

# Community radio for and by people in later life

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Age-friendly  
communities  
case study

October 2021



# Community radio for and by people in later life

Introducing local radio programming created by and for older listeners in communities has been an approach used in age-friendly communities including Newcastle, Bristol and Hackney to improve communication and information sharing.

Nationally, people in later life are over-represented as radio listeners and under-represented as producers, creators and presenters of radio and other audio content. Where radio is created by older people, the broadcasts serve to strengthen the civic engagement and participation of older people in communities.

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## Below are four case studies on setting up radio programmes with and for older listeners.

- **Later Life Audio and Radio Co-operative (LLARC)** case study explores the national network aiming to increase diversity of older people in broadcasting
- **Older Voices** case study focuses on Newcastle’s longstanding radio programme and its change over time
- **Hackney Social Radio** case study explores Hackney’s process of setting up their radio programme in 2020 in the context of Covid.
- **Babbers Radio Show** case study summarises the learning report on the Bristol radio programme, with top tips for places wanting to set up their own.

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## Age-friendly domains covered by the programme



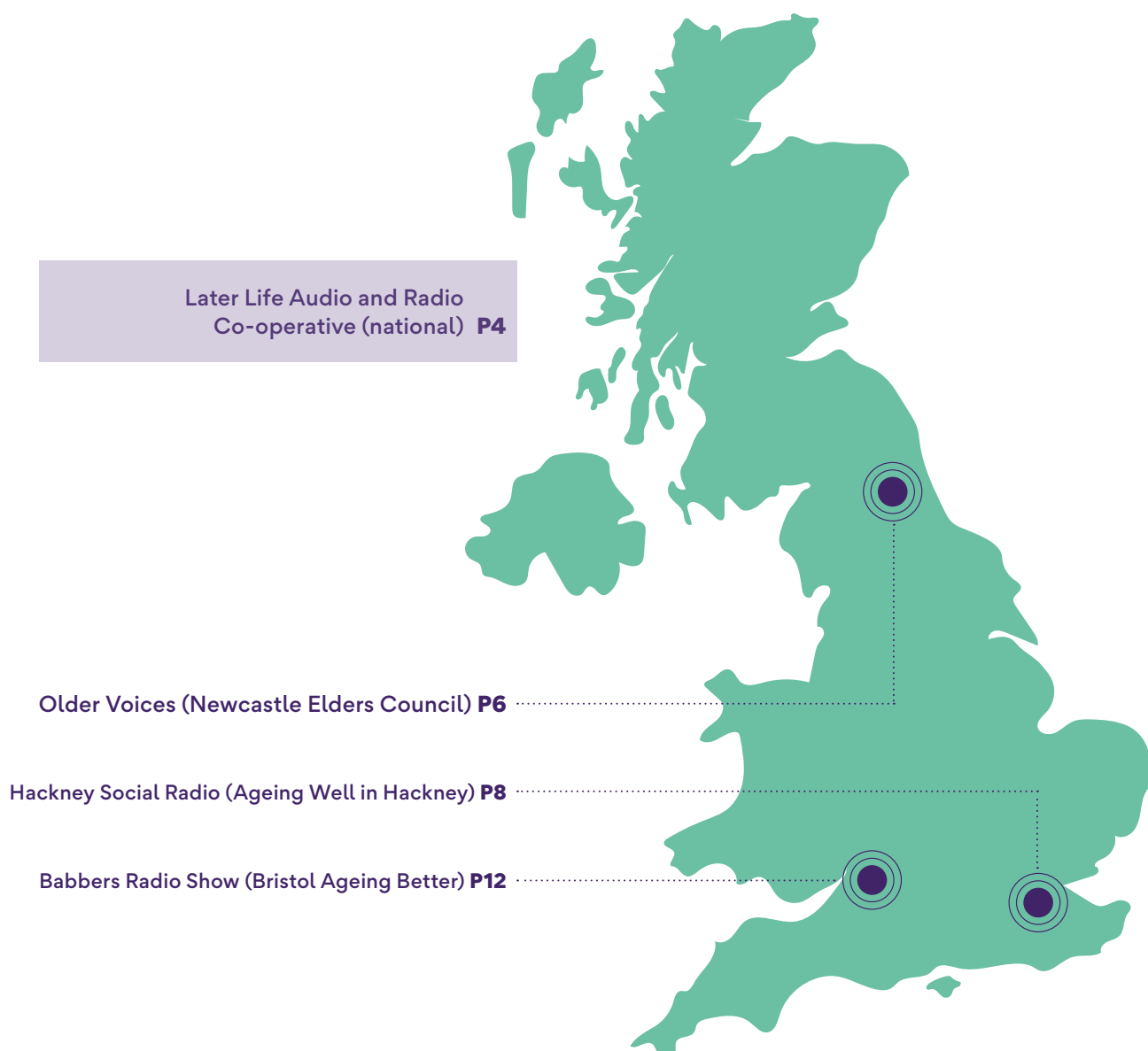
Domain 6: Civic participation and employment



Domain 7: Communication and information

## Useful links

- **LLARC** <https://www.mixcloud.com/LLARC/>
- **Older voices** the radio show of the Elders Council in Newcastle  
<https://www.elderscouncil.org.uk/Radio-Show>
- **Hackney Social Radio** <https://www.immediate-theatre.com/work/hackney-social-radio>
- **Babbers Radio Show** <https://bristolageingbetter.org.uk/the-babbers-show/>
- **Talking about my generation** <https://talkingaboutmygeneration.co.uk/>  
Talking About My Generation is a campaign across Greater Manchester to train people over 50 as community reporters so they could change the record on what it means to grow older in the region.



# Later Life Audio and Radio Co-operative (LLARC)



Photo credit: Daniel Parry, Newcastle University

**LLARC is a national network launched in February 2020 made up of organisations, groups and individuals who share an interest in increasing the representation of older adults in broadcasting. LLARC aims to:**

- promote positive views and challenge negative views of age and ageing by providing talk-based audio and radio content created by diverse groups of older adults.
- strengthen the visibility of content created by older adults in media and encourage the expansion of radio programming related to ageing and relationships between the generations.
- engage older adults in broadcasting, facilitate skill development and build communities by enabling discussion of a wide range of topics.

It was co-founded by a unique partnership bringing together older radio show hosts, including the Elders Council of Newcastle and Mervyn Eastman (who ran Age Speaks on East London Radio); academia (Newcastle University's OpenLab); local government, charities and community groups, age-friendly radio stations, such as Radio Tyneside and Sonder Radio from Manchester; and Information Now, Newcastle City Council's information hub for older people. LLARC began with UK members, then branched out with its first international member in the Republic of Ireland.

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## Civic participation

The network moves beyond the stereotype of older person's radio purely being nostalgic programmes. It has a strong focus on civic engagement showcasing older people as creators in a digital space with them leading conversations.

Radio programmes such as these are living out the ambition of age-friendly communities; giving older people agency and enabling older people to make positive contributions to their communities. As a result, the network has found that the engagement of older adults with this type of "civic activism" is different from that of recruiting volunteers to deliver a particular service; it has proved much more organic, starting with volunteers showing interest, then becoming engaged and taking on more responsibility over time.

The principles of democracy, access and equity in radio programming are carried through in the way LLARC is organised, as a co-operative.

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**"It's driven by older people and is a member-led organisation - that's why we wanted to be a co-op because it's equal and democratic."**

Arlind Reuter - Co-founder of LLARC

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## What's next for LLARC?

LLARC have set up a hub showcasing content created by older people which challenges ageism and promotes intergenerational cohesion and civic engagement. They want to encourage the expansion of this sort of radio programming and make audio accessible, share best practice in community radio and offer peer support between members.

Any age-friendly city that is starting their own age-friendly radio programme or station is welcome to join LLARC. Programmes are streamed on Mixcloud at LLARCooperative | Mixcloud and LLARC can be reached by email or via Twitter.

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**"Joining LLARC has many benefits: connections with other content creators, discussions of best practice, support through the network, and the potential to build conversations and collaborations."**

Barbara Douglas, Executive Officer of the Elders Council

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# Older Voices, the Elders Council of Newcastle



Photo credit: Daniel Parry, Newcastle University

**Older Voices is a live radio show founded by the Elders Council of Newcastle-upon-Tyne. It began in 2007 as a monthly one-hour programme on community radio station NE1fm, which served Tyneside in the north-east of England; it is now hosted by Nova Radio North East. The show recently won an Engagement and Place Award run by Newcastle University.**

Older Voices is run entirely by volunteers, most of whom are in their 70s and 80s. Founder member Steve Whitley used to read the national news on Radio Tanzania, and another member presented on Radio Newcastle; otherwise, none of the volunteers had any experience of radio. Even so, the volunteers run all aspects of the programme, including all the technical and production work. This means that the show is unusual in requiring

no significant funding beyond the periodic requirements for new equipment, which is generally covered by grants or donations.

The show expanded from an hour to 90 minutes, and then to two hours. When the pandemic hit, they had to move to presenting the show via Zoom, and then they expanded again to broadcast the show for two hours twice a month. The team also became a bit more ambitious, because broadcasting on Zoom allowed them to cast their net more widely to invite guests from different locations in the UK, and also from Germany, Canada and Denmark.

Strapping their digirecorder on to a garden cane to maintain social distancing, the team produced an outside recording with four interviewees at the Magic Hat Café in Newcastle. During the pandemic their main concern was to keep listeners informed about the situation as it developed, but they also had space for a Christmas pantomime and other lighter and more celebratory themes.

## Content

The show includes interviews with guests, and music, plus regular slots: notices, a poem or story, 'thought for the fortnight', green issues, gardening, culture, and suggestions for exercises older people can do at home. They also produce intergenerational programmes (for example, working with students from the University of Newcastle to produce content).

Programmes include both the topics that volunteers are interested in creating as well as providing a forum for the Elders Council of Newcastle to disseminate information, such as their recent report on care at home.

## Volunteers

A few volunteers have come and gone over the years, though for the last few years Older Voices has had a consistent team of 10 people.

The team has become more professional over time, developing a number of skills. Working remotely in the pandemic forced their volunteers to improve their digital skills. This includes volunteers making small but significant steps, such as the 91-year-old volunteer who before Covid didn't want to use any technology. She now logs onto Zoom herself and has become more confident using functions like muting and unmuting.

**“It’s not only a way to get out info and communicate, but also for the broadcast team to get together and do something useful in our retirement.”**

Steve Whitley

## Challenges

Even with the progress that Older Voices has made in the production of their show, there remain challenges to ensure that community radio like this is accessible.

Community radio stations have limited broadcast range, especially on older radio sets which often make it difficult to find the FM wavelength. As a result, Older Voices gets reports that Elders Council members would like to listen to the show but can't access the wavelength. This is a particular challenge as the older listeners are less likely than some to be able to listen to the show online, either live or later.



Photo credit: Daniel Parry, Newcastle University

# Hackney Social Radio



**Hackney Social Radio was set up in 2020 based on an idea by older people in Hackney. Dubbed ‘radio for the young at heart’, this community radio show has been developed with older people for older people, to create a sense of community during the COVID pandemic when face-to-face contact was difficult.**

The programme aims to engage isolated residents, promote wellbeing and connectivity, and provide entertainment, as well as information about where people can get help and support, and key health messages.

Hackney Social Radio was set up by Immediate Theatre in partnership with Connect Hackney, a project combating loneliness amongst older people, funded by the National Lottery Community Fund’s Ageing Better programme and Hackney Council.

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**“The asset-based approach of Hackney Social Radio makes a significant contribution to older communities and the age-friendly approach of Hackney. Communities help themselves and co-produce work that brings the borough to life.”**

Petra Roberts – Cultural Development Manager,  
Hackney Council

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## Developing Hackney Social Radio

Immediate theatre had no experience of community radio. Finding funding and an FM home for the show (so people didn't have to just listen online) were two big initial challenges. In addition to recruiting a producer (they got 77 applications) they needed to contract older people to edit the shows, book artists to appear, and recruit and train the older volunteers to make the shows.

### Funding the programme

A home was found for the show on an existing local radio station, Resonance FM. Funding was secured for almost £35,000 from the Arts Council Emergency Response Fund, which was used to fund a part-time producer and editors and pay for artists' appearances.

A second series was later funded from November 2020 to July 2021 from the Henry Smith Charity and the Department for Culture, Media and Sport. A smaller pot of funding was secured from the Arts Council for marketing and audience research, to ensure the programme was reaching its audience.

### Running the programme

A group of older people from Theatre Exchange met weekly to generate ideas and content for the show, provide presenters, and produce original dramas for the radio programmes.

An advisory panel of eight people from Hackney Council, Connect Hackney, and Immediate Theatre was set up to give the project direction and inform the production process. The panel met fortnightly on Zoom to identify key local messages for broadcast and provide introductions to local community groups and individuals.

As things developed Immediate Theatre set up a production club, a steering group of older people, which oversaw production of new features and the development of the programme. Some of the production club have media experience, but most have come to this afresh.

The first series of Hackney Social Radio ran on Wednesdays from 11 am to 12 noon, for three months from June to September 2020. There were 15 episodes in total, made available for ongoing playback through Mixcloud.

178 local people participated in producing the first series, most of whom were aged over 65. These included the production team, feature makers and contributors, editors and interviewees.

### Programme Content

All programmes were run by older people, with a lead presenter, community presenters and a resident DJ, Frank Kaos (aged 78) who was previously part of the performance arts group Mutoid Waste Company. The shows ran with:

- Conversation and 'banter' between presenters.
- Songs either requested by listeners or selected by the DJ.
- An interview with an expert, led by community presenters.
- A chat with a caller who could be a listener or an active community member.
- Features on the community and the arts.

The wide-ranging features focused on:

- Local institutions and spaces: e.g. Rio Cinema, a local independent cinema

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- Community groups and projects:  
e.g. Local oral history project
- Community events: e.g. Windrush celebration and the online Hackney Carnival
- Expert information and advice:  
e.g. a local GP and the Mayor of Hackney

### Training volunteers

The lead presenter, actress Sue Elliott-Nichols, worked with the community presenters to develop their confidence and skills in writing interview questions, putting guests at ease, and drawing out information that would be relevant to the programme's listeners.

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**“When I first started I was very hesitant, I wasn't sure of myself. I learned to talk more naturally for radio by doing it. I didn't like listening to myself at the beginning because I sounded so unsure, but by listening to myself I learned to do it better. Interviewing people I learned as I went along, to ask questions and encourage them.”**

Sharon – Hackney resident and HSR volunteer

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### Impact

The first series had over 12,000 live listeners and over 2,500 online playbacks by spring 2021. And listeners were not only local: because of the online playbacks, Hackney Social Radio has listeners from as far away as Australia.

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**“I'm really quite chuffed about it because I've done one 8-minute feature, another 4-minute feature on 'I Love Hackney', and an interview recorded on Zoom with a vintage film collector who has a one-stop-shop business for vintage film.”**

Donald Hutera – Hackney resident and HSR volunteer

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The success of the project was as much about the skills learned by older residents and their involvement in producing the shows, as it is about the stories about Hackney that they shared with listeners.

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**“I think older people can become invisible, particularly in an area like Hackney which is very young and hip, but actually, they're busy, active, getting things done, and I think Hackney Social Radio gives them a voice.”**

Sue Elliott-Nichols – Hackney resident, HSR volunteer, and actress/media professional

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## Learning and challenges

Producing the first series was a steep learning curve for everyone involved, with the whole team learning a lot about community radio as well as about Hackney itself. The production team worked hard to reflect the demographic and cultural diversity of Hackney, demonstrated in the range of features and experts who joined the show including representatives from the London Buddhist Centre, Hackney Caribbean Elders Association and the online Carers Festival.

**“Hackney is a very diverse community. We don’t personally represent all those groups..., having a social responsibility to think about involving different groups has been a driver, and I think we’ve achieved that really well.”**

Jo Carter – Artistic Director, Immediate Theatre

Moving into the second season the production team decided to form a steering group to co-produce the show with older volunteers. The idea proved much more popular with volunteers when it was re-named the “Production Club” instead of “steering group”. The programme team have recognised that local volunteers are more interested in working directly on the show than in co-ordinating or organising, so they are looking for further funding to resource the management of the programme.

## What’s next for Hackney Social Radio?

Hackney Social Radio’s ambition is for people who are not online to be listening on FM radio. They want those people to feel this is their community and a place where they can be heard and hear each other.

As the second series is now complete, the production team are looking for more funding for future series to continue the work. Further training and support will be provided to volunteers to help them run the programme.



# Babbers Radio Show Bristol



## **Bristol Ageing Better (BAB) supported a weekly community radio show, known as ‘the Babbers’, run by and for older people in Bristol.**

The aim was to present a positive portrayal of ageing and challenge stereotypes around ageing.

The show was broadcast on local community radio station Ujima from June 2015 to August 2020, when the show took a pause. BAB produced a report detailing the successes and challenges of the show, and offering seven recommendations for others who might be thinking about starting a similar venture:

- Ask the community what they would like from a radio show.
- Get funding or sponsorship to allow some regular paid hours to support your volunteers.

- Manage volunteers well: make the time commitment clear, recruit enough volunteers to cover for the inevitable drop-out rate, and provide adequate training and support.
- Build up your listener base through promotion via your networks and social media.
- Develop relationships with local groups and organisations, and a system for them to submit useful information to you.
- Make sure listeners can contact you in different ways, including by phone, and encourage interaction and feedback.
- Take proactive steps to ensure diversity within the volunteer team and the show’s content and guests, so that the show reflects the whole community.



Let's take action today for all our tomorrows.  
**Let's make ageing better.**



**UK Network of Age-friendly  
Communities**

The Centre for Ageing Better creates change in policy and practice informed by evidence and works with partners across England to improve employment, housing, health and communities. Ageing Better is a charitable foundation, funded by The National Lottery Community Fund.

