

Age-friendly case study



Age-friendly communities
Improving services for older customers

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Age Friendly Island and Southern Vectis Isle of Wight

As part of the Age Friendly Island Big Lottery partnership, Age UK Isle of Wight developed training to help service providers become more age-friendly. The Isle of Wight's main bus operator, Southern Vectis, has incorporated this training into its compulsory programme for all drivers, using an age simulation suit and glasses to give participants an insight into common physical challenges in later life.

“

Age-friendly means to me we're all living longer, we're all getting older... Part of my job is to assist people as they enter my work. I'm the driver. This is my bus. I want them to have a comfortable ride.

John Harvey,
Bus Driver, Southern Vectis



Developing age-friendly training

Led by **Age UK Isle of Wight** (Age UK IW) and funded by the Big Lottery as part of their local Ageing Better programme, **Age Friendly Island** is a partnership of organisations – including the police, fire service, trading standards, charities, the library service and the local council – all committed to making the Isle of Wight a great place to grow old. A major area of work has been developing a **training course for service providers**.



It's about shifting the cultural attitudes of people. And we started that really with looking at developing age-friendly training because within that age-friendly training we kind of explain, 'What is age-friendly? What do we mean by age-friendly?', and we get individual organisations to talk about what age-friendly means to them as an organisation.

Emma Lincoln,
Team Leader, Age Friendly Island

Developed in partnership with the **police and fire service**, age-friendly training is targeted at staff who **deal directly with customers**. It aims to improve services by raising awareness of some of the challenges and barriers that older people can face when using services in later life. Delivered over three hours, which can be tailored to the needs of the organisation, the training covers:

- **What age-friendly means**
- **Changes that happen to us as we get older**
- **Communication skills**
- **Bespoke content for the participating organisation**

Age-friendly training was piloted with the police and fire service on the Isle of Wight from February to August 2016. It has now been delivered to over 30 organisations on the island, including Red Funnel, Wightlink, Tesco, Southern Water, Southern Housing, HMP Isle of Wight, the Isle of Wight Library Service and Isle of Wight Council. Age UK IW has been invited to provide age-friendly training sessions for organisations on the mainland, including Hampshire Fire in Gosport.

Age-friendly training for Southern Vectis bus drivers

The idea of age-friendly bus driver training initially came from a member of Southern Vectis staff attending the Age Friendly Island steering group and seeing an age simulation suit in action. The age-friendly bus driver training started in November 2016.

Age UK IW worked with Southern Vectis on a 'train the trainer' basis so that two members of staff could deliver age-friendly training in-house as part of its compulsory training programme for all drivers. It is a legal requirement for bus drivers to do 35 hours of training every five years to keep their Certificate of Professional Competence (CPC). At Southern Vectis, this takes place over the course of a week, with Wednesday afternoon now dedicated to the **age-friendly component of customer care training**.

As well as conventional presentations and quizzes, age-friendly training for Southern Vectis staff involves a highly practical element: **wearing a simulation suit to board the bus**. The suit, complete with vision-impairment glasses and hearing defenders, aims to simulate some of the physical impairments that can happen as people grow older, such as reduced dexterity and mobility, and vision and hearing impairments.



As drivers, we know the bus because we work on a bus every single day. Then you're in the suit and your vision's gone and your hearing's gone. All of a sudden, that environment becomes hostile and unknown.

Russell Jenness,
Customer Promise Ambassador, Southern Vectis

Each driver wears the suit for around ten minutes, boarding the bus and moving right to the back to experience what it feels like to move around the environment. Through this engaging, hands-on activity, **drivers gain valuable insights into the challenges some passengers face**.

Age-friendly domains covered by the training

Domain 2. Transportation

Domain 5. Respect and social inclusion

Impact



Southern Vectis buses on the island, I find they've greatly improved. Drivers have been through a course whereby they're more aware... you step onto the bus, you get a 'good morning' or 'good afternoon'... you get time to sit down before the driver starts to pull away.

Phyllis Newbury,
Age Friendly Island Public Forum Member

Since introducing age-friendly training, Southern Vectis has seen a **reduction in incidents involving slips, trips and falls**. The company achieved a 96% overall customer satisfaction rate in the Autumn 2017 Bus Passengers Survey, **one of the highest rates in the country**.

The training has also led to a range of steps being taken to improve bus services for older customers, including changes to timetables so drivers can allow passengers more time to board. **Even a small change, for example an extra minute added to a route, can make a difference.**



Prior to the training, we would have drivers that were concerned about meeting timetables... We've kind of flipped that on its head with the age-friendly training and said, 'Look, the customer is a priority, you wait for them to be seated. If you need that extra time then we will build that into our timetables'.

Simon Moye,
Operations Manager, Southern Vectis

Feedback from course participants has been positive, with one driver commenting, 'This course has really, really helped because we're putting ourselves in their shoes quite literally'. Participants are struck by the experience of wearing the simulation suit, describing it as 'eye-opening' and 'humbling'.

Around 450 bus drivers across all 14 companies within the **Go South Coast** group have now received age-friendly training. Southern Vectis is exploring how they can build on their age-friendly approach to improve transport services for passengers with learning difficulties.

“

I've learned to be a lot more compassionate... We've got a large elderly community on the island, across the island, and to know to lower the step, to give them a little more time, to help them if they need assistance.

Hannah Cundall,
Bus Driver, Southern Vectis



Challenges and learning

Age UK IW had to make sure age-friendly training was feasible for participating organisations given constraints on staff time.

It was also important that training could be sustained beyond Age Friendly Island funding, hence developing a 'train the trainer' package that could be customised to allow age-friendly training to continue in-house. With supportive staff on board at Southern Vectis, it took 18 months to arrange the practicalities of getting age-friendly training written into the CPC programme.

Good communication between drivers, management and the commercial team within Southern Vectis has been vital to responding to drivers' initial concerns that they might have insufficient time on some routes to put their training into practice. They now have regular opportunities to raise these concerns with the bus company's commercial team, who pinpoint problems with individual vehicles or on specific routes and find solutions.

Costs

When age-friendly training was introduced, Southern Vectis' parent company, Go South Coast, had already set aside £500,000 to cover one round of CPC training for all its drivers. Two customer promise ambassadors attended 'train the trainer' sessions with Age UK IW, provided as a free pilot as part of the Big Lottery funded Age Friendly Island programme. Southern Vectis spent an additional £1,500 on an age simulation suit and glasses so that they could deliver the training themselves.

When providing age-friendly training on the mainland, Age UK IW currently charge £300 for a three-hour session. 'Train the trainer' arrangements are negotiated with individual organisations.



If you're working with someone like the fire service, that's really tricky, for them to release their staff for a period of time.

Helen Lewis,
Engagement Officer,
Age Friendly Island





make our Island a great place to grow old.

EMERGENCY EXIT - turn handle & pull window

Age Friendly Island

Now and for the future.



149

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Email: hello@agefriendlyisland.org or Call: (01983) 525282

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This document is available for download at www.ageing-better.org.uk/afc



The Centre for Ageing Better received £50 million from the Big Lottery Fund in January 2015 in the form of an endowment to enable it to identify what works in the ageing sector by bridging the gap between research, evidence and practice.