Socio-Cultural Challenges

The way in which older people are viewed by society is a barrier that can fuel discriminatory thought and practice. Current societal images of older people often show them as vulnerable (and needing care), aspirationally active (a Hollywood stereotype of the body beautiful), or comically grumpy which not only labels, marginalizes the elderly but also acts as a tool in enlarging the so-called Generation gap between 'young' and 'old'. Add to this, 'race' and 'age' related stereotypes and you begin to appreciate how minority ethnic elder wo/men are seen or not seen. This leads to policy or practice assumptions that see older people as a burden, a problem to be solved, a group deprived of the normal things in life because of the processes of ageing, a process beyond human control.

Our work in active ageing and wellbeing can be demonstrated by our work in developing cross-cultural physical activity programmes for elders and a production of a 'keep fit' DVD (AIM project) which was well received by elders and a useful tool for policy practitioners and mainstream providers. Please see Citizenship and wellbeing for more of our projects.

'One size fits all' approach does not work

We live in a changing society and there is a need for advocacy to combat inequalities in an increasingly complex world. The lifestyle, religion, culture, language, dietary habits etc will be different for each and every ethnic group and for individuals within those groups, as will their perception of, and expectations from statutory and other services. Service delivery should ultimately be given in an individual personally centered way and remove all classifications that will discriminate. Much is being done to change things for the better. But there are still alarming concerns that the impact of the growing number of BME elders has not yet been fully recognised by the system and that the one size fits all approach has not been completely abandoned.

PRIAE's conduct in its first work in 1998 for the Royal Commission on Long Term Care for the Elderly was noted by many as seeing minority elders with 'resources' as well as with serious issues that needed concrete solutions. Such values were reflected in its reports and publications. PRIAE's central thread of 'voice, choice and autonomy' as a barometer for examining and applying changes in policy and practice have been important in how wider society and stakeholders see minority ethnic elders. PRIAE's work inspired by elders engagement with PRIAE and PRIAE's values in action have guided its work on all its themes and projects. Shifting how BME elders are seen as part of 'age as a resource' has also been transmitted specifically in projects like 'Playing our Part After 50'; Ageing Actively (AIM); Policy Network.