
POSTER ABSTRACT

Creating Age-Friendly Communities using a participatory approach

18th International Conference on Integrated Care, Utrecht, 23-25 May 2018

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An introduction comprising context and problem statement: Moldova is experiencing rapid demographic ageing. Persons aged over 60 years are representing 17.02%[1] of the population. They often face social exclusion and loneliness and are hardly participating in the community's life. The potential of older people to play an active role in communities is limited by their outdated perception to accept the decisions taken by a local leader and the scarce possibilities for their social involvement.

Practice change implemented: In order to assist communities to become more age-friendly, an assessment of 14 communities was conducted. The technique of focus group interviews was used and data was collected through a semi-structured questionnaire on age-friendly aspects. 50 % of the interviewed participants were elderly, 25 % were representing the local authorities and 25% were local service providers, according to the WHO guide[2]. The identified age-related problems and solutions to them were included in action plans, further implemented under the guidance of local Community Steering Committees.

Aim and theory of change: Empowered elderly people are in good health, have higher self-esteem, influence decisions and are able to overcome age-related challenges. Healthy and active aging is promoted through behavior change of the local authorities and community members.

Targeted population and stakeholders: Elderly in 14 communities are targeted in this approach. Important key actors who need to be engaged in the concept implementation include local public authorities, service providers, community members.

Timeline: The Age-friendly community concept AFC was launched in 2017 and now is promoted in 14 communities out of three districts.

Highlights: The Age-friendly community turned out to be an effective approach for addressing the community problems, mainly related to the third age, with the involvement of different stakeholders. The involvement of the elderly residents in the assessment has increased their self-esteem and sense of usefulness. Local decision-makers identified problems in communities they did not consider important prior to the assessment and started to take actions. Thus, initiatives like adapting public buildings to age needs, conducting various social events, promoting senior volunteering, improving community services were put in place.

Sustainability: The age-related issues are included in the Local Socio-Economic Development Strategies of 14 communities and funds are allocated.

Transferability: Other communities are exploring this approach. The successful age-friendly initiatives are included in a guide and shared on social networks.

Conclusions comprising key findings: The implementation of the AFC approach has facilitated a better communication among the stakeholders in the assessed communities. The age-related local problems were identified and suggestions for their solving were proposed in a participative and democratic way. Trust of the elderly residents in the decision-makers has increased.

Lessons learned: Elderly need an age-supportive context to respond to the physical, mental and social changes they experience as result of biological ageing.

Encouraging authorities and stakeholders replace the elderly's perception of being a social burden.

Being part of different community actions will increase the elderly self-esteem, inter-connectedness and ability to influence decisions related to their needs.

References:

1- National Bureau of Statistics. Available from:
www.statistica.md/newsview.php?l=ro&idc=168&id=5762

2- Available from: www.who.int/kobe_centre/publications/age_friendly_cities_guide/en/

Keywords: empowerment; age friendliness; participation; older people; active aging
