

Social Services for Elders from Ethnic Minorities – European Approaches

Starting Points

- In many European countries the development and delivery of adequate personal social services for immigrant elders have become important social and social political issues.
- This is due to the fact that many European countries have become migration societies.
- The total numbers of elderly from ethnic minority groups are still small today but will increase rapidly within the next decades.
- There are special challenges for the prevailing systems of community care.
- Relevant providers face the task of opening up their services for elderly from black and minority ethnic groups (BME elders) with their different cultural, ethnic, religious and lingual backgrounds.

Against this background, the project Service Delivery for Elders from Ethnic Minorities (SEEM) was set up. It is funded by the European Commission within its programme to combat social exclusion.

SEEM has partner organisations from four cities which are:

- Leeds City Council, UK (the lead partner)
- Leeds Older People's Forum, UK
- Ville de Lille, France
- Stadt Dortmund, Germany
- Forschungsgesellschaft für Gerontologie, Dortmund, Germany
- Verein für internationale Freundschaften, Dortmund, Germany
- SDF Gunnared – Elderly Services, Gothenburg, Sweden

SEEM aims to:

- Exchange good practice in promoting social inclusion for elders from black and minority ethnic communities
- Build good partnerships
- Involve black and minority ethnic elders and their organisations in the partnership
- Exchange good practice of service delivery for BME elders
- Produce and disseminate policy recommendations



First Results

Life Circumstances:

- Still small but increasing numbers of BME elders in all four countries
- Very heterogeneous ethnic groups
- Similar life circumstances and difficulties/problems (health, housing, access to services)
- Language barriers/inability to speak and read the host language fluently are common characteristics
- Low take up of services
- Common experience of discrimination

Available Information:

- Lack of detailed information on local level
- Little knowledge in how far services meet the special needs of BME elders

Legal Framework:

- Different concepts of citizenship with different influence on the political power of immigrant groups
- Great differences as to the legal status of BME elders
- Differences in the voicing of demands of immigrant groups

Social Political Framework:

- Different concepts of integration/acceptance of cultural and ethnic differences
- Varying concepts of welfare and social policy
- Diverging ways of planning and delivering social services for elders on local level
- Different models and roles of the sectors of the welfare state

Model of Good Practice

The International Day Centre for Elders in Dortmund

The international day centre for elders was built up in 1993 and is run by the Verein für Internationale Freundschaften (Association for International Friendship) which is a registered charity of the (black) voluntary sector. The centre is for elderly people from different ethnic and national backgrounds (including German elders) and its main aims are:

- Providing a place where elderly from different national backgrounds can meet (twice a week: Mondays and Fridays from 15–18)
- Organising information events for instance regarding topics such as pension, health care, long term care insurance etc.
- Organising self help such as advocacy and mutual visits at home or in hospitals
- Celebrating birthdays and holidays
- Visiting services and institutions for senior citizens
- Organising excursions and leisure activities
- Arranging German and health classes

The day centre is based in the rooms of a day care centre for elderly that is owned by the city of Dortmund and run by the Arbeiterwohlfahrt (German charitable association). The building is based in a neighbourhood with very high numbers of immigrants (about 50%) in the northern inner city district of Dortmund. The work is completely done on a voluntary basis. The day centre has won two important German prizes lately.



Agreed Principles to Move on

Developing and improving social services for BME elders on the basis of the following principles:

- User empowerment
- Involvement
- Consultation
- Respecting individual needs
- Collaboration/partnership
- Equality
- Strengthening self help
- Actively supporting voluntary organisations and
- Sustainability

Steps forward

- Reapply for further funding under Phase II of the 'Community Action Programme'
- Find additional new partners
- Intensify the exchange between partners

Further Objectives:

- Combat isolation of BME elders
- Improve consultation and involvement of BME elders in the development and provision of services
- Improve information about and access to services
- Raise the profile of the contribution made by BME elders
- Dissemination of information and good practice in each city, country and across member states
- Influence and inform member states and European Union about the needs of BME elders

Sources:
www.leeds.gov.uk/seem
Gerling, Vera (2001): Soziale Dienste für zugewanderte Senioren/Innen. Erfahrungen aus Deutschland und Großbritannien und ein Vergleich kommunaler Praxis der Partnerstädte Dortmund und Leeds, Herstellung: Books on Demand