

londonage

Age UK London Magazine Autumn 2017



Shaping London's Future

How can we create an age friendly capital?

PAGE 4
Delivering an
Age Friendly
Borough

PAGE 7
Older Renters
are "Living in
Fear"

PAGE 10
Getting
Pensive About
Pensions

PAGE 13
Age Friendly
Policies for
London?

Comment

Paul Goulden
CEO
Age UK London



We're looking to the future with this edition of London Age, as we look into ways to make London as age friendly as possible!

We start in Southwark, as Councillor Richard Livingstone outlines the council's plans for an age friendly borough.

Meanwhile, October saw Age UK London complete our investigation into the experiences of older private renters. George Harvey takes us through the key findings of the research.

We're also very pleased to hear from Daniela Silcock of the Pensions Policy Institute, who discusses the ways in which ageist ideas can even impact upon our pension contributions.

We then look to the future, as Gordon Deuchars talks through the Mayor's vision for London by outlining a series of draft proposals for changes needed across the capital.

Yet there's still time for some nostalgia, as Danny Elliott reflects on his time working at Age UK London as well as tackling the topic of ageism in film.

I hope this edition of London Age will outline some of the challenges of the present yet still provide some optimism for the future!

Contents

Top News

A round up of the latest news from London's Age UKs and older people **3**

Southwark Council: Delivering an Age Friendly Borough

Councillor Richard Livingstone explains how Southwark Council stays as age friendly as possible **4**

"Living in Fear" - Experiences of Older Private Renters in London

Find out all about our recent conference to close our Older Private Sector Tenants Programme **7**

Getting Pensive About Pensions

Could ageism impact upon our pension contributions? Daniela Silcock investigates... **10**

Age Friendly Policies for London?

Learn about the Mayor of London's recent public consultations into a variety of issues affecting older Londoners **13**

Ageism in Film - What I've Learned

Danny Elliott reveals the life lessons learned by studying ageism in film **15**

In the Hotseat...

The head of our Age Allies programme Richard Norman shares his thoughts **19**

Top news

Gangsta Granny!

Following the success of July's gala performance to raise money for Age UK Camden's Good Neighbours Scheme, Gangsta Granny continued to support the fundraising efforts of Age UKs across London over the summer.

Throughout August, teams of volunteers collected donations following matinée and evening performances of the smash hit production of David Walliams' most popular book at the Garrick Theatre in the West End.

Find out more on the Age UK Camden website: www.ageuk.org.uk/camden/

Fantastic Fundraiser!

August saw a fantastic fundraising effort as 70-year-old Keith Stirling rode his trusty Honda Forza 125 from John O'Groats to Land's End - via London - in aid of Age UK Kensington & Chelsea.

Incredibly, this was the 19th time Keith has made the journey, having raised money for charity in this way since 1986. He set off on Monday 21st August and rode until Monday 4th September, raising over £600 along the way!

See more on the Age UK Kensington and Chelsea website: www.ageuk.org.uk/kensingtonandchelsea/

Employment Conference

On 5th September, Positive Ageing in London (PAiL), in association with Age UK London (AUKL), held an interesting conference on age and employment and economic development in London, in partnership with DWP who presented updates on their 50+ strategy and the impact of the national roll out of Universal Credit.

There were presentations from David Anderson, Andrea and Corrine Gregory from DWP, from Chris Walsh of PAiL & Wise Age, and Gordon Deuchars from Age UK London.

Read more on the PAiL website: www.pailondon.org.uk/

Environment Conference

September 25 saw Age UK London host an Environment Conference as part of "The Way Ahead" project - funded by the City Bridge Trust. The event was an opportunity to learn all about the Mayor's Draft Environment Strategy and to allow older Londoners to help shape the final document.

We were joined by Deputy Mayor for Environment and Energy Shirley Rodrigues, who outlined her department's plans and took questions. There were further speeches from Dr Ian Mudway of Kings College London and Carla Jones, CEO of Allergy UK.

Find out more on the Age UK London Blog: www.ageuklondonblog.org.uk/

Southwark Council: Delivering an Age Friendly Borough

In the spring of 2016, Councillor Stephanie Cryan spoke to London Age about the ways in which Southwark Council were making the area more age friendly. This month, we caught up with Councillor Richard Livingstone, Cabinet Member for Adult Care and Financial Inclusion, to find out how they're getting on...



Last year, my colleague and fellow councillor Stephanie Cryan, wrote about our work to make Southwark an Age Friendly Borough and our commitment to help residents across the borough age well. Since that time we have achieved a number of the aims we set ourselves. Schemes that were in their infancy last year have now begun to have real impact on the lives of our older residents. We want to enable older people to live fulfilled, healthy and independent lives and it is this belief that underpins the work of Southwark Council Adult Social Care.

Following on from our accreditation by the World Health Organisation as an Age Friendly Borough, Southwark was similarly recognised by the Alzheimer's Society as taking proactive steps to become a Dementia Friendly Borough.

This is something that we are hugely proud of and as part of Southwark Dementia Action Alliance (SDAA) we have worked with local cinemas to implement dementia-friendly cinema viewings, worked with Millwall Football Club to develop walking football sessions and incorporated the Reading Agency's 'Books on Prescription' programme into the council library service. Our work with SDAA led to Southwark being nominated in the Dementia Friendly Awards 2016 in the Urban Dementia Friendly Community of the Year category.

This nomination recognised the work that has gone into making sure that people living with dementia are not excluded from the vibrant community that exists in Southwark.

From the conversations we have had with older people, we know isolation was one of their main concerns, as they grew older and levels of anxiety and depression can increase. Through our close collaboration with and continued significant financial investment into the voluntary sector, we help older people stay connected to the communities around them and help them to continue leading fulfilling lives. This includes one to one befriending and advice for those who are housebound. There are also art and drama classes, along with other social activities that are so important to combatting feelings of isolation and loneliness.

Maintaining good physical health is important at any age but perhaps more so as people grow older. To this end the council has introduced free gym and swim sessions aimed at keeping older people as physically active as possible. Likewise, we are working closely with our NHS partners to develop a more outcome based approach across the wider health and social care systems to achieve better results for our frailest older people.



Care provision can be a worry as people get older and in Southwark, we are continually looking to provide the best services possible. We want to ensure that people can stay in their own homes for as long as they safely can. We contract care providers to ensure that our residents receive quality care in the most cost effective way.

Southwark Council has long recognised the importance of investing in the people who physically provide care to our residents. Our Ethical Care Charter has been in place for a number of years and will extend to cover all our home care service over the next few months. It is an investment in people that is reflected in the quality of care that is provided to our older residents: rather than the race to the bottom on wages and employment conditions that has often

characterised home care, the Southwark Ethical Care Charter ensures that people who provide home care in the borough receive the London Living Wage, are paid for their travel time and can choose not to have a zero hour contract. Caring is a valued profession and in Southwark, we treat it as such.

Choice is at the heart of our vision for adults' services and this extends to housing provision for older people. We want people to be able to stay independent but we also recognise that there comes a time when older people may need more support. Toward the end of last year, the first residents moved into 42 self-contained Extra Care flats at Tayo Situ House, Peckham; a 'Gold Standard' dementia friendly building.



Residents here are able to live in their own homes with 24 hour care on site. This has enabled some people with very complex needs to move out of care homes and regain some level of independence. As well as living accommodation, there is additional community space and a garden area. These spaces give residents the opportunity to spend time with neighbours, make friends and hopefully feel part of a warm and welcoming community. The first resident to move into the scheme was Priscilla Chigwedere from the Peckham Rye area.

Speaking when she moved in, Priscilla said:

“I’m still learning my way round but it is beautiful, life in a place like this is beautiful. The people here are lovely, you just feel relaxed. I came and I immediately felt relaxed and welcomed. A little party came to meet me, what more could you ask for?”

Now that residents have been in their new homes for almost a year, a second phase of the development is underway. As well as approximately 48 new homes for older people, this second phase of the development will also include a day centre for older people who are quite frail or living with dementia that will be available to the wider community as well as residents.

Across the council we are incredibly proud of the work that we have done to make Southwark an Age Friendly and Dementia Friendly Borough. We recognise that this work does not stop here and this is an ongoing commitment. As a council we are committed to encouraging our communities to be as inclusive as possible, where older people are valued and represented in the communities they live and have contributed to for much of their lives.

To learn more about the work of Southwark Council, please visit:
www.southwark.gov.uk/

“Living in Fear” - Experiences of Older Private Renters in London

On Monday October 9th, Age UK London hosted a conference to reveal the findings of our Older Private Sector Tenants Programme, a research project that was funded by the Nationwide Foundation. Here we discuss the conference and outline some of the conclusions of our research report “Living in Fear: Experiences of Older Private Renters in London”, which was published on the day.

Over the last eighteen months, Age UK London has been investigating the experiences of older private renters in London as part of our Older Private Sector Tenants Programme.

Funded by the Nationwide Foundation, the research collated the views of older Londoners across a series of focus groups and individual interviews to gain a broad insight into the experiences of older renters in the capital. This information formed the basis of our brand new research report: “Living in Fear: Experiences of Older Private Renters in London”.

With the report completed, Age UK London hosted a launch event to reveal our findings at the Coin Street Conference Centre on the South Bank. The conference hall was filled with political figures, older private renters, and a number of experts within the housing sector, all of who were able to use the event to learn more about the private rented sector and to suggest ways to improve it.

After a brief introduction from our own Gordon Deuchars, we were joined by Paul and Olive, two older renters who live in London. During the eighteen month period of research for the project, we have heard many concerning stories from older private renters and this was no different. Upon hearing Paul and Olive’s experiences, it was clear to see why we entitled our research report “Living in Fear”.

In Paul’s words: “It’s not easy to feel secure when you’re an Assured Shorthold Tenant”. This statement matched the findings of our report, which found that security of tenure was one of four main concerns voiced by older renters. “We do live in fear and anxiety, especially as your enter the last nine months of your contract” added Olive to murmurs of agreement around the room. Such assent was a feature of the event itself, especially after Age UK London’s Ben Donovan began to reveal the details of “Living in Fear”.

As mentioned, the research report discovered four main areas of concern for older renters in London: security of tenure; rent costs; repairs and maintenance; and health and accessibility. In addition, many of those interviewed mentioned that poor relationships with their landlord often exacerbated these existing problems. This was clearly the case for those present at the event, as we again heard murmurs of agreement when Ben highlighted that many private renters choose to “keep their head under parapet” and avoid annoying the landlord and risking eviction. As one member of our audience noted, “people can’t complain to the landlord for fear of being kicked out”. This often means that the necessary repairs and adaptations are not completed and this can have a huge impact upon the health and wellbeing of the tenant, especially in old age.

After lunch, the attendees divided into breakout groups to discuss three main topics: Affordability and Security of Tenure; Condition of Housing/Repairs and Adaptations; and Access to Support and Information.

Within these groups, there were frequent references to Section 21 of the 1988 Housing Act, a clause which can allow landlords to make a “no fault” eviction of an Assured Shorthold Tenant. This again corresponded with our research, which advocates the abolishment of the Section 21 clause. One of our interviewees explained the level of concern that Section 21 places upon private sector tenants:

“A Section 21 can be issued at any time and my wife has a disability. It would be very hard for us to find somewhere else with two months notice and who else will take us with tenants with me approaching retirement and my wife with deteriorating health and a possible need for future home adaptations?”

Section 21 causes a feeling of helplessness for many older renters, lots of whom found it difficult to truly call the place they lived their home. This lack of security and fear of eviction leaves many tenants disinclined to invest in their homes or to request repairs and maintenance from their landlord. These issues also display why it is important to highlight the experiences and concerns of older private sector tenants – the fear that rapidly approaching retirement age will directly affect your ability to rent is a unique problem to those in later life.

“Section 21 causes a feeling of helplessness for many older renters”

Yet it must also be stated that many of the issues faced by those in the Private Rented Sector are intergenerational. This was not lost on our breakout groups, who repeatedly stressed the need for greater cooperation between the generations in order to reform the rental market.

Following the breakout groups, the attendees reconvened for our panel session, where a group of experts in the housing sector took questions from the audience. Megan Life of the Greater London Authority and Eloise Shepherd from London Councils explained that whilst the Mayor can’t control rents, he is working towards improving the experiences for private renters in the capital. The current focus is upon naming criminal landlords on a “blacklist” to help provide advice to prospective tenants and to also put other landlords on notice. It is hoped that this project will help different boroughs across London to work together to protect tenants as well as reducing the disparity in the relationship between landlords and tenants: as it currently stands, landlords receive large amounts of information about their tenants without having to provide anywhere near as much in return.

Meanwhile, Jenny Pannell of the Housing Learning and Improvement Network, concentrated upon the ways in which poor housing can affect the health of private sector tenants and the fact that this in turn causes extra strain upon our health services. Robert Taylor of the Camden Federation of Private Tenants pointed out that security of tenure is only secure if you can pay your rent. Therefore, if the rent costs creep up, the security decreases - which is especially concerning for older tenants who are far less likely to be in fulltime employment. Whilst a younger person might reasonably expect or hope to increase their earnings as their career develops, an increase in income is not



often the case for an older person. As a result, many older Londoners are challenged with ever-tightening purse strings in the face of escalating rent costs.

The final speaker at the conference was Sian Berry AM, Chair of the London Assembly Housing Committee, who commended the findings of the report and stressed the importance of these kinds of meetings, which can bring like-minded people together to force progress and change. Sian Berry also noted that older people need to be included in more housing groups and forums so that others realise that older private renters are also facing difficulties and that they have a lot to say. It was also suggested that recent changes in the political landscape have made rent controls a tangible prospect for the first time in many years.

As the conference ended, there was a clear sense that the findings of “Living in Fear” were no exaggeration – for many, the Private Rental Sector simply isn’t working. Yet there was also a heartening desire for greater collaboration between housing groups and older people’s forums in order to begin tackling the problem. This conference will hopefully mark the start of significant changes to the Private Rental Sector going forwards.

For more information, including access to the report “Living in Fear”, please visit the [Age UK London Website](https://www.ageuk.org.uk/london).

This conference was hosted using funding received from the Nationwide Foundation.

Getting Pensive About Pensions

Research suggests that too few people set aside money to provide themselves with a comfortable income in retirement. Yet could ageism be a root cause of this? Daniela Silcock, Head of Policy Research at the Pensions Policy Institute investigates...



'As a research institute, focussing on pensions policy, the Pensions Policy Institute is concerned that the majority of people do not save enough to provide themselves with a comfortable income in retirement.'

There are several reasons for low saving levels including low contribution levels and socio-economic barriers. One main reason for low levels of saving is that people often put it off until the age of 40 or above. By this age, most people, if they have not yet started saving, would need to save at very high levels, of around 27% of salary or more, to provide themselves with a desired level of retirement income.

There are many explanations for behaviour which may seem illogical, for example:

- Widespread low levels of financial capability and numeracy which can hinder people's understanding of pensions or how to make financial plans for the future.
- Common behavioural biases whereby people prioritise spending power today over having a potential income in the future.
- A lack (or a perceived lack) of affordability.
- Competing financial priorities such as housing, family, debt etc.

There is also an interesting psychological element in the phenomena of people delaying saving which has implications not only for retirement income levels but for social attitudes towards older people: younger people are more likely to view their future self as a stranger with whom they have no emotional or physical connection.

This disconnect can be routed to several causes including:

- People generally find it hard to plan more than five or ten years into the future.
- One's older self is often perceived as looking different to one's younger self and therefore being a different person.
- Fear of the potentially negative experience of being old can lead people to disassociate from their older selves.

Accordingly, young adults are far more likely than adults in their 30s, 40s and 50s to associate negative words such as "lonely", "ill", and "poor" with the experience of being old.

"Younger people are more likely to view their future self as a stranger"



This disassociation between people and their older selves goes some way to explaining the prevalence of ageism within society, particularly in light of the fact that some of the disconnect arises from fear of older age. However, there are methods of helping people to associate more closely with their future selves that are being used by insurance companies as a way of motivating people to start taking more of an interest in financial planning for the future. These methods have had positive impacts on attitudes towards people's older selves and their corresponding pension saving behaviour and may also be relevant in the field of anti-ageism.

The prevalence of ageism within the UK can be seen in many arenas, including the print and visual media or the high rate of older people financial abuse. One key arena is the labour market. Older people (over age 55) are particularly disadvantaged in the labour

market. People who leave employment when they are over the age of 55 find it much harder to return to work than younger people.

Barriers to work for older people include:

- An employer preference for employees aged 25-49
- Age discrimination
- Health problems
- The need to provide care
- A lack of take-up or knowledge of flexible working options
- A lack of skills and/or of opportunities to gain new skills

Often ageism within the labour market results in a lack of flexibility to accommodate the needs of older people, rather than an explicit preference for younger people.



One method used by some providers to tackle people's fear of age is to "age" people's faces to show them what they might look like in the future. This can be performed digitally and there are smartphone apps available to perform this transformation. Companies have run programmes whereby makeup is applied in order to age people so they can look in the mirror and see their older selves. This exercise has a powerful effect on helping people to better associate with and care about their older selves.

Other methods, that are perhaps somewhat less resource intensive, include engaging people in talking about their future selves, what they expect for their retirement and what they would like their retirement to look like. An extension of this involves asking people to write letters to their future selves, laying out their plans and hopes for their life at older ages.

These activities are associated with people viewing their own older age more positively and starting to associate more closely and care more about their future self. These changes in attitude can help people to overcome some of the barriers to making financial plans for the future. However, they should not be viewed as a panacea. There are many social, structural, behavioural and economic barriers to making positive financial decisions alongside generally low levels of financial capability.

There are obvious correlations between how people view their older selves and how they view other older people. It therefore follows that if people are better able to associate with their older selves, and feel less fearful about old age, they should be more capable of exploring and changing attitudes they have about older people more generally.

Find out more about the Pensions Policy Institute on their website:
www.pensionspolicyinstitute.org.uk/

Age Friendly Policies for London?

Gordon Deuchars, Campaigns and Policy Manager, Age UK London, gives an overview of the Mayor of London's recent public consultations into a variety of issues affecting older Londoners and explains how you can have your say...

'The Mayor and Greater London Authority are currently engaged in renewing the statutory London strategies which the Mayor is responsible for, and developing some additional ones which the Mayor thinks are needed to respond to London's current situation. Through their influence on the work of TfL, London boroughs and others, these strategies will have an impact on how age friendly London is in future.

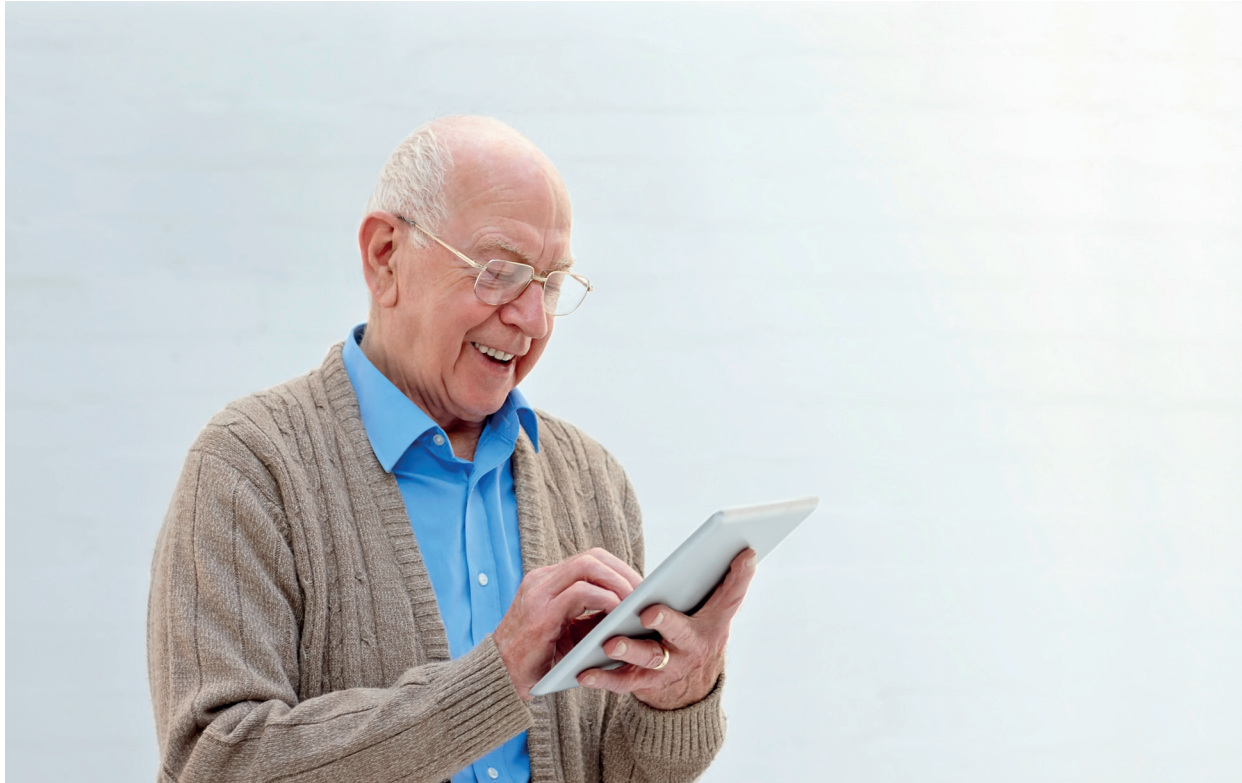
Public consultation has concluded on some strategies including on policing, transport and diversity and inclusion. Currently (November 2017) consultation is under way on for example the housing, environment and health inequalities strategies. It has still to start on others including the London Plan, which is the overall urban planning framework.

As part of "The Way Ahead" initiative Age UK London is working with older people and local groups to co-produce responses to the different strategy proposals. How age friendly do the proposed strategies look so far? One thing worth saying is that throughout the proposals there is a welcome focus on social inclusion and social integration for "all Londoners". The GLA is saying that it wants to be more open and work better with communities and the voluntary sector than it has done in the past. If the GLA could equip itself to work better with civil society, that would give a better platform to put forward the views of older people.

Taking an overall approach to social integration and inclusion for everyone in a strategy can mean that the needs of particular groups (like older people) are not very visible in it. You then need some way of being sure that everyone's needs are genuinely going to be included in whatever action is taken to follow up on the strategy. Otherwise there can be something of a lottery in terms of which issues get attention and are taken up in practice.

In some of the strategy proposals (like the Transport Strategy) quite a lot is said about the implications of an ageing population in London: greater needs for accessible transport, accessible street design and age friendly neighbourhoods. In others (for example, in most parts of the proposed Health Inequalities Strategy) there is much less recognition of older people and later life issues.

"If the Greater London Authority could equip itself to work better with civil society, that would give a better platform to put forward the views of older people"



A big step towards age friendly policy for London would be if the Mayor could publicly commit to work towards making London an Age Friendly City in all the areas identified by the World Health Organisation and others. These are: housing; outdoor environment and neighbourhoods; transport; social, cultural and civic participation; employment, skills and income; community support and health services; communication and information; and respect and social inclusion. Working towards this would help ensure that the Mayor's strategies and policies consistently support older people and help them contribute to London.

Many aspects of being an Age Friendly City involve recognising and promoting the contribution of older people to society, where the GLA has done positive work in the past.

One of the Mayor's highest profile work areas is on housing, given the housing crisis hitting Londoners of all ages. Since the 2016 Mayoral elections we have been calling for action to make a range of suitable, accessible and genuinely affordable housing options (to buy and to rent) available for older people all over London. This includes providing enough good quality specialist housing for older people.

“Since the 2016 Mayoral elections we have been calling for action to make a range of suitable, accessible and genuinely affordable housing options available for older people all over London.”



However even more importantly, new mainstream housing needs to be suitable for all ages and support like aids and adaptations needs to be available for older people in older housing stock (most of the homes in London).

Over the last eighteen months our Older Private Tenants Programme (see page 7 article) has found out a huge amount about the situation of London's older private tenants, who could double in number by the end of the 2030s. They urgently need a better deal including more secure tenancies. We hope that the Mayor's Housing Strategy will take on board the housing needs of older Londoners: the GLA has been open and positive about engaging while preparing it. The Mayor is also responsible for developing a strategy to tackle health inequalities in London. Disappointingly, the draft strategy says comparatively little about ageing or age related conditions and we hope that the final version will be considerably stronger.

A lot of attention has gone to the Mayor's plans for action to improve air quality. Age UK London hosted a discussion between older people, the Deputy Mayor for Environment and other expert speakers on how poor air quality affects older people. We'd also like to see the Mayor's Environment Strategy leading to effective action to support older people in fuel poverty.

To sum up, a wide range of policies that the Mayor is responsible for developing are potentially important for older Londoners. We hope that the Mayor's strategies will consistently help to make London an age friendly city.

Find out more about the Mayor's vision and have your say on the Talk London Website: www.london.gov.uk/talk-london/

Ageism in Film: What I've Learned

In the final instalment of the monthly "Ageism in Film" series on the Age UK London Blog, Danny Elliott reflected on everything he has discovered by discussing this topic over the last year, as well as some lessons learned during his four years working at Age UK London.

Over the last year I've been watching films and TV series featuring older performers and about age related issues and writing a blog series about them called Ageism in Film. My colleague George has contributed three on various occasions where I've been out of action (becoming a dad for the first time led to a lot more hiccups than I'd bargained for!).

Between us, we've watched and written about: Grace and Frankie, Harry Brown, Still Game, Nebraska, Still Alice, The Lady in the Van, Esio Trot, Ethel & Ernest and Up.

Alongside those I've written about, I've also watched: Last Chance Harvey, The Quartet, Last Vegas, The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel, Little Miss Sunshine, The Curious Case of Benjamin Button, Philomena, August: Osage County and What We Did on Our Holiday.

After four and a half brilliant years at Age UK London, today happens to be my last day. So I'm going to take this opportunity as I finish off the Ageism in Film series to ask: What have I learned about older people, both through watching and writing about these films, and in my work since March 2013?

On the film front, I've been hugely encouraged that there's a plethora of really good (and a few bad!) movies about older people. There seem to be more films than TV shows, even if the two series I wrote about (Still Game and Grace and Frankie) are two of the best examples of representing age onscreen.

In my introductory article to this series I quoted Peter Bradshaw, who said:

"Only 11% of characters in the top-grossing films of 2016 are older than 60, compared with 18.5% of the overall population... Well, it's quite true – and complicated by sexism. Older characters become invisible, but the women go first. In contemporary drama, old people can be snowy-haired, unimportant grandparents. Or they can be homeless people."

I can't argue with the facts. Bradshaw (whose article was the catalyst for this whole series – thank you!) suggested a 'Bechdel Test for Ageism', under which I've scrutinised all the movies I've written about. Still Game received a perfect score of 6/6, though a few others got 5/6, missing out only because of a lack of Celia Imrie! At the other end of the scale, Still Alice scored 0/6 but, then again, it wasn't really about ageing!

While the research is undoubtedly correct and, across all cinema, older people aren't represented nearly enough, I'm glad that there's a good stock of films that do depict ageing and are (generally) not ageist.

"Across all cinema, older people aren't represented nearly enough"



Something else which has struck me is that there are a host of brilliant older actors and actresses. I've watched Michael Caine, Jane Fonda, Dustin Hoffman, Lily Tomlin, Martin Sheen, Judi Dench, Bruce Dern and many others dominate in their performances. IMDB's list of 'The Top Actors and Actresses in Their Seventies' also features Robert De Niro, Helen Mirren, Harrison Ford, Anthony Hopkins, Maggie Smith, Ian McKellen, Al Pacino, Christopher Walken (which reminds me, I watched Seven Psychos not so long ago – he was great in it!) and Patrick Stewart.

Quick aside: did you notice how many of those I've just named were British? Seven! Maybe we're doing better at celebrating older actors and actresses on this side of the Atlantic than our friends on the other?! Great actors and actresses stay great. Robert De Niro has made some questionable film choices in recent years, but he's still a great performer. Many would argue that Helen

Mirren, Michael Caine and Maggie Smith have got better as they've got older. And I don't just mean they were better in their 40s compared to their 20s. I mean better in their 60s and 70s compared to their 20s, 30s, and 40s. I love Dustin Hoffman, and I like him more as an actor the older he becomes. Even in Last Chance Harvey and The Choir (there's another one!) he was great in average films.

More actors and actresses should get opportunities as they age to continue performing in leading roles in films that aren't ageist.

And so, to ageism in film itself.

I've been generally happy with what I've seen. Peter Bradshaw's test was an interesting lens to view films through. One of his criteria is, essentially, that not all older people are portrayed as being nice! Nebraska and The Lady in the Van certainly exemplify that.

Harry Brown may have been slightly over the top in its revenge/vigilante style, but Harry and Len are as far from your stereotypical older person as you can get. The way this film dealt with loneliness, isolation, death and community was also, in my opinion, helpful and true-to-life for many. The film's setting, London, helped – as someone working for Age UK London I saw some of what I know older Londoners can experience.

I think my favourite film over the course of the last year was Ethel & Ernest. George actually wrote about it for the series, but we both watched it together in a free private screening along with 45 older people (as organisers, we were allowed to sneak in!) that we partnered with Universal Pictures Home Entertainment Content Group for.

The film was, to its very core, about ageing – following the lives of Ethel & Ernest, Raymond Briggs' (author of The Snowman and, obviously, Ethel & Ernest) mum and dad. The film, literally, shows them ageing, from the first time they set eyes on one another to their last goodbye. As I sit in the office now, I'm getting emotional just thinking about it.

As a good Liverpool lad, I was particularly moved by the song played over Ethel and Ernest's credits, "In the Blink of an Eye" by Paul McCartney.

The introduction on strings, followed by that 75 year old, slightly croaky, South Liverpool-style Scouse-accented voice singing:

"In the blink of an eye,
Many songs have been sung,
Many lives have gone by.
We will never give up,
We will hold on to love,
With no reason to cry."

My four and a half years at Age UK London have indeed gone by in the blink of an eye. McCartney claims that life does too. Ethel & Ernest, and many of the other films I've seen this year, showed me that he's right.

We're all ageing. I'll be 30 in just over a month. Turning 50, 60, 70, 80 or 90 feels like a lifetime away. But it's only the blink of an eye. After all, just yesterday George and I chatted about the fact that we still think of 1998 as being 'only the other year'!

Working for Age UK London has, genuinely, taught me that all of us have to fight for older people. There are so many reasons to list, but if for nothing else, then for the fact that it's our turn next. Older people must have a voice now, if only so that we can have our voice then.

"Working for Age UK London has, genuinely, taught me that all of us have to fight for older people"

I arrived here as a communications professional. I leave a little older and – if I can be so bold – an age-sector expert.

I intend to use that expertise in everything I do from here on out as I work, age, love and live; hopefully long enough to become an older person who isn't simply a non-conformist when it comes to stereotypes related to age, but one who lives in a society that no longer recognises those stereotypes at all.

This article originally featured on the Age UK London Blog. To read this article and the others in our "Ageism in Film" series, visit: www.ageuklondonblog.org.uk/

In the hotseat...

Richard Norman, Coordinator of our Age Allies programme shares his thoughts on his role.

What projects are you involved in?

I am currently developing and coordinating the Age Allies Programme which is funded by the City Bridge Trust until the end of 2019. I have recruited a small group of older volunteers with whom I have developed a facilitated style of workshop designed to enable participants to uncover their own unconscious attitudes, stereotypes and behaviours towards older people which then encourages them to commit to making positive changes. These workshops are being delivered to businesses and organisations across London so I am developing a range of networks and partnerships.

What are the biggest concerns you hear from older people?

In my current role the emphasis is very much on ageism. The way in which older people are defined as a single, homogenous group, without recognition of the huge diversity that exists, is incredibly disempowering. As far as I can tell ageism is unique.

Ageism is the only prejudice where we discriminate against that which we hope to be, and which we will – barring accident or illness – become. It is so deeply embedded in society that we are mostly unaware of it. Even older people themselves buy into it!

What one thing would you ask local boroughs to do to improve things for older people?

Stop making assumptions and recognise that decisions are being made based on unconscious bias and age prejudice. This is, of course, a very big ask. It would require an exceptional level of unlearning and self awareness. Age Allies would be very happy to act as a catalyst for this process

What is your vision for your work at Age UK London?

To reach as many people as I can through the Age Allies workshops and really get them thinking!

For more information on the Age Allies programme visit: www.ageuk.org.uk/london/projects/age-allies/

Editor

George Harvey

Contributors

Gordon Deuchars
Danny Elliott
Kathleen Egan
Richard Livingstone
Richard Norman
Daniela Silcock

London Age highlights issues which affect older people in the capital. It is produced to support Age UK London's mission to improve the quality of life for older Londoners and to enhance their status and influence.

t 020 7820 6770
general@ageuklondon.org.uk
www.ageuk.org.uk/london
[@ageuklondon](https://twitter.com/ageuklondon)

Age UK London works across the capital to improve the quality of life for older people and to enhance their status and influence.

If you have any comment on the magazine content or ideas for the next issue, we'd love to hear from you: gharvey@ageuklondon.org.uk

Charity registration number 1092198
Company registration number 4407861

Products and services designed for the over 50s

- Home Insurance
- Car Insurance
- Travel Insurance
- Personal Alarms
- Funeral Plans



For a no obligation quote, visit:

Age UK London Trading (Tavis House)
Ground Floor
Tavis House
1 - 6 Tavistock Square
WC1H 9NA

Tel: 0800 328 6089
or visit

www.ageukproducts.com



Buying Age UK Products & Services helps fund our charitable work

.....
Car and Home Insurance are administered by Ageas Retail Limited. Age UK Funeral Plans are provided by Dignity. Brought to you by Age UK Enterprises Limited. Age UK Personal Alarms are provided by Aid-Call Limited.
.....

Age UK Insurance is arranged by Age UK Enterprises Limited and arranged and administered by Ageas Retail Limited, who are both authorised and regulated by the Financial Conduct Authority. Personal Alarms are provided by Aid-Call Limited, which is authorised and regulated by the Financial Conduct Authority for Consumer Credit. FS registered number 707455. Age UK Enterprises Limited is authorised and regulated by the Financial Conduct Authority for insurance mediation and to introduce potential annuity customers.

Age UK Enterprises Limited is the commercial arm of Age UK (charity no.1128267) and donates its net profits to that charity. Age UK Enterprises Limited is registered in England and Wales no.3156159. Registered address: Tavis House, 1-6 Tavistock Square, London WC1H 9NA. FS registered number: 311438.