

Article by Chris Brayshay as it appeared in The Northern Echo on 14 March 2005

Prejudice over age is costing millions

The region is losing millions of pounds because of prejudice against older people and a failure to recognise the experience they have to offer, according to a report today.

By not recruiting elderly volunteers, under-staffed organisations such as emergency services support, education and community services are missing out on willing workers, it says.

It is an oversight that is costing the North-East economy more than £6.5m a year.

The report also says offers of help from a potential 145,000 volunteers are ignored in Yorkshire and the NorthEast.

Home Office Minister Fiona Mactaggart is today launching a two-year Government funding initiative to promote volunteering among the over65s and encourage more groups to recruit older people.

The initiative is called Vita - Volunteering Initiative for the Third Age.

Voluntary and community sectors are being challenged to confront the barriers that can stand in the way of older volunteers.

Vita will also issue practical advice for older people wanting to volunteer.

Research reveals that 12 per cent of over-65s would like to volunteer, but are deterred.

Half of those questioned said opportunities were advertised in inappropriate places, such as the Internet, which many older people cannot access.

Others said voluntary and community groups did not approach them, and some cited problems with transport, cost and lack of self-confidence.

Volunteer Mike McCann, who is retired and leads a healthy walking group, urged people to give up their time to benefit themselves and others.

He said: " The organisation has provided training opportunities so that all walk leaders are trained from a health and safety perspective."

Sheila Windsor, of Vita, said: "Everyone wishing to volunteer should be able to do so, regardless of age. Older people have skills and abilities acquired over a lifetime, which can make a tremendous difference to their communities."

Over-65s who would like advice on how to volunteer can call 0845 305 6979.

By CHRIS BRAYSHAY

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