

ESCaD PUBLIC MEETING 18.6.26 : HIDDEN VOICES 2: OLDER PEOPLE

Summary

To view the recording see here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=svOdSUVOtCM>

ESCaD's latest public meeting on 18th June focused on the hidden/discounted voices of older people, the need to challenge ageism, self-organise and push for a radically re-imagined National Care, Support and Independent Living Service.

Neil Duncan-Jordan, Labour MP for Poole, suggested that we can take people with us in arguing for collective public provision of Social Care as they see the inequities of having to pay huge amounts for the care of someone with dementia but not with cancer etc. He suggested that the Casey Commission was a massive missed opportunity. As it isn't due to report until 2028 the current Government will have no opportunity to implement its recommendations in this Parliament. We have to turn this round. Government needs to tackle privatisation, the low pay and status of care workers, unhook certificates of sponsorship for workers from overseas from specific employers and address the massive lack of support for unpaid carers. We should start by taking domiciliary contracts back in house when they come up for renewal. Longer term we need to look at how care homes can be brought back into public ownership.

Neil said that he will be pressing for a commitment to a publicly provided, national care service to be in the Labour manifesto. In answer to a question from Rosie about what we can do, referencing John McDonnell's suggestion that we need to create a social movement, Neil suggested that getting people to write to their Constituency MPs, asking them to raise questions in Parliament, table amendments, attend meetings and debates, sign petitions etc. really does work. It may be traditional but stirs MPs to act, particularly when they get multiple similar requests. He agreed with McDonnell that it helps enormously to have a movement outside Parliament as well.

Alisoun Milne, Emerita Professor. Kent Uni. presented research showing that the market model comes with inbuilt risk and causes preventable harm. When firms running 'care' homes collapse or pull out and their workforce is precarious, residents suffer physical, emotional, autonomy and relational harms, including acute distress. Two key causes of ruptures in care are financial instability and worker precarity, both of which are particularly high in the private sector. 8,000 care homes closed from 2011 – 2023; 20,000 people had to be found alternative places.



Disruptions to care at home through having a succession of carers, carers turning up erratically and lacking time to build a relationship, also cause harm. These harms particularly damage people who e.g. have dementia and are least equipped to act as autonomous, independent individuals.

Alisoun argued that human rights protections for older people need to be embedded in policy making and planning of care services: noting that the construction of care as an economic commodity has corrupted any alignment with a rights-based agenda. There is also need for stronger regulations and for foregrounding what matters to older people through ruptures e.g. protecting relationships with other residents as a care home closes.



We need to invest in preventative work which isn't profitable to private firms and develop Cooperatives and not for profit alternatives.

Gordon Peters, ex-Director of Social Care talked about a grassroots initiative by a few older people in Haringey recently diagnosed with mild cognitive impairment. They have come together both to support each other and challenge the prevailing but erroneous notion that MCI is always a precursor to dementia and nothing can be done. Gordon noted that only 50% of people with MCI go on to develop dementia; early intervention can prevent 40% of cases but is largely non-existent. This needs to change.

The Council and Joint Partnership Board have been supportive, weekly group sessions have been set up and interest is growing. Gordon suggested that this is a short story about getting a significant health and social need recognized, tackling stigma or fear which stops people getting support and prising out willing professionals/ experts to work as equals on a local solution.

Marianne Lynch, carer and advocate described how a striking deterioration in her 87 year old father's health in hospital after a routine operation, fall and hospital acquired Covid infection, was wrongly characterised as an inevitable consequence of aging. His voice went unheard, his whole self unseen and his needs dismissed. This started a long slide to his voice being ignored and needs not met. It was aggravated by the greed of care companies who employed and exploited poorly paid workers on sponsorship visas and didn't give them any training. She has had a long struggle to get her father the support that would enhance his life rather than deprive him of choice and agency. As his advocate she too felt unheard by professionals, the Council and whoever she approached. She tried to get Continuing Health Care funding without success. She resisted the suggestion that her father needed to go into a care home where she was sure that he would be unsafe and deteriorate rapidly. Marianne ended her contribution by talking movingly about what her father is really like as a person and asked that we make sure his and other voices of older people are heard.

Councillor David Jenkins, Chair of the Age Friendly Board in Leeds, outlined how older people from a wide range of backgrounds are involved in shaping developments in local transport, health services etc. Tony Watts 'Later Life Agenda', and the Centre for Aging Better are useful resources. A number of organisations are campaigning for an Older People's Commissioner.



Thanks to attendees for all their contributions.

Colin who is involved in an embryo Equal Care Coop in Ealing suggested we should all be pursuing free home care and JOIN UP! Ealing CLP has a motion to Labour Conference on social care, he is organising a stand and Dame Sally Powell is arranging a fringe meeting.

Anne noted Local Govt. finances are incredibly insecure; in Haringey a fight to retain and remodel a LA home failed because of the lack of cash.

Jo and others spoke about the need to hammer home the argument that spending on social care is an investment not a drain.

Larry said the Government needs to start by doubling the pay and numbers of care workers

John queried whether Alisoun thought the CQC does anything to improve the quality of care. She said that over the years the CQC has become less about the things that matter to older people, relationships, time spent with them, activities etc. and more about numbers of fire extinguishers etc. In the chat **Penny and Jacquie** noted that the CQC was damaged and rendered less effective by re-organisation.



Chris said that providers, social workers etc. must listen when people raise concerns not bully them!

Mike asked why the Supreme Court reduced DOL safeguards. Alisoun said she doesn't know but some people have noted that it saves money.

Gay hopes the Green Party's new councillors will counteract the influence of Reform and use their power to challenge aspects of the current system.

Gilda referred to the briefing for Green Party and other councillors on the ESCaD website:

<https://endsocialcaredisgrace.org/letter-to-green-councillors/>

John noted that Reform in Lincolnshire is closing dementia support services.

Jacquie has asked Hannah Spencer, her Green MP to raise Parliamentary questions re carers.

Sylvia made a plea for mental health support.

Apologies for missing out other contributions but MANY THANKS ALL. It was an excellent meeting!