

819 AD

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<p><819/c></p>	<p>younger than those they counsel must similarly allow that the feelings of older people can be based on quite different values and assumptions from their own. In recognizing this, the younger counsellor should accept that the peers of an older counsellee might often provide something the counsellor can never offer. It might be that they can discuss and compare life during the Great War, or in the 1920s and 1930s; or they might want to talk about how expectations, duties, responsibilities have changed since their childhood days. Many topics may arise from such conversations, many happy and formative memories can be rekindled. Or they may wish to discuss their present lives with each other, and compare how they cope with the problems and difficulties of being old. New ways of coping can be shared, and solutions to problems can be found based on the values and ideas of their generation, not according to the views and attitudes of the modern world. Self-help, and self-action groups There is considerable evidence that older people are becoming less passive and more assertive in demanding their social and political rights. Groups such as the Grey Panthers in the USA started the process. Similar UK movements, both within and outside the trade union movement, are now working to improve the condition, status and quality of life of pensioners. These organizations usually consist entirely of older people committed to fighting elderly issues directly. They have been established in recognition of the fact that it is pointless to wait for public sympathy and a change of political will to improve the level of basic old age pensions, and the quality of life for older people generally. Only by being more actively involved in identifying issues, organizing action, and thereby helping themselves by fighting for their own rights, can older people hope to improve matters. This kind of group can be thought of as having only a minor role within counselling. But when older people form groups with the intention of becoming involved, or rather re-involved, in the wider social context, they raise their own self-image and the status of older people generally by showing society that they are full citizens who have to be reckoned with. They enable older people to be the givers rather than the receivers of help. It also enables older people to challenge what is done for them, and to make provision more in line with their real needs. These should be major counselling objectives, and encouraging an ageing person to be part of such a group would indeed constitute a major counselling success. The campaigning or action group of committed older people may not be what many people expect from the counselling process, preferring acceptance and contentment rather than possible militancy as</p>
	
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	<p>the outcome of help and support</p>
	<p>. It is, after all, easier for us all if we know where our 'old folk' are and what they are doing. We feel 'responsible' (which really means that they are not or should not be responsible), and believe that they should be taking matters more easily, accepting their situation and peacefully 'enjoying' their last years of life. Age integrated groups There is an increasing social trend towards age segregation. Retirement sections off the 'elderly' from the rest of the population. Special old age concessions such as travel permits, cheap beef and butter, of which we are so often</p>

proud, emphasize that pensioners are to be treated differently. Separate holidays for the young and the old can now be purchased. Special forms of segregated sheltered housing, and ultimately the old person's residential home, ensure that older people are taught to feel that their lives are somehow different and separate from other age-groups. For some older people the establishment of groups for the elderly merely emphasizes age segregation. Not every older person wants to be in the company of peers, or find it difficult to include younger people among their circle of friends. Many older people prefer to be in groups which emphasize the common experiences and interests of young and old alike. Such groups can lead to valuable exchanges of feelings and knowledge between the generations; many focus on particular interests, hobbies and pursuits, and where appropriate older people should be encouraged to join, and even take a lead in their running and organization. The role of the counsellor Whatever the relationship with the individual counsellee, the counsellor can perform many functions in relation to groups of older people. The counsellor can be the 'facilitator' of group formation; or merely provide an opportunity for an individual to enter an already established group. It is assumed here that the counsellor will play an active part in the formation of a group. The primary task in the early stages of group formation is to create a safe environment which provides individuals with secure boundaries in which they are able to function. Introductions are important, making each group member feel welcome. Thereafter, the use of names is an important element in making everyone feel part of the group. The purpose of the group meeting should be made clear from the start so that everyone knows what they are about, and what is expected of them. The agenda of meetings should arise from the interests and concerns of the group. No subject should be forbidden, and each individual should be encouraged to raise issues that are of current concern or interest. Similarly, all feelings should be considered valid, despite