

1940s

Lifecare began its life in autumn 1941 as the Edinburgh Old People's Welfare Council. In 1948 its name was changed to Edinburgh and Leith Old People's Welfare Council (ELOPWC). It was formed by a group of three wonderful ladies: Miss Lowe, a chartered accountant; Miss Whigham, a lawyer; and Dr Baxendine, the Physician Superintendent of Queensberry House Hospital. The ELOPWC was created...



“ IN THE HOPE THAT ITS ACTIVITIES MIGHT GO SOME WAY TO MEET THE CLAIM OF THE OLDER MEMBERS OF THE COMMUNITY TO A FULLER SHARE IN THE COMMUNITY LIFE ”

Within ten years, this “hope” became a reality as it built up a wide range of services which greatly enriched the lives of many older people in the city. The ELOPWC was a trailblazer being one of the first such organisations to be created in Scotland. It started life based in Ainslie House in St Colme Street and focused on help with home visits, housing and social activities. The chairman was a Reverend Notman. A number of church men sat on the governing body.

Tackling loneliness was an early priority so plans were soon made to arrange regular visits to older people, whether living in their own residence, a home or a hospital. From the outset, the aim was to decentralise this activity as it expanded so as to build a local and personal touch into the service. Regional committees were established to enable this. Initially, these were based in Restalrig, Tynecastle, Leith and Edinburgh South. Committees later were established in Broughton, Stockbridge, Central, Canongate, East Pilton, and Portobello.

The friendship and companionship provided by visitors was a great boon to isolated older people. Books and periodicals were also lent to those visited and they were encouraged, if they were able, to join the local club or attend a monthly party. A particular effort was made to visit people who failed to attend events run by the ELOPWC to check that they were safe and well. A challenge throughout this period though was finding enough volunteers to make regular visits to those known to the ELOPWC.

By the late 1940s, ELOPWC to run a small meals on wheels service. This service was a new idea which was also being taken introduced by other organisations at the time.

Like other cities in Scotland, Edinburgh suffered from problems of poor housing. Overcrowding, poor hygiene and damp were prevalent. ELOPWC wanted to provide decent accommodation for some older people trapped in such homes. During the decade two residential homes were established. The first was in Manor Place which opened in September 1947 and provided accommodation for 27 residents. Most of the cost of purchasing the building and fitting it out was covered by a very generous donation of £5,000 from the Red Cross. The second home was in West Coates was purchased in the late 1940s, refurbished and opened in 1951, offering accommodation for 23 people.



Social activities were at the heart of the ELOPWC's activities, providing opportunities for people to meet, mix and enjoy entertainment together. From the start, these events attracted large numbers. A Christmas party was held in 1943 in the Walpole Hall, Palmerston Place. The 300 capacity was insufficient to accommodate all the people on the ELOPWC register and a repeat event was held in the Kirk O'Fields College.

BEVERIDGE REPORT

The ELOPWC had its eye on the national scene from the outset and submitted evidence in 1941 on pensions, health care and home helps for the elderly to the Beveridge Committee. Beveridge published his report the following year and his recommendations laid the foundations for the modern Welfare State. These included a basic minimum income for older people in the form of pensions, from age 60 for women and 65 for men. However, it is sobering to note that average life expectancy in the late 1940s was 64 for men and 68 for women.



Activities took several forms. Day trips were organised to a variety of places including Carberry Tower, Balerno, Rosslyn Castle, and Dunfermline. Entertainment was provided to residents in retirement homes owned by other bodies and in hostels. Monthly parties were held in various parts of the city. 400 people attended a party in Leith and it was decided to hold two events every month to spread the numbers. However, it was found that some folk were enjoying the parties so much that they were attending both!

The ELOPWC established a number of clubs where people could meet on a regular basis to chat and play cards, draughts and dominos. The first club was set up in Broughton in 1945. Further clubs were later established in Glenlockhart, Morningside, Canongate, Leith and Riego Street. Church halls were commonly used as venues.

The growing range of activities delivered by the during ELOPWC the decade was underpinned by a significant increase in funding. In 1943 its income was £377. By the end of the decade it had quadrupled to £1500. Private donations accounted for a large part of this income. In 1948 the Lord Provost became the Honorary President of the ELOPWC and a donation of £400 was received the following year from the Lord Provost's Fund.

The ELOPWC was keen to promote awareness of its activities and a newsletter was introduced in 1947 for this purpose. By the end of the decade this transformed into the “Old Folks Own” magazine. It was a thirty two page periodical containing short stories, articles and poetry. 1,000 copies of each edition were distributed.

One measure of the reach of the ELOPWC was the increasing number of Christmas cards which it sent to older people known to it. In 1944, cards were sent to 1,900 people. By 1947, 3,000 cards were dropping through old folks' letter boxes. The motto on cards was a quotation from Sydney Smith:



“ LIFE IS TO BE FORTIFIED BY MANY FRIENDSHIPS ”

1948: A ROYAL YEAR

In March 1948 the Lord Provost passed the ELOPWC a cheque for £100 by way of a donation from HRH Princess Elizabeth. At Christmas, Princess Elizabeth provided a package of rice as a gift to residents in Manor House. This was then a luxury as rice had been rationed since 1942. Also, that year the Duchess of Gloucester (Princess Elizabeth's aunt) visited Manor House.

