

## **Elders Council project – Elders blog**

***By Barbara Douglas***

Recently we completed a project with talented Northumbria University Business Clinic students to find ways of increasing our membership and broadening our appeal to different audiences across the region.

As a not-for-profit membership organisation for people aged 50 and over in Newcastle, we want to promote a positive image of ageing and inspire and enable older people to be active and improve their quality of life. We already have around 1,300 members on our books but we're actively seeking to engage with more people across the city and boost the proportion of our members in the 50-65 age bracket (this currently represents only 13% of our total membership).

With limited resources, we needed assistance to push this project forward and that's where the Business Clinic stepped in to help. We asked the students to come up with a plan to increase awareness of Elders Council, strengthen our relationships with ethnic minority groups, and create opportunities for us to forge new contacts that could help us improve and expand our service offering.

Their recommendations were varied and wide-ranging and have given us plenty to think about. Their suggestions included an overhaul of our marketing materials, ideas for increased collaboration with local organisations such as training providers, universities and Newcastle City Council, new activities for members to try including a new book club (an idea I really like), and paid-for and organic campaigns to increase engagement on social media (which we haven't utilised to its full potential).

There were other good ideas, too. We could do more to link up with local charities, religious organisations and community centres to increase engagement with ethnic minority groups. Perhaps a jobs board in our magazine and bulletin could encourage more people to offer volunteering services, or a crowdfunding campaign could help us to raise funds to improve our services. It is great to have a menu of recommendations (based on our budget) that we can implement.

I'm really pleased that we engaged with the Business Clinic students on this worthwhile project. Many of the findings from their report were not that surprising to us; we've known for a while that we needed to improve in certain areas and the students' work has confirmed this for us. Their fresh perspectives have helped us to question our existing way of doing things and given us the opportunity to implement change for social good.