

# Elders Council of Newcastle

## *Report on Newcastles of the World 2016 conference*



**T**hree delegates from the Elders Council attended a 'Newcastles of the World' conference in Newcastle, Ontario, Canada in September this year. The key theme of the conference was ageing, hence the Elders Council was keen to take part. The week-long conference provided a welcome opportunity to learn more about the approach that other cities around the world are taking about issues that affect their older citizens. Newcastle upon Tyne is an age-friendly city and prides itself on its work on ageing. Through a crowd-funding drive and other fund-raising initiatives, the

Elders Council was successful in raising enough money to pay for two delegates to Newcastle, Ontario in September. A third member paid her own way. This report sets out what the team did and what was learned.

## **Newcastles of the World network**

The network came from an idea in Newcastle upon Tyne to share experiences and ideas internationally on culture, heritage and education over twenty years ago. In 1998, a formal alliance of the many Newcastles in the world was set up in Japan. Since then, there has been a biannual conference to share information and best practice in areas of common interest. There is also a parallel youth conference. This year, 13 Newcastles sent over 70 delegates to Canada from around the world. The Newcastles represented were very diverse according to size of population, demographics, history and development, including Latvia, Australia, South Africa, USA, Denmark, Germany and Switzerland. Our Newcastle upon Tyne sent a total of 14 people, including the 3 Elders Council members.



*Elder council delegates  
Mary Nicholls, Dorothy Ternent  
and Julie Irvine*

# Conference Activities



There was a 6 day programme which consisted of keynote speakers, presentations, large and small group discussions, tours and outings in the region. The days usually started at 8.30 in the morning, finishing mid evening. The conference was very well organised, with all meals and accommodation provided. Because of the different agendas across the various Newcastle, there were many issues raised in addition to that of ageing. These included tourism, cultural heritage, business development, social cohesion, economic challenges and housing, all of which were discussed during the week.

Elders Council members attended and contributed to all the sessions particularly around promoting the need for positive views about older people and sharing our own work and activities. The first keynote topic was music as a form of social cohesion and person-centred care. It was argued that music improves quality of life as well as having therapeutic benefits. Another important topic was the use of urban design in promoting age-friendly cities. One city, for example, required every local authority department to address the needs of an ageing population, with a particular emphasis on mobility. The issue of older people and paid work was considered with special attention given to employment enterprise for over 50s and career extensions.



Delegates from the Youth conference gave two presentations with an intergenerational emphasis. One proposal was 'Choirs in the Castle', with an emphasis on the sharing of skills and conservation of cultural traditions. The other was a 'House of Living', which would provide a chance for young and old to spend time together, learning with

and supporting each other in a dedicated environment. Mary Nicholls was invited to make an impromptu speech on our own approach to older people and civic engagement, followed by a panel discussion (see photo above). The Elders Council manifesto was distributed, along with leaflets about the organisation, to all delegates.



## Insights about ageing

- The Elders Council in Newcastle is very much 'ahead of the game' in terms of partnerships, participation and the voice of older people being heard. We were given examples of older people's associations and strategies being developed but these tended to be 'top down', and have a focus on recreation and health promotion. We were therefore able to actively promote a very positive view of Newcastle upon Tyne and the Elders Council itself with examples of civic engagement.
- An emphasis on the built environment and street furniture was a key issue for some cities with a focus on illness prevention and health promotion among its older population. This provided some networking potential with particular Newcastles such as Neuchatel in Switzerland, Newcastle in Indiana and possibly Neuburg in Germany.
- The value of music and singing as activities that promote well being for the majority of people emerged as a key theme throughout the conference. Not only did music enhance social cohesion and improve mental and physical health, enabling a better quality of life. It also can be used effectively with people with dementia, Parkinson's and aphasia to enhance communication and gait.
- The 'Newcastles of the World' passport was seen as a means of developing tourism that, in turn, would benefit older people in every Newcastle. Elders Council members were able to promote ourselves as assets in using digital media and online resources such as Information Now.
- Housing and transport were issues that affected communities in different ways – whether it be lack of choice, non existent public transport or poor services.
- Employment of and by older people was seen as important in those cities and countries with an ageing population.



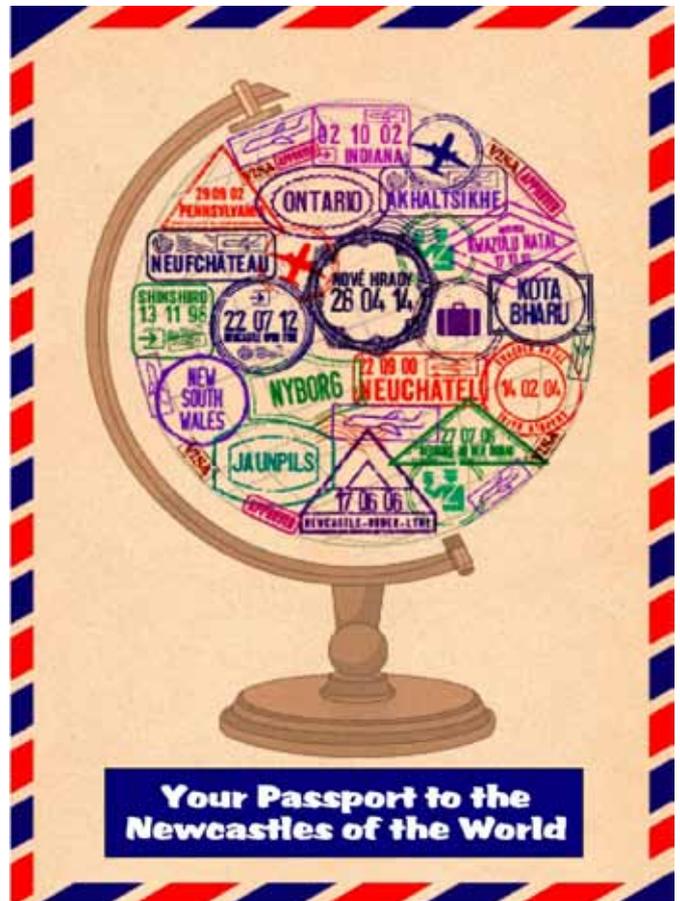
# Future possibilities

A key focus of the conference was to encourage practical opportunities to link up and develop joint projects. The Elders Council thinks there may be value in participating in key proposed projects, particularly:

- Newcastle's of the World Passport
- Choirs in the Castles
- An Exchange Programme for Older People

Now that Newcastle/Gateshead will be holding its Great Exhibition in 2018, there will be opportunities for partnership work within these and other initiatives. The Elders Council is meeting with other conference delegates to consider these above proposals further.

Hopefully there will be further opportunities to build on such initiatives through cooperation with other organisations.



*This report was written by Julie Irvine, Mary Nicholls and Dorothy Ternent (October 2016)*



*Some of the Newcastle upon Tyne delegates*