What are the objectives of the programme?

SeniorNetworks aims to mobilise the self-support potential, participation and resources of the elderly on a neighbourhood basis around specific activities. The networks provide opportunities for voluntary work, contribute to age-friendlier neighbourhoods and help to identify and put on the agenda the needs of the elderly. It is based on the idea that senior citizens who are a part of an active network live healthier, are more autonomous and are less likely to depend on external help.

Timeline

It began in 2002 and is an on-going programme. Now, 83 networks exist.

Background

In the late 1990s, social workers in Cologne faced several challenges in their work with senior citizens:
- decreasing participation in low-threshold activities despite of the growing number of elderly people
- less attractive meeting places for certain groups (e.g. younger active seniors), and
- a poor range of offers to meet the diversity of senior citizens (e.g. people with disabilities, migrants, etc.).

At the same time, the city of Cologne recognised that many of its older citizens would like to get involved in voluntary work and be more engaged in the everyday life around the city. As a result, the city and welfare organisations set up SeniorNetworks.

Who is responsible for the project's implementation?

The city of Cologne and welfare organisations for the elderly are responsible for their implementation and coordination.

How does the project work?

Originally, the network was part of the 2001/02 plan for age-friendly Cologne. Today 38 out of 86 neighbourhoods have a SeniorNetwork.

SeniorNetworks are created in three different ways:
- following the initiative of the office for social affairs and senior citizens
- based on the initiative of older people themselves, often in cooperation with an welfare organisation, or
- based on existing meeting points which are developed into platforms enabling additional activities from outside based on a participatory approach.

SeniorNetworks are open to older people and their organisations. They offer activities such as neighbourhood cafés, bike and hiking tours, DIY activities, German language courses, inter-generational meetings, internet cafés and lecture series.

Network coordinators are responsible for identifying the needs in the neighbourhood and to promote the SeniorNetworks. They create the network and set up activities. As the network develops, it becomes autonomous and the network coordinator withdraws.

What are the results of the project?

The programme stimulates self-management: different activities and events are organised and offered with the support of a network coordinator. Once the network is able to manage itself, the coordinator slowly withdraws and leaves the management of the Network to its members (today 3,800 persons are involved in the programme).

The programme attracted more financial contributions from different sources: the city of Cologne, the welfare organisations and their members as well the Sozial-Betriebe-Köln GmbH (social services) contribute to the financing of the SeniorNetworks.

Through the programme, the political importance of senior citizens in the city of Cologne has increased.

Was the project evaluated and were there any follow-up activities?

The SeniorNetworks initiative receives positive feedback from users and was granted the national prevention award in 2005. The programme has not been evaluated yet.

How is the project funded and what resources (financial and human) are dedicated to its delivery?

For the networks that were created following the initiative of the city of Cologne, kick-off funding is provided for a network coordinator from a welfare organisation (1/2 staff member for three years).

Self organised SeniorNetworks receive support through a dedicated NGO-run service point (capacity building, training and supervision) and can have some of their material expenses reimbursed.

Who is the contact person for the project?

Carolin Herrmann
City of Cologne, Agency for Social Affairs and Senior citizens
carolin.herrmann@stadt-koeln.de

Website

www.seniorennetzwerke-koeln.de

If you have an example of a good practice that you would like to include in the database, please send an email to caroline.greene@eurocities.eu.