



Older People Speak Out
Promoting the value of older people

LIFE TIMES



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Five ways to wellbeing: start your journey today

The following steps have been researched and developed by the UK-based *New Economics Foundation*. Let us know what you think about them and how you look after your wellbeing!

Connect

There is strong evidence that indicates that feeling close to, and valued by, other people is a fundamental human need and one that contributes to functioning well in the world.

It's clear that social relationships are critical for promoting wellbeing and for acting as a buffer against mental ill health for people of all ages.

With this in mind, try to do something different today and make a connection.

- Talk to someone or write a letter to a friend
- Ask how someone's weekend was and really listen when they tell you
- Put five minutes aside to find out how someone really is.

Be active

Regular physical activity is associated with lower rates of depression and anxiety across all age groups.

Exercise is essential for slowing age-related cognitive decline and for promoting wellbeing.

But it doesn't need to be particularly intense for you to feel good - slower-paced activities, such as walking, can have the benefit of encouraging social interactions as well providing some level of exercise.

Today, why not get physical?

- Go for a short walk. Each day, go a little further...
- Do some 'easy exercise', like stretching, after you wake up in the morning.

Take notice

Reminding yourself to 'take notice' and broaden your awareness of the world around you. Studies have shown that being aware of what is taking place in the present

directly enhances your wellbeing and savouring 'the moment' can help to reaffirm your life priorities.

Heightened awareness also enhances your self-understanding and allows you to make positive choices based on your own values and motivations.

Take some time to enjoy the moment and the environment around you. Here are a few ideas:

- Have a 'clear the clutter' day
- Change your daily routine or visit somewhere you've not been before
- Have a conversation with someone you don't know well.

Learn

Continued learning through life enhances self-esteem and encourages social interaction and a more active life.

Anecdotal evidence suggests that the opportunity to engage in work or educational activities particularly helps to lift older people out of depression.

The practice of setting goals, which is related to adult learning in particular, has been strongly associated with higher levels of wellbeing. Why not learn something new today? Here are a few more ideas:

- Sign up for a class at your local library
- Read the newspaper or a book
- Join a book club or community group
- Do a crossword or Sudoku
- Research something you've always wondered about.

Give

Participation in social and community life has attracted a lot of attention in the field of wellbeing research.

Individuals who report a greater interest in helping others are more likely to rate themselves as happy.

Research into actions for promoting happiness has shown that committing an act of kindness once a week over a six-week period is associated with an increase in wellbeing.

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Fun for the Frail & Frisky

Sheds, dens, studios, studios

Very few men have not had one of these places, even if it was under the house!

A place to do their own thing, to get out of the house, to keep things. It is their place – just as a woman has her place, be it the writing desk, the garden or elsewhere.

As long as they remain in their homes, men can keep their areas. However, when older people retire to units, retirement villages, or hostels, they often lose this space of their own, and with it an important motivating part of their lives.

To mend things, to ‘do things with their hands’ (using old skills or developing new ones), to be useful, is what older men in rural and metropolitan areas have said they need.

Those who build retirement villages, units for older people, hostels and independent living units, need to respond to this request. In some cases the answer could be the community shed, setting out spaces for woodwork, renovating furniture, welding, leatherwork and artwork etc. Places for individual storage of odds and ends, tools and incomplete projects. Chairs to sit on for a yarn or reflection would also provide a ‘place’ for them.

And let’s not be sexist about this, many older women also enjoy woodwork, furniture restoration and craftwork of all types. The products could be marketed by the group.

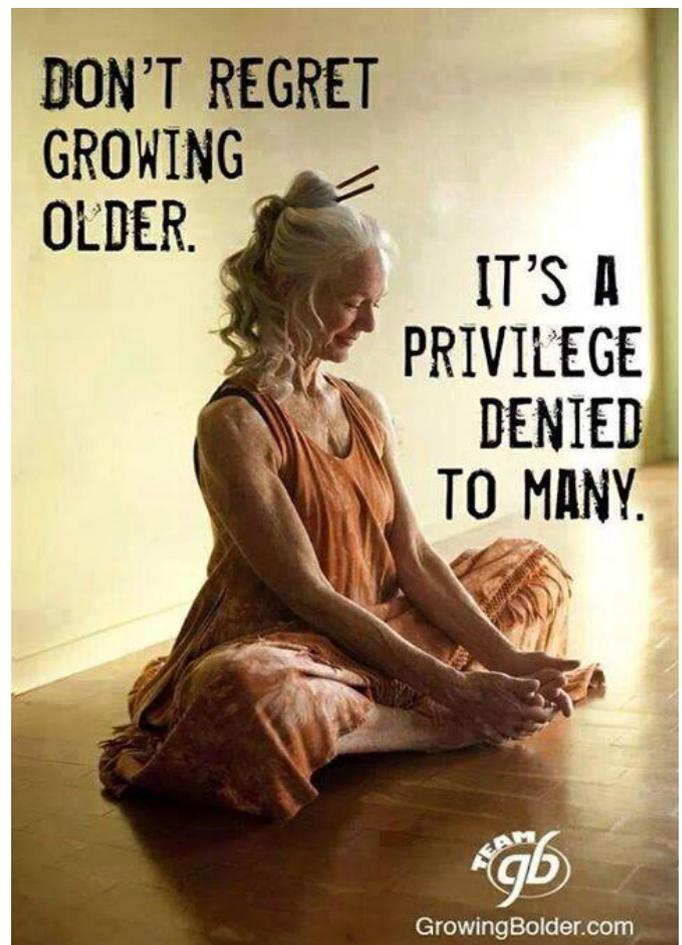


Certainly the more active could teach young people and other older people who could visit the shed, the skills that belonged to their own youth, skills that may otherwise be lost. They could also be encouraged to record in writing or on tape, the secrets of their craft.

Another request from both men and women is for a place that is always there, where one can do hobby and craftwork, when one wants to – not when one is told is convenient. This is something that needs to be taken on board by those who design retirement villages. This is a must for units, nursing homes and hostels, for a home-like environment.

Developers and business and marketing people are often overworked and stressed. They visualise retirement through their own eyes, as a time for sport, rest, travel etc.

Most older people who have tried retirement, however, still want to feel useful, to do some work, to contribute. All play for 15 to 30 years can be boring, believe it or not!



Old Bird's Eye View of the World – in visibly old age

So many women mourn publicly about a cloak of invisibility that swirls down over them after they reach a certain age, that there must be some truth in it for them.

And, certainly, much has been written and said by various people, including me, about the major shortfall in depictions of older people – and especially of older females – in the various forms of the mass media. So much so that it was one of OPSO's earliest and crowning glories to develop a strategy to counter this through the establishment of its highly regarded and ongoing annual Media Awards in order to reinforce the frequency of positive presentations of older people.

So why do I, now, find myself sounding a bit like an invisibility-in-old-age denier? It's an interesting question, and the answer lies in two spheres, the personal and the public.

At the personal level, I have come to realise, on reflection, that invisibility can occur at any age, and is due to many factors, and may – also – be relative. Taking each of these in turn, looking back on my life, there have certainly been times throughout my life when I have been painfully invisible. A standout was at my first high school dance, as a slightly chubby 13-year-old wallflower in my new blue satin dress, with all hopes of being crushed to some manly young chest à la Georgette Heyer cruelly dashed.

But, fast-forward a few years, to university, and the delicious memory of being surrounded by a coterie of gallants vying for my attention. High grade visibility then. And, over my past 73 years, there have continued to be waves of visibility and of invisibility, with the former being at times a darned nuisance. As a keen amateur photographer of the human condition, for example, I would often have preferred to be invisible when I clearly haven't been, even in my most advanced years.

Then again, not so long ago and wearing a cheerful floral skirt and blue top while shopping, came the delightful invasion of my personal space by a stranger who felt she had to stop me to tell me how much I had brightened her day, seeing me in my spring outfit. The feeling I got from that has resulted in me passing it on

in my turn, occasionally, when moved by some other stranger's appearance, whatever their age. Or sex.

Among the things that I have learned, in terms of the sorts of factors that are linked to one's invisibility, and visibility, are that – while what one wears can certainly make an impact – what also makes a major difference is how one carries oneself, and what one does. For example, I realised by studying people in general that if you walk with your head held high, looking people in the eye, and with a cheerful expression, people respond to that. They do see you. But if you walk with slumped shoulders and downcast eyes, at whatever age, it is easy to get overlooked.



And that so does apply in shops, which can be a *bête noir* for many older people who feel ignored by the sales assistants. I have to say that I do not get ignored, as I do now hold my head high and my place firmly if I'm in a queue, and otherwise go looking for sales personnel (and right there is a true study in invisibility, in many stores) rather than waiting around until one might find me. Of course, there are those times when I crave invisibility in dress shops, so I can have a quiet schmooze, and too often have to beat off helpful staff who insist on seeing me.

But perhaps the most significant issue regarding invisibility is relativity, or the questions of whom you would like to be visible to, versus whom you are

actually visible to.

For example, how you look, at any age, will be an issue. If you are the most attractive person around, you will be the most visible. If you're not, and you're not famous or remarkable in some other way, you won't be. Then, there is your age and stage: if you are young, you'll most likely be seen clearly by other young people, but less so – as an individual – by an old person to whom all young people can look pretty much alike. And, of course, the converse is also true, and that – most likely – is what hurts women on the cusp of ageing and still feeling young, in a culture that is so skewed to value youth.

Specifically to counter the whole invisibility-as-an-older-person grief, Wendy Harmer wrote one of her enjoyable essays on the subject of how much fun it

was to find herself amongst a group of women of her age in a chemist shop, comparing notes on similar experiences. A spontaneous party for older women who all saw each other very clearly. And, on the other hand, journalist Jenna Price wrote of the relief of being too old to be harassed by young wolf whistlers on the street.

It's always been a bit of a horses for courses thing. If we think about it in terms of our own experiences, visibility is not an all or nothing condition. And, above all, it all comes together when it comes to your visibility to your family and your friends as opposed to your invisibility to some strangers whom you may no longer feel seen by.

How can we overlook the look of love from a partner, or the joy on a grandchild's face greeting you when you get off a plane or out of a car? And the pleasure of being welcomed by friends as you come to meet them for a lunch date? And the caring light turned towards you, in the eyes of siblings who have known you and who you are for ever?

Why are such heady moments of visibility discounted because not everybody you see sees you?

For many of us, the reason is that those are such normal or routine times of visibility that we just take them for granted. But those of us who have no one like that are suffering a true invisibility that is grievous. And many of the homeless who move amongst us like ghosts may well be in that position.

Going beyond the personal to the public, we come to the book that I have been writing on ageing, and which expands on OPSO's media awards approach of taking a close look at the presence of older people in our mass media, and – specifically – of if, how much, where and how they are featured. And, despite the passionate decrying of the lack of older role models in the media in 2012 by that stunning role model Rachel Ward, it does look as though the news is not all bad in that department either.

As a 55-year-old, she was specifically upset about the lack of “hopeful examples of women peaking in their 50s and 60s... I want myriad examples, and countless recycled images of Meryl and Madge won't do it.”*

Well, apart from thinking that she's set rather narrow age limits for her hopeful examples, I do wonder if she's looking in all the right places. Or whether she is actually missing some of the sterling examples of women who are being featured in the media of our times, perhaps because they too are so much a part of our taken-for-granted and broadening world view that we don't think of them in terms of their age?

Since she restricted her cri de coeur to the dearth of females (there being, she noted, a plethora of “visible representations” of males of a certain age), what I'm going to do here could be fun for anyone to have a go at: going beyond Meryl and Madge to list some of the women whom I've come across in the various forms of mass media that I take in.

On the political scene (whether we love or loathe them), there are women like Angela Merkel, Hilary

Clinton, Aung San Suu Kyi, Julie Bishop, Bronwyn Bishop, Christine Lagarde and – of course – our apolitical and erstwhile ruler, the Queen.

On screen and stage we have luminaries such as Robin Nevin, Noni Hazlehurst, Lorraine Bayley, Ita Buttrose, Rebecca Gibney, Georgie Parker, Geraldine Doogue, Caroline Jones, Lee Lin Chin, Jenny Brockie, a whole phalanx of British actors in the *Marigold Hotel* series, Jane Fonda, Susan Sarandon, Betty White, Shirley MacLaine, Diane Keaton and the inimitable Helen Mirren.

And then there are other achievers: writers, thinkers, doers. They include Kate Grenville, Liz Byrski, Mem Fox, Kate Llewellyn, Libby Hathorn, Margaret Atwood; and Wendy Harmer, Helen Garner and Anne Summer, who continue to challenge us with provocative ideas. The remarkable Dr Catherine Hamlin. And a lovely example to end up with: Ronni Kahn, who popped up in *The Sydney Morning Herald's Good Food* of 10 March. Now strikingly white-haired at 63, she is continuing to work wonders with OzHarvest, the organisation that she founded 10 years ago, and which “collects surplus food from all kinds of suppliers and delivers it free of charge to more than 500 charities in cities Australia-wide.” As a job lot, just those women whom I've mentioned range in age from 51 into the 90s. And while I don't want to look backwards, I do have three personal heroes who died with their boots on not so long ago: Margaret Olley, Nora Ephron and Joan Rivers. You couldn't get three more different people, but each of them had a bright public presence while doing things their own way, right to the end.

Despite this cornucopia of women,
and OPSO's successes to date in
turning the tide, I by no means
totally deny that there is still
inequity as far as visibility of older
women in the media goes.

And yes, also, older people may well be more likely to be overlooked in their everyday activities. So, more needs to be done. But it is good to see that there are older women who are being seen, heard and read. And to round up this issue, older women now have fortnightly issues of a new magazine in Australia. It's called *Yours*, and according to its website, it “is positioned for women over 50 in Australia [and] aims to reflect the readers' lives and what's important to them.” And it does this pretty well, in my book. My personal favourite in it? A regular 2-page feature showing representatives of their target group in striking and/or interesting and/or attractive outfits in a particular area or suburb. It's good to see so many older women standing out on our streets.

*Rachel Ward, ‘I am strong. I am invisible.’ *The Sun-Herald*, 25 March, 2012, p. 117



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Journalists are also invited to enter in
the following categories:

Best coverage of Aged Care

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All media (rural, regional & community) –
\$1000 + trophy

Best photo spread, photo series, body of work or gallery of images that depicts older Australians in a positive manner

All media (metropolitan) – \$500 + trophy

All media (rural, regional & community) –
\$500 + trophy

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All media (rural, regional & community) –
\$500 + trophy

Most effective news story on an issue relative to older Australians

All media (metropolitan) – \$500 + trophy

All media (rural, regional & community) –
\$500 + trophy

Best feature story illustrating positive ageing

All media (metropolitan) – \$500 + trophy

All media (rural, regional & community) –
\$500 + trophy

Best coverage of Cultural Diversity

All media (metropolitan) – \$500 + trophy

All media (rural, regional & community) –
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