

# **'Perceptions of Ageing' Response**

**Queensland Government, Department of Communities, Office for Seniors**

24 September – 1 October 2007

Surveillance with Public Intent Vehicle (SPIV)  
Action Researcher/Performer (AR/P): Astra Howard

The Department of Communities, Office for Seniors conducted a social research project, designed to capture community attitudes on ageing during the week leading up to the International Day of Older Persons (1 October, 2007). Astra Howard, the Action Researcher/Performer (AR/P) was commissioned to use her 'Surveillance with Public Intent Vehicle' (SPIV) to generate discussion around the topic of ageing and record the public's opinion. The project was located in three public space sites in Brisbane: The Valley, South Bank and Queen Street Mall. Over the course of a week the project inspired hundreds of conversations, many of which are documented in this response paper.

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## **1. Questions/statements (based on common myths about ageing) devised by the Office for Seniors and presented to the public via the SPIV.**

- What does ageing mean to you?
- Are older people all the same?
- What do older people do?
- Are older people more likely to be lonely?
- What do mature age workers contribute to the workforce?
- You can't teach an old dog new tricks - is this true?
- Where is the best place for older people to live?
- Older people are sexy.

- Baby boomers are rich and spoilt.
- How can different generations work together to support our communities?
- What makes people age well?

Most members of the public did not respond proactively to these questions/statements when they were presented to them directly. The public generally thought the framing of the questions around these myths actually pigeon holed the aged as a group separate from the rest of society. Many people laughed when the AR/P wrote these statements on the windows of the SPIV and others walked away in bewilderment. The majority of people responded by saying that older people are like everyone else, so the answer to these questions/statements would be the answer to questions/statements about any generation. Taking these general responses into consideration, the AR/P necessarily approached the subject matter in a different way that was appropriate to each individual who engaged with the SPIV. Once the AR/P had conversed with a member of the public for a while, she introduced some questions about ageing. When addressing a crowd of onlookers, the AR/P would ask open-ended questions that would usually inspire an individual to come closer to the SPIV to answer the question.

## **2. New questions posed to the public via the SPIV generated from discussions between the AR/P and members of the public.**

- What can we learn from older people?
- Do you know any special older people, and if so what makes them special?
- How do you think older people have coped with the 'internet age'?
- Do you think women face different issues to men in their later years?
- How often do you speak with older people?
- Is there a difference between how older people are treated/respected in Australia and in other parts of the world?
- Are there any specific concerns for the aged in Brisbane?
- Do you think older people feel more isolated than younger people?
- Do older people have enough opportunity to spend time with younger generations?
- Do you think older people get discriminated against in the workforce?
- Do you agree with the statement 'the older I get the younger I feel'?
- Are there enough resources dedicated to the aged?
- With an ageing population are their adequate nursing homes/hospitals?
- Do you think older people get the respect they deserve?

## **3. Public response to the theme of 'Ageing' noted by the AR/P**

- "Yes I deal with older people, like my boss, I speak with them in the same way that I speak with younger people".
- Girl says: "I have gained a lot of respect and insight from my grandmother".
- Boy says: "we need more human compassion".
- "We need more awareness needed around the issue of ageing".
- "More resources are needed for the aged".
- "There needs to be better conditions in nursing homes, a man got food poisoning in a nursing home I was in, in Darlinghurst, Sydney".

- "There is not enough respect for older people".
- "The issue for me is grey hair. The treatment is hair dye!"
- Boys say: "we speak to our older neighbours everyday".
- Some people feel that technology has left older people behind.
- Most people agree with the statement that 'you can teach old dogs new tricks'.
- Only a few people say that it is too difficult for older people to learn new skills.
- "There are not enough hospitals".
- "We are all ageing".
- Many people comment: "we do not want to pigeon hole people, by saying that they are aged, or talking about them in a way to suggest that they are different from everyone else".
- "We are all just ageing, not just old".
- "I like all of my wrinkles, signs of ageing. But I agree that this is unusual".
- "People are old when they need care, when they can no longer look after themselves".
- "There is not enough money for the aged care".
- "Through music and arts we can bridge the gap between old and young. A greater respect for history and tradition is needed". The participant used the example of a very good older jazz player he knew and indicated how he has immense respect for this person.
- "We need to develop a culture of living, not just for the old or the young, but for all".
- Nurses and staff from a local RSL who deal with old people all the time say: "loneliness is a major issue for the aged".
- The theme of loneliness comes up again and again as a considerable issue for the aged.
- "We need to see issues from all perspectives".
- "Older people have knowledge and wisdom, skills and talents".
- "All of the young and the old have same issues".
- Most people say that 70 years of age is old, a few say 80, or 65 the retirement age.
- Woman says: "they should make the retirement age more flexible".
- "There are different perceptions of ageing in different countries. In Indonesia all members of the family live together. The old and young in same house, even when couples get married and have kids".
- "Grandparents as old people are like kids without questions".
- "Old age is a state of mind".
- "Stereotype of older people as different is problematic".
- "I'm 31 and feel old".
- "I'm 26, but sometimes I feel like I am 96".
- "If people have a better human conscious then they will be better able to deal with aged care".
- "There are more people ageing (baby boomers) so perhaps these matter will become more pressing and therefore addressed".
- "We need more compassion in our society".
- "We need more social workers".
- "We need more resources for the aged and disabled".
- "There are not many forums for people to discuss these issues".
- "Technology dehumanises people whether they are old or young".

- "I don't talk about the same things with my grandparents as I do with other people".
- "We need to bridge the gap in interest areas and concerns between different generations".
- Some participants say that they talk everyday to older people.
- Young woman says: "I took two minutes to help a lady cross the road and it made my day".
- Older woman says: "we need to give older people more time, consideration and respect".
- "Yes some older workers are discriminated against".
- "No, I do not think older workers are discriminated against".
- "Yes, you can teach old dogs new tricks".
- "Older people have authority on knowledge".
- "The health care system needs to be improved".
- Young Asian boy talks about teaching older people computer skills.
- "The aged need more respect in Australian culture, like they get in other cultures".
- "Old people all over the world face the same problems".
- "Very poor resources go to older people".
- "More housing and community support for the aged".
- "People don't care about the aged, I saw this man being pushed in front of a moving train at Albert station".
- "Yes technology has disadvantaged the old".
- "Old is 70, old is 30, depends on your age/perspective".
- "Old people can be re-skilled".
- "The older I get, the younger I feel".
- "We need more government dollars to support the aged".
- "Age gracefully".
- "The elderly are not respected, they are considered a burden on society not valued".
- "Ageing is not good for the wrinkles".
- Lots of discussion about the media's influence on people opinions regarding the aged.
- Woman says: "after fifty women become invisible".
- "Wisdom should be better respected".
- "You are only as old as you feel".
- "Ageing is cool".
- Teenage girl: "You learn heaps as you age".
- "Old for me is about 80".
- "No, I do not know any older people".
- "Some people you can teach new tricks".
- "You're only as old as you feel".
- "With regard to ageing, do it gracefully".
- "In order not to age, don't have children. Children make you age faster".
- AR/P Q: Or arguably, they make you live for longer? "There is no wisdom in that".
- "Know that you don't live forever and therefore experience as much as you can have".
- "Growing old is inevitable, but growing up is optional".
- "Culture has a lot to do with it, how the aged are viewed and respected".

- "I have an ethnic background I'm blessed to have a strong family culture".
- "Yes but the older people have the resources to access and learn about the technology".
- "My grandparents have no idea about the internet".
- "Need to have computer classes specifically for the older generation".
- "The opportunity is there, for older people to interact with younger generations but it is difficult for younger people to relate to the older".
- "My next door neighbour is 95 and I've known her my whole life. She is like a grandma to me. Yes, I have learnt a lot from her, she taught me how to be cool and play cards".
- "Yes I guess, I do think older people are more lonely, so I visit them like my neighbour and talk to them".
- "No, I don't think older people have been able to keep up with technology. My nanna has a phone and she can't text or even answer calls half the time".
- "Well, me and my nanna always talk about how people my age have no respect for older people".
- "For younger people, talking to older people, this is unusual no?"
- "I was just thinking, there doesn't seem to be any real sense of community anymore. We all say how crap it is when older people get their house broken into or knocked down but no one really faces that fact of why that happens".
- "I guess lots of talking needs to happen".
- Male 30s: "Ageing is inevitable".
- "We can learn communication and values from older people".
- "We need specialist training for young people working with aged people".
- "I really think age doesn't matter and young and old all want to be youthful today so if everyone can have a fun mindset everyone will be young and happy".
- "Older people talk more to me".
- Yes, I do think older people are more likely to be lonely than the young?"
- "I like my age. Been through a lot, wouldn't change it".
- "No, older people do not get the respect they deserve. Especially in the workforce, experience doesn't count for much anymore. I'm an electrician, but trying to get a QLD licence is bogged down in paperwork, yet they scream for trade people".

#### **4. Public response to the theme of 'Ageing' noted by Stephanie**

**Friday 28 September 2007, Queen Street Mall**

- "In Western culture kids are brought up to be independent often too soon, missing out on values prevalent in other cultures re: respect for the aged".
- "Old cannot be defined. It can be different to everyone. I would think if a person thinks they are old, they are. I really respect what you're doing – breaking down the barriers".
- "I feel like I am ageing too fast. My head can't keep up".
- "Exercise. Eat Well. Limit Alcohol".
- "As soon as we are born we cease to belong to us and start to belong to all".
- "Government is bad at planning for the aged. They act like it only happens to a few".

- "I wish elderly people didn't feel the need to tell me their life stories when I'm at work".
- In a book I have just written, I mention that older workers should be a) retained, b) encouraged to work beyond 55+ (part time) and c) share their skills and experience. After all we will be facing labour shortages".
- "The media always presents age as something of fear especially when beauty is celebrated via an unrealistic perfect".
- "Botox is the answer for the vain".
- "It is a natural beautiful process. But, society has created a different opinion".
- "There are a lot of issues that face the aged and no doubt this will increase with the ageing population. I think if the aged continue to be respected and valued as individuals contributing to society then I'll be fine with that".
- "There seems to be something wrong with our society. We don't value the wisdom and experience of older people as we used to. In many cultures older people are the most respected and valued members of the community".
- "I think individuals need to be more aware of what older people have to offer and also the government needs to put more things in place to allow the voice of older people to be heard".
- Teenage girl: "I have wrinkles". AR/P: "You don't have wrinkles". Teenage girl: "Just wait!" AR/P: "So you think that the appearance of physically ageing is a big concern for most people?" Teenage girl: "Yes". AR/P: "Can you do anything about it?" Teenage girl: "Botox and creams".
- "My Mum moved me up here in 1984 and my grandfather took on the role of my Dad".
- "I think wisdom doesn't necessarily come with age, rather from the desire to improve yourself".
- "Too bad we all get older everyday but we can look after ourselves by extending our years through exercise, proper eating habits such as vegetables and fruits etc".
- "I feel very strongly that there is a huge barrier between youth and the elderly. This is caused by stereotypes and misconceptions. Youth is driven by hype, sex, drugs and alcohol and disrespect (in some cases). The elderly are presented as conservative, boring, not understanding etc. BUT...youth are really crying out for direction, love, guidance and mentorship from the elderly and a sense of hope from those of the youth who are passionate about making the world a more just place (where all ages reach out to one another). Both need to cut the stereotypes, reach out and learn from each other towards unity".
- "I don't know what has happened to the youth of today...There is no respect for older generations. Homer 500BC – Listen to each other".
- "Wisdom and intellect come from age and experience. It's a shame we can't have these things when we are young and vibrant. Ageing seems better than the alternative; dying".
- "Youth is wasted on the young".
- "Ageing is a measure of survival. This is fresh. Our reality is bound by time (ageing) and space".
- "Ageing: it can be transcended through perception of self".
- "I work with older people. Have been doing so for 17 years in the UK and Canada. There are a lot of stereotypical attitudes in society, but we do a lot of work in educating for both. We teach a lot of older people to accept the new challenges including teaching IT/Computer Skills/ Health Issues etc".

- “We still need to do a lot of planning for the ageing population (especially the 3 tiers of government)”.
- “Western society is a lazy culture. I think we are always taking the easy way out of avoidance. Learn from one another instead of fighting one another”.
- “In regards to older people being lonelier it depends upon the way they’ve spent their life eg. big family, good friendships, church groups etc”.
- “Age is nothing without forgiveness”.
- “I wonder if there will be enough money from them, from the government”.

### **Saturday 29 & Sunday 30 September 2007, Queen Street Mall**

- “Ageing is cool”.
- Teenage girl: “Um you learn heaps as you age. 80 is old. I don’t know any older people”.
- “You’re only as old as you feel”.
- “Do it gracefully”.
- “Don’t have children. Children make you age faster”.
- “Know that you don’t live forever and experience as much as you can have”.
- Man 20s: “Growing old is inevitable. But growing up is optional. Culture has a lot to do with it. I have an ethnic background. I’m blessed to have a strong family culture. Older people have the resources to access and learn about technology”.
- “My grandparents have no idea over how to use the Internet properly. Classes are probably needed for the older generations. There is opportunity for older people to interact with younger people, but difficult, I think, for younger people you relate to older people”.
- Teenage male: “My next door neighbour is 95 and I’ve known her my whole life, she is like a grandma to me. I have learnt a lot from her. She taught me how to cook and play cards”. I think older people are lonelier. I guess people have to go visit them, like I visit my neighbour and talk to them”.
- Teenage male: “Older people have not been able to keep up with technology for example my Nana has a phone and doesn’t know even how to text or answer calls half the time. My Nana and I always talk about how people my age have no respect for older people. I was just thinking that there doesn’t seem to be any real sense of community anymore, we all say how crap it is when an older person gets their house broken into or knocked down but no one really faces the that fact, if that makes sense”.
- Male, late 20s: “I really think age doesn’t matter and young and old all want to be youthful today so if everyone can have a fun mindset everyone will be young and happy. Older people talk very nicely to me. I do think they’re lonelier than younger people though”.
- Man, late 50s: “I like my age. Been through a lot, wouldn’t change it. Older people don’t receive the respect they deserve, especially in the workforce – experience doesn’t count for much anymore. I’m an electrician but trying to get a QLD license is bogged down in paperwork – yet they scream for tradespeople. I’ve worked in Sydney and Europe as an electrician. I moved to QLD because I hate the cold plus the people are friendlier. The older I get, the younger I feel. Absolutely. Have you seen the movie “What the Bleep do we know?”? The relationship with consciousness and/or reality. I am what I am or think. People don’t understand the power of their thoughts. If you think you

are old, you cannot feel young. One of my assignments at uni. Studying BA Philosophy, comparative religions. Western religions teach either nihilistic or...Western religions are the problem older people face because they have to follow what happens after death. A Buddhist on the other hand understands the concept of life and death. And is not afraid of ending up in Purgatory for a lifetime. Essentially schooling needs to change. We have to stop being taught what to believe and start being taught how to think. Culture and religions needs to be separated. People will benefit from stopping their belief in falsehoods etc. Nietzsche 'Obermenseh'".

- Boy, young teens. "I think it's a personal matter of opinion. Everyone experiences it, just depends upon how you handle it, it is natural after all".
- Girls, 20s: "83 is old. The older people we know are our grandmas. In regards to the Internet Age it depends if they want to adapt to the new age of technology. Older people are lonelier than younger people".
- Young man, 20s: "Older people brought up with less impact of technology and fast moving environment than younger people. Things change so dramatically among younger generation. In older people's world they are prone to small changes unlike us in today's society. So I think that the gap between old and young today is hard to bring together".
- Girl, 20s: "Yes, it's even in retail (technology). Work in retail and hospitality". AR/P: "So do you deal with many older people?" "I work in a service station – many older people they do love to have chats. Where as the younger generation have little communication. The age that they were brought up causes older people to be more personable. In the old days they didn't have much technology. But what's going to happen in the future there is going to be no face-to-face contact. Everything will be done by technology. Concerns over the local/international divide. What's the point of having a conversation on the Internet with someone in America if we don't even know our neighbour".
- Boy, Teenager: AR/P: "How old is old? "63ish". AR/P: "Do you think you can teach old dogs new tricks?" "I can't teach my Grandparents to use the Internet – they are too old! Dumb down the Internet". Are you old though?" AR/P: "Not by your calculation".
- Man, Late 20s (Papua New Guinea): "They should sometimes, young people are wiser we can learn from each other. That way it is said that man is an island. I can't find the relationship between ageing and emotion. I am not in the position to answer that. I am only 28 – as it from the oldies. My father and our church Minister (older people who are wise). In my father's case, he is depressed but it is perfectly understandable situation because he had his foot amputated. Agrees that in Western culture aging people are valued less. That's true we have high regard for older people and even care for them like infants".
- Woman, 50s: "Women over 50 become invisible to society. Old is 80. Yes people get more lonely as they age, but not me. Keeping people socially included? Keep Busy. Feeling Engaged. Happy. Useful, active mentally and emotionally. You tend to feel mentally about 30 forever until you meet someone".
- Boy, early 20s: "Urgently need to connect young with the old. Back to praise the wise and change of emphasis on pressure to perform. So basically if you're functional, age it shouldn't matter". (The boy drew yin and yang symbol)
- Man, 20s: "Surely the disparity between generations is necessary – for social progress".



- Guy, 20s: "Media? Is it possible that the feeble are necessary for a functioning society? We find ads that scare ageing women about wrinkles, scenes of older widowers watching TV alone in an apartment. Wont this give young generation a scary picture of being old?"
- "Good questions! I believe education and positive media coverage of older people and ageing can help signify the beauty of ageing".
- Boy, Teens: "Further media coverage. More manipulation of how people view or think of others. Such ?? will worsen the situation by giving out fake representation. Not at all to imply either greater need for 'anti ageing' is derogatory. I was implying, however that saying positive media coverage could change perceptions is so blindly optimistic, it's pathetic. That may be cynical/pessimistic but I find that to be the truth. Please outline your perceptions on ageing. Through what medium? How will it be effective anyway? And how will they be effective? Media? That much is obvious but as long as ageing will hinder ones appearance then such a material world – society will obviously look upon it in a negative light. You /anyone/can't change such opinions/perceptions. That's what I thought the concept of positive media was all about? Optimism is not about running away from reality, it's to learn to hold the attitude towards it. There seems to be an imbalance of positive and negative perception towards ageing. We need to create the grey area to let people see the other side of things".
- "My great grandma lives in NZ and is 101 she lives with my grandpa and other relatives in NZ and the first thing he told me was never to live to 100. How many relatives and friends are around – she has watched almost all of them die and as a result she feels constantly lonely. She is perfectly healthy but very depressed. I believe that the elderly are more likely to be the loneliest of all".
- "The man who has respect for his parents, he both becomes happy while living and becomes blessed when dead".
- "Many different cultures are in Australia and many have much healthier attitudes to ageing. A cultural study of ageing could help promotion of generational health in the aged population".
- "I'm too old to name an opinion".
- Teen, Girl: "People are beautiful no matter what age, culture, etc. I love the Dove ads – grow old peacefully. It's hard to say...ageing is a bit general, every through it. From birth we age! How old is old? I don't know everyday think they are older as they mark each year. Not old, old role models, people to aspire to, most people are younger, not old, however they say older is wiser".
- "Any day above ground is a good day!"
- "Most people think of ageing as getting older, not growing wiser. Give it a negative sign to it. Ageing is part of life. Stop trying to prevent it and get use to it!"
- "Yes regularly but I usually tune out which is quite rude. I know I should listen to my mum more often. I agree when I am old I would want someone like my mum helping me out".
- Girl, 20s (England): "Yeah I think a lot of people don't realise that old people have experience and all have lives and feelings and emotions just like your own. It seems they are just put in a box. Where can I start? Everything they have experienced, think from falling in love, breaking up, war, raising children – all these things make them wiser than us. I only have one grandparent, she is 87 years old, blind and almost deaf and lives alone. She doesn't let this bring her down as she has her family. I'm not sure I could be as strong in the same

situation. It's like older people have more strength than the young mentally and physically. Well so many old people are learning to use the Internet now. It amazes me how some people are adapting to modern times. I think it is great what you're doing!"

- Woman, 30s (China): AR/P: "Do older people in China have any particular concerns?" "Yes when at 50 years old our government will give them some money every month. So they do not have to work? No just a little. Not enough for their life. Ageing is sad".
- Boy, 20s (Korea): "Ageing is a beautiful thing and people should respect them. In Korea many of them – I can't say that happens a lot except the physical thing. They have so many experiences. Depends on the person. It is very difficult to say their keeping up but recently the system for older people is getting better".
- Man, 60's: "Older I get the younger I feel. Sounds good, looking out! Still feel young but looking at me I'm not. People judge by appearances. The old? Have looking to present a younger positive outlook and don't give up. Do you think older workers are discriminated? Probably they should be as they age. They have experiences of life that the young are still learning. Online? I don't, you must work on communication and develop new hobbies etc. Probably not, but I try. Any particular concerns? I don't have any – it's all state of mind. I self taught myself, don't want to work now (67) – yes should be done but sometimes enough is enough, I'm out to enjoy!! The same really (issues/concerns). No (should have more awareness) we should be capable with all life's experiences in having no concerns. Probably not but it's all in the mind isn't it – I say get on with it! No one ever wants to listen to grumps!"
- Male, 41: "I'm health conscious. 2 glasses of water as soon as you wake up. What can we learn from older people? Patience. AR/P: "Dogs new tricks?" "Depends on the dog". AR/P "Internet?" "Most haven't coped. Maybe for some – depends on the dog". AR/P: "Men/Women Difference?" "Yes same concerns. AR/P: "Do you know any older people?" "Yes my Dad".
- Male, 20s: "No such thing as old! Just wise! I think age is just a state of mind". AR/P: "Lonely?" "No necessarily. I speak to everyone – not too sure exactly. It would depend if they want to give each other a chance to accept that they like a lot of different things. Old and young. It's good for older people to move forward with technology. Maybe they should go to TAFE to re-skill. That is true (age is a state of mind)".
- Male, 60s: "Walk with a smile on your face. Age is a state of mind. Older you get the Younger you feel? No, you can't buy experience. People who have been there and hopefully learnt. Old? Old is – 5 yrs, 10 yrs, 30 yrs, 100 yrs".
- "Your complaints are that aged pensioners are not receiving enough money for their pensions. Can't afford food, vitamins, dementia care – 2 years – Govt need to be more focused on pensioners – who worked hard to pay taxes – super gone – can't afford to live off \$500 a fortnight – too difficult to afford to live. Food is very expensive. Bulk billing no longer an option. Now it is \$60 to go to the Doctor".
- Male, 60s: "You are saying that we should not define or single out any group. No, each person has got a certain talent. There is no ageing – it's called experience".
- Male, 20s: "How old is old? They said over 25 is over the hill. Wrinkles and what sort of creams to use".

- Woman, 30: "There are lots of older people at the museum they know stuff. YAY. Living exhibits, Archaeologists. Patience with idiots and developers to value our heritage. Too many angry undisciplined teenagers". AR/P: "Lonely?" "Lonely in a different way, older people miss the families they don't have anymore. Young people are lonely because they feel like they don't fit in". AR/P: "Old dogs news tricks?" "My Dad just got the Internet connected".
- "Yes a nun I know gave up the veil at 50 and got a boyfriend and feels very much like a teenage she says. Yes. I think boys are never invisible. I think some older women let themselves become invisible. Not sure about the main issues for older people in Brisbane. Don't really know any older people except the ones at work. Yes they feel abandoned by family usually. For sure. Families aren't always biological".
- Young kids: "What the hell is ageing?"
- Woman, 40s: "No one thinks they're old anymore".
- Girl, 20s: "Ageing is Scary! The unknown future. Learn? Everything – they've done it all before. We're too late. Damn the 60s. Definitely not Gen Y just want things straight away and aren't willing wait for it – unlike older people. I think for my generation it's too late but perhaps we can teach our children. Very well – I see many middle aged people at work trying very hard to learn and keep up and I find it admirable just a tad frustrating at their pace. Yes, definitely we are quite divided – I'm not sure how but somehow new connections would be great and that wisdom you mentioned could possibly be passé down".
- "Just curious do you have prescription for eternal youth? I'm a Doctor. This is no escape from it (ageing). DNA is the latest research and it will allow man to live until 300 years. Imagine Einstein at age 150 or 200! No, the wiser, more acceptable to issues of life. In Anglo culture but in for example Asian or South American culture very much so. Yes, in this culture you keep your identity and personal pace from early in life – grow up on single entity. We grew up on a family unit so we are never alone".
- Girl, teens: "What makes your grandparents special? Cooking. Yes my grandparents have lots of modern things like Cell phones". AR/P: "Do you think you can speak to younger people in the same way you speak to older people? Probably not".

### **Monday 1 October 2007**

- Man, 40s: "It's hard for older people thanks to software. I could never get a job in that field. Too long to learn so little. Do you think you can change fields now or will it require re-skilling? I have to get off my old habits. Discriminated? Yes, can we do anything about it? The politicians have to debate this in parliament. Respected for wisdom? We all should respect that. Lonely than young? Yes Generations connect? Yes".
- Girl, 20s: "This project is silent yet so powerful". (Observation)
- Man, 50s: "Respected for wisdom and experience? Not by a lot of the younger generation because we are thought of as old fogies who think they know everything. Some take notice and give respect – I think if you are brought up properly to respect yourself and others it helps".
- Woman, 30s: AR/P: "Ageing any thoughts?" "I have just been seeing a cosmetic specialist. She showed me my face in 10 years time. So scary! How?

Special machine. Women have different concerns?" AR/P: "An older woman said to me 2 days ago that after 50 she feels invisible". "I think it's more of a concern for younger women to see the future. Start making changes and wear sunscreen everyday".

- Observation: Two men who have hearing impairments (one from Dublin, one from Canada) met randomly after writing on the Perspex box. After leaving the box they were seen in the distance signing to each other.
- Male, 20s: "How old? 30. Why? Because you have responsibilities".
- Observation: Man around 60 points to the word ageing and pretends to slit his throat.
- Man, 30s: "Your body olds, it does not age." AR/P: "What do you mean? That is you can still feel young in the mind?" "That you can reverse body by unlocking the energy".
- Observation: Older woman in her 80's walked past and said: "she's talking about ageing" – "I'm one of those and then pokes her tongue out".
- Woman, 30s: "People should age 'naturally' no plastic surgery – just as god intended". AR/P: "Learn?" "What can't we learn?" AR/P: "Internet Age?" "If they want to – I think there are opportunities for older people to learn if they want to. Old dogs? Definitely".
- Woman, 80s: "Internet? Younger people are use to change".
- Teenager: "Can't wait to get old – people respect you more".
- Man, 20s: "Learn? How to eat without teeth".
- Woman, 20s: "Perhaps nothing is an age? AR/P: "State of Mind?" "Yes, think young, play young. AR/P: "Respected?" "Perhaps sometimes". AR/P: "More lonely?" "Guess it depends if they keep company often". AR/P: "Discriminated workforce?" "Yes a lot". AR/P: "What can we do? Different generations need to connect. Some older people have mentioned they only deal with older people".
- Woman, 20s: "Learn? They have a lot of life experience". AR/P: "Respected?" "No". AR/P: "Can we do anything about it?" "Work experience in places like nursing homes and hospitals". AR/P: "More lonely?" "Most definitely". AR/P: "Keep up with technology?" "Not my Nanna". AR/P: "What makes Nanna special?" "She is all I got, she struggles with mobile phones and computers". AR/P: "Old dog new tricks?" "If they are willing to learn". AR/P: "Ageing women and men?" "Not really, older women more conscious about skin and looks. Older get the younger you feel – does your Nanna feel this way. We sent her on a Harley ride for her 60<sup>th</sup>. Did she enjoy it? She asked for it!"
- Man, 40s: "Cell ageing causes wrinkles but does time place a part. AR/P: "I'd say science is our way of explaining how time affects the body no? So any concerns or issues?" "Yes I'm 43 but I feel about 28". AR/P: "Why?" "Attitude and lifestyle". AR/P: "Can we change negative perceptions?" "Yes get them out and about". AR/P: "Technology?" "In the most part but again dependant on attitude. Technology is affecting the young more!" AR/P: "Discriminated in the workforce?" "Yes but there is an individual responsibility". AR/P: "Loneliness, does it affect the old more than the young?" "They don't get out like they used to and converse rather than stay in and watch TV, surf net". AR/P: "Even older people?" "Yep taught my 80 year old grandmother solitaire and then she played it straight for 4 hours. Only had 2 games as she struggled with the mouse".
- Man, 40's: AR/P: "Ageing?" "Do the young only worry about today and not what the aged can teach them about tomorrow and survival. Yes to some

extent do you? Think the young want it all done for them – won't roll up their sleeves and do the hard yards". AR/P: "Do you think we can change?" "Unplug their Ipods". AR/P: "So you think if we could have more opportunities for face to face dialogue between generations that would make both old and young more aware?" "Yes. Best way to learn is face to face. A book changes with each reprint". AR/P: "So what forums could we construct for this to occur? Is it about technology and education?" "I think both but technology seem to be all they want". AR/P: "What is your job?" "Strip out refills of Offices". AR/P: "Are people of all ages in this industry?" "Less and less each year – work is too hard for them". AR/P: "So it favours the young?"

- Woman, 20s: AR/P: "Learn?" "Yes I learn every day from older people at work – more experience and wisdom". AR/P: "Respected?" "No we tend to move them on, particularly if they do not keep up to date with technology. We have a lot to learn from older people and we need to provide them training on new technology".
- Observation: Younger people handing older people the brochure.
- Man, 60s: AR/P: "Older I feel?" "Mind says so body doesn't". AR/P: "Old dogs new tricks?" "Yes if the tricks are worth doing".
- Woman: "Young people are removed from society and forgotten. I think women are more self conscious hence worry more about looking older".
- Man: AR/P: "Technology?" "Most over 60 haven't kept up".
- Woman: "Definitely one can remain young at heart living a positive life and enjoying activities such as keeping the mind and body active. Have a happy growing old life – I have!!"
- Woman, 80: "I am well for 80 years – I am doing okay".
- "Government should put more money into aged people while they can enjoy – they would be keeping them active longer".
- Man, 50s: AR/P: "Internet?" "Given time they will be good".
- AR/P: "Mature age workers?" "It appears youth is certainly favoured – one man who works in fitting out offices just said that it is difficult to find young workers. AR/P: "Older staff more committed?" "Yes and often overlooked by employers".
- "I think we can learn tolerance and delayed gratification. AR/P: "Are respected?" "I think some are but it is particularly difficult for some older people who start to use their senses e.g. sight and hearing. We don't give them the time". AR/P: "Lonelier?" "If they are it is certainly a lot harder for them to change their situation – Isolation as their friends depart".
- Girl, 11yo: AR/P: "How old is old?" "50 (then changed to 30)". AR/P: "What can we learn?" "Stuff that happened before we were born". AR/P: "Special older people?" "Yes Audrey Hepburn for her unique beauty, inspiration, amazing humanitarian efforts".
- Woman, 30s: "40 is the new 30, 50 the new 40 and 'young' gets older as I get older. Getting older is weird it's harder than I thought! It would be, I think because we grew up with TV in the house, all those young, perfect, sexy people. AR/P: "Younger I feel?" "No, I just don't feel as though I'm getting older, just staying the same. My dad said it was weird, looking in the mirror and seeing an old man looking out – it's like that. Same person inside, shell changing. I think it's especially hard for women. Men become distinguished and women fade (societal perception I think – not mine). Like I said 40 is the new 30".

- Woman, 20s (Columbia): "Talking about age, I'm a foreigner and it's sad to see Aussies complaining about the Government. When you haven't seen serious problems you start trying to find them".
- "Age isn't a number but your spirit".
- Teenage Girl: "Older people are cool. They're wiser. AR/P: "Old?" "Old is when you're paying for life insurance".
- Woman: AR/P: "Ageing?" "Yes, it shouldn't be allowed".
- Man, 70s: AR/P: "Respected?" "No". AR/P: "Internet?" "I can't keep up with technology".
- "Us Young People get ignored a lot!"
- Man, 20s (China): "I come from China and we do not have such issues. The generation gap is not so big". AR/P: "Respected?" "Yes we are influenced by the Confucian. The older should get the higher respect". AR/P: "A few people have mentioned that in China/Japan/Taiwan that older people are more respected?" "I think the youth – I think it's about culture. To console them – communicate with them at night. Pay more time to their feelings. Yes from what people have said – older people feel invisible or a burden on society". AR/P: "I understand in China older people are held in high esteem? They want to control the younger generation".
- Woman, 20s: "Why are there so many older people leaning toward Euthanasia (so sad) and how can the govt/community avoid people falling into homelessness".

## **5. Project Notes - Astra Howard - AR/P**

- Positive comments about the 'Perceptions of Ageing' project and for its promotion/facilitation by the Department of Communities.
- A general feeling that promoting the issue of 'Ageing' through this public vehicle encouraged discussion and debate.
- Lots of people take photos and video (a number ask if this is ok).
- When people think about the aged in general they do not have too much to say, but when they talk about a personal story like their grandparents or neighbours they have strong and mostly positive views.
- An older man talks about his prostate cancer, how he will start thirty-seven treatments at the end of the week. He is very scared about it and doesn't think he is strong enough to cope. He also speaks about his life experiences in Brisbane. He appears to like staying by the SPIV slowly writing. He enjoys the interaction with the AR/P and other members of the public who are drawn to the project. It is significant for him to have the opportunity to talk with someone who will listen, respond and acknowledge his comments.
- Other older locals who interact with the project appear to enjoy the subject matter being addressed.
- Two deaf men meet each other through individual interactions with the SPIV.
- A young man, answers the AR/P's questions verbally. He later returns with a piece of paper and begins transcribing another response onto the windows reading from his notes.
- Two 'Big Issue' sellers ask the SPIV assistants to write down their comments onto the windows on their behalf. Details noted include their names and job description.

- A guy shakes a lot when he writes. He says that he has dyslexia. He rubs out everything he writes as he holds the pen with two hands, shaking.
- There are a lot of older people in The Valley.
- Some teenagers found the exercise too difficult.
- Some participant's explained where they live, for example, locations ranged from: Caboolture, The Valley, Sunshine Coast, Melbourne, Sydney, Townsville, Gold coast, Columbia, Canada, Ireland, South America, Germany, Sudan, New Zealand, France, Korea, Japan and Italy.
- Generally speaking younger people appeared to be more comfortable immediately writing on the windows of the vehicle than older people. Often older people needed more encouragement to participate, many choosing to simply speak through the windows rather than write.
- The average age that most people said was considered 'old', on a scale from the most to the least common was: Seventy years old, eighty years old, forty-five years old, thirty years old, twenty-five years old, sixty-five years old.
- Participants used various approaches to respond to the questions posed by the AR/P, including: writing forwards on the windows; writing backwards on the windows; getting a friend/stranger to write on their behalf; writing a note on a piece of paper and holding it up to the AR/P; speaking through the windows; leaving a graffiti tag; writing quotes in order for a response; writing quotes/comments and not expecting a response (walking away).

#### **Public Responses to the SPIV**

- "oh that's the person we saw a few days ago at South Bank".
- "You're Government?"
- "Howard or Rudd?"
- "What do you think about the war in Iraq?"
- "How long have you been in there for?"
- "Where do you go to the toilet?"
- "Do you eat or drink?"
- Two guys lift up shirt.
- Respond to Chinese or French tourists in Mandarin and French language.
- "Is she deaf?"
- "I am from Sudan I only arrived six months ago, my English is not very good".
- "Really intriguing, I think it's awesome".
- "Come out and I will buy you a coke".
- "Are you claustrophobic?"
- "Isn't it hot in there?"
- "Can you breathe?"
- "There is an air-conditioning unit in there".
- "I like to think outside the box"
- "I've been all over the world and never seen anything like this"
- The AR/P gets asked numerous times how old she is. The responses vary according to the person asking the question.
- "What's your name?"
- "Can we go in there?"
- The AR/P is asked her views on topics ranging from: who will win the football final, to who will win the up and coming political election and what her views are on euthanasia.

- “We have decided that you are the ‘Analogue Blogger’”.
- In The Valley, a very hostile man tries to take the breaks off the SPIV and push it down the road. He continues to be negative towards the project exclaiming that the AR/P is a “Bourgeoisie parasite”. The assistant tries to reason with him as does the AR/P via text on the inside of the booth, but he remains relentless in his commentary.
- AR/P activation note: avoid self-referencing the project unless communicating public contributions.
- Questions/statements posed to the public via the AR/P should be tested on a sample group prior to commencement.
- AR/P Notes: The AR/P requires at least two assistants for the smooth running and successful documentation of the SPIV project. Duties range from: transcribing texts from the window surface onto a notepad; wiping down the windows (to make sure there is always clean space for the next participant to write); managing the crowd (behaviours and commentary); explaining the purpose of the project and encouraging interaction; documenting with a digital still and video camera; and assembling/dismantling/transporting the SPIV from one location to another.
- Hundreds of passers-by took photos and video of the ‘Perceptions of Ageing’ project over the course of the research week. One can presume that in showing this footage at a later time to family and friends, further discussions would have been generated on the subject matter of the aged. Also, it appeared that those ideas discussed on the SPIV for a short time were further debated down the streets and into local cafes by participants. As a catalyst for conversation on the subject matter of the aged, the SPIV proved to be an effective means of intergenerational communication.

## **7. Project Notes - Stephanie and Louise - Assistants**

- Need at least 2 assistants working at once to record information.
- It was not appropriate to inform people about the purpose of the project – it is important for the assistant to stay as anonymous as possible.
- Scribing made the assistant feel invisible and respectful to the process.
- Taking photos was difficult – you need to intrude to get a successful shot.
- People need to figure out what is happening for themselves – they seem to be more honest and raw in their feelings when they make the step.
- Forcing people to write made them feel uncomfortable (i.e. The ABC journo who made the 85 y/o woman write on the box).
- The project needed more media coverage.
- Older people stood back often waiting for quieter times to write on the box (i.e. when people weren’t watching).
- Younger people were less inhibited – used to communication via writing (i.e. text and email).
- The age group of 15 – 45 were the main age group captured.
- The sharing of the flyer was an important statement (it brought young and old together in an inconspicuous manner).
- Workmen on smoko going away to figure out what they want to say and writing it down and then transferring onto the windows.
- A lot of international students and tourists participated.



- Cultures involved: Sudan, Columbia, Papua New Guinea, China, America, Canada, UK, Ireland, NZ, Africa, Japan, Italy, Mexico, Vietnam, Taiwan, Korea, India.
- Participants were from a mixed demographic including those with: mental health, recovering from drug addiction, illiterate, homeless and culturally diverse. They ranged from being: students, teenagers families, mothers, fathers, children, mixed ability, shop owners, retirees and pensioners.
- Young people consistently asked where the research could be found. Will it be available on the net?
- A lot of positive feedback from young people in the crowd.
- Negativity towards the project only came from a few passersby who did not stay for long or allow the AR/P or assistants to explain the motives.
- The SPIV encouraged strangers to share their opinions about ageing. Two members of the public shared experiences of caring for sick relatives, suffering strokes, dementia, cancer and therefore advocated for euthanasia. They saw it as a positive way to have ended their loved ones immense suffering.

## **7. Appendix: Interview with 4zzz radio transcript.**

Summary of the 'Perceptions of Ageing' Project response by Astra Howard (the Action Researcher/Performer) to questions posed by 4zzz Radio.

### **Can you explain a little bit about the project?**

The Department for Communities, Office for Seniors were keen to utilise one of my Action Research/Performance projects to generate discussion with the public about the topic of ageing. This social research project was to coincide with the International day of the older person on Monday 1 October and attempt to both gauge the public's perception on ageing as well as dispel and negative myths.

### **Why were you chosen to be inside the booth?**

One of the staff members from the Office for Seniors had seen a presentation that I gave at a conference in Hobart where I discussed a range of my more recent Action Research/Performance projects undertaken locally in Sydney and Melbourne and also internationally in Beijing, Paris, New York and Delhi. Through a PhD research process linking together the fields of urban studies, social science and performance art, these works critiqued theories of the city directly within the spaces to which they demanded attention. From initially spending hours on footpaths, to twenty-four hours in phone boxes and then weeks in shop front windows, I became increasingly interested in and amazed by how much the public wanted to discuss their experience of the city. Also I found that by disabling the normal means of communication in some way, that is for example, taking away sight or sound, it actually encouraged interaction between strangers.

As a catalyst for discussion between members of the public, it was decided that one of my more recent projects, the 'Surveillance with Public Intent Vehicle' would be a useful tool to raise questions about ageing and promote a positive attitude.

### **What was your role?**

The conversation booth utilised for the 'Perception of Ageing' project was a two metre high by 1 metre wide aluminium framed vehicle on wheels with four large Perspex

windows. From 10am to 4pm I would stand within this confined viewing space and pose questions to the public on the windows. I necessarily was required to write backwards with a white board marker pen so that members of the public would be able to read the text on the outside. Then, those people who were keen to respond to my questions and commentary would take a whiteboard marker pen and write their response on the outside surface of the window. We continued discussion about older people, writing backwards and forwards on the window surface, without speaking to one another for anywhere between a few minutes to one hour per person. Many conversations overlapped encouraging dialogue between strangers.

**What are some of the most commonly recurring community perceptions on ageing that you witnessed?**

- The age which most people felt signified 'old' was approximately 70, however a large proportion of people described how 'age was just a state of mind' and that you could feel old at 26, 33 or 45 depending upon your perspective.
- There was a strong sense that older people had great wisdom and experience and that they did not receive enough respect for this. Many people felt that in other countries older people were treated with greater dignity and their knowledge was appreciated.
- There was a strong feeling that greater awareness was needed to address the issues and interests of the aged and that more human compassion and understanding would assist this process.
- People felt that there needed to be more resources made available to aged care, an increase in social workers and greater acceptance of mature aged workers.
- Many people described how older people felt lonely and that there needed to be measures put in place to close the gap between generations or assist a dialogue in some form.
- There was a sense that through arts, music and cultural practices the gap could be bridged between generations as younger people very much respect older people who are skilled in these areas.
- Most people thought that 'you could teach old dogs new tricks' although there was some concern with the training opportunities for older people to develop their IT skills.
- There were suggestions that when you age you become more invisible and that one has to be conscious of the effect that ageing has on appearance. However, there were an extraordinary amount of comments to support the theory that 'the older I get the younger I feel'.

**How do you feel the booth was received by the public?**

I am always surprised by how much the public are interested in engaging in such Action Research/Performance projects on the street. Initially, people are intrigued by the process of writing backwards and then they become enthralled with the method of silently communicating with a stranger via the simple act of writing on the window panels. The 'Perceptions of Ageing' project attracted an extraordinary amount of

discussion and debate about the subject matter and connected otherwise disparate individuals together via this narrative process. There was a constant flow of people writing on all sides of the SPIV and many hundreds more reading the text and watching the event over the course of the week.

Many people who wrote on the SPIV expressed their appreciation for the opportunity to offer their ideas in such an unusual yet simple public forum. One typical example of this was a deaf man who came to discuss the topic on the windows and at some stage chose to ask me if I could tell if he was deaf. I said that I could not, but suggested to him that coincidentally, I had just been in conversation with another deaf person who was still standing just behind him wearing a blue t-shirt. After finishing our conversation he immediately approached the man in the blue t-shirt and they both continued to converse signing to one another down the road. This man like many others came back the next day to recall the details of the conversation he had with his new friend about life and the topic of ageing.

### **What will the results of the research be used for?**

The Department of Communities, Office for Seniors are hoping to use the results of this research for future community engagement initiatives, social policy development and social service provision. A number of new ideas have already been developed for Seniors Week in 2008 that extend from the findings of this social research project. The data and stories collected also provide a unique perspective on the subject matter circa 2007, the project yielding potentially quite different answers if repeated again in five, ten, or fifteen years.

### **In what other ways are you involved in working and campaigning for older people?**

I have been working with the homeless, marginalised and disadvantaged community in Sydney for many years, initially in a volunteer capacity in a drop in centre in Kings Cross and now as the Program Coordinator at a crisis accommodation service for the homeless in the inner city suburb of Surry Hills. In this role I develop programs and services that assist, engage, skill and inspire this group of people to reengage with the community and find new pathways in life. From accredited university programs, to TAFE modules, therapeutic groups, music, drama and arts activities, these programs apply much of the research data I have accumulated in the past ten years of undertaking Action Research/Performance projects on the streets to actually make real change and provide opportunities to people who would otherwise not have the access to such learning experiences and resources.

It was therefore an interesting challenge for me to target another particular group of people, the aged, for this project and see how my methodology would hold up, that is, driving a more defined social agenda. The outcome of undertaking such a project has inspired me to develop a new series of works that will be designed specifically to address certain target groups or identified issues in a more focussed and comprehensive manner. These new vehicles for conversation will open up discussion between generations and as community building measures, provide a space for the development and application of innovative, consultative thinking, learning and sharing.