Positive Ageing Advocacy Group

Project overview

The Positive Ageing Advocacy Group brings together seniors from Mount Alexander Shire to discuss issues relevant to older people, address isolation and social exclusion, and support self-determination and empowerment.

The advocacy group supports Mount Alexander Shire Council's commitment to fulfil the Age Friendly Victoria Declaration and provides a direct connection, and formal consultation framework, between older people in the community and government agencies and stakeholders. The group continues to provide input and advocacy to council on age-friendly initiatives.

Project description

The Positive Ageing Advocacy Group is an independent group established under the auspice of Castlemaine Community House. It has terms of reference and an organisation structure. The group develops ongoing advocacy projects and education sessions.

In particular, it hosted a series of forums about housing options for older people based on the latest research and models used in other communities.

The group has also distributed resources relating to age-friendly communities to businesses and groups in the community.

Project model

- Group members were recruited through local media.
- A core group membership established a steering committee.
- The group modelled itself on the Mount Alexander Shire Disability Advocacy Group, an existing, successful and well-respected group. The two groups now have a common member to ensure projects employ the best use of resources, skills and knowledge.
- The steering committee used a collaborative approach to develop the terms of reference.
- The terms of reference support a sound model that can be replicated in other communities.
- The group meets regularly to explore advocacy projects.
- Initial key projects include housing options for positive ageing, and addressing discrimination and isolation of LGBTIQ+ people living in residential age care facilities.
- Five seniors organise monthly meetings and engage with other community groups (for example, the Mount Alexander Shire Disability Advocacy Group and the Senior's Festival Steering Committee).

Budget

Total project cost	$15,000

Project challenges

The group used an independent advocacy group model, so it could maintain its independence. Independent advocacy is a way to help marginalised people in society have a stronger voice and to have as much control as possible over their own lives.

The key challenge was finding older people who wanted to be involved in the group, but did not believe they had the skills to be an advocate. This was overcome by recruiting members using local media and providing them with a framework for independent advocacy and the skills to deliver it.

Another challenge was the need for facilitation to ensure a collaborative approach was used to identify and select the range of projects nominated by members.

The group has found that forums are not necessarily the most effective method for gathering and disseminating information but engaging guest speakers to discuss key issues was a far more effective method.

Project outcomes

Following the work conducted through the wider Age Friendly Communities Project, Castlemaine Community House is now coordinating the Seniors Festival for Mount Alexander Shire Council.

This provides a great opportunity for collaboration between the Positive Ageing Advocacy Group and the wider community involved in the Seniors Festival. It also increases the awareness of social isolation and community participation for older people.

Ten older people have been engaged with the Positive Ageing Advocacy Group and developed new skills in community leadership in the process.

Other outcomes include:

- developing a postcard, website and email address to promote the group to the wider community
- establishing links with existing groups
- sharing success stories and models of best practice.

Project sustainability

The Positive Ageing Advocacy Group is now established under the auspice of Castlemaine Community House.

Through this arrangement, the group can access free meeting rooms, a minute taker and other support.