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Working with local authorities

In May and June, I have greatly appreciated the opportunity to meet with groups of people addressing questions of what the Positive Ageing Strategy means in local government, and for different communities and regions. In May, three Councils from “The Top of the South” – Nelson, Tasman and Marlborough – held a seminar to discuss these questions, then in June, the Christchurch City Council ran an “Age Quake Forum”, attended by about 150 people.

At the Christchurch meeting, Andrew Dickerson, Chief Executive of Age Concern Canterbury, spoke in terms of looking ahead to 2050 – and in particular, the need to take a long term vision.

By 2050, the population over 85 years of age will have grown by 600% and I will have lived through the most dramatic demographic change our country has ever seen. Many commentators are predicting some sort of ageing crisis - that our current standard of living and our social services will not be sustainable in to the future. I disagree with that view.

Firstly, it assumes that older people are nothing more than the passive recipients of welfare and have very little to contribute to our society. In fact they play many important roles in our community:

- as grandparents
- as mentors to the young
- as employees
- as taxpayers
- as consumers
- as volunteers
- and as life-long members in a diverse range of organisations.

I was speaking to an older man recently and he was telling me about his early life growing up in Christchurch. I asked him if he had lived his whole life in Christchurch and his reply was ‘NOT YET !!!’ I guess what he was trying to tell me is that he still has a lot to contribute and a lot of living to do. Shouldn’t we be celebrating that fact that people are living longer? Isn’t that a sign of human progress ?

There are an increasing number of older people participating in the workplace. We no longer have the ridiculous and discriminatory practice of compulsory retirement. We already have a situation where 2/5th of men and 1/5th of women remain in the workplace between 65 and 70 years of age. In the UK they are actively encouraging people to remain

in the workforce longer with very radical changes to their pension system. If someone postpones taking up their pension, and remains in the workforce, they can become eligible for a very large, tax free, lump sum at a later time. Austria has tax incentives for employers to employ older workers. And Italy has reduced the tax contributions that older workers have to make.

This enormous increase in the older population is not going to happen overnight. When we wake up tomorrow morning there won't be 600% more people over 85 years of age. We do still have time to plan for this change. But we need to start planning now.

The planning cycles of agencies like the City Council and District Health Board have typically been for 5 - 10 years. It's important that we do this planning but it is even more important that we take a longer term view and do some longer term visioning of what our community might look like in say 2050.

In the case of the City Council this will affect every aspect of the Council's work including housing, transport, recreation and civil defence. When we talk about 'housing' and 'transport' in the context of older people we are really talking about INDEPENDENCE. We need to look at a diverse range of options here.

A fortnight ago in Christchurch we hosted the first Conference on Fuel Poverty to have been held in this country. When we talk about 'Fuel Poverty' we mean a household that needs to spend more than 10% of its income to maintain a home at a safe level of warmth.

Early research has established that:

- 46% of households in Dunedin
- 40% in Christchurch
- 24% in Wellington and
- 14% in Auckland

are living in Fuel Poverty.

The reasons for this relate to the:

- poor standard of much of our housing
- inadequate insulation
- inefficient heating
- inability of our most vulnerable to afford the electricity to heat their homes.

Countries with much colder climates than ours do not have the increase in winter deaths and hospital admissions that we do. These include Canada, Norway, Sweden and the other Scandinavian countries. In Japan the Government is aiming to have 40% of its housing stock suitable for frail older people by 2015 - half will be newly built and half will involve adapting existing housing. In Denmark the Government has put a freeze on the development of any new rest homes and are spending massive amounts of money on new community housing for older people. 24 hour community based care is a reality in Denmark. In Ireland there is a growing interest in older people flatting together and employing a caregiver between them rather than go in to residential care.

The World Health Organisation has published Guidelines for Age Friendly Cities. Cities like Vancouver are embracing those Guidelines and are using them to work towards accreditation as an age friendly city. I believe they may be a useful tool for Christchurch to provide a better environment for our growing older population.

The decisions that are made in our public bodies need to take account of our ageing population. We already know that older people have higher rates of participation in elections than any other age group. I predict that we will see many more older people participating in the democratic process - not just as voters but also as candidates. In the United States Presidential election while commentators and journalists have focused on whether we would have the first woman or the first African American as the next President we may actually end up with the oldest President ever to have been elected. No doubt the glass ceiling and prejudices John McCain encountered were just as great as those experienced by Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama.

Above everything else I think we need to value the contribution of older people - both the past contribution that helped get us where we are now - and the future contribution they have to make. **Andrew then concluded his address by reminding us of two classical quotations ----**

‘Remember there is wisdom in old age - and a long life brings understanding’. (Job 12:12)

‘I enjoy talking with very old people. They have gone before us on a road that we too may have to travel. We do well to learn from them what it is like’. (420 BC Socrates)

2007 Visitor to NZiRA: November 17-21, 2008

NEW ZEALAND INSTITUTE FOR RESEARCH ON AGEING

School of Government, Victoria University of Wellington

Dr Hilary Arksey

The New Zealand Institute for Research on Ageing is pleased to announce a visit from Dr Hilary Arksey, Senior Research Fellow from the Social Policy Research Unit, University of York, UK for the week of November 17-21, 2008. Her strong research interest is in policy and practice in the linked fields of informal care and employment opportunities for carers. This interest is shared by NZiRA in light of our published work “Combining Work and Eldercare”, and of significant New Zealand developments, supporting “work-life balance” in an ageing society. The release of the Carers Strategy in April, and the introduction of the Flexible Working Hours legislation in July 2008 are indicative of growing New Zealand interest in research, policy and practice in the “work-care interface”.

In order to plan her programme in more detail, (which will include a public lecture, and working meetings about her areas of research interest), we are currently seeking expressions of interest and support from a range of organisations. Enquiries can be made to the Director of NZiRA, Dr Sally Keeling (sally.keeling@vuw.ac.nz).

Rural Ageing: A good place to grow old?

NEW BOOK: Edited by Prof Norah Keating (who was the 2003 NZiRA TOWER Fellow), from the University of Alberta, Edmonton, Canada. During that visit, Professor Keating offered interesting comparative insights about the experiences of ageing in rural Canada and New Zealand, and the book extends this area of research, along with considering policy and practical implications. Contributors to the book include a mix of Canadian and UK researchers, many of whom examine the conflicting stereotypes of rural communities as either idyllic and supportive, or isolated and bereft of services. The book is published The Policy Press, Bristol, UK, as part of their Ageing and the Lifecourse Series – and is a welcome addition to the NZiRA library.

Older Workers – 2008 Report from Judith Davey, Institute for Policy Studies Workforce Ageing – An issue for employers

New Zealand's workforce is ageing. At the time of the 2001 Census, 48% of the total labour force was aged 40 plus, and this had risen to 52% by 2006. The proportions aged 55 plus grew from 14% to 18% over the 2001-2006 period. By 2012, the median age of the labour force is projected to reach 42. Skills and labour shortages are emerging, with serious economic implications if measures are not taken to improve labour force participation rates and to increase productivity. Projections by Treasury indicate that there will be a slowing in labour force growth in the coming decades, due to population ageing and declining birth rates. The growth rate is expected to become negative by the 2020s, as large numbers of baby boomers exit the workforce.

In a paper for the Employment of Older Workers Summit in September 2006, Judy McGregor, Human Rights Commissioner, cited figures to show that significant increases in participation rates for workers aged 55 plus will be required to maintain the size of the labour force, even without an allowance for growth. The Household Labour Force Survey (HLFS) shows that there has been an upturn in participation rates for men and women aged 60 to 64 and 65 plus, since the 1990s. According to HFLS figures for December 2006, 73.1% of men and 50.6% of women aged 60 to 64 were in the labour force. The corresponding percentages for people aged 65 plus were 19.5% and 9.4%.

A recent Department of Labour report estimates that older people represented half of labour force growth in New Zealand over the period 1991 to 2005. The number of people in the labour force aged 50 plus more than doubled from 267,000 in June 1991 to 547,000 in June 2005. In addition to overall change in the age structure of the population, policy adjustments – increasing the age of eligibility for New Zealand Superannuation and the prohibition of compulsory retirement under the Human Rights Act, 1993 - contributed to this change. Further details on these options and examples of overseas initiatives are available in [Maximising the Potential of Older Workers](#) (available on the NZiRA website).

This research aims to explore the attitudes of employers to ageing workforce issues and to find out what actions and adjustments are already being made to meet the challenges. It is a joint project by the Institute for Policy Studies at Victoria University of Wellington and the New Zealand Institute of Management (NZIM). Stage 1 was a postal survey of NZIM members, conducted in mid-2007. Stage 2 consisted of 20 face-to-face interviews with respondents from Stage 1. The Stage 1 and 2 Report is available as a Working paper on the IPS website.

<http://ips.ac.nz/publications/publications/show/222> Published in April 2008

Selwyn Centre for Aging and Spirituality (SCAS)

A Centre for education, research and advocacy on issues related to ageing and spirituality has been established in Auckland, under the auspices of the Selwyn Foundation Group. Further to these strands of work, the Selwyn Centre will be hosting an international conference in September 2009

“Aging and Spirituality: Gender, Culture and Care”

Working Group to enhance research on population ageing

The Ministry of Social Development has convened a Working Group to develop solutions to enhance research on population ageing by firstly identifying:

- the existing resources available for research on ageing
- ways to make better use of these resources
- the longer term direction for research into ageing issues, including possible future research priorities, and options for moving this forward.

Research on population ageing includes research on those who are 65 years and over and the preceding generational cohorts. It includes broader research on population dynamics, its implications for ethnic, cultural, regional, and life-course diversity, and its impact on social policy, services and New Zealand's economy.

The Working Group members come from academic and research institutions, and the non-government sector and government sector, reflecting the diversity of those with an interest and knowledge in population ageing.

Members of the working group can be contacted directly with your views surrounding solutions to enhance the research on population ageing.

Working group members are:

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To register your interest in the activities of the Working Group contact Virginia.Wilton001@msd.govt.nz