

'ELDERBERRIES' PROGRAMME

This is a project working in partnership with Age Concern, to develop a programme of activities to reduce isolation, encourage social inclusion and promote healthy activity for the over 50's. A key strand to the project is to challenge the myths around ageing and presumptions about what older people traditionally like to do and, through consultation, develop a programme of activities chosen by the users themselves.

In order to ensure this from the offset, our first activity was to hold a public consultation day to which 150 people attended and 110 of these people kindly completed and returned questionnaires. The results of the questionnaires demonstrated that often we presume that older people are only interested in more traditional activities such as gardening, reading and crafts. Some of the activities suggested included speed-dating, fashion shows, henna tattoos and race nights. Some traditional activities such as dancing and history talks were suggested too and this demonstrated the need for us to develop a widely diverse programme of activities to appeal to all tastes and interests.

Since September 2006 when the project was launched, 663 people have taken part in activities which have included health walks, tea dances, a stained glass window workshop, jazz night, 'tea and tattle' sessions, garden talks and salsacise and we have received some very positive comments and feedback which demonstrates the success of this valuable community programme, for example:

Tea and Tattle sessions have provided an opportunity for people to meet and make new friends. Two ladies from Morpeth who started coming as they could no longer drive and were feeling lonely discovered that they had lots in common and have developed a friendship outside the group. Another lady, who moved to Alnwick after a relationship break up and felt very alone, comes regularly and feels that her confidence has really grown from attending the group. These anecdotal examples show how the project is acting to safeguard mental wellbeing.

The stained glass course was also very well received with again all comments being very positive from the quality of the tuition to the venue and the fact that these courses were not run elsewhere.

This project has many positive social and community impacts as well as contributing to the long-term economic sustainability of The Garden.



Enjoying a tea dance in The Pavilion

Project Objectives

- 1) to encourage older people to take part in some form of physical activity
- 2) to improve the well-being and psychological health by reducing isolation
- 3) to raise awareness of the links between health and exercise
- 4) to encourage lifelong learning and acquirement of new skills
- 5) to encourage interaction with younger generations

The Alnwick Garden has had proven success with its established rolling programme of arts and educational activities and we believe that the 'Elderberries' programme will be just as successful. The advantage that The Garden has over traditional educational venues is that its relaxed atmosphere and enjoyable environment raises mood (enhancing mental wellbeing) and encourages people to join in. Often people do not even realise that whilst they are taking part in activities they are at the same time being educated. Furthermore we believe that people want to come to The Garden to take part in activities because they know that they can get much more out of their visit while they are here. They can sit and have lunch or coffee with friends and can enjoy the rest of The Garden as well as take part in activities.

Our ability to attract people can be demonstrated by the number of people who have joined the Elderberries Programme since September to date – there are 294 individual members and 14 organisations which have approximately 10 members making up their groups.



Health walk around The Woodland Walk



Stained Glass Window workshop



Making bath crystals from kitchen staples and essential oils