

Frank Glendenning Memorial Lecture

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What has the last 40 years taught us about ageing?

I am honoured to be asked to give this lecture particularly as it also marks the 40th Anniversary of the Beth Johnson Foundation. I met Frank Glendenning but was never fortunate enough to know him properly. However, his legacy has shaped the work of the Foundation over the years through:

- The people he mentored
- The rigour he left as a legacy
- The importance of linking policy, practice, evidence
- The need to be clear why we do things
- Understanding what difference are we seeking to make

This lecture is shaped by four elements:

1. As part of the 40th anniversary I have been revisiting and reflecting on Beth Johnson's work, particularly in the context of where we are now, and I am going to share some of that with you.
2. There is a personal dimension to this as thinking about BJB has also made me think about my own personal biography.
3. We have just been commissioned to develop a knowledge repository to mark EY2012 to counter the risk of continued reinvention of knowledge we already hold.
4. Over 40 years how much has the public attitude and discourse to ageing moved on?

In 1972 I was at university and first became involved in voluntary work. In 1975 I trained to teach young people with special educational needs (as it was then known) and in 1978 I became a lecturer with the Spastics Society at their Further Education College in Kent. Quite a number of the young people I worked with had not attended school when they were young as prior to the 1970 Education Act many young people were classified as ineducable and looked after in Junior Training Centres. When you look back on this as we celebrate the most successful Paralympics ever, and against a background of a strong Equalities and Human Rights framework, it brought home to me how much our thinking and attitude towards people with disabilities has moved on in the past 40 years.

In parallel with all this, the Beth Johnson Foundation was established in 1972 with a vision to challenge how people thought about ageing and in particular to link practice and research to impact on policy. Below is a chronology of just some of the key activities the Foundation has been part of, which also give an insight into the journey we have taken together in the ageing sector over these past 40 years.

1975: First national seminar with Department of Adult Education at Keele University on working with older people.

1978: Member of Forum for the Rights of Elderly People to Education: This is ironic given the pressure put on life-long learning in recent years and highlights a theme that runs throughout my lecture that services for older people have always been given a lower priority as compared to service and resources for young people, which have often been protected and prioritised in comparison to the wider population as it ages.

1982: Manpower Services Commission funded research to study YTS schemes on services for Older People in North Staffordshire. This was our first involvement in intergenerational work but the gendered pictures on the cover also show how far the debate about gender has come.

1983: Beth Johnson Leisure Association: This is now completely volunteer led and will have its 30th anniversary next year. It is an excellent example of a sustainable community programme that predates substantially the discussions on Big Society.

1985: Launch of pilot Peer Health Counselling Scheme that was the predecessor to the national Ageing Well Programme and also our Active in Age initiative. By this time the Beth Johnson work already had a number of core attributes to its approach to working for older people. These are that our work is:

- Asset based
- Solution focused
- Sustainable
- Valuing people doing for themselves
- Community focussed

1986: Launch of the Self Health Care in Old Age Project

- Senior Health Shop (The first such facility in Europe)
- Peer Health Counselling
- Health Care Courses groups for Older People
- Telephone Care Line

1988: The Foundation amended its objectives to relate to people from the age of 50 rather than 60. We also funded a national survey of long term unemployed people aged 50+.

1989: The Foundation gained Department for Health Opportunities for Volunteering funding to support the development of Advocacy work in a variety of care settings which was the foundation of the advocacy for older people's movement. We also published '*Community Care with Older People: strategies for the 1990s*': by Mim Bernard and Frank Glendenning

1992: Foundation co-sponsored the Journal of Educational Gerontology with the Association for Educational Gerontology and launched the SCIPS (Senior Citizens Involved in Public Services) as a model for older people to shape services.

1993: SCHIPSHA (Senior Citizens Involved in Public Services Health and Advocacy)
This project informed the development of the Better Government for Older People.

1993 was also the European Year of Older People and Solidarity between Generations. The background to this mirrors the debate around the current European Year of Active Ageing and Intergenerational Solidarity. The context was rooted in concerns over the 'demographic time-bomb', conflict between the generations and a global economic crisis - sounds familiar?

1994: Contributed to the Department of Health Code of Practice for Advocacy with Older People

1995: Grant to Association for Educational Gerontology to help production of the re-named Education and Ageing Journal.

1996: Produced leaflet on sexual health, older people and AIDs.
It seems ironic that 15 years later the Daily Mail should lambast Manchester City Council for producing a guide for older people and sexual health. Clearly many people are still not comfortable with the idea of older people being sexual beings.

1997: International Seminar at Keele to honour contribution of Dr Frank Glendenning to International Educational Gerontology. This year also saw the launch of our intergenerational project working around community activism, mentoring and young and old people learning IT skills together.

1998: The launch of our specialist Advocacy and Dementia Project in North Staffordshire, which we are still developing.

1999: We were one of the founding partners in the Older Peoples' Advocacy Alliance UK which is still hosted by the Foundation. Also became the UK founding partner of the International Consortium for Intergenerational Programmes and launched our Health Improvement Project and National Health Action Zone Innovation funded mentoring in schools. Locally we worked with the African-Caribbean population on the development of the Hibiscus project for Black Elders.

2001: We launched the UK Centre for Intergenerational Practice, which has gone on to develop Centres in all the devolved nations and a European Network. 2001, when we became one of the eight national pre-retirement projects, also marked the start of our long-standing interest in midlife and work across the life course which now forms the heart of our Positive Ageing Programme

2002: We developed a formal partnership with the Better Government for Older People programme to develop the structure and support for the UK Older People's Advisory Group.

2003: Marked the start of our partnership work in Wales which has become an increasingly important strand of our interests

Since then our work has continued to grow in scope and influence nationally, internationally and locally. And yet, our work is just a fraction of what has happened and been developed over the past 40 years, during which society has also changed. As we celebrate our 40th anniversary we find ourselves in the European Year of Active Ageing and Intergenerational Solidarity that mirrors many of the concerns and proposed solutions of 1993. Rather than celebrating the great success that has seen people's life expectancy continue to increase, we seem almost fearful of people living too long, exacerbated by continual negative reporting in the media.

Loneliness and isolation have become a major problem as families and communities change and financial pressure limits people's opportunities for engagement. Too much of the debate about ageing is still about deficit and we are yet to have a mature debate about growing old that mirrors what has been achieved on gender, race and disability.

Fourteen years after the start of the Better Government for Older People Programme government and local authorities are still exploring how best to engage with all older people, particularly those who are socially excluded. The inequality gap has grown and for the most excluded the number of years at end of life lived with poor health has also grown.

We still have a culture of re-invention and re-branding. Nearly 10 years ago the Local Government Association published '*Inverting the Triangle of Care*' that set out a vision for investment in prevention and opportunity. We still struggle to make that vision a reality and focus too much on consequences rather than causes.

Later this year the Welsh Government will begin work on the next refresh for the national Strategy on Ageing. It will be framed about addressing:

*Life course *Poverty and disadvantage *Entitlement *Citizen Leadership

So the vision 40 years ago that led to the establishment of the Beth Johnson Foundation is as valid now as it was then. We need to conduct a mature conversation about all of our experiences of growing older based on an appreciation of change and the fact that we all have a future to embrace and enjoy.

The greatest challenge facing us now is to confront the inequality in our society that makes growing old such a diverse, differentiated and often unfair and unequal experience. The next 40 years need to mark a change in the way we think about ageing. It needs to be grounded in valuing the assets and resources of us all wherever we are in our life course, and to emphasise participation, engagement and control.

I don't know what the future holds for me or for the Foundation, but I do know I want it to be productive, exciting and of value to others. Most importantly it is about looking forward while learning from our past to use what is good and avoid repeating mistakes. We need to use our knowledge, our commitment and belief to change the way we work and recognise it takes a lifetime to age. Surely we can now find the time to create a society and systems that give everyone the best chance for the future as we all share the common experience of growing older.

Thank you very much.