

NEWSPROBE

SPOTLIGHTS

- A new day welfare centre aimed at people over the age of 65 for men, and over 60 for women may be built in Aberdeen.

- Dr Ian Richardson, chairman of Aberdeen Old People's Welfare Council hopes that money for its construction will be subscribed by city folk.

- Reaction to the proposed centre—which might cost members 2/6 per month—is very favourable. But the main concern of OAPs is that the site chosen will be convenient for transport.

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A DAY welfare centre with a meals service . . . recreational and educational facilities . . . a library, workshop and quiet room ... run by trained staff ...

This could prove to be the future home — from-home for many of Aberdeen's population of pensioners — if a scheme at present under consideration is put into operation.

Behind the idea is Aberdeen's Old People's Welfare Council.

And the council chairman, **Dr Ian Richardson**, senior lecturer in social medicine at Aberdeen University, has told NEWSPROBE: "We have been thinking about the establishment of such a centre for the retired in Aberdeen for some time."

"Now, pending the full approval of the council of course, it is almost certain to go ahead."

Two factors are hastening and encouraging the advent of the proposed centre:—

An estimated large future increase in the number of old people in the city - according to predictable population trends;

And a recently-completed survey by Aberdeen psychology students which indicates that the scheme could be successful.

The chairman, who is an expert in geriatrics, the medical study of old people, described the reasons for the centre and outlined the problems he anticipated.

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Some give up

"The centre will be aimed at people over the age of 65, for men, and over 60, for women—the retired, the younger generation of pensioners, you might say."

"We wish to give them an interest in life to compensate for giving up work."

"To some people this can mean a considerable gap in their lives. It can be like the difference between day and night."

"So many retired people I have encountered, have given up. They feel that society has

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dismissed them as no longer capable of taking an active part in the life of the community.

"They say: 'I've nothing to do. I can't be bothered . . . but you get used to it.'"

"This is so wrong and this is what we want to change. There is a great deal they can do with their time—if they want to."

"We want to give them, social companionship of people their own age, an interest in life."

Dr Richardson said that complete plans for the centre were not drawn up. They were still at the discussion stage. But one of the main essentials is a new building. : And this is also one of the main problems.

"It has to be a new building, constructed specially for the purpose. -It is no use trying to convert an old building. This has to be a new concept of a welfare centre, to give as many rooms as possible, so that we can provide as many facilities as possible."

"But the difficulty is finding a suitable central site. I have already made approaches in certain quarters and the matter is under consideration."

NEWSPROBE asked the doctor

A BOLD NEW CITY PLAN

me-from-home for the OAPs

Dr IAN RICHARDSON



"Then it might be possible to engage teachers to coach the members in whatever educational pursuits they wished.

"There are so many things we can do. And it is important that the range should be wide and varied.

Dr Richardson said that a small membership fee would possibly be charged — something like 2/6 per month.

• **Which brought up the question of cash. Where was it coming from?**

"Public subscription, I hope," he answered. "Aberdeen has always proved itself to be generous towards a good cause. And this is a good cause.

"My idea of the centre is that it could be a tribute from the working population of the city to the retired population in recognition of their work for the community."

How do Aberdeen's pensioners react to the idea? **NEWS-PROBE** tested the feelings of a meeting of St Machar's branch of the Aberdeen Old Age Pensioners' Association.

Their approval was unanimous. They felt it was a grand idea.

Main concern

"The only snag," said Mrs Margaret Geddes, branch secretary and also secretary of the Scottish OAPA area council, "is the site. I hope it is going to be central. Or alternatively that it is going to be convenient for transport. That is our main concern.

Another member, who had visited just such a welfare centre in Edinburgh, raised a point about meals. "What you can do in Edinburgh is stay the whole day at the centre, getting all your meals. This is ideal for old people who mightn't want to trail back and forth from their homes to the centre.

"That way they are able to spend the whole day with their friends."

All the old people at the meeting considered that the proposed centre was a good idea and that if possible they would support it.

"Anything," they said, "to make up for the loneliness."

if the proposed centre would cut across the well-established activities of the council's own clubs and the Old Age Pensioners' Association clubs.

"No. There is a place for all these activities. The centre would be more of an extension of both establishments. And the important feature is that the centre would be open all day.

"The members could perhaps call at the centre for a cup of morning coffee, afternoon tea, or possibly lunch. They could then play whist or bridge, or take a book out of the library and spend the morning or afternoon in the reading room.

Still useful

"Or they could engage in a hobby. There are so many retired craftsmen in Aberdeen who are still useful with their hands. And they could make goods. To sell if this is possible



No loneliness "blues" for this happy group pictured at the St Machar Old Age Pensions Association annual Christmas dinner and party in the Queen's Hotel, Aberdeen. Third from the right in the front row is Mrs Margaret Geddes, branch secretary and secretary of the Scottish OAPA area council.

Survey reveals 87% support for centre

An intriguing, and at times surprising, picture of the lives of a cross section of the younger members of Aberdeen's older generation has just been revealed.

It comes out in the recently-completed survey aimed at testing the feelings of a fairly representative group of pensioners towards the establishment of a day welfare centre in the city.

And this is the pattern of social life which emerged:—

On the whole, the people interviewed considered that, apart from reduction of income, their lot since recent retirement was a happy one;

They described themselves as being in better health, with more time to sleep, relax, "ease up" and do the things they liked doing;

And they had regular contact with their families. For the majority this provided the mainstay of their lives.

The survey, conducted by 10 students from the University's psychology department and commissioned by the city's Old People's Welfare Council, was based in Woodside.

The people interviewed, 43 women and 41 men under the age of 75, were representative of the city's pensioner population compared with the 1961 census figures for age and the 1951 social class distribution in Aberdeen.

It was discovered that a large majority of those interviewed did not live alone, but had their spouse and/or their family living with them. And they "visited or were visited by their relatives during the week they were interviewed,

Exchange visits

There was also a great deal of exchange visits with friends and the biggest majority of the pensioner went out at least once a week. Most could do so without assistance

Church-going figures largely in their various social activities and a few had part-time employment.

the family situation," claim the students, "these figures show that the majority of these elderly people are fairly active and by no means neglected."

This finding is further strengthened by the fact that a large percentage said they were never lonely. And only a few felt that they would like to meet more people. Rather more said they would like to have more things to do, some said they were often bored and about a quarter of those interviewed said they were occasionally bored.

Social activities

One wife mentioned that "she doesn't care for her husband sitting about all day."

The students explored the social activities of the old people a little further by asking them if they attended clubs.

There is a welfare club, one of the most successful in the city, and a branch of the OAPA in Woodside.

Of those interviewed, 11% attended the OAP meeting and two people were members of the other club.

•Those who attended the former mentioned favourably: good company, sociable people, plenty of social activities, good entertainment (especially concerts) and generally gave the impression that "it takes you out of yourself."

•The old people who did not attend gave as their reasons: overcrowding, noisy meetings, gossiping, "nosi ness" and "cattiness."

The two who attended meetings mentioned enjoyable company, "getting out of a rut", passing the time nicely.

Those who didn't attend said that there were "too many people there", they didn't like the people attend-

ing, didn't know anyone there, and revealingly perhaps, "if they asked me, I would go".

Of those who stayed away, the majority are too occupied with their own families and pastimes—and it must not be forgotten, the survey points out, that very many elderly people are not attracted by such a centre—while others feel they cannot go by themselves or uninvited.

It was found that 87% were in favour of the idea of an all-day centre. And as for amenities they had some strong preferences.

Top of the list came afternoon tea, a chiropody service, lunch service, talks, library, trips and tours and a quiet room.

In activities, dressmaking was the most popular chosen by the women and a fair percentage chose rug-making and basket work. More than half of the men said they would like to do some gardening.

Fairly active

Generally, said the students, as well as providing more activities for the higher percentage of people who are fairly active, a centre might be of particular value to those who feel time dragging now and again, and would like to meet more people. One should not assume, however, that a centre will necessarily provide a cure for loneliness.

In conclusion, the group state: "So far as this survey could establish it, it would seem that an all-day centre would be successful in Aberdeen."

** All-Day Centres for Retired People; A Social Survey. Submitted by A. J. Bagley, C. S. England, C. French, M. L. Hughes, P. A. M. Johnston, A. M. MacGregor, F. MacLeod, R. T. Third, A. Watson and M. J. L. Welsh.*

"Taken with the data on