opportunity to find out about the range of activities on offer and to take part in some taster sessions.



Or

Programme C

A day at the Lightfoot Centre

The Lightfoot Centre is a leisure centre which serves people from the East End of the city. The Nifty Fifties are a group of people aged 50+ who enjoy a regular exercise session at the centre every Tuesday. This event will be an opportunity to try out some of the activities which the group enjoys (e.g. Tai Chi; movement to music) as well as complementary therapies. It may also include a performance by the Sword and Shield Dance Group from Turkey.

Day 3 Wednesday 23 August 2006

Morning

Programme A

Swimming at East End Pool

Visitors can enjoy a relaxing swim and aquafit session at East End Pool, one of the City Council's public swimming pools. Sauna and steam room will also be available.

Or

Programme B

A cycle ride along the Quayside

An opportunity to cycle along the Quayside – suitable for beginners or rusty cyclists. Visitors can either walk down to the Quayside or take a bus.



Lunch time

The Sage Gateshead

A performance by the Sword and Shield Dance Group from Bursa, Turkey on the concourse at The Sage Gateshead.

Afternoon

Activities in Exhibition Park

Visitors will enjoy a picnic lunch in the park followed by the opportunity to enjoy a range of activities in a traditional and historic city centre park. These activities will include bowls, croquet, boats on the lake, giant chess and draughts or a gentle stroll around the park.

If it rains heavily, we will spend the afternoon in the Discovery Museum.

Evening

A social evening with the Elders Council of Newcastle

Members of the Elders Council of Newcastle will welcome visitors to a social evening at the Ouseburn Regeneration Centre – a centre on the river with spectacular views of the Tyne and Gateshead Millennium Bridges. This informal evening will be an opportunity to find out about the work of the Elders Council.

Visitors can take the Quayside (yellow) bus from the centre of town down to the Pitcher and Piano on the Quayside and talk a stroll along the river to the Ouseburn Regeneration Centre.

Day 4 Thursday 24 August 2006

A day at Kielder Water and Forest (Northumberland) with a choice of activities

Kielder Water was created in 1982 and is the largest man-made body of water in Britain. Its main function is to provide drinking water to towns and cities in the North East, but now it is also an important recreation centre.

Kielder Forest, which surrounds the lake, is one of the largest man-made forests in Europe. The trees are mainly spruce and the wood is used for construction timber, fencing and packaging as well as paper products such as cartons and packaging.

During the summer (especially in the evenings), there are plenty of midges at Kielder, so visitors are advised to bring strong insect repellent with them!

Programme A

Better Than You Know –

An Abseil at the Calvert Trust

The Calvert Trust is an outdoor activity centre providing a range of activities for people with disabilities. The Better Than You Know course has been devised by retired Chief Inspector of Police, David Hand. The aim of the day is to demonstrate to people who are retired that they can still enjoy a challenge. The challenge is to undertake an abseil off a man-made tower. This day is suitable for people who have never done an abseil but would like to try something different.



Or

Programme B

A cycle ride in Kielder Forest

A 29 km or 16 km cycle ride in Kielder Forest. An enjoyable bike ride for experienced cyclists.

Or

Programme C

A walk in Kielder Forest followed by a boat cruise on the lake

An easy walk (approximately 5 km) in Kielder Forest taking in some of the sights around the lake. Visitors will have a packed lunch by the lakeside before enjoying a leisurely cruise around the lake.

If the weather is terrible, we will arrange an alternative day at Wallington Hall.

Day 5 Friday 25 August 2006

A day of dance and music at Dance City

Dance City is a national dance agency based in Newcastle upon Tyne, offering a very wide range of dance classes for adults and children, amateurs and professionals. It also supports dance companies and dance performance throughout the North East. In January 2006 Dance City moved into a beautiful new purpose-built centre in Newcastle.

We will spend the final day of Senior Games Week at Dance City, with the opportunity to try out a variety of different types of dance from more gentle movement (e.g. Alexander Technique; gentle yoga) in the morning to more vigorous dance (e.g. tap; salsa) in the afternoon. For those who do not wish to dance there will be a music and singing workshop and the opportunity to learn a few Geordie songs.

We will end the day with a ceilidh – an opportunity for everyone to join in some local dances.

The Sword and Shield Dance Group and some of the visitors from Ireland will entertain us with a performance.

Our Senior Games Week will end with farewells at 18.00 hours.



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