

Creative Aging Across Generations



Pat Spadafora MSW



Changing the way we view aging

The Art of Ageing Forum
Niagara College, Welland, Ontario
June 27th, 2019



Questions to guide us



- What are my own attitudes and beliefs about aging and their impact on how I view the world?
- Why is it important and timely to reframe the conversation about aging?
- What is creative aging and can a creative aging approach disrupt our thinking about age?
- How might intergenerational/multigenerational programming fit into this model?
- Can we take inspiration from intergenerational programs around the world and apply that inspiration in a Canadian context?



Reflections – Looking inward

- *How might you feel if someone told you how young you look for your age? How old do you feel inside?*
- *Do you hear remarks made about older people, such as saying how well they look despite their age?*
- *Have you ever felt awkward about revealing your age?*
- *Have you looked at an older person and thought ‘You’re too old to do that or to wear that’? How old is too old? Who decides?*
- *Do you use simple words, talk slower or louder to someone because of their age?*
- *Have you ever hidden or considered hiding your age when applying for a job?*

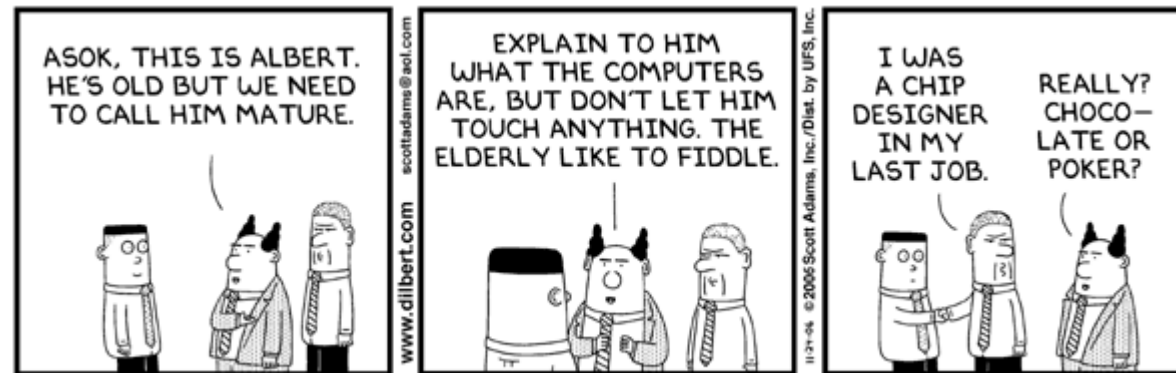
At what age does one become old?



Images and words

There are no neutral images or language. All images and language have meaning.

'You can't teach an old dog new tricks'



© Scott Adams, Inc./Dist. by UFS, Inc.

What does the picture on this poster say to you?


What is the impact of the words in the title?

Lightening the Load


The Crisis Centre's Senior Volunteer Team presents a Wellness Workshop for Seniors.

Come join us!

- Gain tools to support our wellness.
- Explore community resources.
- Connect with others.



Date: Tuesday, October
Time: 11:10am - 12:10p
Location: Roundhouse Community Centre
To register for this FREE session: Online, In-person at the Front Desk or by phone: 604-713-1800

**Crisis Centre™**

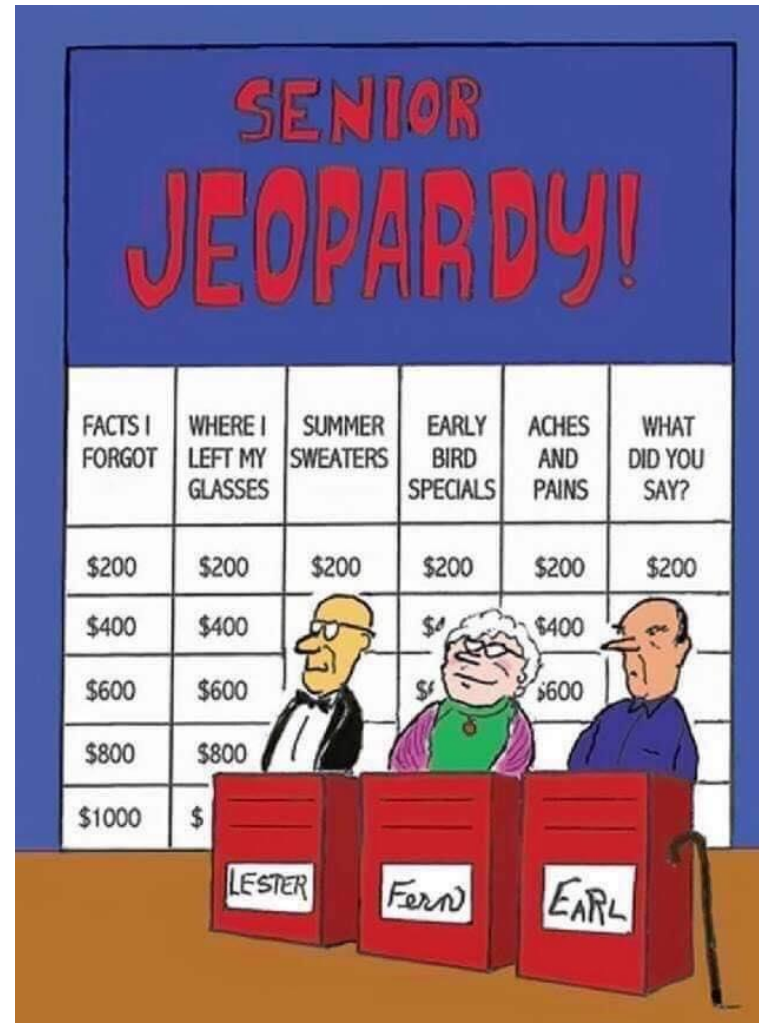
Refreshments will be provided

What is the message?





More images and words





Addressing ageism

We are all part of the solution!

Dr. John Beard, Former Director, Ageing and Life Course
World Health Organization, Geneva, Switzerland

“Nothing is possible unless we address ageism. It is pernicious and pervasive. It frames the way we ask questions and the way we conduct research”

Ageism is the most socially accepted form of prejudice in contemporary society and is ingrained in the mindset of many people.



Why reframe the conversation about aging?

Because.....

- ✓ Society has changed. We live in an era of longevity - realities about aging have changed but, in general, attitudes and beliefs have not kept pace - many people can expect to live up to an extra 30 years post traditional retirement age
- ✓ Ageism is systemic and pervasive in, for example, health care, education and government services as well as in the not-for-profit and corporate sectors
- ✓ Even benevolent ageism disempowers older people (e.g. sweet old man, old lady). *It's important for older adults to understand the subtle ways in which this kind of talk can constrain their opportunities and lower their self esteem and confidence.*
- ✓ Growing body of research that demonstrates quantifiable negative health effects of ageism (e.g. on cardiovascular health)



Speaking of longevity.....

A new chapter or, life stage, is evolving between middle age and old age – a development not unlike the creation of adolescence a century ago. Some describe this emerging period as **‘a season in search of a purpose’** (Mark Freedman, ‘How To Live Forever: The Enduring Power Of Connecting The Generations’, 2018)

A colleague from South Africa refers to older age as a **‘legacy season’**

Every fifty-year old ought to receive a two-sentence letter to help set the stage for his or her next chapter. This letter should read ‘You may live another fifty years’.

Dr. Bill Thomas
Geriatrician
Founder of The Eden Alternative



Field of creative aging – paradigm shift

"Of all of the self-fulfilling prophecies in our culture, the assumption that aging means decline and poor health is probably the deadliest."

Marilyn Ferguson (author, Age of Aquarius)

Historically, we have “medicalized” aging

- older people as “patients” requiring services
- the health professional as “expert”
- society encouraged to view aging as pathological, a period of loss and decline
- older adults, especially women, as invisible

*Creative aging recognizes the potential for
life-long growth and development*

*‘Don’t program
yourself to break
down as you age
with thoughts that
decline is
inevitable’
.....Wayne Dyer*



One definition of creative aging

If you search for definitions of creative aging, the arts focus of this definition is common to most of the definitions you will come across.

But.....creative aging has meaning and is relevant beyond the creative and performing arts



What is Creative Aging?

"Creative Aging is the practice of engaging older adults in **participatory, professionally run** arts programs with a focus on **social engagement** and **skills mastery**. This movement is about providing opportunity for meaningful creative expression through visual, literary and performing arts workshops; it **is not about making macaroni necklaces.**"

- CAT4PL creativeagingtoolkit.org



Creative aging – a broader definition

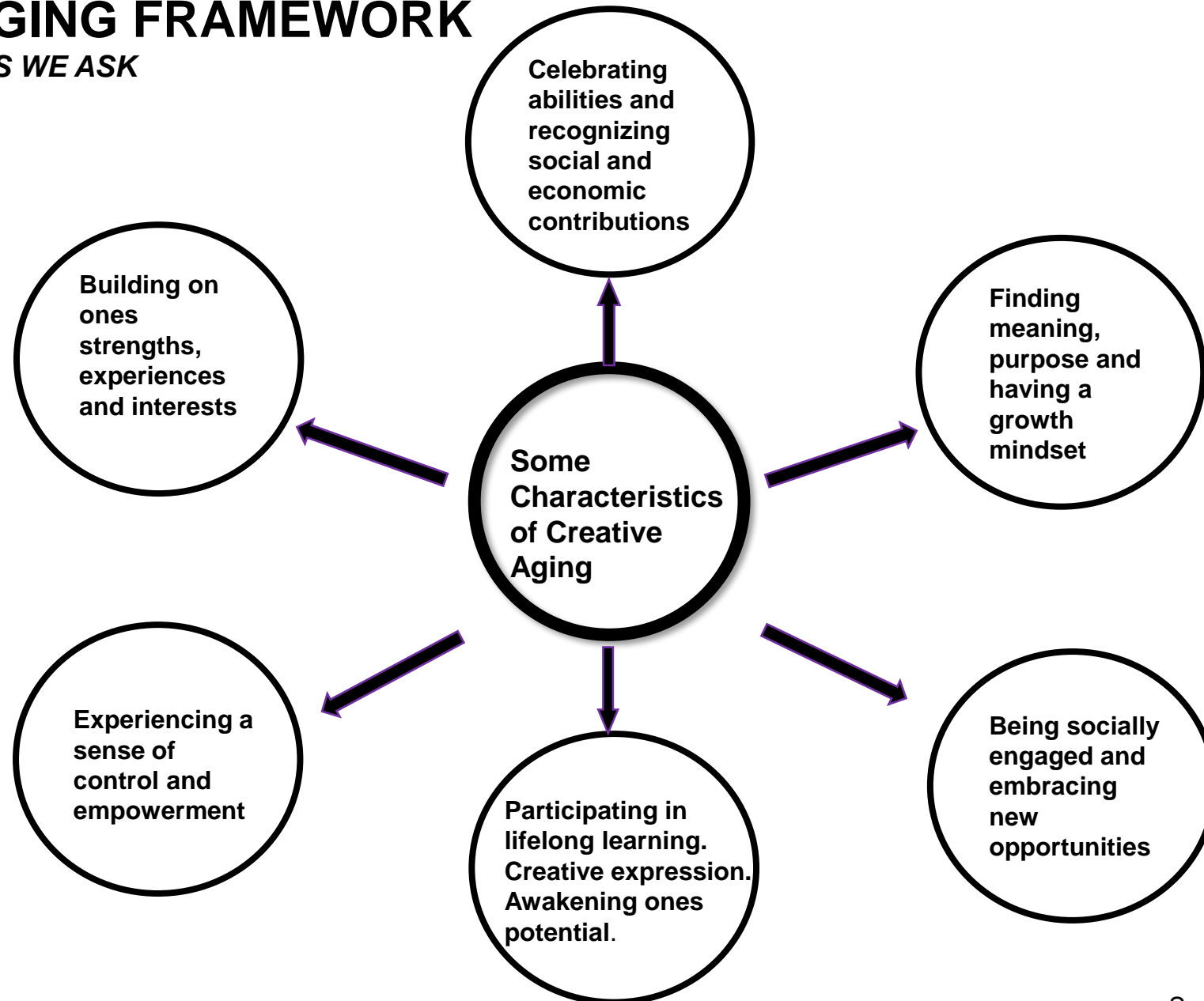
“Creative aging is about possibilities, freeing ourselves of limiting beliefs about aging and embracing the reality that individuals continue to grow, learn and contribute to their communities throughout the life journey”



Pat Spadafora 2012

A CREATIVE AGING FRAMEWORK

SHAPES THE QUESTIONS WE ASK



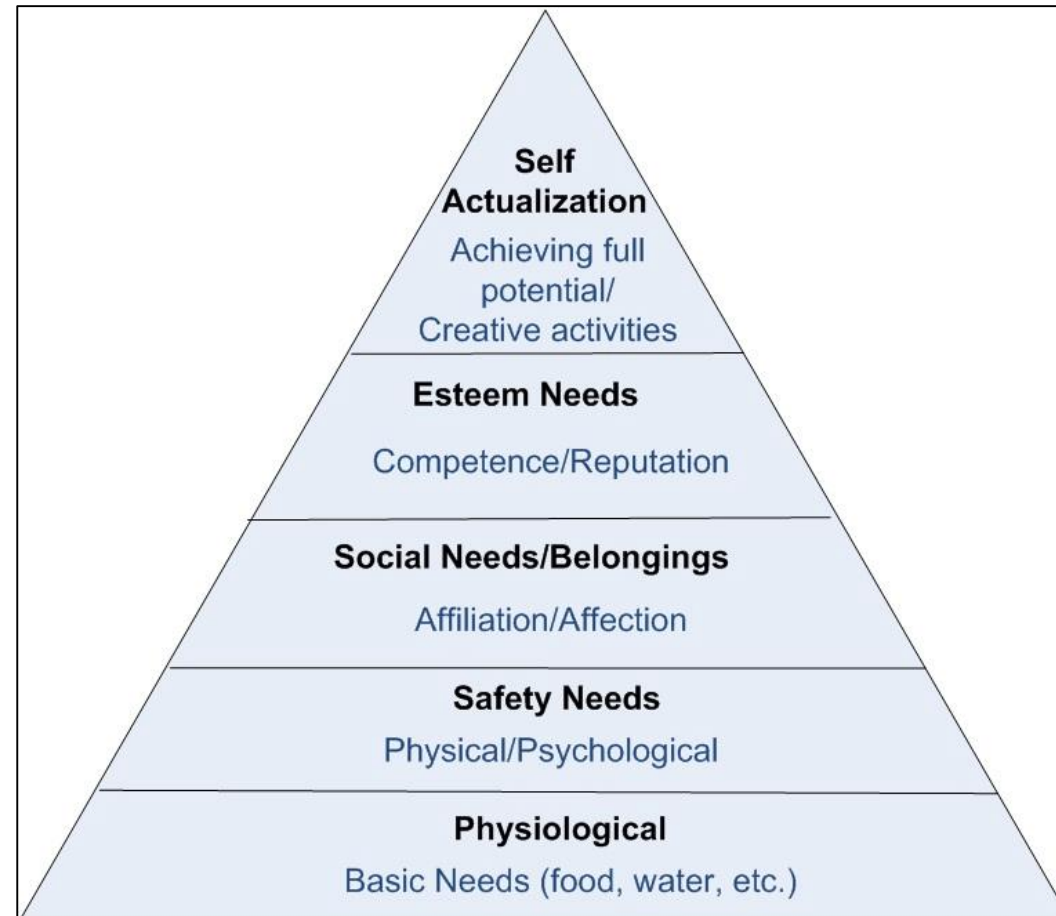


Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

A note of caution –

It is important to note that, when we work from a creative aging framework, there may be individuals who are struggling with physiological and/or safety needs. As a result, they may not see the relevance of some aspects of creative aging for them.

** Maslow lived until 1970 and the pyramid doesn't represent his final thoughts on the matter. In his later years, Maslow added a new apex to the top of the pyramid: **self-transcendence – a sense of meaning and purpose***





From age segregation to age integration

Connecting generations  Reducing ageism



What brings these people together?



Benefits of connecting generations

- Inter/multi generational programs have the potential to create connections on multiple levels – emotional, spiritual, social – they bring people together because of shared interests and age becomes either irrelevant or secondary
- Getting to know and interact with ‘real, live older people’ helps children to look beyond ageist stereotypes. They become more comfortable with aging.
- Active and engaged older adults who have close intergenerational connections consistently report much less depression, better physical health, and higher degrees of life satisfaction.
- Young and old can fulfill the role of student and teacher for each other – notion of reciprocity and mentorship



Intergenerational music therapy program Schlegel Village of Riverside Glen, Guelph, ON



Ontario
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Foundation



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An agency of the Government of Ontario
Un organisme du gouvernement de l'Ontario

- Project led by Kate Dupuis, Ph.D., C. Psych., Schlegel Innovation Leader in Arts and Aging, Centre for Elder Research, Sheridan College, Oakville, ON
- Participating in arts-based programming and, specifically music, can benefit older adults by improving mood, enhancing creative abilities and increasing self-esteem and overall quality of life
- Music is a universal language that benefits individuals of all ages and provides a natural way to bring generations together



Intergenerational music therapy program Village of Riverside Glen, Guelph, ON



- In this project, 10 children under the age of 4 (10 months to 3.5 years) were invited to participate in music making with an accompanying adult
- 9 adults attended 12 weekly music therapy sessions facilitated by a trained music therapist
- The therapist led the participants in song, integrating instruments and activities such as bubble blowing and dancing with a parachute
- Songs were chosen to appeal to both the children (e.g. nursery rhymes) and the older adults (e.g. songs from the 1940s and 1950s)



Intergenerational music therapy program Village of Riverside Glen, Guelph, ON



Preliminary results indicate that:

- Residents were engaged in the sessions
 - Interacted with the children (e.g. playing peek-a-boo)
 - Interacted with the accompanying adults and the music therapist
- The accompanying adults participated in singing and the use of instruments
- Resident to resident interactions were also observed, reinforcing existing relationships and helping to create new ones in the LTC home





Good Gym – Tower Hamlets London, United Kingdom



Exercising with a purpose

Nurturing intergenerational friendships

- Launched in 2009, the idea was to start a running club that also helps the community
- 5000 members combine work for community organizations and visits to isolated older adults with their runs
- Older adults become their coaches, supporting and encouraging them to keep running in exchange for a friendly weekly visit



Friendships are the longevity 'vaccine'!



Gen2Gen Champions USA



Gen2Gen is Encore's campaign to mobilize 1 million adults 50+ to stand up for — and with — young people today.

“By bringing the generations together, we’re working to realize the potential of longer lives, the potential of every child, and the power of older and younger generations working side by side for change”



Weaving Words of Wisdom Calgary, Alberta



- Fish Creek (a United Active Living home) resident Gordon Schnell. Gordon, along with his wife Jeanne were partnered with two students from St. Mary's University in a year-long life writing project called Intergenerational Life Writing.
- About a dozen residents were paired with students, who, together, wrote some of the residents' most memorable experiences.
- A student painted artworks that reflected some of the stories and another student took portrait photos of the residents.



*Gordon and Jeanne Schnell with painter
Jenna Leong*

**Creative expression, finding meaning,
lifelong learning + intergenerational!**



St, Joseph's Home for the Aged and Hospice, Singapore



- Serves about 400 people but they are not all older
- Includes a childcare centre for 50 children, age 2 months - 6 years
- At the centre of their courtyard is the nation's first intergenerational playground, designed to leverage proximity and encourage natural interaction between old and young

Sister Geraldine's vision is to create an environment that encompasses the full 'circle of life; with children at its core.



To wrap up.....

Based on what I have shared today, I see the opportunity before us as three-fold:

- For each of us to promote more positive images of aging – to be role models ourselves
- To change the conversation on aging and consider creative aging as a lens through which to frame the conversation – for all ages
- To create a culture that values interdependence and reciprocity as generations learn from each other

***“Connections
between
generations are
essential for the
mental health and
stability of a
nation.”***

Margaret Mead

#multigenmatters #creativeagingmatters

Thank you!

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