

# Making Connections

**North East Coventry Older People's Forum is bringing together hundreds of older people for support, information and to discuss the issues affecting them. Its chair, Pam Lewis, puts their success down to 'knowing who to talk to and where to go'.**

*'When I retired I felt I was on the scrap heap. I'd had to retire because of company policy, and I really felt sorry for myself.'* Fortunately, a friend gave Pam the encouragement she needed to get involved in the community. But she didn't at all enjoy the first meeting she attended.

*'When I spoke to someone at our local Area Co-ordination about that experience, she said to me, 'Well, what are you going to do about it?'' And that was like a red rag to a bull!'*

*'So I spoke to a councillor, and someone else at the council house, and we all met in his office one lunchtime. That was the beginning of the North East Older People's Forum, and it's just grown and grown. Last year we had a conference at the Ricoh arena, and we had 200 older people there. It was absolutely wonderful.'*

This year the forum hosted 2 Christmas dinners in the Henley Green Community Centre, for a total of 190 people. Pam gets a buzz from these events. *'I love my older people. They go from 50 to 90 and over, and they're a wonderful crowd.'*

## **Get plugged in to the network**

When people ask Pam how to go about setting something up themselves, she just tells them what she did.

*'I just tell them: go to people who can help you. You've got to get people behind you and work with them. Get together with a group of local people or a councillor, or with Neighbourhood Management.'* (See box on right for details



*Pam Lewis (left) at the annual conference she helps organise*

## **North East Older People's Forum**

The forum holds three informal meetings a year, which cover subjects that have been raised as concerns at the last meeting. Speakers from relevant organisations are invited to answer questions on these issues. This is followed by a buffet and music. People can be taken there and collected.

The annual conference focuses on information sharing and is a good opportunity for older people to access organisations offering support and advice.

The forum also hosts a Christmas meal each year, and occasional trips.

## A Coventry Community Empowerment Briefing

of CEN's monthly meetings where you can meet local people who may be able to help).

*'I've made a habit of knowing who to go to and where to go. Sometimes the most unlikely people can help you, but its knowing how to approach people. People are different – with some, you can go and demand, and others you need to approach more softly.'*

Pam also advises people to get involved in a variety of different things to find out what is going on. *'I like to see things from all angles. I'm not just nosy! I want to see if I can learn from one thing and apply it to something else.'*

Networking is important. *'Sometimes people put silly ideas forward, and if you're involved in several things, you can spot what's clashing with something else.'*

And she says her diary is essential! *'I have to get my priority right. If there's something very serious going on I've got to put that first and apologise to others.'*

### Looking to the future

*'The forum gives me great pleasure. I just want it to grow. We had the Yorkshire Bank suite at the Ricoh arena this year for our conference. Next year I think we'll have the same – we've got room for expansion. But the year after - there's a bigger hall and I've got my eye on it!'*

For more information contact CEN and we will pass your enquiry on.

### Get networked! Join CEN

Free membership is open to any Coventry community or user-led group or local network that completes a membership form (subject to approval by the CEN Steering Group). To request a registration form, please contact us:

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6<sup>th</sup> Floor Coventry Point,  
Market Way, Coventry  
CV1 1EA

**T:** 024 7622 0381

**E:** [covcen@coventry-vsc.org.uk](mailto:covcen@coventry-vsc.org.uk)

**W:** [www.covcen.org.uk](http://www.covcen.org.uk)

### CEN monthly meetings

are a good opportunity to hear and respond to what is happening in your community and city, and meet inspiring local people. Find out when the next one is by contacting CEN or looking at our website.

### Neighbourhood Management

*(Neighbourhood Management has replaced Area Co-ordination).*

North West 024 7629 4429

South 024 7678 5555

North East 024 7678 5910

### Councillors

To find out who your local councillors are, contact:

**T:** 024 7683 3156

**W:** [www.coventry.gov.uk/councillors](http://www.coventry.gov.uk/councillors)