

PRESS RELEASE

OLDER DRIVERS: AFTER THE WHEELS STOP TURNING

CADR, the Centre for Ageing and Dementia Research is currently supporting the “Older Drivers: After the Wheels Stop Turning” campaign, which aims to increase awareness around the lack of support and guidance for older drivers after they have been told they must stop driving or have made their own decision to surrender their licence.

Dr. Amy Murray, Researcher at CADR began discussing the difficulties of informal support for older people who can no longer drive whilst undertaking her PhD between 2014 - 2019. Within the thesis, Dr Murray talks about how a more active generation of older adults has resulted in broader horizons, and an increased level of mobility and travel needs. *“64 per cent of people aged 70 and over held a full UK driving licence in 2017, compared to only 39 per cent in 1997.”* A large body of research has found a positive link between mobility and health status in later life, with those who are able to independently meet their mobility needs reporting increased levels of wellbeing, and overall quality of life. However, what is lacking is information surrounding those who are no longer able to drive. Dr Murray’s study delves into a much-needed discussion around what happens next and how not being able to drive affects not only the older person in question, but those who must become an informal support for those people, and lest we forget those who do not have family and friends, who have no support at all.

On 15th September 2021, coinciding with “Older Drivers Awareness Week”, BBC Radio Wales presenter Jason Mohammed asked its listeners whether age makes a difference to how we behave behind the wheel and should the driving population be re-tested when we reach a certain age. CADR member Carol Beaumont shared her experience of driving, feeling that she is a much safer driver than those around her. Dr Murray also contributed to the conversation talking about the process of giving up driving for older people resulting in a theme of loss, with people experiencing a decrease in their identity. She also stated that being an older driver is key to independence. Although this was a very lively and interesting show, it again opens the discussion around what comes next?

CADR will be launching its first podcast with a mixture of messages from Dr Amy Murray and older people in Wales, who will be talking about their experiences of what happens after older adults stop driving, with advice from professionals and actions which should be taken to ensure that when a licence is turned in, informative guidance is made available for support, not only to those who can no longer drive, but for those who may act as informal support systems.

This is a first step in building the conversation around this subject as well as an opening to the topic of what happens to the people who can no longer drive that don't have the option of informal support.

Dr Amy Murray said "It is imperative that we open up the discussion around older people's experiences of giving up driving, whilst also recognising the role which informal support can play. Those who provide this support are often overlooked, although as highlighted within my doctoral study, informal support providers require recognition and support, as well as those they may assist. Current and previous research has recognised driving cessation as a major later life transition, although there is a lack of understanding surrounding the meaning of this upon the lives of older people, and those around them".

Professor Kieran Walshe, Director of Health and Care Research Wales, said: "Driving and staying mobile play a huge part in a person's mental and physical wellbeing. Dr Murray's podcast will enable essential discussions surrounding the topic of driving in later life, which will help to start build an evidence base for decision making in this area."

Dr Amy Murray has shared her findings through a podcast which can be found at www.cadr.cymru/older-drivers. The podcast features:

Lived experiences from Daphne Gibbs

And Professor Charles Musselwhite, Director of THiNK.

CADR has created a digital booklet which is downloadable from the CADR website (www.cadr.cymru/en/drivers-campaign.htm). The booklet can be used to share the findings of Dr Murray's research, highlighting key information regarding informal support and contact details of national services available. CADR will also be sharing an adaptable version in which councils and voluntary organisations can input their services and contact details, to reach the people directly in their areas.