

“A neighbour, she’s very kind to me but she’s eighty---I think she’s eighty seven”: Older people’s views on and experiences of getting help and support from neighbours

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Contents

Summary.....	5
Background	5
Aim of the study	5
Method	5
The respondents	6
Findings.....	6
Conclusions	7
Background.....	9
Aim, research approach and method.....	13
Data analysis	14
The Respondents	17
Findings	21
Knowing the neighbours.....	21
Neighbourhood	25
Neighbours.....	26
Respondents	28
Neighbourliness	30
Receiving help from neighbours	34
Asking for help	38
Help from neighbours and informal care	41
Social networks	43
RVS Good neighbour Scheme	48
Third stage: U3A group reflect on findings.....	52
Conclusions.....	55
References	57

Summary

Background

- Having good social relationships with neighbours is important for the wellbeing of older people
- A good neighbourly relationship respects privacy while being friendly and offering help with small tasks and at a time of urgent need
- Social policy makers have viewed neighbours as a resource for helping and supporting older people so that they can remain in their own home
- Little is known about the views and experience of older people who receive help from neighbours

Aim of the study

- To increase understanding of the role and potential of neighbours in providing help and support to older people living in the community, through an exploration of older people's perceptions and experiences of seeking and receiving help from neighbours

Method

- A multi phased qualitative study of two groups of older people: members of a Northumbrian University of the Third Age (U3A) and people who use the Royal Voluntary Service (RVS) in Northumberland, including a RVS led Good Neighbour Scheme
- In the first phase, two focus groups made up of U3A members explored what it meant to be neighbourly. In the second phase 9 members of the focus groups and 15 RVS service users were interviewed concerning perceptions of their neighbourhood, interactions with current and past neighbours, managing day to day life, views on and experience of giving/receiving/seeking help from neighbours
- Group meetings of U3A and RVS respondents to discuss the preliminary findings were planned. It only proved possible to organise one for U3A respondents.
- All interviews and group discussions were digitally recorded and fully transcribed. Data was thematically analysed
- Research was carried out in line with the British Sociological Association Statement of Ethical Practice

The respondents

- Six of the nine U3A respondents, and nine of the 15 RVS respondents were women. While there was an overlap in age range, most RVS respondents were aged 80 or over, while most U3A respondents were less than 80 years of age
- All but one of U3A respondents were incomers, whereas 12 RVS respondents had lived in the same area all their lives
- U3A and RVS respondents differed in a number of personal circumstances

	Live alone	Family close by	Carers	Problems with mobility	Private transport
U3A (9)	3	3	0	0	7
RVS (15)	15	9	10	9	0

Findings

- Some respondents did not wish to engage with neighbours. Amongst those who were positive about neighbouring, factors relating to the neighbourhood, the neighbour or personal circumstances affected getting to know neighbours. Lack of mobility was a significant impediment.
- Neighbourliness involved sociability, mutual help with small tasks, and assistance at a time of urgent need together with a respect for privacy
- Relationships with neighbours were dynamic and could grow in response to changes in circumstance, such as bereavement or illness
- Nine RVS respondents said they had received help or support from neighbours. The help did not involve personal care. The neighbour giving the help could be a similar age to the respondent receiving the help.
- The relationship between neighbours, which involved help, were longstanding, predated the point at which the help commenced and had evolved in response to changes in circumstances.
- Help was situated within conventional neighbourliness. Respondents neither expected nor wanted neighbours to take on long term responsibilities for their care.
- Respondents were reluctant to ask for help. Consideration for their neighbours and neighbourly relationships, sense of self and reciprocity lay behind the reluctance.
- U3A respondents' social networks were varied and extended well beyond the place in which they resided. Whereas, RVS respondents were focused in the area in which they lived. Some had very rich networks, comprising of neighbours, friends, people from the church, interest groups and organisations such as RVS, and kin. Others had scantier networks. Lack of mobility or access to private transport was a factor in impoverished social networks.
- Having many weak ties, such as between neighbours, could compensate for a lack of stronger ties, such as from kin.
- The five respondents who had a Good Neighbour had very different experiences. In the most positive, the respondent had a lot in common with her Good Neighbour, received weekly visits and chose from a range of activities, which included trips out. Three though, had visits once a fortnight or less and only one of these three was taken out (in a wheelchair).

Conclusions

- The kind of help and support that respondents were getting from neighbours was commensurate with conventional neighbourliness and set within the context of ordinary relationships between neighbours. The neighbourly relationship from which help stemmed was founded before help was needed and reciprocal.
- Relationships between neighbours could be dynamic and adapt to changes in each other's situations. Interdependency characterised the relationship between several respondents and their neighbours. Respondents were both giving and receiving help to neighbours of a similar age. There was no clear distinction between the helper and the helped.
- Respondents acted to exert control over changing circumstances in their lives (showed agency) including the decision whether or not to get involved with neighbours and what help it was appropriate for neighbours to give.
- The potential of neighbours to provide help and support is dependent on fostering ways to build ordinary neighbourly relationships, not on trying to build extraordinary ones solely for the purpose of providing help and support.
- Building neighbourly relationships could be challenging. Localities which had no communal spaces, a floating population and inhabitants who left the neighbourhood during the day impeded their development. Respondents who had a problem walking and lacked access to private transport faced significant problems. Initiatives to foster and build social networks should extend to the use of electronic social networking and social media.
- Trying to harness neighbourliness as a source of informal care in order, for example, to keep older people out of hospital, runs the risk of damaging the neighbourly relationship. The symmetry of the relationship is lost as the neighbour's gaze is directed to issues of safety and wellness in the older person, and the neighbour's interpretation of what constitutes being safe and being well takes precedence over the older person's view. Thus the relationship would become one of cared for and carer. Agency and privacy could be undermined and the value and benefit derived from neighbourliness diminished as a consequence.

Background

Having good social relationships with neighbours is important for the wellbeing of older people. (Gardner, 2011; Wenger, 1990) Such relationships enable socializing, the prevention of loneliness, a feeling of being cared for, having someone to call on for help, and a sense of belonging to a community.(Bowling, 2005) The reverse, the impact of health on relationships with neighbours, is less well understood. (Cornwell, Laumann, & Schumm, 2008)

Some have argued that close knit, neighbourly communities are a thing of the past and that the neighbourliness observed in communities, such as Bethnal Green in the 1950s, the time when Young and Wilmott carried out their study of working class life there, has passed. (Harris & Gale, 2004) However, Young and Wilmott also observed a transformation in the degree of neighbourliness when the people from Bethnal Green were rehoused in a new locality. There the displaced East Enders complained about the unfriendliness of the estate. *'The neighbours round here are very quiet. They all keep themselves to themselves. They all come from the East End but they all seem to change when they come down here.'* (p147) (Young & Wilmott, 1962) Young and Wilmott argued that the close relationship between neighbours in Bethnal Green was a result of living in close proximity to relatives and non-relatives over several generations; *'Long residence by itself does something to create a sense of community with other people in the district.'* (p105). However it was the interaction of long residency and having many relatives in the locality which created the strongest ties between people. Since Young and Wilmott carried out their study, social changes have made it much less common for people to continue to reside in the same area as their extended family or in the same location, over a lifetime. (Harris & Gale, 2004)

In the ensuing fifty years, has the growth of individualism weakened ties between neighbours and made for a more fractured society?(Boyce, 2006; Bulmer, 1987) Data from surveys are one source of evidence concerning the state of neighbourliness in Britain today. An Age UK survey in 2012 reported that 3.5million people were not getting any help, support or companionship from neighbours and 700,000 older people did not know their neighbours.(AgeUK, 2012) The main reasons cited for older people not wanting to get to know their neighbours, included not wanting to be a burden and neighbours seeming to be busy. A 2010 survey by Co-operatives UK had mixed results in a comparison of how neighbourly Britain was in 1982 and 2010.(Mayo, 2010) However, the call out line on the front cover of the report was, 'The UK already has a big society of neighbours looking out for each other', based on the finding that a significant number of people took steps to keep an eye on someone else in the neighbourhood who was elderly or disabled (26% kept an eye on non-relatives and 11% on relatives in 2010 compared with 6% in 1982).But the number of neighbours "with no interest in contact or helping people living next door" had increased from 26%, in 1982, to 43%, in 2010. It is difficult to interpret these kinds of statistical findings as indicators of degrees of

neighbourliness. In the case of the Age UK survey, it was not stated whether not receiving help and companionship from neighbours was a problem. Older people not wanting to impose a burden on neighbours and being sensitive to how busy they are, is, arguably, an indication of neighbourliness rather than the opposite. What is the meaning of 'taking steps to keep an eye on a neighbour' in the Cooperatives UK survey? Does it involve making contact with the older or disabled neighbour, or, indeed, is the neighbour even aware that someone is keeping an eye on them?

A 2004 Manchester neighbourliness review, called 'Looking out for each other', included qualitative as well as quantitative data and interpretive work was a major part of the review. (Harris & Gale, 2004) A key difference between the Manchester neighbourliness review and the aforementioned surveys was that the aim of the review was to develop an appreciation of neighbourliness in Manchester, not to measure it. A 2006 'think piece' by the Joseph Rowntree Trust took a similar approach and drew on published literature, including the Manchester neighbourliness review, to investigate neighbourliness in Britain. (Buonfino & Hilder, 2006) The report concluded that:

While life patterns have changed, often shifting our frames of reference outside the neighbourhoods where we live, the evidence suggests that good relations with neighbours at the very local level can still have very beneficial effects on quality of life and are still valued by most people. They may not be based on family, close friendship or 'strong ties', as they used to be in the past, but respect, friendliness, and help in times of crisis or need can go a long way to improving people's lives. While neighbourliness is not for everyone, facilitating more encounters between neighbours could support a rediscovery of the local – and help people, in particular the most vulnerable to live happier and healthier lives. (P7)

However, the report also warned that "neighbourliness is not the answer to every social problem" (p5), and that there was a thin divide between neighbour interaction which engendered a sense of belonging to a community and that which invaded privacy. Neighbourliness involves being sensitive to and respecting neighbours' privacy, as well as being friendly and willing to help at a time of need. (Harris & Gale, 2004)

The idea of the 'Big Society' - a political ideology and social policy - was articulated by David Cameron in 2009, while still Leader of the Opposition. He saw it as a way of restoring the balance between the state, the individual and society to the time when the welfare state was created. He argued that the state had taken over what people could be doing for themselves, their families and their neighbours. (Painter, 2012) In 2013, Norman Lamb, then the Minister for Care in the Coalition Government asserted that rebuilding neighbourly support could help prevent older people from being 'pushed into' care homes. ("Minister calls for neighbours to help older people," 2013) Age UK, whilst agreeing that neighbourly support was a good thing, considered that on its own it would not address problems within social care. The idea that neighbours should take on tasks, such as routine care of their elderly neighbour is beyond the scope of neighbourliness. (Bulmer, 1987) Bulmer argued that policy makers commit the sin of pronouncement when they make an underlying assumption about normative social

relations, which they do not examine, and proceed to build policy on the assumption. In other words, the 'sin' occurs when policy makers decide what attributes should be included in a concept, such as community or neighbourliness, and then research the 'facts' using their taken for granted view of the concept.

On the health information section of the NHS Choices website, there is an example of the NHS trying to promote neighbours as a source of informal care and support to older people. Advice is given regarding how neighbours can help older people who are lonely or socially isolated and includes the recommendation that people get to know their elderly neighbours. It makes the following plea:

Seize the opportunity to introduce yourself to an elderly neighbour when you see them. Ask if you can help in any way. Do you know an older person who lives alone, rarely leaves the house, has recently suffered a bereavement, is in poor health, disabled, has sight or hearing loss, or doesn't seem to have close family living nearby? They're the ones who are most likely to appreciate this type of contact.

(NHS, 2013)

It seems unlikely that a person would be visiting an NHS website for advice on how to help an elderly neighbour, who they do not know, to combat loneliness. Worryingly, the elderly neighbour in the scenario appears not to be receiving help from statutory services. Putting this to one side, it is the view of normative neighbourliness contained within the advice that, arguably, is an example of the sin of pronouncement. The assumption that there is a natural tendency of neighbours to build social ties does not take account of people living in close proximity needing to protect their privacy. (Boyce, 2006; Crow, Allan, & Summers, 2002; Harris & Gale, 2004) There are other suppositions too. The older person in the scenario lacks agency. It is assumed that he or she is helpless, in both senses of the word. The idea that an older person could be in charge of their very difficult situation, and have a life beyond it, is absent. The gaze of the would be helper neighbour is directed to a series of deficits of the older person, who is selected for social interaction because they are perceived to be at risk and in need of help. The elderly neighbour takes on the group identity of a vulnerable old person. With such an identity comes the loss of potential for reciprocity with neighbours. (Barrett & Twitchin, 2006) The neighbour is being deployed as a source of informal care. Twigg makes the point that statutory agencies conceiving of informal carers as resources are responding to what is an existing reality (lonely, housebound, unwell) rather than attempting to influence or determine that reality. (Twigg, 1989) Further, the elderly neighbour lacks a voice. The assumption appears to be that the elderly neighbour will welcome the attention of their neighbour and the offer of help.

While research has been undertaken into the experience of friends and neighbours offering support to an older person (Nocon & Pearson, 2000), little is known about the reverse i.e. the views and experience of older people receiving the help. If neighbourliness is being factored into welfare policies and services, then it is essential that older people's attitudes and experiences of receiving help from neighbours is understood.

Aim, research approach and method

The aim of the study was to increase understanding of the role and potential of neighbours in providing help and support to older people living in the community, through an exploration of older people's views on and experiences of seeking and receiving help from neighbours

We wanted to understand how the kind of relationship that older people have with their neighbour, regarding help and support, has been shaped, from the perspective of the older person. It was beyond the scope of this study to include the neighbours of the older person as respondents. Our starting point was that older people will try to maintain continuity of their younger and older selves concerning how they relate to neighbours. This assertion resonates with a theory of ageing called continuity theory. (Reed, Stanley, & Clarke, 2004) Continuity theory has been criticized for not taking into account that loss in old age, such as being widowed or loss of mobility can itself cause discontinuity. Innovation theory takes this into account by arguing that older people can and do innovate as a way of preserving their sense of self in the face of such loss. (Nimrod & Kleiber, 2007) Innovation theory is the theoretical underpinning for the study.

Our study was a multi phased qualitative study of two groups of older people. One group were members of a Northumbrian University of the Third Age (U3A) and the second group were people who use the Royal Voluntary Service (RVS) in Northumberland, including a RVS led Good Neighbour Scheme (GNS).

In the first phase, two focus groups made up of members from two interest groups at the U3A - Life Stories (5 members present) and Social History (7 members present) – explored what it meant to be neighbourly. The groups met every month and so were used to discussing ideas pertaining to social issues. The research focus group took over one of their regular meetings and lasted for an hour. A facilitator (JG) introduced a series of topics: getting to know neighbours, neighbour interactions, ideas on what constitutes being a good neighbour, views on seeking /giving help to neighbours and relationship with neighbours in the future; but encouraged the group to discuss with each other rather than address the facilitator.

Ten members agreed to a follow up interview to probe in more detail the findings from the focus groups and gather individual narratives. Nine people were eventually interviewed in eight interviews carried out by Janet Grime, Elizabeth Porter and Pam Stephens. Four of the interviews took place in a U3A meeting room, one over the telephone and the remainder at the respondents' own homes. The interviews lasted between 20 and 75 minutes.

In a second phase, 15 older people who use RVS services were interviewed. In the week prior to the interview taking place a RVS organiser approached individual service users, talked about the study and asked if they were willing to take part. Verbal consent was taken at the time of the interview. Nine of the people agreeing to participate attended an RVS Social Centre and six used the RVS 'Get Out and About' and/or the 'Good Neighbour Scheme'. The interview was semi-structured and included the following topics: perception of their neighbourhood, kinds of

Research approach and method

interactions with current and past neighbours, managing day to day life, such as shopping, cooking, and their views on and experiences of giving/ receiving/seeking help from neighbours - including the Good Neighbour (GN) if appropriate. Nine of the interviews took place in private areas at three RVS Social Centres and six in the respondent's own homes. In one case, a Good Neighbour was present when the interviewer arrived and stayed for the interview after she had checked that this was all right with the interviewee. In another the daughter of an interviewee was present. The interviews lasted between 25 and 75 minutes and were carried out by Janet Grime and Elizabeth Porter.

In a third phase it was planned to hold two group meetings, one with U3A respondents and one with RVS respondents, to discuss the preliminary findings. Unfortunately it did not prove possible to organise a group session for the RVS respondents. Six U3A respondents met for just over an hour. They came from both interest groups. Janet Grime presented the preliminary findings (15 minutes) and then the respondents were asked what, if anything, in the findings was surprising, unclear or missing and what the findings appeared to indicate about the role of neighbours in helping and supporting older people. The discussion expanded to include how neighbourliness could be promoted.

Data collection and analysis was an iterative process with nascent analysis of the U3A focus group informing emerging questions asked in the U3A and RVS interviews. All interviews and group discussions were digitally recorded and fully transcribed.

Data analysis

Attride-Stirling's guide to conducting a thematic analysis of qualitative data was the basis for the data analysis. (Attride-Stirling, 2001) A coding framework was developed for the data arising from the focus groups and interviews. Data was initially allocated to four main areas of interest: neighbourhood, neighbour, neighbouring and help seeking/giving. Each area was sub divided into codes chosen to capture the point being made in the text. (There was an overlap with some text being allocated to several codes.) Codes were developed for text which was relevant to our research aim but did not belong to any of the four areas, for example, sense of self, weekly routine. The coding framework was refined three times, collapsing some codes and creating others. When coding was complete a word file was created for each code and all the text pertaining to that code was placed in the file under the name of each respondent.

The next step involved identifying themes and categories from the coded text segments. Within each word file all text was compared to look for agreement and also to pick out incongruities. In this way the text was reframed to seek out patterns or themes. Themes across the codes were then grouped into meta-themes such as, knowing your neighbour, neighbourliness.

The third phase discussion group was written up as a narrative synthesis of the points that were made.

Janet Grime carried out the data analysis.

All names are pseudonyms. The research was carried out in line with the British Sociological Association Statement of Ethical Practice. ("Statement of Ethical Practice for the British Sociological Association (March 2002)," 2002)

The Respondents

The age and sex of the interviewees can be seen in Table 1. Three members of the U3A focus group were not interviewed and are not included in Table 1. These were all men in their early (1) or late seventies (2). It can be seen that while there was an overlap in age range, most RVS respondents were aged 80 or over, while most U3A respondents were less than 80 years of age.

Table 1: Interviewees age/sex

Age group	U3A Interviewees			RVS Interviewees		
	Female	Male	Total	Female	Male	Total
60-64				1		1
65-69	2	1	3			
70-74		1	1			
75-79	1		1		1	1
80-84	2	1	3	4	2	6
85-89	1		1	1	1	2
90-94				3	1	4
95-99					1	1
Total	6	3	9	9	6	15

The type of location in which the respondents lived and whether or not they were incomers is shown in Table 2. The typology that has been adopted for area type is adapted from the Office of National Statistics. (Pateman, 2011) The term deprived was used for two urban towns which town council documents (accessed online) indicated had undergone decline following the loss of major industries, been subject to regeneration projects, were still seeking to revitalise the town and had wards that show relative deprivation as described by the English Indices of Deprivation 2010. (www.gov.uk, 2011) But all towns were mixed and it is not known if the ward that a respondent lived in was deprived. Neither can it be assumed that, villages or hamlets did not also have deprivation.

The term incomer was applied to respondents who had moved into the area, even if many years previously. It was not applied to respondents who had moved house but continued to reside within the same geographical area, for example a respondent who had lived and worked on a farm but moved to a nearby town following retirement.

Table 2: Type of location and whether incomer

Area type	U3A = 9 interviewees			RVS = 15 interviewees		
	Female	Male	Incomers	Female	Male	Incomers
Relatively deprived town	0	0	0	4	1	0
Not relatively deprived urban town	2	0	2	3	0	1
Rural town	2	1	2	0	3	0
Village	1	1	2	1	2	1
Isolated hamlet	1	1	2	1	0	1
Incomers	6	2	8	3	0	3
Years lived in area	4.5-24	4.5 & 10		2, 20 & 25		

Table 2 shows that no U3A respondents lived in a town which, on our classification, was relatively deprived and all but one were incomers, though most incomers had lived more than 10 years in the area. In contrast, twelve of the fifteen RVS respondents had lived in the same area all their lives and five lived in areas classified as relatively deprived. They differed in other aspects too. In contrast with RVS respondents, fewer U3A respondents lived alone or had family living nearby. None had carers or problems with mobility and most had access to private transport.

Table 3: Comparison U3A and RVS respondents on number of personal factors

	Live alone	Family close by	Carers	Problems with mobility	Have private transport
U3A (9)	3	3	0	0	7
RVS (15)	15	9	10	9	0

General categories, such as the ones in Table 3, conceal other differences. In the case of the RVS respondents, the ‘family’ that was living close by was a daughter or daughters who were a part and, mostly, a significant part of the care that helped enable their mother or father to live alone. U3A respondents’ children who lived nearby were not in this kind of care relationship with their parents.

Physical impairments, often following a stroke or heart attack, made it difficult for nine RVS respondents to walk far, if at all. The same impairments meant those that had been driving were no longer able to do so. Thus, they experienced a double blow to their ‘mobility’ and, indeed, a third in that physical impairments made it difficult or impossible to use public transport, which in any event is limited in rural parts of Northumberland. The contrast with the mobility of U3A

respondents is stark. U3A focus groups took place in meeting rooms in a building regularly used by U3A members. The sole access to those rooms was by means of a steep staircase. The two U3A respondents who did not have private transport could use public transport, and lived in a location which had bus and rail services.

Findings

Knowing the neighbours

A pre-requisite for provision of help and support between neighbours is that the neighbours are connected, i.e. there is a tie between them, however weak. (Harris, 2008) They are acquainted. Stokoe points out that the physical proximity of houses means neighbours get to know a lot about each other simply from what they see from their own property without necessarily knowing names or even being able to recognise the faces of their neighbours – a detached knowing. (Stokoe, 2006) However, inherent to being connected is knowing someone as a result of social interaction. (Cornwell et al., 2008) Knowing neighbours was a theme of our findings and concerned knowing in the latter sense. In this section we show why our respondents did or did not get to know their neighbours.

The U3A respondents could recall moving into the area (8) or within the area (1), mostly at retirement, and what had happened in relation to getting to know their neighbours. Two of the eight had subsequently moved to an apartment block for over 55s, just a short while before being interviewed, and spoke about that experience, too.

The position of the 15 RVS respondents was much more varied. Like eight of the U3A respondents, three were incomers and talked about establishing relations with their current neighbours. Of the remaining twelve, who all came from the wider area in which they now resided: three had lived in the same neighbourhood all their life; three had moved to their present house early on in their married life, two of these after the Second World War on to what were then new council estates; two had moved into apartments for over 55s following bereavement/illness; two moved for reasons connected with their house being tied to employment; and two moved in order to live in a smaller and more manageable dwelling after their spouse died. If they had contact with neighbours, and three did not, then the neighbours were, predominantly, people who they had known for a very long time. These people had not necessarily always been neighbours. There were two types of event that could lead, potentially, to RVS respondents having neighbours who they did not know:

1. The long standing neighbour of a RVS respondent moved away or died and new people moved into their house
2. The RVS respondent moved, though the move was always to a locality not far away

The first type of event could result in strangers coming to live close by. Joe had lived in the same ex-mining village all his life and, at one time had known everybody because he used to deliver the papers.

But I don't know anybody now. It's changed. Everybody's moved out or died out and newcomers come in and they just don't want to know. --- People two and three doors

Findings

away from me died this last while back and I didn't know until I'd seen the funeral in the paper. It's as bad as that nowadays. (Joe, late eighties, village, RVS)

Joe called the people who have replaced his neighbours as newcomers and had not got to know them, barely recognising a person coming to his house, to collect a parcel left with Joe because his neighbour was away, as his neighbour. For Kitty though, two 'newcomers' were not strangers but the children of longstanding neighbours now deceased. In the 1980s, Kitty and her husband, like their neighbour across the road on the ex-council estate where she lived, had bought their house. After the death of her neighbours the house passed to their son. A second 'newcomer' had separated from his wife and returned, with his own son, to live with his father, Kitty's next door neighbour. He continued to live there after his father died. Kitty had known these two sets of neighbours since they were infants, indeed she refers to her neighbour opposite as a 'nice quiet lad'. The lad is aged 72. Homes being passed to the next generation also occurred at the more affluent end of home ownership, when houses became very desirable because of their location along touristy parts of the Northumbrian Coast. The large houses were easily converted to provide a home for the 'children' and a holiday flat for income. This was how Therese came to know her 'new' neighbours.

And they all had these lovely big houses and as soon as they died and left them to their children, the children made them into flats. We know them all, you see. They were all the sons and daughters of the people that we started with. (Therese, early 90s, village, RVS)

In the second event- when respondents moved - it was often the case that their new neighbours included people who they already knew. This was because respondents had not moved far and had perhaps been to school with that neighbour, knew them from having been involved in common hobbies, past times or voluntary work, or like June, they had worked in the town or village to which they moved. June had driven a taxi in the town that she had moved to six months before being interviewed.

And the man next door, we talk across the fence. And well, he's quite interesting really, but then you see I've known him for about forty years. You do with the taxi's you know. (June, early eighties, urban town, RVS)

I knew quite a few of them (new neighbours). Actually, since I was a boy of fourteen and we'd lived near (names village) I used to cycle to (names town he has moved to), to the milk bar on a Sunday, have a milk shake and we all cycled back again. (Cliff, mid-eighties, rural town, RVS)

Thus, the stability of the population, not just in the neighbourhood but in the area as a whole, was an important factor as to whether RVS respondents found themselves living amongst strangers or people that they knew, even when the respondent themselves had relocated.

Next we turn to exploring why respondents, U3A and RVS, did or did not form relationships with neighbours, when there was no pre-existing relationship, i.e. when they acquired neighbours they did not know. Diagram 1 is a thematic network showing the connections between the many factors that underpinned the cross cutting theme of 'Knowing the neighbours'.

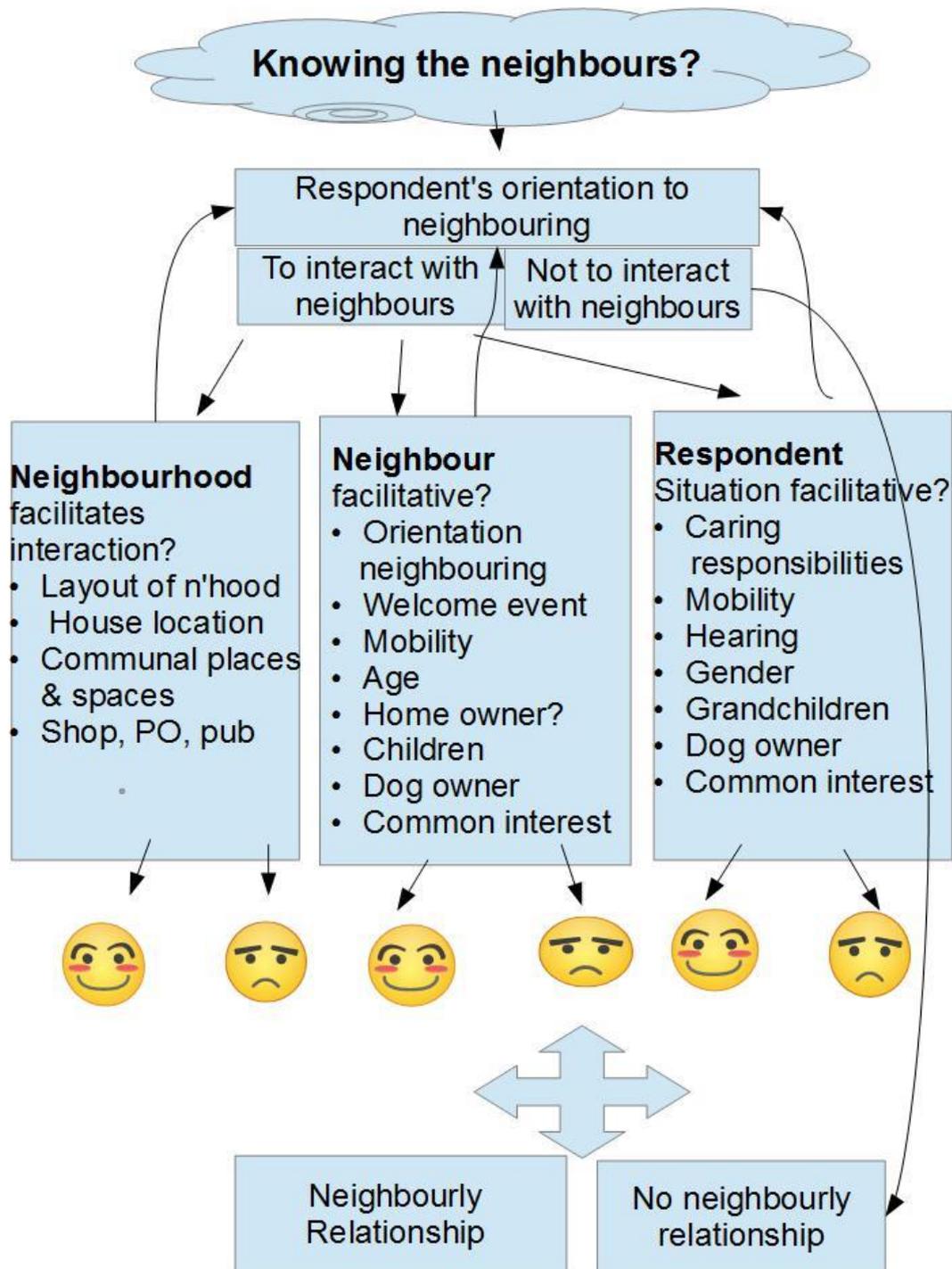


Diagram 1: Knowing the neighbours

Findings

The overarching factor was the orientation of a respondent towards interacting with neighbours - neighbouring. By orientation we mean a general preference for doing or not doing something, in this case getting involved with neighbours. For example, one respondent in the U3A focus group said that he and his wife had chosen their house because it was secluded and not visible to neighbours. His negative orientation to neighbouring preceded his relocation and appeared to have developed as a result of difficult experiences with neighbours in the past. We are not suggesting that orientation is a fixed trait but rather an inclination which could be moulded, reinforced or overridden by circumstances.

Three RVS respondents expressed indifference toward neighbouring. Partly this reflected a predisposition towards involvement with neighbours in general.

Well sometimes I think (I would like contact) but you know they (neighbours) could be a bit of a nuisance as well. But sometimes you can't shake them off and after you go (out), you're out (the neighbours are not around). So, I'm happy as I am.

(Theo, late nineties, rural town, RVS)

Theo was not suggesting that his current neighbours were a bit of a nuisance but that there was a generalised risk that neighbours could become more involved with him than he desired. Earlier in the interview he said that his impaired hearing made communication with neighbours hard work

You get tired you see (when you are hard of hearing); you can't be bothered with them (neighbours).

(Theo, late nineties, rural town, RVS)

It is not possible to ascertain whether if Theo had had better hearing he might have talked to his current neighbour and got to know him. He had had a relationship with a neighbour three years previously when his wife was alive but very poorly. This neighbour had moved, though he continued to meet her once a week at the RVS centre.

In the case of another respondent there was more evidence of synergy between a physical impairment and orientation. Stan, who had lived all his life on the same street, had for two years required a wheelchair to get about. Now he had very little contact with his neighbours and when asked if he would like more, he said he would not. Later in the interview, though, he spoke about his neighbour who lived a few yards across the road. When he could walk he was able to go over and visit her and sometimes she visited him, but not anymore.

Interviewer: And has she moved away now?

Stan: *She's still there but, as I say, a lot of the time she's working so I don't see her.*

(Stan, early eighties, deprived urban town, RVS)

Lacking mobility had, seemingly, not only physically made it difficult to be involved with neighbours but also modified his orientation toward doing so. The direction of influence on Diagram 1 is, therefore, not only downward, i.e. orientation influences whether neighbours interact or not, but also the reverse that whether neighbours interact or not also influences orientation.

However, even if a respondent had a positive orientation to neighbouring, factors pertaining to the neighbourhood, the neighbour and the respondent could facilitate or impede building a relationship. We will take each in turn.

Neighbourhood

Milton et al found that it was people and activities that defined neighbourhoods rather than geographical space. (Milton et al., 2015) In our study, opportunistic encounters were the most common way that respondents got to know their neighbours. The lay out of the neighbourhood and siting of the house could affect these. Living on a small cul-de-sac made it easier to get to know neighbours than living beside a main road. A village that was a ribbon development and had no centre made it difficult, particularly in Nora's case where a large number of houses at the rear of her house were up a secluded lane and the residents left their houses by car.

If you go up there (a little lane), there are a great many large, I would think pretty prosperous houses. And it (the access lane) is not to be seen. And it is a village that doesn't have a centre as such.

(Nora mid-seventies, village, U3A)

The situation of the house and whether respondents could see their neighbours affected their ability to connect with neighbours.

The other neighbours live in a big house and there's a huge thick hedge, so I never see them, you know. (Nathan, early eighties, rural town, U3A)

I sit by my window in my living room and I can watch people going by and they all walk their dogs around this green.—The thing is I never saw anybody at (names village she used to live in) going past because my living room was on the back of the house and the road was on the front. (June early eighties, urban town, RVS)

Being able to observe neighbour activity from the window of a respondent's home and being able to exchange a wave with neighbours was important for connecting to them. (Lager, Van Hoven, & Huigen, 2015) The homes on Nancy's street had had a change of use, such as next door which had become a nightclub, that and the situation of her house, meant fewer neighbours were passing.

I think with being on the end as well any neighbours are sort of on the next street. And the next house is let out so people come and go, you know, so it's not the same as what it was. More offices are coming down this street, you know. (Daughter of Nancy, deprived urban town, RVS)

Nancy could only get out in a wheelchair, so her main way of recognising who were her neighbours was watching people pass by.

Local shops, the post office or the pub, and communal places, such as the church, and the village hall, can be a focal point for socialising (Gardner, 2011; Stewart, Browning, & Sims, 2014) and a

Findings

reason to go out (Lager et al., 2015) When Therese was able to get around independently she attended events at the village hall.

We have what they call an Autumn Club for the elderly that meets once a week in the hall and we're all elderly, we all go there to the club and have talks and things like that. (Therese, early nineties, village, RVS)

Joe could get out and about independently but, unfortunately, in the village where he lived the shop, the post office and the pub had closed and the village hall had become a sports club. These changes had come about at the same time as most of his longstanding neighbours had died or moved away. New people moved in but there were no, what Gardner refers to as, third places – specific neighbourhood destinations – to get to know new neighbours. (Gardner, 2011) Joe had experienced discontinuities in his neighbourhood; he had lived in the same village all his life but it had changed around him.

At one time it was a mining village. Everybody knew everybody else. Most people were related to each other, because in them days people didn't move around. ---But the village it's not a community anymore. It's a village and people just come and go and you never know who they are. (Joe, 88, village, RVS)

In contrast with Wiles at all respondents who felt a sense of belonging to their community from meeting and greeting neighbours on the street and in places, such as the local shop, (Wiles, Leibing, Guberman, Reeve, & Allen, 2012) Joe with the exception of one neighbour was not connected to his neighbourhood.

Neighbours

The neighbour's orientation to neighbouring was crucial in building a relationship with respondents. Some neighbours wished to keep themselves to themselves. Joe talked of strangers coming into the village who he felt did not want to know their neighbours. Florence who had lived in an apartment block for over 55s for 14 years said that there were some residents that she had never met and how over the years the number of people who came to organised events, such as coffee mornings and bingo, had shrunk.

The warden we had now, she's a new one, poor thing, she's doing her best to get them (residents) to come (to organised events) but they won't. And you cannot make them can you? You cannot make them. Florence, mid-nineties, deprived urban town RVS)

On the whole, respondents seemed sanguine about neighbours not wanting to get involved, accepting it as the way that some people are. There was a sense of regret though, when a longstanding neighbour died and the new neighbour did not wish to be sociable. Kitty had known her 'joined on' neighbour, from traveling on the same bus, even before she moved into her house 61 years previously. They became very close – she used the word neighbour and friend interchangeably - but her neighbour had died three years ago and been replaced by a single, middle aged woman who Kitty hoped to get to know.

I spoke to her once after she came. I was out the back and that, I said to her, then she spoke and told me where she worked and that ----now I never see her. She comes out and

she's in the car and she comes back and out the car and straight into the house. I haven't got to know her. And it would be nice just for somebody to talk to, you know. (Kitty, early nineties, urban town, RVS)

For Dorothy who lived in a rural hamlet with few neighbours getting to know neighbours was very problematical. Dorothy lived in one of four houses. The other neighbours had nothing to do with her or each other.

On the end is the shepherd who's lived here for a very long time —after a year of living here does actually smile and acknowledge me now (laugh)—but I see him go past on his quad bike with the sheepdogs, that's about it really. (Dorothy, early sixties, isolated hamlet, RVS)

In contrast with this orientation of detached neighbouring (Buonfino & Hilder, 2006), five U3A respondents said that when they first moved in their neighbours organised a little get together to welcome them or called round with a cake or flowers. In this case it was the existing neighbours who took the initiative but Edward considered that the person relocating should make the first move.

Inviting your new neighbours when you move in, just to come in, you know, just perhaps for a short time, erm, not as a group but just your next door, the house next to that, just the immediate ones, I think, seems to be a standard sort of way of doing it and a perfectly acceptable one. If they choose to ask you back any time then it is neither here nor there. At least you have got to know them. (Edward, early eighties, village, U3A)

Edward was expressing a code of etiquette to demonstrate civility and good manners towards neighbours, rather than a determination to get involved with them. Three male respondents, mentioned gender as an issue in relation to getting to know their neighbours. They felt that women in general were much better than men when it came to engaging with people in the neighbourhood. It was women in the U3A respondents who promulgated the idea of gifts of food or flowers, or holding a little gathering, as a way of welcoming new neighbours

Neighbours' circumstances affected whether they were likely to come across respondents and thus have the possibility of interaction. For example, neighbours of working age were less likely to be around the neighbourhood when respondents were out and about.

I can go out in the day and meet people but quite a lot of the people are working during the day and they're going out in the evening when I'm mainly in, so it's partly an age thing as to who you get to know. (Frances, mid-eighties, urban town U3A)

The nature of neighbours' employment was another factor. People in some occupations, such as working on oil rigs or in forestry, could be absent for weeks at a time.

Findings

We've been there about a year, so I suppose now (there are) about three or four people that we recognise and say good morning to, but there's at least two (houses) that are owned by the Forestry Commission and they're occupied part time. ---So, it's very much a floating population. (Owen, early seventies, urban town, U3A Focus Group)

Neighbours who rented rather than owned their property could also make for a shifting population. Renting (or even more short term - holiday lets) was much more a feature of the neighbourhoods in which the RVS respondents lived, though Marcia (U3A) observed that the houses on her close which had been solely owner occupied, now had one which was being rented out.

Neighbours with young children or dogs could foster meetings between neighbours and, importantly, present a reason for stopping to talk when meeting out on the street. While children had played a greater role as facilitators of neighbour interaction earlier in life, when respondents had moved in when their own children were young, grandchildren continued to be a conduit for getting together if they were the same age as neighbour's children. Hobbies could be used, in a deliberate way, to get to know neighbours.

And I garden sometimes to get to know some of the people in the flats better. (Citrine, early eighties, rural town, U3A)

Having a common interest could bring neighbours together but anything that hindered their ability to meet also hindered their ability to get to know one another.

Respondents

As we have discussed above the respondent's orientation to neighbouring was paramount but if their orientation was positive then other factors came into play to facilitate or impede getting to know neighbours. As with neighbours, any circumstances of the respondent that diminished the opportunity for meeting neighbours made it more difficult to get to know them. In the case of respondents this primarily concerned being tied to the house.

Several respondents, mostly RVS, spoke of how they looked after their spouse in the last few months/years of their life. Such an experience could strengthen ties with existing neighbours. Theo did everything for his wife before she died, except for personal things. One neighbour came in to talk with her and though she had since moved out of the street he still met her at the RVS centre. Equally, caring responsibilities could hamper getting to know neighbours or keep up relationships with existing ones.

My wife and I moved to (present house) in February. She was diagnosed with cancer in May and died a year later. I feel that hindered me getting to know people ---I suppose in a way I cut myself off from people. (Nathan, early eighties, rural town, U3A)

I didn't think they (neighbours) realised what (that I was ill) because when my husband, before he died, you see, we didn't see that much of neighbours at the end. (Therese, early nineties, village, RVS)

Caring for a spouse could, in effect, amount to being housebound and thus being invisible to neighbours. Mobility problems had the same outcome. Not being able to get out and about independently had momentous consequences since getting to know neighbours was largely dependent on a myriad of brief interactions in the neighbourhood. Loss of mobility also seemed to reduce personal ambition towards neighbouring as we saw with Stan. It was true of Nancy too. She had Parkinson's disease and had difficulty even moving around inside the house. She only knew her neighbours by sight from seeing them through her window. In years gone by, neighbours in her street used to stand at their back doors chatting and when asked if she would like to go back to those days, she replied,

No. --Well, we're all right here. We don't need anybody, really because my daughter is handy, she's just in the next street. (Nancy, mid-eighties, deprived urban town, RVS)

She had a family dependent social network. (Litwin, 2001) For a respondent who did not have family close by and for whom loss of mobility included not only problems with walking but also no longer being able to drive, the impact was devastating. Dorothy, who only had three 'detached' neighbours, spoke about this.

And I haven't found, I mean I'm actually just as lonely as I was when I first came here. I really haven't found any eager organisation or way of linking up with people that has opened any doors to me in terms of ongoing support or friendship. --- You know anybody opening any doors to make it possible for me to get there and join in, so it seems to be the lack of mobility that's the biggest problem. (Dorothy, early sixties, isolated hamlet, RVS)

It was the permutations and combinations of all three types of factor that led to relationships between neighbours being formed, transformed or not arising at all. (Shown by a 4 way arrow in Diagram 1)

Wilmott and Thomas (1984), as reported in (Bulmer, 1987) p30, suggest that three components help to develop a sense of belonging to a community:

- Degree of interaction between people in a particular locality
- Interests and values shared by neighbours
- Extent to which local people recognise that they live in an identifiable area and feel attachment to it

Features of the neighbourhood, the neighbour and the respondent affected each of these components and the possibility of forming social ties between neighbours. Such ties are important for enabling help and support between neighbours (Gardner, 2011) but we also need to understand the nature of those relationships and how providing help to older people fits within the context of normative neighbourly acts.

Neighbourliness

The meaning of neighbourliness is contested and difficult to define. (Buonfino & Hilder, 2006; Harris, 2008) Nevertheless, there is general agreement that it involves being sociable and helpful whilst respecting privacy, and arises out of residential proximity. The ways in which neighbours are helpful to each other has been documented. (Bulmer, 1987; Buonfino & Hilder, 2006) The list has changed over time, for example, letting in meter readers has been replaced by dealing with wheelie bins, reflecting the changes to aspects of everyday living which are tied to the place in which a person resides. The kinds of tasks on the list are indicative of the nature and onerousness of help that constitutes normative neighbourliness. The U3A focus groups explored what it meant to be neighbourly. We asked respondents about the kinds of interactions that they had with neighbours, what makes for a good neighbour and the converse, and whether they had ever experienced a problem with neighbours.

The kinds of positive interactions which made for being neighbourly fell into three categories:

1. Being friendly and sociable, greeting each other when they met, passing the time of day and perhaps stopping to chat and exchange news of neighbours and what was happening in the neighbourhood.

(Don't know) everybody (on the estate). No. A fair number but we all say hello to each other even if we don't know their names. (Marcia, late sixties, urban town, U3A focus group)

I think one of the things about living on our small estate is you do hear about what's going on. People talk to each other maybe in the street or in the road, so if somebody was ill you would know about it because another neighbour might have mentioned it and therefore you would either enquire how they were or go round or say is there anything I can do to help. But there are clear boundaries between who that would be --- (Bea, early eighties, urban town, U3A focus group)

2. Help and information relating to living in the neighbourhood where there was a common need. Doing little tasks for each other, such as putting out and taking in wheelie bins, taking in parcels, keeping an eye on each other's property, holding a spare key, giving lifts to the airport

My neighbour's got keys to my house. He's never used them. They're there in case I've lost mine or if I've pegged out he can at least get the door off without destroying the house. (Nathan, early eighties, rural town, U3A focus group)

Keeping an eye on property usually referred to being aware of issues of security with their neighbour's dwelling but Malcolm and his neighbours kept an eye on the security of the inhabitant from this distant monitoring.

And the man next door was in his late eighties and his niece used to visit him every day but my first wife and I made sure that we had seen him during the day. When he first got up he had enough sense to always open his front door because he had a little porch with a front door, just so that we knew he was still alive. –We (neighbours) all kept watch to make sure the old boy was alive. (Malcolm, mid-seventies, village, U3A focus group)

3. Help in an emergency or short term urgent need

However, a few respondents had got to know some of their neighbours much better than others and had a broader range of interactions with them, for example, phoning or calling on a neighbour for a chat or advice, having occasional social events - such as at Christmas, offering help, such as doing shopping, if a neighbour was ill.

And (in our close) it's a very supportive network of people because we all moved in together. Erm and we've seen children grow up and I think if there was any problem there would always be somebody who would help because we know each other so well and we do, do the bins and if we pass each other we'll stop and chat ---we do know our names and we do have parties and get togethers and barbeques. (Marcia, late sixties, urban town, U3A focus group)

Marcia described the enhancement of being neighbourly which developed with neighbours that she had got to know well. Bea's quote (above) implied that while showing a general concern would apply to any neighbour that was ill, offers of help would be restricted to certain neighbours.

With essential and enhanced neighbouring, reciprocity was part of the equation, not in a formal 'tally stick' way but in the sense that what a neighbour did for them was what they would expect to do for a neighbour and vice versa. So there were limitations on the kinds of tasks that neighbours would undertake for each other. Tasks which were arduous because of the work involved or the requirement for a long term commitment, or those which involved personal care were not felt to be an appropriate part of being neighbourly as these could not be reciprocated.

I don't think I would ever expect a neighbour to give a higher level of support, like constant taking to and from hospital or being there on a daily basis to help with my medical problems. I wouldn't expect it and I wouldn't want it. (Marcia, late sixties, urban town, U3A)

Marcia was talking theoretically, anticipating her stance should she be in a position of needing intensive support in the future. Frances was, at the time of the focus group, helping a neighbour to put on her elastic stocking every morning, at her neighbour's request. The neighbour was a year older than Frances. Frances was ambivalent about helping her neighbour in this specific way.

I was a bit embarrassed at being asked to do the stocking. You know, I mean her leg, it's not a pretty leg and I, if it had been me I'd have been very hesitant about asking anybody

Findings

to do it. ----- And she's a dear old lady who was very friendly to me when I first arrived. She's got no family. She's a single lady so you do feel you need to, you know, you want to help her. (Frances, mid-eighties, urban town, U3A)

When she was interviewed some weeks after the focus group she said that someone from a voluntary organisation had taken over this task, much to Frances' relief. Because of the close relationship that had developed between Frances and her neighbour over the years, she wanted to help. It was the intimate nature of the task that made Frances uncomfortable about doing it.

The benefits of neighbourliness – the warmth from social exchange, mutual help with small tasks, and security from having someone to call on at a time of urgent need – were valued. Most neighbouring took place in the space between houses. Living in close proximity could be a potential threat to the inner privacy of the household and a distance had to be maintained. (Crow et al., 2002)

It is about respecting other people's privacy and their space and knowing when to enter that space and when not to. (Bridget, late sixties, isolated hamlet, U3A focus group)

The boundary between being concerned and being nosy or interfering was a fine one. Running through respondents' descriptions of the kind of things that neighbours did for each other was the rider that neighbours did not make frequent visits to each other's houses. The front door or even garden gate was a physical boundary, the threshold between a public and a private space. (Gardner, 2011)

I live on a small estate on the edge of (names town) and er we (neighbours) sort of know each other in a friendly way but not that we're always popping in and out of each other's houses. (Bea, early eighties, urban area, U3A)

And you don't know what goes on behind closed doors of anybody. (Marcia, late sixties, urban town, U3A))

I must admit there was one neighbour we used to have who has now moved and he was quite new to the estate, he didn't live here long but it used to annoy me that he will work his way onto my garden path to chat, and I think, "Hold on, this is part of my area." (Malcolm, mid- seventies, village, U3A)

Overstepping the mark, for example, visiting too frequently, staying too long, or visiting for reasons that were not perceived to be part of a neighbour's business, were an intrusion and a cause for concern.

I'm very conscious of when you've got a new neighbour or, you know, it's either you've moved in to a neighbourhood or somebody new has moved in, you get to know, there's a changing cakes...exchanging cakes or eggs or whatever it is, but you're constantly thinking how am I going to relate to these people, what are the ground rules. We don't want their kids in our garden, you know, and that sort of thing, and we don't want them

knocking on the door every five minutes borrowing cups of milk and so there's sort of basic ground rules, aren't there, involved? (Ken, mid-sixties, rural hamlet, U3A)

The other six members of the focus group that Ken was in said it was not a case of there being a formal set of ground rules but rather individuals finding a way of relating to neighbours that worked for them – having their own rules. It was a tricky situation, as respondents wished to avoid confrontation with neighbours but they were not in charge of what their neighbours might or might not do. This was evident when Catrine reflected on her recent move to a block of apartments for retired people. Flats along corridors, potentially, offered increased accessibility compared with the house in a village where she had previously lived, and she feared there would be too much visiting by neighbours.

I would rather know them (the neighbours) but equally, I was worried about what the boundaries of one's own life was going to be here (apartment block for over 55s) So far the boundaries have been respected and there isn't too much in and out (of each other's flats) but we do get to know each other. (Catrine, early eighties, rural town U3A)

Her fears had not materialised. The tension between interacting enough to be helpful and friendly but not too much to invade privacy is a common finding in other studies. (Bulmer, 1987; Buonfino & Hilder, 2006; Crow et al., 2002; Harris, 2008) *"The ideal neighbour is neither too interfering, too sociable, or too intimate."* (Bulmer, 1987) p92

The accounts of RVS respondents showed they had the same view of what it meant to be neighbourly i.e. a relationship which combined sociability and privacy, between showing restraint and being there when needed. Where the boundary lay between sociability and privacy, varied amongst respondents. We saw above that Catrine had worried about this before she moved to an apartment. Two of the RVS respondents also lived in (different) blocks of apartments for over 55s. Florence had lived in one for 15 years; when asked if she ever visited her neighbours, her reply was:

Never. Never have. Never have. Never. All the years I've been here I've never known them (co-residents) going to anybody – each other's flat.---We'll just meet in the hall in the lounge and tell wor (our), all wor woes and aches and pains. (Florence, mid-nineties, deprived urban town, RVS)

It was not that Florence did not know her neighbours; she described the person living in the adjoining apartment as a good neighbour. Jessie also lived in an apartment block for over 55s, (a different one from Florence's). She was asked what made for good relations between neighbours, she responded by saying,

Well, being comfortable with them and being free. Being free to go out and mingle with your neighbours and be quite happy if somebody knocks on your door and they'll come in, but I don't get any intrusiveness – I don't know if that's the right word – I am completely satisfied. (Jessie, late eighties, deprived urban town, RVS)

Findings

Further research would be required to understand why in one block of flats for older people there was no visiting between neighbours but in a different one, though in a similar type of location, 'sensitive' visiting was part of neighbourliness.

While there was no evidence in the respondent's accounts that the length of time per se as neighbours, was directly related to growing closer, relationships were dynamic. Neighbours adapted to changes in each other's circumstances which might result in their growing closer. The longer they lived as neighbours the greater the chance of some change in one or other's situation, so time and change were indirectly linked.

I'm much closer (socially) to my next door neighbour. ---But it's since her husband died, really, we've got closer. But we've always been helpful. She tends to put my dustbin out or I'll put hers back or whatever. (Frances, mid-eighties, urban town, U3A)

Frances and her neighbour shared birdwatching as a hobby but this did not bring them together until after her neighbour's husband died. Then they went away on bird watching holidays together, even sharing a room.

It was not just that a change in the nature of the relationship, i.e. becoming closer, re-fashioned the kind of interactions that took place but also the reverse. The introduction of a change in the kind of interaction that neighbours had could reshape the relationship. Interactions moulded relationships. (Ong, Richardson, Porter, & Grime, 2014) Bridget spoke of the time when she visited a neighbour who had been in hospital. Her neighbour's husband answered the door and told Bridget to go upstairs as his wife was in bed.

I was slightly taken aback at being given permission to cross that personal boundary. Erm, but when I thought about it, I thought that was really nice because it meant that there was some sort of, well relationship, really, on a sort of more personal level. (Bridget, mid-sixties, rural hamlet, U3A)

The normative demand for a neighbour to be neither busybody nor nobody (Crow et al., 2002) had not changed but what had changed was what constituted being a busybody or a nobody. The kinds of change of neighbours' circumstances which could bring about an alteration to the dynamics of neighbour relationships – bereavement, illness – are also the kinds of circumstance that can make the affected neighbour needier. The possibility of asymmetry is introduced into the relationship which leads to the question of how a neighbour receiving help from a neighbour is situated within neighbourliness and its normative requirement for reciprocity. It is to this we now turn.

Receiving help from neighbours

U3A respondents were not receiving regular help from family, friends and neighbours or from paid carers, though one respondent had a cleaner who had become a friend and confidante. When U3A respondents were responding to questions about receiving help from neighbours, it

was in a hypothetical way when imagining the life that was yet to come, (apart from Frances who, as we described earlier, had experience of giving help). It was the kind of help that U3A respondents foresaw that they might need in future, if for example, they developed a chronic condition. They anticipated needing something more than the normative mutual help between neighbours. Parker 1981, [cited in (Bulmer, 1987) p19], distinguished between caring as being concerned about someone and caring as tending i.e. providing help with the instrumental activities of daily living that people can no longer do for themselves. It was this, the physical tending, that the U3A respondents had in mind when ruling out neighbours as a source of help. Care as concern, a neighbour showing concern for a neighbour who had become incapacitated, did not feature, although this type of care was part of their concept of neighbourliness. In the focus group they spoke of concern between neighbours and that if, for example, people got to know a neighbour was ill then they might visit or phone to make enquiries. Probably as an artefact of the questions posed by the interviewer, the U3A respondents abstracted themselves from their network of social relationships when imagining the future, so the benefits of neighbours displaying emotional support was not considered.

Amongst RVS respondents, nine said they had received help or support from a neighbour, which included:

- Doing shopping
- Holding a key, on the key holder list for an alarm system
- Lifts for NHS appointments
- Managing wheelie bins
- Keeping an eye on a respondent e.g. checking to see the blinds are drawn
- Cutting grass and tidying the garden
- Calling for a chat
- Bringing over items of homemade cooking
- Sorting out tablet used for Skyping

Items, such as managing wheelie bins, holding a key or keeping an eye on a neighbour also appear on the 'neighbourliness list'. There is a qualitative difference though, in that the help and support was responsive to the specific need of the respondent, for example, Kitty's wheelie bin tended to get blown over, so the neighbour had devised a way of tying it down after moving it back and always ensured her gate was closed. Keeping an eye on a respondent was more than routine observation at a distance.

After I moved in there on a Sunday morning, age old tradition, you know have a long lie in on a Sunday morning (laugh) curtains weren't drawn. On the Monday morning I also slept in. Curtains weren't drawn. Knock on the door, yeah, and two, one girl who owned the flower shop, just along the terrace, and this gentleman, and I knew him (from the past), and I said yes what can I do for you. He said well we're just a bit concerned because your curtains have been drawn two mornings straight running (laugh). We wondered if you were all right. And I said, well I thanked them very much for being so considerate and that, and off they went. (Cliff, mid-eighties, rural town, RVS)

Findings

Though Cliff had only recently moved in, his neighbours' concerns when they saw closed curtains quickly translated into action.

The list of types of help above conceals the relationship, between respondent and neighbour, out of which the help emerged and seems to suggest that there is an elderly neighbour who is dependent and a younger/more fit neighbour who provides care. This was not how it was. The relationships between the neighbours were longstanding, predated the point at which the help commenced and had evolved in response to changes in social and personal circumstances. Sidney had lived in the same house for over 60 years in a small rural town. His wife had died 20 years previously and subsequently he had had two heart attacks and a stroke. Up to having the stroke, he was able to drive. After his wife's death he used to take four ladies shopping, two on alternate weeks.

One of the ladies that I used to take shopping, she's a neighbour – she's very kind to me. Any shopping or anything, she'd have taken me here, anywhere, you know, and she brings us down to the doctors, if I cannot get a taxi. --- Well, my wife and her was very friendly and when my wife died she used to come over (to my house.) And she was making scones; she brings us these scones over. She makes soup and brings us some soup over. --- Almost every day she's over. She's a marvellous lady but she's eighty – I think she's eighty seven.' (Sidney, early nineties, rural town, RVS)

Sidney described how the relationship with his neighbour changed, firstly following his wife's death and then again after he had a stroke and could not drive. He said, 'You see, that's the biggest blow for me losing my wife and losing my car licence.' The relationship with his neighbour was reciprocal. He had taken her shopping every other week and now she drove him to medical appointments if he could not get a taxi. He gave her money for fuel and also took her out to lunch occasionally. When her family came to visit her they also visited him. His relationship with another neighbour, who was the same age, was also longstanding but rather different, giving not receiving help. Sidney said that she had turned into a bit of a recluse since she fell in the street and cut her head and he sounded a little impatient as he explained that he did not visit her anymore because visiting had got to be one sided and he considered that she could visit him. Nevertheless, they have an arrangement which he suggested whereby they shared wheelie bins that he took in and out on refuse/recycling collection days.

Even when the neighbour giving help was a generation younger than the respondent, the relationship had not been founded on a basis of providing help to an older neighbour with needs.

And when they moved in I met them (neighbours) but then I had a dog and I used to take her for a walk and I met them with their dogs on the promenade. And, of course, I spoke to them because I knew they were just moved in and we've been friendly sort of ever since. (Wendy, early eighties, urban town, RVS)

Wendy's neighbours often invited her over on Sunday for a meal. They enjoyed entertaining and she took a bottle of wine or something toward the meal and occasionally took them out. (Her flat was too small for entertaining.) Since getting to know them, and quite recently, she had developed a condition which limited her ability to walk. Now her neighbours collected her in a

wheel chair to take her to their house on a Sunday. Her problem with walking had made a further difficulty for her because she had discovered that taxis were reluctant to take wheelchairs. She described one instance when she had to be at a nearby hospital for day surgery very early in the morning.

---my next door but one neighbour, he took me. He said, "Oh well. I don't mind going down at five o'clock in the morning to get you there."----

They're (neighbours) absolutely marvellous. They come round in the night and if I press that (pointing to an alarm) and they were called they'd come round whenever it was.

(Wendy, early eighties, urban town, RVS)

Wendy was still adjusting to her physiological changes and was concerned about what was going to happen in the future if she was unable to look after herself but there was no sense that she looked at her neighbours in a new light, as potential care providers.

Victor, Scambler and Bond argue that the perspective of research into social relationships "*is very firmly fixed upon the function of social relationships in the provision of care or support in times of crisis such as bereavement or major illness*". [p 8 (Victor, Scambler, & Bond, 2009)]. Such a perspective turns the neighbour relationship into one of helped and helper but the respondents and the helper neighbours in our study could not be distinguished in this way. In Sidney's case he was giving help to or receiving help from different neighbours at the same time or helped by and then helping the same neighbour over time. There was interdependence. (Fine & Glendinning, 2005) Neither could they be distinguished by age. Further, the kind of help and support that was given or received was mutual and arose from and was shaped by the relationship which had evolved, as well as by the respondent's and neighbour's social and personal circumstances. The help and support was not physical tending; a most important aspect of it was the conviviality of neighbour interactions which took place alongside help with tasks. Respondents were mindful of what could be expected of a neighbour in relation to help and where the boundary lay.

If I should run short of bread or that, he'll (neighbour) get me a loaf or a pint of milk but, you know, he wouldn't do shopping. Well, I wouldn't ask him to do it. No, he's not a bad lad.' (Kitty early nineties, urban town, RVS)

Respondents were considerate of their neighbours' circumstances and recognised and appreciated their help and kindness. Sidney had had a neighbour previously who would offer to fetch him something from the shop when she was going for herself and Sidney would suggest a food item, such as a pie, even though he did not need it, because he did not want to appear to reject her thoughtfulness.

We conclude, therefore, that the help that neighbours gave was set within ordinary, not extraordinary, neighbourly relations. However, this still leaves a question about asking for help which lay outside the existing arrangement, i.e. something that was not part of their routine interactions. Kitty made reference to this above. Her neighbour fetched her bread and milk if she

Findings

ran out, he did not do general shopping, and she made clear that she wouldn't ask him to do general shopping. What about other respondents?

Asking for help

People are reluctant to ask for help. (Allen, Spandler, Prendergast, & Froggett, 2015)

Respondents in our study were also disinclined to ask for help beyond that which was routinely given by a neighbour. The question posed during the interview and the reply, concerning asking for help, could be interpreted in two ways:

- As theory: Could you ask for help?
- As practice: Would you ask for help?

Interviewer: And if you had a problem over something do you feel that you could ask them?

Joe: *I think I could. I wouldn't because I think they've got enough on for to look after their own like. But, as I say, if I want anything they're there and I know they'll be there if I need them.*

(Joe, late eighties, village, RVS)

The distinction in Joe's reply demonstrates that he anticipates his neighbour would be fine about his asking but it was Joe himself who excluded asking out of respect for his neighbours circumstances. The interviewer though did not specify what the 'problem' was and Joe's reply left open the possibility of asking for help, 'if he needed them'. The reluctance to ask was not because respondents anticipated being turned down.

I don't do it (ask neighbours for help), like if you asked them, you know, they would.

(Hubert, late seventies, village, RVS)

The explanations for their averseness to asking for help fell into three categories.

- Concern for neighbours and the relationship with them
- Sense of self
- Reciprocity

We will take each in turn.

The mix of concern for their neighbours and the relationships they had with them is evident in Joe's reasoning (above) and in Therese's (below) for not asking for help.

I wouldn't ask (a neighbour) to do jobs, because you wouldn't feel they were friends anymore if they were put on. – Because they're in their seventies and the husbands probably in their eighties. They're not in the best of health.' (Therese early nineties, village RVS)

They were aware of their neighbours' situations and their capability to take on additional work. Joe's neighbour was in her nineties but she was not the person he would be asking. It would be her daughter who had returned to live with her mother following divorce, or her ex-husband who lived further down the street and whose children lived with his ex-wife and mother-in-law.

The daughter kept an eye on Joe and put out his bins and her ex-husband cut the grass and tidied Joe's garden. There was quite explicit that asking for help to do jobs would damage the relationship that she had with neighbours, quite apart from the fact that her neighbours might have needed help themselves.

Respondents did use the word burden and spoke of not becoming a burden (in relation to family as well as neighbours) but the appraisal of becoming burdensome was from the perspective of the respondent, not the neighbour.

Interviewer: How would you feel about asking her (neighbour to help with bed changing)?

Wendy: *I think there wouldn't be any difficulty? I know she has definitely helped me out in lots of ways. But they live quite a busy life and I wouldn't like to think that I was a sort of burden on somebody. That's the thing, I think, that worries me most, that I need people more now than I have ever done before.* (Wendy, early eighties, urban town, RVS)

Wendy, in using the word burden, was making an assessment as to whether the relationship she had with her neighbour could support the provision of additional help, such as changing the beds, or whether it was too much and the neighbours would be burdened as a consequence.

Wendy continued by saying that she didn't want to feel as though she was relying on other people all the time and just wanted to be independent. Respondents took pride in being independent.

I'm quite self-sufficient, I think. (Nathan, early eighties, rural town, U3A)

And I'm a very independent fellow mind. (Sidney, early nineties, urban town, RVS)

This sense of self as being independent was a reason for being reluctant to ask for help.

I'm absolutely beat if I ask, you know what I mean? No, I'm – I never ask anybody to do very much for us, no, I'll be quite honest with you. Up to now anyhow. (Sidney, early nineties, urban town, RVS)

Interviewer: You perhaps felt a little or might feel reluctant to ask for help over something you couldn't do just because--

Catrine: *Well, that's just me because I'm so darned independent.*

(Catrine, early eighties, rural town, U3A)

However, there could be a tension between maintaining a sense of independence and feeling safe when deciding whether or not to do a job oneself or to ask somebody else.

I think you always try and do the things yourself first. But, erm, I know now that there are things ---I don't put in lightbulbs because I don't feel safe on steps, but I did it as long

Findings

as I possibly could. I think you always feel that you don't want to admit that you're failing but erm, there comes a point where for your own safety you feel you have to ask.
(Frances, late eighties, urban town, U3A)

Frances, however, constructed an alternative identity from the negative sense of self as 'failing' to the positive sense of self as being resilient – to keep going.

They (neighbours) know I'm fairly active. In fact they sometimes say how good I am to keep going, do as much as I do, so I don't mind admitting the things that I can't do, if you see what I mean. (Frances, late eighties, urban town, U3A)

She is able to ask for help without undermining her identity.

Crosscutting both concern about burdening neighbours and preserving identity was reciprocity. A reciprocal relationship between respondent and neighbour meant, in effect, that one party was not asking the other. They were interdependent because both benefitted, for example, Therese said that she would never ask a neighbour to do jobs but her neighbour did do Therese's washing. In return the neighbour used Therese's tumble drier for her own washing. Hubert said he had had been unable to go to a funeral because he had no transport. He gave shyness as the reason for not asking his neighbour but he also hinted that something else lay behind his unwillingness to ask.

Interviewer: Would you ever ask the man next door for help if you needed it?

Hubert: *No [laugh]—I could like, but I wouldn't.*

Interviewer: Now why not?

Hubert: *Just shy*

Interviewer: Right. Okay.

Hubert: *I used to, when I had the car, I can't drive now.*

Interviewer: Of course.

Hubert: *And I used to run people all over the place and last week I should have been at a funeral but I wouldn't ask the neighbour or anybody to take us there, you know.*

(Hubert, late seventies, village, RVS)

It seems that Hubert could have asked his neighbour for a lift if Hubert himself had still been driving and giving the man next door lifts, i.e. it had been a reciprocal relationship. Respondents found it easier to take up offers of help than to ask for the help directly but, as Catrine observed, without asking for help it may not be forthcoming.

I've always liked to be able to do things myself and yet, at the same time, when things have been difficult I've wished that other people had known that they were difficult and come to help. That's ridiculous isn't it? If you don't say help you're not going to get it.
(Catrine, early eighties, rural town, U3A)

Because privacy is an element of neighbourliness, a neighbour may be unaware that another neighbour is facing difficulties.

Help from neighbours and informal care

Help from neighbours is counted as a type of informal care. (Bulmer, 1987) As reported above, U3A respondents, when thinking about the future and growing older, ruled out getting help from neighbours should they become incapacitated. They seemed to envisage help as being related to what Parker called tending, i.e. providing active, face to face care on a daily basis. Whereas the accounts of RVS respondents, who had experience of getting help from neighbours, were talking about something akin to what all respondents considered to be a part of normative neighbourliness. There is a further question though. How is help from neighbours situated in the landscape of informal care? To answer this question we will first need to define care.

The Open University material for their on line course, 'Caring: A family affair', defines care as *"something that is needed when people cannot function in daily life without the practical help of others"*. An informal carer is defined as *"a person who, without payment, does some tasks for someone who is unable to do them for themselves."* (Open University, 2012) The OU adds the qualification that being a carer involves doing tasks on a regular basis (regular could mean a 24 hour commitment or be less intense). Depending on what is meant by less intense, it is only the regularity of giving help that is at odds with thinking of neighbours as carers, particularly because the OU draws attention to the difficulty of identifying someone as a carer where there is interdependence.

Replacing the word care with help has been mooted, because of the negative connotations of care with its suggestion of dependency and discourse of burden. (Fine & Glendinning, 2005) However, Fine and Glendinning argue that for all of its appeal 'help' also has its problems. The usefulness of trying to define care and carer is so that those who have need of help in daily life and those who give them unpaid assistance can demonstrate their entitlement to state welfare services and benefits. They also point out that with 'help' from friends, neighbours or the wider community there is no assurance of a long term commitment, neither is there necessarily a sense of urgency or the prioritising of need when mobilising help. They conclude by saying that care does not have a simple uncontested meaning, that it is a complex concept and cannot be demarcated by a restricted set of tasks.

Reflecting on this was useful because it offered another way of thinking about situating neighbourliness and help from neighbours within informal care. As exemplified by the 'Big Society' initiative, a major interest in studying older people's social relationships, such as with neighbours, is in their potential as a resource for provision of care. (Victor et al., 2009) Victor et al claim *"there is a tendency to 'problematise' older peoples' social relationships as 'resources' available to provide support and care in times of crisis."* (p 4) They favour studying social relationships as an end in itself because, they argue, the extent to which older people are bedded into a social network formed around family, friends and neighbours gives the setting within which ageing is experienced. So we will situate our respondents' relationships with neighbours within a broader social network and in doing so recognise that *'social relationships in later life are more than just a prelude to the provision of care'*. [p9 (Victor et al., 2009)]

Findings

Before proceeding with an analysis of respondents' social networks we will look at an example of an informal care operated scheme – a personal alarm system - being imposed on neighbourliness. Frances' neighbour asked her to be a key holder for a personal alarm system which mobilised help in an emergency. Frances assumed that she simply held her neighbour's key which somebody would collect. She was number three on the list. After the first two dropped out and it looked as if Frances was going to be number one she looked in more detail at what she had to do. This was not easy as it was written in very small print on the back of the form. She discovered that the centre picking up the emergency alert contacted the key holder and the key holder had to go to the older person's house.

If you have the key and you're phoned you have to go up and assess the situation -say what help they need - er which I didn't know if I was capable of doing and also, if it happens in the middle of the night and it's frosty and I've got to go up the hill, I don't think I could. I mean, she's eighty eight and I'm eighty seven. –So erm I got a bit worried. --- I had a chat on the phone and suggested the couple next door to her. "Oh well, I don't know them well enough" But I went up and had a –to have this final chat having decided I was going to politely withdraw and she'd happened to have met the lady (next door) in the street and who'd offered to do it. So I thought that was a wonderful answer to my problem. And she'd (eighty eight year old neighbour) also read these conditions more carefully and realised that she couldn't really ask me to do it. So, I didn't have to look too unfriendly and unchristian in saying I couldn't but it gave me quite a lot of thought. --- It did worry me for a while but I felt I – in one way I felt I ought to help her but in another way I felt I really couldn't – it would be a danger to us both possibly. So, I'm quite glad we've got out of it in a very friendly and easy way. (Frances, mid-eighties, urban town, U3A)

Frances was on the horn of a dilemma in relation to neighbourliness. She felt a sense of obligation to help her neighbour but the practicalities made it impossible to fulfil the help requested by her neighbour. However, she worried that turning her neighbour down would be detrimental to their relationship.

A look at the web sites of two organisations that run such alarm systems revealed that advice and information about the key holders was very limited:

"If the person using the device cannot speak into the unit or is not close to it, staff will contact the people named as 'keyholders'. These are relatives or friends who live within 30 minutes who have access to the property with permission of the person using the SOS service." (Saga) ("How the Saga sos personal alarm works," 2016)

"To use your personal alarm, our call centre must have someone to contact who has a set of keys to your home. We ask for at least 2 separate people living within 15-20 minutes of you to become key holders. They can be family members, friends or neighbours - it's up to you. If you only have 1 key holder we can provide the service under the condition that you have a KeySafe." (Age UK) ("Choosing your key holders and Key Safe," 2016)

Frances' neighbour had no relatives, and her friend and neighbour was Frances. The assumption that a friend/neighbour might be willing to help was right but the organisations had, seemingly,

made an assumption about who a neighbour might be. A leaflet in large font for prospective key holders explaining how the system worked would have prevented this awkward situation arising.

Social networks

There was a difference between and within the two groups of respondents concerning the make-up and degree of connectedness to social networks. All of the U3A respondents except one were incomers and had friends and kin outside the area. With access to private transport, they had a range of connections with voluntary and other organisations, such as U3A, the church or community groups. For one respondent it was the neighbours who had suggested groups to join.

Another thing that happened on our little estate, our neighbours belong to various groups and we were invited to join those groups or leisure activities, like Probus for instance, erm, so that's how my husband got involved with Probus and now another person moved onto the estate who we also introduced to Probus. So there's a bit of a network of various events that a number of people go out to. (Bea, early eighties, urban town, U3A)

Some had relocated several times in their working life. Joining organisations was a strategy which was employed to forge social connections in a new area. One U3A respondent had closer ties to people in organisations and interest groups than with his neighbours.

People we might say hello to on (names neighbourhood) are people who are in the same sort of groups and organisations that we are in rather than the neighbours. (Owen, urban town, U3A)

This was unusual, most had got to know neighbours whether or not they were members of the organisations to which they belonged.

Those who had moved about observed that although they had kept in touch with friends, they had not done so with neighbours. There were different experiences concerning making close friends at this stage in their lives. For some, their closest friends emanated from earlier in life and now lived some distance away. Piers closest friend lived at the other end of the country but they met up every year for a week. Others kept in touch via social media. Nora thought that people did not make close friend later in life and also that keeping in touch with old friends was a possible reason for not giving precedence to getting to know neighbours.

--quite a lot of my friendships, as I say, are fairly widely scattered. Because I'm up here, (in Northumbria) I don't see so much of the people I would have done, but we're in touch by e-mail or by phone or whatever and perhaps one doesn't feel the need for the immediately on- the-spot neighbour. (Nora, mid-seventies, village, U3A)

Findings

Others had made good friends locally, including neighbours who became friends. There was agreement though that it had been easier to make friends earlier in life when their children were young.

Two U3A respondents had moved, not long before the interviews, into an apartment block for over 55s. They continued to keep up with their existing social contacts but had added new ones. The apartment block had well attended coffee mornings, a communal garden and organised trips out.

And it's (coffee morning) a very happy little hour. It's nice. And we even had a bus trip to, and this is quite funny and I've always vowed it was the sort of thing I would never do, erm, a bus trip to South Shields, and we all had fish and chips at this very famous Coleman's place and I had to walk further than I should have done that day. But even that was nice because you get to know people a little bit more and I do like to get to know people. (Citrine, early eighties, rural town, U3A)

While some U3A respondents had chosen the area in which they resided because it was close to a son or daughter, family members were not, on the whole, as close, geographically, as most of the RVS respondents' kin. Overall, the U3A respondents' social networks were varied and extended well beyond the place in which they resided.

RVS respondents' social networks were focused in the town or village where they, and often their family, lived. The richness of their networks was more variable, compared with the U3A respondents. At one extreme there were Sidney and Cliff who were embedded in thick networks in their local community. Sidney used to be in the local football team, had started a Red Cross cadets' group in the 1960s and had been involved with flower shows throughout the region. He had connections, across the generations, with people from his days of doing voluntary work and who now visited and took him out.

I was out last night and I was out the night before, and that friend's coming to pick us up on Saturday night to take us down to the cricket club because they're having a sort of a buffet and a friendship and a bit of a chat and that and bingo or something. And I'll be joining in with that and I meet a lot of people that I know. – I'm very well-known like, you know. (Sidney, early nineties, rural town, RVS)

Many of the people that Cliff knew were people from his youth and when, for 31 years, he had been a special constable in the area. These two respondents lived in the same rural town, which, while it had its share of incomers, had a large enough population to still have many people they still knew but not so big that they did not come across them. The people they interacted with could be neighbours, friends or acquaintances. They both had family living nearby. Theo, who lived in the same town, did not have such an extensive network but between his friends, family, two organisations which included RVS, and the church; he had a weekly programme of going out and visits.

A lady from my church comes on a Monday morning to see how I am and have a coffee and (comes again on a) Wednesday. And then I have another friend in (my town) comes, been a friend for years, and she looks in about maybe once a week. Now that's all of the strangers (non-family) I get. Then I get my daughter on a Saturday with my groceries and I've another daughter at (town XX), just who moved last week there. She comes now and then as well and her husband does my garden. -----

I have a scooter and I go on a Monday to the bank and down to the church sometimes, along here to this (RVS day centre) on a Thursday. And a Friday down at the (XXXX) Club have a dinner and a game of bingo on a Friday. (Theo, late nineties, rural town, U3A)

Theo had no contact with neighbours; he did have a paid carer but did not mention her as part of his weekly schedule. Other respondents also described a weekly routine, such as Joe, whose routine involved a carer/cleaner on weekday mornings, the RVS Social Centre on Tuesday, a domestic on a Wednesday and visiting his daughters at the weekend. The difference between Theo and Joe was that having private transport Theo was in control over going visiting in the wider neighbourhood.

At the other extreme was Dorothy who had no social networks, only two occasional visitors (one an RVS Good Neighbour and one who was part of a church pastoral service). Her daughter lived a long way away. She belonged to a choir but the group met only to sing, there was no socialising. The church was the only other place she attended but that had stopped since the person who gave her a lift had become ill. She had tried to join various organisations, including U3A, but was hampered by lack of transport – a health problem, which had worsened since she came to live in the area two and a half years earlier, meant she was unable to walk far or drive. She had contacted an organisation who offered a transport scheme but the volunteers were reluctant to go out to her as she lived in a remote area. Her limited experience of using the scheme had been disagreeable.

--I won't do (use the transport scheme to get a lift to the dentist) again because it was a very sanctimonious woman who lectured me all the way there about, you know, the sins of my choice to live in such an awkward place and was very off hand about dumping me and not at all interested in showing any interest, compassion, caring or anything else and gave me a similar pep talk all the way home. -----because I suppose I don't fit the stereotype, so because when they turn up I'm not visibly old, crippled or they're not quite sure of what my entitlement is to be imposing upon their services and that's very much the way they treat me. (Dorothy, early sixties, isolated hamlet, RVS)

Two of the voluntary drivers were just the opposite of the driver described above, but one was very popular and much in demand, and the other only volunteered in the winter. So, it was difficult to book them. It appeared, from Dorothy's account, that the volunteer driver who took her to the dentist felt she had the right to deliver advice which, however well meaning, was paternalistic and ill judged. It suggested a taken for granted asymmetry in their relationship which was not appropriate in an interaction between a voluntary helper and recipient of help. As part of dignified care for older people, a social connection between those providing care and

Findings

those receiving it should be based on a reciprocal relationship. (Tadd et al., 2011) Ironically, the conversation between them would have constituted a major part of Dorothy's social contact for that week.

Nancy and Stan, like Dorothy, also required a wheelchair to get out, and also like Dorothy, they did not have a local network of non-kin. The difference was, though, that they did have family nearby. Stan's landlady occasionally dropped in too and he also had a friend from time spent in the forces who came from Yorkshire to see him.

So he comes up about maybe five or six times a year and he stays at one of the (travel) lodges. Because it's a bit awkward – I've got a spare bedroom but its full of---- well, clothes and everything that I use so--- (Stan, early eighties, deprived urban town, RVS)

Thus, even two respondents who lived in town and in the same neighbourhood for most of their lives had private restricted networks (Wenger, 1997) partly the result of being unable to get out and about independently. Scharf and De Jong Gierveld concluded that older adults with wider community focused networks (including from their engagement in the community and relationships with family, friends and neighbours) were less likely to be lonely than older people with a more private and restricted network. (Scharf & De Jong Gierveld, 2008)

Therese had several things in common with Dorothy - her only kin - a sister - lived a long way away, she was unable to get out on foot or drive her car. The latter was the result of a serious accident, so had been a sudden rather than a gradual change. There were also important differences between them. Therese had renewed contact with her neighbours, she had a RVS Good Neighbour who she thought of as kin and, uniquely amongst our respondents, she also counted the village as part of her support.

The whole village is terribly friendly and terribly kind. Shop keepers and post office and things. It's a wonderful village, the friendship and what people have done for me in the village in friendship ways and coming to visit me. (Therese, early nineties, village, RVS)

The village shop delivered to those customers who were unable to get out, free of charge. The people who delivered were school leavers waiting to go to university or who were unemployed. Therese took an interest in their situation and offered them further opportunities for paid work, such as tending her garden, which brought mutual benefit.

He's been coming every week (to deliver groceries). He can't get a job and he's just left school, poor lad, and he can't get into a college at the moment, so he'll come anytime. --- Sometimes some of these lads I'll ask them if they'll come and water the garden for me or do something like that and I'll give them £8 an hour and that's all they get. You get a professional gardener and costs you hundreds of pounds. (Therese, early nineties, village, RVS)

The morning before the interview she had dropped eggs on the floor when putting away her groceries and the delivery boy, without being asked, had cleared up the mess. The combination of RVS Good Neighbour, neighbours and shop keepers/delivery boys, together with paid help from a cleaner and a paid carer enabled Therese not only to manage to live on her own but pursue a life that she enjoyed, i.e. having company and getting out.

Florence and Jessie's main social network were neighbours, not kin. They lived in different blocks of apartments for retired people but they had got to know each other through RVS. The lounge in Florence's apartment block was used by RVS on one day a week as a social centre for older people in the wider community, which included Jessie. Her presence was the reason that Florence attended.

Florence: I love that little lady (Jessie). That's the only reason why I come to the (RVS session). Oh, I think she's lovely.

Interviewer: And does she live in the flats here?

Florence: She's in a home up (town x) I think aye. Because there's a fellow brings her in a taxi. ---I did have a dear friend of ten year, Monica they called her but she passed away as well. And there was another one they called her Betty, and I used to say to her, she used to sit at my table, I says, 'How are you this morning?' ----- She dropped down dead.'

Florence, mid-nineties, deprived urban town, RVS

Most of the neighbours that Florence had known when she came to live in the apartments 14 years previously had subsequently died. Her relationship with Jessie had developed from meeting her once a week at the RVS session and was based on affection. Florence rarely left the apartment block and never went to visit Jessie.

Lastly we consider Kitty. She was the only one who used electronic social networking. Her only child had emigrated to the USA after university, married and had two sons who were now in their late teens. Since Kitty had had a heart attack she had been unable to visit her son but he came over twice a year on extended visits. In between he used to phone but two years ago he bought her a tablet and Kitty had learned to Skype.

He (son) was on last night for about an hour and a half. And it's lovely just to see them. Well he brought over a laptop because he uses it when he's here and the boys (grandsons), last year they came with their laptops. ---But I can't use it (laugh). If I could it would be much better, I could see a bigger picture of them, but I can't use it. I use the Skype, yes. If anything goes wrong the lad next door, he's into that and he sorts me out. (Kitty, early nineties, urban town, RVS)

Between the extended visits and Skype, Kitty had as much electronic contact as other respondents had face to face contact with their children. Note too, the neighbour's role in the electronic communication. She had regular phone contact with her sister and niece who did not live far away, and, though unable to get out and about independently, she had visits from friends and neighbours. However, she did use a transport scheme but had a very different experience from Dorothy.

But it's nice just getting out for my shopping, and twice for two different men, with the car. And they go around the shop with me. They know because they do it regular, and they know where everything is in the supermarket. "What's next on your list?", and they'll take me to it. (Kitty, early nineties, urban town, RVS)

Findings

One of the drivers, she already knew from when he delivered 'meals on wheels' to her mother. Living in the same area all her life conferred advantages, in that she reconnected with people in past social networks when making 'new' connections with volunteers.

Granovetter proposed that weak ties, (ties between neighbours would be an example) are '*indispensable to individuals' opportunities and to their integration into communities*'. [p1378 (Granovetter, 1973)] Weak ties have a cohesive power, he suggests, because they bridge separate, widespread social networks. For example, Sidney interacted with his neighbour across the road and the neighbour is a bridge to her family who also interact with Sidney when they are over. Strong ties (more likely to be found amongst kin) bring about high local cohesion, so the Granovetter argument goes, because the members of the family all interact with each other but the consequence is overall fragmentation. The network stays separate from other networks. Nancy interacts only with her daughter and granddaughter and there is no bridging to other networks. The thinking behind the strength of weak ties is a way of understanding our findings. The strategy of some U3A respondents of joining different groups and organisations, and getting to know their neighbours, when they relocate, in order to tap into social networks, resonates with Granovetter's theory. Dorothy had no weak ties, because, although she had tried to join organisations and groups, mobility problems had impeded this and she remained isolated. Therese had many weak ties and few strong ones but, arguably, the former compensated for the latter. Kitty has both. Neighbour relationships are, potentially, an important source of weak ties for older people.

RVS Good neighbour Scheme

One of the objectives of the research was to learn of older people's experiences of using the RVS Good Neighbour scheme. (Royal Voluntary Service, 2016) Five of the RVS respondents were in the scheme. Two of these gave detailed accounts of their experience of having a Good Neighbour, while two made more fleeting references. Our purpose was not to use this data to evaluate the scheme but to understand respondents' views and experiences of another sort of neighbour – a Good Neighbour.

This is how the RVS promote the scheme.

Good Neighbours



No two Good Neighbours services are identical but the intention is broadly similar in every case. Namely, to offer the practical help that can make all the difference to older people - whether it's collecting a pension or a repeat prescription, walking the dog or changing a light bulb.

Often family members might live too far away to visit regularly so Royal Voluntary Service Good Neighbours provide valuable company and friendship as well as making sure the older person is safe and well.

Good Neighbours will spend perhaps an hour a week either in person or over the phone in the company of an older person. Sometimes classes - from IT to tea dances to Tai Chi - are run as part of the scheme.

It's our way of helping people stay independent whilst providing friendly, social contact and making sure they're safe and well. Good Neighbours help counter social isolation and the service can act as a pre-emptive step to keep those who are vulnerable out of hospital.

Working with local GPs, Royal Voluntary Service will identify those older people in the local community who are most risk of ending up in hospital within the next year. By acting first, Good Neighbours can alleviate the strain on local services. (Royal Voluntary Service, 2016)

The word neighbour comes from the Old English 'neahgebur' meaning nigh dweller. Dweller also means a farmer or countryman. The initial connotation of the word was of a social relationship based on proximity (though not necessarily very close proximity) and the setting was the countryside. It was a relationship with affection arising from shared experiences from cradle to grave. As the word became used in towns and cities, the affective element was contested. Another definition of neighbour is presented within Christian ethics – love thy neighbour as thyself - notably in the parable of the Good Samaritan, where Jesus tells his followers that all fellow human beings are neighbours i.e. there is an obligation to help anyone in need. The Christian ethic also came to imbue the 'near dweller' concept of a neighbour. In French, though, there are two words for neighbour, the usual one is *voisin* but there is an alternative, *prochain*. *Voisin* means near dweller but *prochain* is the standard translation of the biblical term in the Ten Commandments. (Painter, 2012) The Good Neighbour is a *prochain*.

All five respondents, who had a Good Neighbour (GN), were unable to get about outside the house, on their own. We will first consider the accounts of Therese and Dorothy, the two respondents who had most to relate about their experience with the GN scheme.

Findings

Therese could not recall exactly how she had acquired a GN but it had taken place following a long stay in hospital after falling and seriously injuring her back.

When I came out I was just so depressed and to come back alone with nobody in the house and no family and not my son there (her son died a few years previously) who was such a help. ----- I was so hopeless (in relation to fixing things in the house) and helpless that it was absolutely desperate. And somebody came and I can't remember who -----and they said to me, "What's your worst problem?" and I said, "My worst problem is company." I said (that) I have really managed to do most things (getting dressed/undressed, making meals) myself without anybody helping me. I just do need a little bit of a check-up but I said I missed people so desperately. (Therese, early nineties, village, RVS)

Therese's GN had stayed on after a visit, so was present during the interview and Therese involved her in the conversation. There had been a choice of candidates for GN and the one appointed had worked in the same profession as Therese. So they had a lot in common and a lot to talk about, Therese says they just seemed to click and she was like her daughter (who had also died) would have been to her. In addition to companionship, her GN gave practical help and took her for rides in the car.

*That's why (my GN) is so marvellous because she'll take me anywhere, you see, in the car. She took me down to Marks and Sparks last week, didn't you? -----
We've had some lovely runs up Bamburgh way and then we've come back and stopped at a pub on the way back. (Therese, early nineties, village, RVS)*

They had no fixed routine just doing what the weather or their inclination suggested: having fish and chips out or buying them in, doing a crossword. The GN did not always come on the same day of the week. Therese said that the GN had saved her sanity.

Dorothy's introduction to the GN scheme started after the transport scheme did not work out.

*Then at some stage when that (transport scheme) hadn't been working very well for me they started a new initiative. And suggested to me that a better way for me into the system than the just, you know, phoning up for transport, and so (the) supposition being that it (GN Scheme) could possibly provide some sort of assistance or company in other contexts.
(Dorothy, early sixties, isolated hamlet, RVS)*

Dorothy said that it was nearly a year before RVS found a GN for her, the reason for the delay was the same reason that the transport scheme had not worked out – the difficulty of finding someone who was prepared to make the journey to a very rural place. She felt the shortage of volunteers lay behind the mismatch between theory and practice.

When (person from RVS) first came to talk to me about the ideas she had for a good neighbours scheme ---you know the theory sounds brilliant. I would love to---yes I can't climb up and change light bulbs and there is a million things that I'd love to be able to call on somebody to utilise because that was the original concept. But the practicalities

seem to be that they can't get the helpers as it were. (Dorothy, early sixties, rural hamlet, RVS)

There was only one volunteer GN, it appeared, willing to travel out to the place where Dorothy lived. Dorothy knew her slightly, since they had both attended the same therapeutic group. The GN had visited three times and Dorothy would not deter her from visiting but felt that it was unclear who was helping whom in the visit. There was supposed to be a follow up by RVS to check the compatibility of the GN and the person that they helped, but this had not taken place. She felt that shortage of funding was a common factor behind services – statutory as well as voluntary – making it difficult to provide and deliver responsive care.

Nancy and Stan had the same GN. Both had started having a GN because they did not want or were no longer able to visit a RVS day centre. The GN used to visit once a week for a chat, though more recently it had become once a fortnight. She sometimes pushed Stan into town in his wheelchair. Nancy also had a wheelchair and would like to go out in it. Her daughter was aware that the GN would consider taking someone out in a wheel chair as part of what she did but she had been reluctant to ask because she thought her mother would be too heavy to push. So the visit is spent conversing.

Interviewer: And so what kinds of things do you talk about then if you're talking about the old times?

Nancy: *Well, she (GN) seems very interested in what the war was like, you know, when the war was on. –So I talk about that a lot.*

Interviewer: How old were you then at that time when the war was on?

Nancy: *When the war started? I was eight.*

Interviewer: And so she and you talk about those times?

Nancy: *Yes. Well she doesn't—I don't think she was born then you know.*

(Nancy, mid-eighties, deprived urban town, RVS)

Stan used to like to go to football matches.

But its (going to football matches) all gone now because I'd have to get somebody to push me and if they didn't want to stand. I mean me I'm all right, I'm sitting down ---
(Stan, early eighties, deprived urban town, RVS)

He expressed his regret of this loss as a matter of fact, not in expectation that this was something that the GN could or would do anything about.

Kitty had only recently had a GN. She had been invited to go to a RVS centre but ruled this out because she found it difficult going into a social situation on her own amongst people she did not know. So she had been offered a GN to visit her for a chat once a week. When she came she recognised her from seeing her as a shop worker in town. There were plans that her GN would take her out.

So, respondents had very different experiences of the GN scheme. For Therese, it appeared to us, that her GN exceeded the description of the scheme as laid out in the information from RVS.

Findings

The GN created a varied programme of activities which were selected according to the circumstances on the day of the visit. Therese was able to participate in everyday activities outside of the house, such as shopping and eating out. Talk was easy between them as they had much in common in relation to their previous occupation. Dorothy's experience, on the other hand, did not correspond with what she had expected and was poles apart from Therese's. Dorothy had little in common with her GN who visited infrequently. Getting out of the house was the single most important thing for Dorothy, she would have welcomed going food shopping but the GN visits only took place in Dorothy's home. Stan and Nancy fell somewhere in between. The most significant disparities from Therese's experience was that their GN visits had been reduced to once a fortnight, the chatting did not appear to be so effortless and both would have liked to get out in their wheelchairs more, Nancy for an airing and Stan to go to a football match. It was early days for Kitty but things had started well. If the GN only visited the house rather than taking respondents out there was not the same opportunity for the respondent to make contact with people and the chance of forging new social relationships.

Third stage: U3A group reflect on findings

The content of the brief presentation to six U3A respondents, aged mid-sixties to mid-eighties, concerned the findings on receiving help from neighbours, which mainly involved data from the RVS interviews. Following the presentation, members of the group sought additional details and clarifications. Individual reactions to specific aspects of the data were voiced rather than a discussion of the findings as a whole.

One person was struck by the consideration that respondents showed towards their neighbours who helped them in some way. But another felt that perhaps it was very British to be reticent to ask for help and wondered whether people in other countries responded in that way, which was answered with the observation that people in other countries would be more reliant on their family than neighbours. The importance of the family in RVS respondent data led two people in the group to reflect on how accessible they were to their family and perhaps they needed to move closer. One person noticed that one of the RVS respondents had contact with the church and remarked that with small congregations there were insufficient people to organise pastoral visiting from each church these days. The pastoral care people had a large patch, which limited what they can do and offer to each person on their visit list.

Mobility was raised in different ways. Firstly in relation to neighbours being unaware that their older neighbour was needy and thinking that neediness would be self-evident if someone needed to use a wheel chair to get about. Equally, there was recognition that if a person was not seen because they could not get out and if they were quiet about the difficulties they faced, then neighbours would not realise they had a problem. One member was shocked that transport schemes might not work well for those who live in a very rural area and also surprised that among four neighbours living in a remote place there was no interaction. Another commented though, that when you moved into a new location you had no idea what your neighbours would be like. There was a view that older people were more likely to be the kind of neighbour who spotted that an older person needed help because they (the neighbour) were

about during the day, had the time, and understood their situation better due to the fact that they were older people themselves.

The comment, that some older people were reluctant to let other people know they needed help, led to questioning whether this would change in succeeding generations, and the role that electronic communication might play. All of them used this form of communication. While they saw the benefits of keeping in touch, even with neighbours, by electronic means, there was also a downside. The drawbacks included not only affording a device, such as an iPad, and needing training in its operation but also knowing what to do if something unexpected happened while using it. One person asked their grandson and another asked a neighbour but having moved to an apartment block for over 55s the latter found she no longer had neighbours who knew what to do.

There was a brief debate about neighbours volunteering help. Some thought it was not intrusive to simply offer help and then leave it up to the older person as to whether they took up the offer or not. Others considered that the recipient, assuming they did need help, might be left feeling that other people knew their business and had been talking about them. So, offering help could be experienced as an invasion of privacy.

There was some hilarity in an exchange of experience about the tyranny of using curtain opening to signal to neighbours that all was well. Having a lie in and not opening the curtains ran the risk of a call from a neighbour. One person after a late night decided she would accept the risk, have a lie in and face the consequence with the neighbours. However, it was not her neighbour but her daughter who called from work. She had been driving past the house noticed the curtains and called her mother to see why she was still in bed.

Finally the point was made that neighbourliness would always be needed because in the event of an emergency, such as recent flooding, it was on the spot help from neighbours that was called for.

Conclusions

Our research aim - to increase understanding of the role and potential of neighbours in providing help and support to older people living in the community – appears to contain implicit assumptions:

- One neighbour is the helper and the other the helped.
- The helped is old and infirm. The helper is able bodied and not old.
- The relationship, out of which the help arises, is formed in order to offer help and support.
- Neighbourliness between neighbours when one is old and infirm and the other is able bodied and not old is qualitatively different from neighbourliness between neighbours when neither is old and infirm.
- Old infirm people lack agency and require help from others, including neighbours, to actively manage their situation so that they can continue to live in their own home
- Older people anticipate and desire that neighbours will offer long term help and support should they become physically incapacitated

Our findings do not support these assumptions. The kind of help that respondents were getting from neighbours was commensurate with conventional neighbourliness, i.e. help with small tasks, looking out for each other, conversation, friendliness, willing to help at a time of need; placed in a background of respect for privacy. The relationship between longstanding neighbours was dynamic, though, and adapted to changes in each other's situations. However, respondents neither expected nor wanted neighbours to take on long term responsibilities for care. The neighbourly relationship from which help stemmed was founded before help was needed and reciprocal, when reciprocity is considered over the length of the relationship and even across generations. In some instances the neighbour and respondent were peers and there was interdependence. Respondents acted to exert control over the changing circumstances in their own lives (showed agency), including choosing not to get involved with neighbours, but also deciding what kind of help it was appropriate for neighbours to give. Respondents were reluctant to ask for help sometimes out of sensitivity for their neighbours but also because they felt it challenged their independence, particularly if they felt they were unable to do something in return.

Building social policy on incorrect assumptions could render the policy ineffectual. For example, trying to harness neighbourliness as a source of informal care, in order to keep older people out of hospital, runs the risk of damaging a neighbourly relationship. The symmetry of the relationship is lost as the neighbour's gaze is directed to issues of safety and wellness in the older person and the neighbour's interpretation of what constitutes being safe and being well takes precedence over the older person's view. Thus the relationship becomes one of cared for and carer; agency and privacy are potentially undermined, and the value and benefit derived from neighbourliness is diminished as a consequence. The older person, arguably, is worse off.

Conclusions

Building neighbourly relationships could be challenging. Localities which had no communal spaces, a floating population and inhabitants who left the neighbourhood during the day impeded their development. Respondents who had a problem walking and lacked access to private transport faced significant problems. They found it difficult to build social networks outside as well as within their local area. Schemes such as the Good Neighbour scheme could help if the volunteer and older person had common interests and experiences, and if the volunteer enabled the older person to participate in everyday activities outside the home, thus facilitating the development of social networks, or connectedness to existing networks of the older person that they visit. Having rich social networks, even if made of weak ties, such as with neighbours, compensated for a lack of strong ties, such as with kin. The potential of neighbours to provide help and support is dependent on fostering ways to build ordinary neighbourly relationships, not on trying to build extraordinary ones solely for the purpose of providing help and support. Initiatives to foster and build social networks should extend to the use of electronic social networking and social media.

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