Summary of the Getting Older Project

What is the Getting Older Project?

The Getting Older Project is a research project to find out what getting older is like for people with learning disabilities.

I did the project as part of my training to be a Clinical Psychologist.
Why I did the project

The number of older people with learning disabilities is getting bigger. This is because people with learning disabilities are living longer.

Some projects have started to find out about what old age is like for people with learning disabilities. We still do not know much about how people with learning disabilities feel about getting older.

I did this project to find out more.

I wanted to find out what changes people with learning disabilities notice as they get older. I wanted to find out what getting older means to them and what it feels like for them.
I asked Community Learning Disability Teams and day services to tell their customers about the project. I wanted to find people who wanted to take part.

I interviewed 7 people with learning disabilities.

They were all at least 60 years old, and the oldest was 81. There were 3 women and 4 men.
I met them at home or at their day service to ask them questions about getting older.

I recorded the interviews, and wrote down what everyone said.

I looked at what each person said about what getting older is like and what it means to them.

I wrote a report about the main things each person had said, and the things that seemed most important about getting older for the whole group.

I changed people’s names so that no-one could tell who they were from the report.
Most people said that friendships had stayed really important for them as they got older.

Some people had close friends and spending time with friends made them happy.

Some people felt sad that they did not have any really close friends.
Some people felt powerless. They felt that other people choose what they are allowed to do. They felt that they depend on staff to help them go out or see friends.

Some people worried about understanding what other people want. They worried about getting things right.

1 person felt very angry that other people boss her around and do not listen to her.

A few people said that they had got more control over their lives as they got older because they now live in their own home or in supported living.
It seemed very important for people to feel useful.

Most people talked about feeling wanted and needed at work, or doing useful jobs at home.

They said they enjoyed having jobs to do.

They said having jobs made them feel proud.
More than half the people I talked to had noticed changes in themselves as they got older.

They noticed things like slowing down and finding it harder to walk.

Some people felt sad or angry that some things like walking were now harder.

Some other people did not mind the changes.

A few people had not noticed any changes at all.
Some people talked about their lives getting better. Some people felt that they had changed, for example, they are calmer or more confident now.

Some people said they were happier because they liked their homes better than places they had lived in the past.
3 people talked about how they feel about getting older in the future.

1 person felt calm about it and said that it was natural.

2 other people felt scared of getting older because they were worried about not being able to do things for themselves any more.
What this means for services for older people with learning disabilities

It is important for services to help people keep their friendships going as they get older. Services need to let people control their own lives as much as possible.

Services need to be aware that people might not want to retire as they get older.

They might want to keep going to work or doing jobs at home because it seems important for people to keep busy and feel useful.
Some people want to start looking back over their life as they get older. They might need services to help them do this.

Some people did not know much about what getting older means.

Some people only knew about the bad bits of getting older. This might make people feel scared of getting older.
If people understand more about what might happen as they get older, they might feel less scared when they notice changes. Services could help people to learn more about what getting older means.
Do you have any questions?

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