

Covent Garden Dragon Hall Trust

The Charity of Sir Richard Whittington
Older People and Housing Programme

A welcoming, responsive space connecting older residents at risk of isolation and loneliness in Central London

Covent Garden Dragon Hall Trust (CGDHT) is a community centre in central London which received funding to continue and to develop its activities targeting older residents in central London, who are at risk of isolation and loneliness.

Activities are aimed at keeping older people physically fit, emotionally well and socially engaged, so that they can stay independent for as long as possible.

“When you retire, it's so important to feel part of something, to feel included.” Member



Why the work is needed

Holborn and Covent Garden Ward has Camden's highest level of household food poverty in a single Lower Super Output Area, its joint highest 'after housing costs' poverty and is in England's most deprived areas regarding living environment. St. James Ward is within the lowest 20-30% of London Wards for Income Deprivation among older persons.

All these factors are known contributors to poor **mental health** and **emotional wellbeing** in older people.

Approach

All attendees are encouraged to contribute to delivering, designing, and participating in the services we offer. All activities are low cost or free.

Services are designed to:

- Build connections and feel part of a wider community
- Stay active longer
- Boost their mental health and emotional wellbeing
- Develop their skills and confidence in using digital technology
- Address financial difficulties

“We are asked for our views and ideas, It's very inclusive and democratic, which I think is really important.” Member

Activities and services include:

- Tea Dances
- Advice sessions
- Food pantry
- Yoga
- Trips out
- Arts and crafts
- Digital activities and support
- Language classes
- Guided walks
- Mental health support

Impact



Growing Reach: Significant increases in footfall have highlighted the value that the local community places on the centre.

In one-year CGDHT provided 463 activities attended by 5,215 people.

"I just think it's so valuable, because hardly anything is ever done in preventing people getting old and decrepit and this sort of thing keeps us all really well and healthy."

Member



Reducing Isolation: A large part of CGDHT's success is attributed to the welcoming atmosphere and involvement of older people in designing the activities and services on offer.



Improving health: Dedicated activities for older people were highly praised. This is thought to contribute to older people engaging in activities that they would not normally consider.



Challenges

"It's the demand for services, we are getting so stretched." – Project Worker

The centre is limited by its physical space, impacting the activities that can be offered, and the capacity of social gatherings after events. CGDHT addresses this through partnerships with Covent Garden Community Centre and the Phoenix Garden, as well as external trips and visits.

CGDHT feel that they have been less successful in engaging some sections of the community so far, for example, older men and the local Bengali community.

The Cost-of-Living Crisis is impacting older people, costs need to be kept to a minimum to ensure that those who need the service can continue to access it.

Learnings

Partnerships with Covent Garden Community Centre and the Phoenix Garden are leading to a coherent and coordinated offer for older people in the local area.

Volunteers are essential for the running of activities and services, therefore increasing the volunteer pool is now a priority. One way this is being addressed is through links with local universities and colleges.

The Future

- CGDHT plan to continue beyond this grant period because there is a clear and ongoing need for older people.
- The organisation is interested in exploring how partnership working can enhance funding offers, and the role that corporations could play in funding community projects.

"For me it's like a lifeline... it's affordable, it's convenient, the instructors are good...you can't ask for more." Member