

Healthy Ageing in the 21st Century

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Everybody has hidden talents

What are yours?

(If you think you don't have any, look again. You are undervaluing yourself)

Ageing in the 21st century



Life expectancy for a 65 year old today is approximately 85. This means that half will live beyond 85.

By 2055, in roughly 40 years, life expectancy is likely to be 95.

Two questions: how will we fill these years and who will support us?

Once we reach 65, or retire

- Half of us will have to plan for at least 20 years of life ahead, for some of us it will be 40 years.
- Are we really ready to be written off, are we past our 'use by' date?
- Have we nothing else to offer the world?
- Is this all we are capable of achieving?
- Does all the knowledge, experience and wisdom we have acquired over the years mean nothing?
- Does the world really have no use for all of this, or for us?
- Is our only choice to fill in time for all the decades we have ahead?
- What about all that hidden talent/bright ideas we have tucked away inside us, relevant to our work and/or to the world around us?

What bright ideas?



Ageing

- Except in a few cases where mental ill-health intervenes, the main changes that occur to us beyond 65 will be physical.
- Our bodies tend to wear out and often need replacement parts, such as glasses and hearing aids. Later we could include walking sticks, walking frames, replacement hips and knees. Using these can put us back (almost) to where we were before we started ageing, although perhaps a bit slower, but then what's the rush?
- If we keep our bodies fit by exercising, and keep our brains fit by staying involved, and contributing to the world around us, ageing is not the problem it is painted to be.
- Ageing is not really a problem, it's just that the community likes to make it one.

The community attitude towards ageing

- This is the real problem.
- Society regards us older people as past it, a waste of space, fools, a burden on the economy, intolerant, ugly, forgetful etc.
- The reality is that we are very experienced, very knowledgeable and very wise. We carry a lot of history because we have lived through it.
- We tend to retire for three reasons
 1. We are becoming too physically frail for fulltime work.
 2. Our employer does not allow part time employment.
 3. We feel undervalued and/or are bored at work.

What the community's attitude should be!

- In the workplace older people should be regarded as a valuable resource.
- Updating knowledge through training courses should be available to all employees, including older ones.
- Older employees should be valued as they have a lot to offer, including work place loyalty. They are less likely to look for work elsewhere.
- Employers should make partial retirement an acceptable option. It costs a lot to train a new staff member.
- In more efficient workplaces, management values all its staff. This leads to reduction in sick days and reduced staff turnover.
- All employees, regardless of age, should be treated as a valuable part of the company's assets.

Looking to the future

- We need to look on older people as a resource, not a burden.
- We need to have their talents recognised and be enabled to fulfil them.
- This involves providing opportunities, including giving older people a belief in themselves, not the negative ageing we currently have.
- As a nation we worry about how we can support the increasing ageing population but at the same time we create an atmosphere of dependency.
- If we encourage older people to continue to contribute all their skills and knowledge in whatever way they feel comfortable, it solves many of our problems.
- They then feel wanted, useful and loved and importantly society gains from the contribution which they make.

Heaven on earth!

- Not literally, but we would have a society in which we older people feel that we are not a burden but an important part of that society and our community.
- It is likely to have health benefits. Physical problems among older people could be likely to disappear or be overcome if we feel valued.
- If we are using our brains more, it is likely that this will improve our mental health. It may help to reduce the rate of dementia or slow it down.
- We older people are likely to make a valuable contribution to society through our knowledge, experience and wisdom if given the opportunity to do so.
- As the number of older people grows these benefits would escalate.

What we need to do as a community

- We need to start with a shared view of where we want to go.
- It needs people to look at the retirement years as a time of fulfilment, not just decades to be filled in.
- We need to persuade older people that they still have a lot to offer and to use their skills, knowledge and talents to contribute to society in any way they want, either paid employment or voluntary work.
- It needs the community to acknowledge that older people have skills, knowledge and talents that are valuable to the community.
- It will result in an improved economy, and better physical and mental health for older people.
- Instead of just filling in time for decades, older people will feel wanted and important, contributing to society in a way they want and can.

Its our world, its our choice, its our lives!

One day you too will be 'old'

for a very long time!

(A time to implement your hidden talents and bright ideas!)