

# Education for the Over 80's in the Mornington Peninsula Shire: A Literature Synthesis and Responses from Older Residents

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# **Education for Over 80s in the Mornington Peninsula Shire: A Literature Synthesis and Responses from Older Residents**

## **Executive Summary**

### **PART A: INTRODUCTION**

In 2009, the Mornington Peninsula Shire Council (MPSC), through its advisory committee PACE (Peninsula Advisory Committee for Elders) requested a review of literature associated with education of those aged over 80. Some of the models that emerged from the review were discussed with older residents. Face-to-face and telephone focus groups were selected as the main ways to collect data.

Groups chosen reflected a range of living arrangements:

- a) Living Independently (FGs 1, 2)
- b) Library Users/Volunteers (FGs 3, 4)
- c) Low Care Residents in Nursing Home (FG 5)
- d) High Care Residents in Nursing Home (FG 6)
- e) Residents using Home and Community Care (HACC) services (FGs 7, 8).

Thirty three English-speaking people, ranging from 72-94 took part.

Question topics included:

- Participants' backgrounds, interests, education and work experience
- People's views on reading and libraries
- Reasons for learning in older age
- Changes in learning between 60-80
- How education for older adults should be delivered
- How those who are housebound/living in residential care can receive education
- Views about potential models for learning
- The role of technology in older adult learning
- Views about Council's role in older adult learning

### **Background of Focus Group Participants**

Focus Group members possessed a wide range of educational experience which had often been affected or disrupted by the Depression and/or World Wars. Major points were that:

- Several left school at minimum age
- Some managed to complete school but went no further.
- Several men completed their education in evening school before launching into associated careers
- Others took on apprenticeships
- Few women went on to any kind of further study
- Only three people had undertaken higher education.

Men clearly received more education and tended to have entered higher status careers. Meanwhile women had generally undertaken lower status work or gone into professions thought suitable for women. On marriage most ceased working.

## **PART B: CONTEXT FOR THE PROJECT**

### **1. THE DEMOGRAPHIC IMPERATIVE AND MATTERS ASSOCIATED WITH DEFINING AGE**

In western countries, including Australia:

- the population is ageing as a result of rising life expectancy
- there are far more people in the active retirement than formerly
- there are more elderly people.

According to the ABS, projections concerning older adults are set to rise quite dramatically in the next few years. In addition, a significant feature is the aging of the aged population itself.

#### **Living Arrangements of Older Adults in Australia**

Approximately 20% of Australia's population over the age of 70 use aged care services at home, in nursing homes and in hostels. This means that 80% are living independently in their own homes but ¼ of these are living alone.

#### **Demographic Information in Relation to Mornington Peninsula Shire**

The population of the Shire has been increasing gradually each year since 2001 but the most remarkable growth has been in the older age groups. This growth is projected to continue:

<b>80+</b>	<b>2001</b>	<b>1,500</b>	<b>1.4%</b>
	<b>2006</b>	<b>5,200</b>	<b>3.5%</b>
	<b>2009</b>	<b>8,500</b>	<b>5.7%</b>
<b>(Projected)</b>	<b>2014</b>	<b>9,500</b>	<b>6.1%</b>
	<b>2019</b>	<b>10,000</b>	<b>6.3%<sup>1</sup></b>

#### **Other Matters Associated with Age**

Since the mid 1970s it has been suggested that there may be some value in distinguishing between the 'young old' and the 'old old'.

#### **The Problem of Categorising All Those Over 60 as a Single Homogeneous Group**

Age has usually been determined by date of birth, designated retirement age and date of death. However, there are other ways to conceptualise age e.g:

- a) Self-Definition of Ageing where many who are defined as 'old' chronologically continue to view themselves as young or middle-aged.

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<sup>1</sup> These are much larger proportions than most municipalities in Victoria

- b) Concepts of 'Third Age' and 'Fourth Age' where the 'third age' refers to those who finish work and have an active retirement; and the 'fourth age' refers to the final stages of life leading to death. However, the third and fourth ages may overlap because many people remain mentally active while becoming frailer. However, education can lead to an extension of the third age, prevent the onset of dementia, and, as a result, lead to reduced costs in care for the community.<sup>2</sup>
- c) A Failure to Recognise Individual Differences Because of Stereotyping.

The main problem is that society still tends to think the old as having reached decrepitude but this is often out of step with reality because many lead rich and independent lives.

An associated problem for education has been the 'lumping together' of all those over working age, be they 60 or 100. Consequently, there has been a call to recognise individual differences during ageing and to understand that the needs of the 'old-old' may be quite different from those who have just retired; hence the need for a study over 80s.

#### **The Extent to which Focus Group Participants Considered Learning to be Different at 80+ from when they Were 60.**

Most of those interviewed felt that learning at 80 was quite different from when they were 60 because for over 80s: learning takes longer; reactions are slower; they can't concentrate as long; it's harder to retain/recollect information; and the body is frailer. However, it was noted that those that had learned earlier in life found it easier.

## **2. COGNITIVE FUNCTIONING OF OLDER ADULTS**

There has been misconception that cognitive decline is inevitable as we grow older and that the majority of older adults will have some form of dementia. However, less than 1/3 over 80 will live with this condition.

Other encouraging research findings are that:

- Older adults are quite capable of learning and acquiring new skills
- Some older adults perform better than some younger people
- Older adults can learn to think faster, remember better and reason more efficiently
- The ability to be creative can undergo a late-life resurgence
- There are brain changes and growth that come with ageing
- Education is one of the strongest predictors of sustained cognitive functioning, intelligence and adjustment in older age

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<sup>2</sup> The term 'fourth age' has been given a slightly different connotation when applied to educational contexts. In Britain, it has come to mean education that is delivered in nursing homes and so could be delivered to anyone between 60 and 100 living in high care situations. Also it might not be the period immediately preceding death but could be long-term over many years.

## Why is it Important to Keep Learning in Older Age?

Reasons given to keep learning in older age include the need to:

- Adapt to Change, Both Personally and in Current Society
- Find meaning
- Satisfy physiological needs
- Create a feeling of satisfaction
- Increase self-sufficiency
- Create a feeling of control over one's life.

When deprived of being able to acquire so-called 'identity capital' the elderly can be especially vulnerable to depressive and passive behaviours. Furthermore, provision of education encourages civic participation and possibilities of making a social contribution.

Focus Group replies echoed the above points. One should keep learning in order to:

- Keep the brain alert and active
- Keep up with the times and a rapidly changing world
- Be able to hold an intelligent conversation with others including grandchildren.
- Be able to contribute to society
- Keep you young at heart
- Prevent boredom
- Have fun
- Gives people something to look forward to
- Maintain self-esteem
- Ward off the onset of dementia
- Prevent loneliness.

## 3. INTERESTS OF OLDER ADULTS AND ATTITUDES TO EDUCATION

Older adults want to keep up with the world around them. Also participants over 80 appear to choose topics in which they have some basis of knowledge, or topics that seem relevant.

FG participants were asked several questions related to communal activity, past educational activity, hobbies and what they would still like to learn about. Results revealed that:

- The bulk of participants belonged to (or had belonged to) some sort of group. Many belonged to Probus (x11)

Other membership was associated with:

- Other older adults groups e.g. Senior Citizens
- Men's organizations e.g. Lion's Cub, Freemasons
- Women's groups e.g. CWA
- National organizations e.g. The National Trust
- Health/Social welfare e.g. Red Cross, Vision Australia
- Religious Organisations e.g. Church Groups
- Sports Groups e.g. Golf Club
- Outdoor Activities e.g. Bushwalking Club, Gardening Club
- Reading e.g. Library Group, Book Group.

Only four people claimed not to have belonged to anything.

### Hobbies

Hobbies were also diverse. However gardening was by far the most popular with over a quarter of participants mentioning it. Five also nominated computing as a hobby

Other categories comprised:

- Arts and Crafts
- Physical Activities
- Games/Cards
- Reading

### Education Undertaken Since 60 Years of Age.

Group members were also asked to nominate learning that they had undertaken since they were 60. Areas of learning comprised:

- Computing/other technologies
- Metalworking
- Handcrafts
  
- History
- Philosophy
- Current affairs
  
- Literacy course
- Short story writing
- French
  
- Gardening
- Fishing
  
- Various games/sports.

### What Participants Would Like to Learn About Now

The most common desire was to learn about **Computing**.

(Libraries in the Shire already offer 'Getnet Ready' classes where 2/3 are over 65 years of age. There is a large demand so that double the number of classes could be run if there were enough resources.)

Other activities nominated were:

- Arts and Crafts: Painting, Sculpture, Cooking
- Literacy Interests: Writing Family History, Learning Foreign Language, Poetry
- Music: Singing in a Choir, Playing the piano, Music Appreciation
- Outdoor Activity: Croquet, Gardening
- Outside World: Current Affairs, Learning about other countries, Geography, Astronomy.

#### 4. HOW AND WHERE SHOULD LEARNING OCCUR?

Little has been suggested for how to teach those over 80. What has been put forward though, is that older adult learners:

- need to be autonomous and self-directed
- have life experiences and knowledge to draw upon
- are relevancy oriented, so learning has to be applicable to student interests
- require respect.

Those in the age group have suggested:

- short lesson times as because of problems with concentrating and staying alert
- active involvement in a learning experience
- learning in friendship groups as social activity is just as important as academic
- a strong and knowledgeable instructor.

Those attending classes also wanted a pressure-free learning environment with no reading requirements, assignments, having to memorise things or take tests.

#### Studies on Learning Styles of Older Adults

Over 75s prefer an Assimilator style (learning by thinking and watching). So, not all older learners are hands-on learners as adult education literature purports but rather, with age, there is a tendency to become more reflective and observational.

Those in Focus Groups felt that the best advice regarding learning/teaching would be to:

- learn in small groups of 4-5 or one-to-one
- hold lots of short quick classes with breaks
- go through steps slowly, one at a time
- have notes for revision
- have teachers who are patient
- take into account that some people have hearing difficulties
- recognise that older adults can have various preferred learning styles.

#### Where Should Learning Take Place?

Adult learning already takes place within the Shire. Locations on the Peninsula where more older adult learning could take place are:

- Senior Citizens' rooms
- Community halls
- Libraries
- Art Galleries
- Through older adult groups such as Probus.
- Schools when not in use.

One was to have learning near the home or in the home. Therefore the idea of running learning from within retirement villages was a popular option. This was because many interviewees said they no longer drive and so had no transport. Also wherever chosen, it should be somewhere where people can come together for social interaction.

### **Knowledge of what's on Offer in the Mornington Peninsula Shire and Elsewhere.**

All groups were asked to nominate the educational opportunities that exist for older adults on the Mornington Peninsula. Many cited Probus, the U3A, Senior Citizens and Community House Groups. However when asked if there were any exciting programs for Older Adults further afield no-one group could think of anything.

## **5. A CONSIDERATION OF THE USE OF TECHNOLOGY**

Older adults have been hankering after computer skills for more than a decade. Motivations to learn how to use a computer include keeping up with the younger generation, maintaining contact with family and friends and finding information on the Internet. However, among Australians over 75 in 2006, only 5% reported using a computer at home and only 3% used the Internet. Nevertheless there have been attempts to increase training and distance learning programs for older adults.

Although there was no specific question on personal use of computers within FGs, constant reference was made to the topic. Some were keen on computing because it allowed them to stay in touch. Others felt that to learn computing was important in order to keep up with the times and to remain 'literate' in an increasingly technological world.

## **PART C: DIFFERING MODELS OF EDUCATIONAL PROVISION**

Ten models of older adult education provision emerged from the review. Each is presented on a separate page:

### **MODEL 1: PROGRAMS ATTACHED TO UNIVERSITIES**

Examples are:

- a) Lancaster University's Senior Learners' Program. This has various components including a lecture series, a Virtual Senior Learners' Computer Forum and a Senior Learners' Society. The Learner's Society is run by members and provides regular activities, ranging from trips to concerts to physical activities such as dancing or walking.
- b) University of Kentucky Donovan Scholars (similar to above).
- c) Special Housing/Learning Communities Attached to Universities. In the USA there are now a number of college/university linked retirement communities offering education in the nearby university for older adults during their entire life span.

The nearest University would be Monash University, Peninsula so there could be difficulties with transport. In addition, Monash no longer has a Continuing Education Department on site. Some also felt that U3A fulfilled a 'higher education' function.

However, with Council assistance, there are possibilities to make links with either Monash University or Chisholm Institute of Technology.

## **MODEL 2: SPECIAL SENIOR CENTRES/COLLEGES FOR OLDER ADULTS, SUPPORTED BY GOVERNMENT**

Some countries have special centres supported by Government. Examples include:

- a) Canada which has publicly subsidized centres within local government areas. These have a mandate to serve the education needs of local older adults.
- b) Japan which has set up elder colleges throughout the prefectures and subsidized by the Ministry of Education since the mid 60s. For instance, Inamino Gakuen College offers classes to 2000 students with courses in gardening, pottery, health, culture and education.
- c) South Korea, where a scheme is being implemented in Seoul to provide 'cultural spaces' for the ageing through a network of colleges established for the elderly. The colleges are to teach 70 subjects including foreign languages and philosophy.

Again Focus Group members felt that the U3A provided the equivalent and that it would be far too expensive to set up separate educational facilities for older adults.

### **MODEL 3: SCHOOLS FOR SENIORS IN AUSTRALIA**

In Australia, there are Schools for Seniors. For instance they exist in Perth WA, Launceston, Tasmania and Wodonga. They offer companionship through learning and offer a variety of courses.

The idea of specialised schools gained little support in FGs because:

- facilities already exist in the Shire (such as libraries, community halls)
- organisations such as the U3A already serve as education centres
- it would be too expensive to build a specialised facility
- it was felt that the population of over 80s is currently too small to sustain such schools.

#### **MODEL 4: PEER TEACHING**

a) Long-Term: University of the Third Age (U3A)

Originally a university extension program in Europe, the U3A spread to the UK. There the teaching delivery format was reformed so that teaching was undertaken by volunteer members. Australia has followed the same pattern since 1984 so that in 2009 there are 84 U3As across Victoria with many thousands of members. Courses cover subjects as diverse as Bicycle Repairs to Aboriginal Land Rights and Science to Creative Writing.

The University of the Third Age was spoken of positively in every interview and considered to be an excellent model for older adult education. Four people were current members and another two former members. Learning in small groups, informally and without stress was appreciated.

b) Short-Term Peer Teaching

The National Prescribing Service (NPS), in conjunction with the Council on the Ageing (COTA) National Seniors Partnership, have used this model for medication management. This approach recognises that older adults possess valuable life experiences which place them in an ideal position to communicate important messages to their peers.

Focus Group interviewees considered that this could be a good strategy for short-term, targeted learning.

## MODEL 5: LEARNING THROUGH THE USE OF TECHNOLOGIES

### a) The Use of IT/Computers

Examples of how IT has been incorporated into older adult learning include the American 'Generations on Line' which attempts to bridge the digital divide with a package of Web-based software, paper materials and training available to long-term care facilities, senior centres and libraries in order to help older adults to use the Internet.

In Australia U3A on-line began at the end of 1999. This allows people to study at home or through community-based venues via the Internet. Meanwhile in Tasmania there is the Older Persons Electronic Network (OPEN) which caters for older people and the disabled and also the Australian Seniors Computer Club, formed to bring people together in 1998.

Other types of technology used for educational purposes have included:

### b) Radio For the Visually Impaired organised by Vision Australia

### c) Teleconferencing such as American University Without Walls which offers 240 academic courses to frail elders in Manhattan via the telephone. Examples in Australia include programs run by Do Care, Wesley Mission and Vision Australia. Programs have been so successful that there are often long waiting lists to join.

Those in Focus Groups were in favour of the use of the telephone to deliver education as they realised that the discussion in which they were involved constituted a type of learning and had enjoyed the experience. They also thought that it could be appropriate for those confined to home.

### d) Mobile Audiovisual Unit

In Israel there is an Audiovisual Centre for the Elderly where the objective is to use AV which brings films to the elderly at social clubs, day centres and homes for the aged.

A question that Focus Groups struggled with was how technology could assist with learning. The only ideas were to use existing technology such as TV, videos, CDs and DVDs. It was rare for people to be thinking about cutting edge developments such as the use of Skype, videoconferencing etc.

## **MODEL 6: PROGRAMS CONCENTRATING ON CREATIVE ACTIVITIES**

Successful programs for over 80s by having a creative focus such as:

### a) Art Programs

Focus Group participants thought arts programs were a good idea and attract many people on the Peninsula—also art appreciation could be arranged through local galleries.

### b) Writing Programs

### c) Autobiography/Reminiscence

Some gerontologists suggest that reminiscence and life review are pivotal to reaching integrity during older adulthood. Therefore, it is suggested that activities, such as journal writing need to be organised for this age group. Various kits and books about how to run associated sessions are available.

Focus Group response to programs associated with memory work or reminiscence for the over 80s was positive and thought to be important for this age group.

## **MODEL 7: INTERGENERATIONAL PROGRAMS**

Example of intergenerational programs include:

- a) A poor New York borough working with the Millennium Art Academy, a public high school that requires all students to participate in intergenerational activities. The program is designed to improve the lives of elders and students through social interaction, storytelling, writing and art.
- b) Ithaca College in NY which has formed an intergenerational programmatic partnership with a nearby residential facility for older adults. Each semester 40 intergenerational activities take place with residents auditing or participating in classes and students teaching residents music, photography or computer use.
- c) In Glen Eira in Melbourne, a residential community for older adults meet Grade 4s in a local Primary School. They have been working together to create a mural that has explored how life has changed throughout the years.
- d) Similarly in Collingwood, older residents have visited students in the local primary school to paint tiles in order to make a path and to decorate a wall together.

Responses to intergenerational learning were mixed. Some FG members thought it would be a good idea, particularly for those on their own. Others felt younger people aren't patient and might be bored. However, the possibility and advantages of intergenerational learning was said to be a particularly good idea for those in nursing homes.

## **MODEL 8: PROGRAMS FOR THE LESS MOBILE**

Frail older people are often ignored with regards to education. An exception is *Learning for the Less Mobile (LLM)* a HACC-funded educational program in Victoria which aims to provide stimulating activities for isolated and housebound people. This is run from the Hawthorn Community Education Centre in Boroondara. Door-to-door transport is arranged via the Council's community bus service. Others are brought by taxi or car.

Focus Group members thought LLM would be an excellent idea if Council and volunteers could arrange transport to the educational activity location. A form of LLM was already said to be happening in the Shire for those requiring respite and to get to libraries. It was suggested that this could be extended to academic activities.

## **MODEL 9: PROGRAMS FOR THOSE IN NURSING HOMES/RESIDENCES (often referred to as Fourth Age Learning)**

### Education Within Retirement Villages

The impact of increasing numbers of retirement communities has led to the examination of the educational needs of this age-segregated population. Most residents appear to be interested in education for leisure and personal development.

### Education In Nursing Homes (4<sup>th</sup> Age Learning)

This is the group; *“that most desperately cry for mental stimulation.”* Thus the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (NIACE) in the UK has begun to place fourth age learning high on the agenda. Two examples of 4<sup>th</sup> age learning include:

- a) *The Fanshaw Lodge Project* where artists were commissioned to undertake work in a Council residential home.
- b) *The Carry on Learning Project* which involved two organisations developing a ‘learning culture’ in specific care settings.

Other examples of learning activities associated with residences have taken place in:

- a) Extra Care Housing West Midlands, UK.  
Upon arrival frail residents are given “The Book of Life” in which they record their past. This ‘case history’ is shared with a key worker.
- b) Balham, South London  
At a large complex for over 300 Jewish elders, the site has been extended to incorporate a theatre and synagogue as well as a well-appointed arts/crafts centre with two teaching staff. There is also a paid activity and leisure manager who runs clubs, discussion groups and outings, the resident’s forum, a magazine and a choir.
- c) Central and Cecil Housing Care Support, London  
This housing group provides
  - i) an Arts and Education program for its older residents Activities include art, exercise, reminiscence, music, entertainment, cooking and outings.
  - ii) In sheltered accommodation the Group provides a monthly film club. Tenants and members of the public can watch a film and then have a discussion afterwards.

Some Focus Group members described how well some residences were catered for on the Peninsula. Meanwhile, others stated that while their nursing home did introduce some activities they were not for academic purposes but rather to entertain and amuse.

However, there were further calls for people to come in and lead intellectual small-group activity. Providing such activities is advantageous as it does not require any transport.

## MODEL 10: INDIVIDUALISED PROGRAMS FOR HOUSEBOUND OVER 80s

Examples of individualised programs include:

a) The Bar-Ilan Program, Israel

This provides housebound elderly with an individualised one-one-one or small-group learning program delivered in their own home or institutional residence. The project is carried out by trained, retired volunteers.

b) The Wandsworth Housebound Learning Project, London

This program relies on volunteers delivering education courses to housebound older people. Each week a volunteer attends a free class at one of the centres of the South Thames College in a subject of interest and then passes on what has been learnt.

c) Homebound Learning, Canada

Again this initiative provides over 125 topics for individualized learning programs delivered to participants in their own places of residence, an audiovisual lending library, educational TV programming and a peer counselling service.

Focus Group participants were keen on the idea of individualised programs, particularly for nursing homes and those confined to home. The idea of education in the home also won favour because of transport issues.

### SUGGESTED ACTIONS FOR MORNINGTON SHIRE COUNCIL

Mornington Peninsula Shire Council could consider/encourage:

- the extension of U3A-type activities into nursing homes
- the use of the telephone to link older adults for discussions/programs
- intergenerational programs, especially between schools and nursing homes/retirement villages
- a program similar to Learning for the Less Mobile
- individualised programs for the housebound and those within nursing homes

or any combination of these.

The Council also needs to consider:

- the role that technology can play (especially as this will be expected by all older adults in next few years)
- the implications for: a) transport arrangements b) staffing.

## **PART D: THE ROLE OF LIBRARIES IN OVER 80s LEARNING**

The Association of Specialized and Cooperative Library Agencies (ASCLA) have put forward ideas for offering library services that can serve the education needs of the elderly. These include:

- a) Homebound programs involving;
  - telephone book discussion groups which link homebound people
  - library program participation by bringing people to the library
  - special interest visits from library volunteers .
- b) Programs in Care Facilities (long-term, hospice etc) including:
  - discussion groups
  - AV programs using films, CDs, DVDs or multi-sensory kits.
  - Talking Books or Radio reading that allow 3-4 elderly people to share a listening experience as well as discussion with, or without, formalised leadership.
  - Library therapeutic programs.

### **Examples of Programs across the World**

- a) The Use of Mobile Libraries to Deliver Books and Other Materials  
The most common sorts of programs are those where library resources are delivered to people's homes or where a mobile library is taken out to regional areas.
- b) Educational Outreach for an Older Adult Housing Development in Kentucky  
One example is a program run by the Kentucky Department for Libraries and Archives. In this case a mobile library has facilitated a large-print book discussion group at a special senior citizen housing development.
- c) A Roving Program in New York State  
'Lively Minds' is a Travelling Library Learning Program for older adults in Nassau, NY. It comprises 1 hour continuing education programs using library services and materials.
- d) A Large-Scale Outreach Project in Florida  
In Florida, outreach librarians conduct programs in 31 senior facilities across the area served. Sessions take place in: nursing homes; retirement communities; assisted living facilities; Council on Aging programs; and in adult day care centres. The project is run from a mobile library. The program has expanded to teach computing.
- e) Library Outreach to the Elderly at a National Level in Sweden  
Swedish libraries are working with residencies. Often a librarian works part-time in both the local library and the institutional library. Visitors receive questionnaires to fill out about their relative/friend's interests, former work, whether the resident had spent their life in the city or country and their reading/academic ability. Then librarians try to find appropriate material. Other aspects of the program include a discussion group. Finally, paid 'cultural ombudsmen' from nursing homes etc. are used (rather than volunteers).
- f) Monthly Library Clubs in Gloucestershire
- g) "Top Time" weekly activities for older people in Suffolk libraries.

### Interest in Reading and Reading Services

About a third of FG interviewees were not interested in reading or found reading difficult. The remainder had considerable interest in books. Four had worked with books professionally and another four were library volunteers. About 1/2 interviewees were members of Rosebud or Mornington libraries.

Older adults enjoyed a wide range of material from autobiographies to genealogy and from motoring to historical novels. Other reading material that was popular included newspapers. Others read/used particular parts of the paper e.g. crosswords and puzzles to keep their minds active or read international news via the computer. Reading material that seemed less popular were magazines.

### Views on the Provision of Space, Programs and Facilities for the Elderly

There were suggestions about how library facilities and services should be used to full capacity and be extended to include specialist services for the elderly. Yet others discussed how there should be regular speakers in the library to speak on various topics.

### Library Space as Social Hubs Where Older Adults Can Meet

Group members also talked about the importance of socialisation during educational activities and so libraries need to become meeting places or 'Library Hubs'.

### Accessibility

One of the barriers to attending library activities was thought to be transport. Therefore, it was suggested that libraries should organise to bring people in. This is occurring to some extent and is really appreciated when it can be arranged.

### The Use of Mobile Libraries

There was also discussion about how outreach could be arranged for those who are confined to home or a residence by extending the use of the mobile library.

### Being Read To

There was also the suggestion that older people like being read to by volunteers. Some confirmed that this was already happening.

### How Technology Provided in Libraries Can Help Over 80s to Learn

When asked about how technology can help people to learn, mention was made in a several interviews about 'Talking Books' and about recently available 'Daisy' machines for the vision impaired. However, not all residents know about such services.

Some FG participants also talked about how they could learn by using the computing facilities at the various libraries.

### Library Organisation of Book Clubs/Groups

The idea of a book club produced mixed reactions. Some were simply not interested while others perceived difficulties/barriers. Meanwhile, others reported that they would be interested in this activity and that it would be a popular activity. Yet others stated that such groups already exist within Probus, retirement villages and nursing homes. Those in telephone FGS also realised the possibility of running book groups via the telephone.

## **SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE ACTION REGARDING LIBRARIES AND THEIR ELDEST PATRONS IN THE MORNINGTON PENINSULA SHIRE**

- Make sure that library spaces are used to the fullest extent possible
- Provide lists of new books or lists of suggested reading for older adults
- Encourage older adults into the library by providing 'social' areas
- Promote the library as a meeting place
- Continue bringing the frail and impaired into the library through use of volunteer transport or wheelchair-friendly transport
- Extend computer classes using library equipment
- Invite regular speakers to the library to speak on topics of interest to the elderly
- Ensure all events and activities are well-advertised
- For those away from major centres in the Shire, extend services and activities offered by the mobile library
- Promote the mobile library more
- Consider how more older adults can be read to
- Promote the use of talking books and associated accessories more
- Consider introducing more book clubs especially for the elderly (These can be held either face-to-face or by telephone link up)
- Work more closely with older adult residencies.

## **PART E: THE ROLE OF GOVERNMENT IN OLDER ADULT LEARNING**

### **Historical and Policy Imperatives**

#### The Concept of Lifelong Learning (LLL)

The term 'Lifelong Learning' was coined by UNESCO in the mid 60s. By 1979 the UNESCO Institute of Education published; *Life Transitions and the Older Learner*. Another document was the Faure Report which reported that lifelong education enhances the quality of life and is empowering to citizens. Then the first international conference based on lifelong learning was held in Rome in 1994.

Now there is an inquiry into the future for lifelong learning being undertaken by National Institute of Adult and Continuing Education (NIACE) in Britain. It was established in September 2007 and is to produce a major report in September 2009.

#### The Growth of Interest in Lifelong Learning in Australia

In Australia the idea of lifelong learning began to be recognised about 30 years ago. Some important reports then started to appear including:

- *Come in Cinderella*
- *Expectations of Life: Increasing the Options for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*
- *Report for Positive Ageing* (1996) in which a whole chapter was dedicated to Lifelong Learning
- *Towards a Learning Society* which identified health benefits from continuing education.

More recently there have been supportive Victorian policy initiatives such as:

- the Victorian Parliamentary Inquiry into Planning for Positive Ageing 1997
- the *Commonwealth National Strategy for an Ageing Australia* (2001)
- the Victorian Government's *Growing Victoria Together*
- the Victorian Government's policy statement; *Making This is the Age to Be in Victoria: A Forward Agenda for Seniors*
- the World Health Organisation—*Active Ageing: A Policy Framework* (2002).
- *Positive Ageing: A Strategy for Current and Future Senior Victorians* (2004).

This was followed by The Victorian Government's release of *A Fairer Victoria 2005* and *A Fairer Victoria Progress and Next Steps* (2006).

In addition, there have been other initiatives which align with the concept of older adult learning. Examples in Victoria over the past decade have been the instigation of Learning Towns, Community-Building Hubs and Adult and Community Education (ACE) Cluster arrangements. Overseas there have been reports such as the Canadian *Age-Friendly Rural and Remote Communities: A Guide*.

In response to such documents and reports, there have been various initiatives funded by the Dept of Planning and Community Development e.g:

- a) The Municipal Association of Victoria and Council on the Ageing: *Positive Ageing in Communities Project*. As a result:
  - 11 Victorian councils now have a position dedicated to positive ageing
  - 57 councils have identified staff with positive ageing as part of their role
  - some larger councils are establishing positive ageing teams.
  - over 10,500 older people have participated in 31 demonstration projects

- Neighbourhood Houses and Community Learning Centres have changed their educational programming to include the needs of older people.

b) Positive Ageing Projects funded between 2005-2010.

Meanwhile in May 2009, the Victorian Government released *Ageing in Victoria*. Within this older Victorians have contributed ideas about how to make Victoria a better place for older people.

## THE ROLE LOCAL GOVERNMENT CAN PLAY

Focus Group members, were asked to consider how the MPS Council could assist with older adult education. One suggestion was that there should be:

*....a part-time person in the Shire Council to co-ordinate and organise volunteers and to allocate venues like the libraries for example. That would be a start—to start the ball rolling on it.*

Whatever Council decides however, should be the result of consultation at the grass roots level. Therefore, older adults have to be pro-active in asking for what they want and should be engaged in related planning/data collection activities.

Otherwise there is a need to:

- carry out a needs assessment to find out what people want, possibly (for HACC residents through those coming in to clean, as they could forward information to Council)
- introduce a program similar to Hawthorn's 'Learning for the Less Mobile'
- introduce some 'at home', individualised education for those who request it
- arrange outings for housebound people/low care nursing home residents

In order to achieve some of the above:

- liaise with community-minded groups such as Freemasons, CWA, Lions Club.
- advertise for volunteers.
- provide more transport to take older people to educational venues
- provide transport that will hold several wheelchairs
- use some of the rates to support over 80s education programs and venues
- wherever possible, provide venues free of charge or ask for low rents
- ensure all venues (such as community centres, Neighbourhood Houses and Senior Citizens) are utilised fully and offer well-designed programs for over 80s.
- supply information about what's available to residents.
- relate the benefits of older adult education as many are unaware.

Finally it was pointed out that while there are plenty of facilities and programs available on the Western side of the Peninsula there are not so many on the East. Therefore, MPSC needs to ensure equitable coverage of educational provision for the over 80s.

## **SUGGESTED ACTIONS REGARDING COUNCIL INVOLVEMENT IN PROVISION OF EDUCATION FOR THE OVER 80s IN MORNINGTON PENINSULA SHIRE**

### Provision in the Shire

- Carry out a needs assessment (reinforcing the suggestion already outlined in the Draft document Lifelong Learning on the Mornington Peninsula).
- Ensure facilities and programs for Over 80s education are provided equitably for all major population centres within the Shire.
- Make full use of existing facilities (such as libraries, schools and community halls) for older adult education.

### Personnel/Assistance

- Consider employing a person to provide a focal point for education for the over 80s where the role would be to promote, liaise and organise.
- Consider employing a gardener and/or cook to introduce programs for over 80s.
- Liaise/work with community groups to achieve aims.
- Create a pool of volunteers to assist with over 80s education.

### Programs

- Consider new educational options (such as education programs for the frail, individualised programs for those who need it, or group outings).

### Transport

- Consider potential transport options associated with the provision of various educational models.

### Marketing

- Market the idea of education for those over 80, emphasising benefits.



# **EDUCATION FOR THE OVER 80s IN THE MORNINGTON PENINSULA SHIRE: A LITERATURE SYNTHESIS AND RESPONSES FROM OLDER RESIDENTS**

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## **PART A: INTRODUCTION**

### **Purpose of the Review**

Until recently, adult education in the Western world has concentrated upon; those over 25 needing further qualifications for work; the disadvantaged (such as women and those with low literacy); and pre-retirement education. Only in the last twenty-five years with greater longevity and greater affluence in society has there been any serious interest to educate those in the 'third age' (because of the prospect of long years of retirement ahead) and then the 'fourth age' (when independent living is no longer possible but there is still a need for mental stimulation).

As part of this interest, it has been recognised that those at the 'top end' of life i.e. those over 80 are creating a 'new demographic' group that is expanding rapidly and whose particular requirements and interests need to be addressed—because at the moment they are being subsumed with an amorphous group of anyone over the age of 60. This raises questions such as; Why do we need education for the those over 80? and Should we question existing practices and models of education for this particular age group?

As a result, in 2009, the Mornington Peninsula Shire Council, through an advisory committee PACE (Peninsula Advisory Committee for Elders), requested a review of associated literature. In addition, some of the models that emerged from the review were discussed with residents aged over 80 to discover locals' reaction to them.

In summary the aim of this review is to determine what is known about learning in older age, what has been attempted with those over 80 and what preferences and learning models should be taken into account when considering education provision for the latter cohort. It is also hoped that later, some potential models can be trialled within local communities.

### **The Search Process**

This synthesis of literature involved both peer-reviewed literature and grey literature on the Web. The former was accessed through a search of several databases (such as PschyInfo, ERIC, Sociofile, Proquest and Web of Science) using the following key descriptors: 'ageing', 'older adult', 'elderly', 'adult education', 'adult learning', 'fourth age', 'brain development', and 'demography'. There were also concentrated searches through particularly relevant journals such as *Educational Gerontology*, *The Gerontologist*, *Adult Education Quarterly*, *Lifelong Learning*, *Adults Learning*, *Canadian Journal for the Study*

*of Adult Education, The International Journal of Lifelong Education and The Older Learner*. Finally, searches of the 'grey' (website) literature were undertaken by trawling through major government, private sector and other websites for reports and descriptions of relevant activity.

## **Focus Groups with Mornington Peninsula Shire Residents Aged Over 80**

Focus groups were selected as the main way to collect data about views of older adults as they allow a range of attitudes and opinions to be determined and debated (Hurworth, 1996, Krueger, 2003) and lead to; *"a rich and detailed set of data about perceptions, thoughts, feelings and impressions of people in their own words"* (Rice and Ezzy, 1999). This method is also advantageous in that group interaction can also assist members to explore and clarify complex issues (Hansen, 2006).

While two groups were held face-to-face in Nursing Homes, the remainder of groups were carried out by telephone. This provided a number of advantages for this particular project such as that participants:

- were spread over a wide geographic area and could be linked
- did not have to make an effort to dress up or travel to a centre
- who were carers and tied to the home managing ill/disabled spouses could take part
- used first names only on the phone and this meant a considerable degree of anonymity (see Hurworth, 2004).

## **Focus Group Logistics**

Telephone groups were arranged with the assistance of PACE and staff members from both Mornington Peninsula Shire Council and the library.

Groups chosen reflected a range of living arrangements and interests. The final list of eight groups comprised those who were:

- a) Living Independently (FGs 1, 2)<sup>1</sup>
- b) Library Users/Volunteers (FGs 3, 4)
- c) Low Care Residents in a Nursing Home (FG 5)
- d) High Care Residents in a Nursing Home (FG 6)
- e) Residents using Home and Community Care (HACC) services (FGs 7, 8)

(see Table 1)

## **Topics Covered During the Interview**

The question route was designed to find out about:

- Participants' backgrounds, interests, education and work experience
- Residents' knowledge of educational offerings in the Mornington area
- People's views on reading and libraries
- Reasons for learning in older age
- Changes in learning between 60-80

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<sup>1</sup> These initials will be used later as part of an audit trail that indicates source of quotes.

- How education for older adults should be delivered
- How those who are housebound/living in residential care can receive education
- Views about potential models for learning
- The role of technology in older adult learning
- The role of libraries in older adult learning
- Views about Council's role in older adult learning (Appendix1).

Interviews lasted from an hour to an hour and a half and were taped.

## Analysis

All taped interviews were transcribed. The 50 pages of resultant transcripts were then read several times and pertinent data displayed and analysed using Miles and Huberman (1994) style grids. These provide a helpful tool by which to determine emerging themes in preparation for writing as well as forming a particularly rigorous way to deal with qualitative data.

## Characteristics of Focus Group Participants

Thirty-three people took part in eight Focus Groups. Eleven (1/3) were male and 22 were Female (2/3). They ranged in age from 72 to 94, with the majority being in their early 80s. Participants lived in various parts of the Peninsula including: Mornington, Rosebud, Rye, Hastings, Mt Martha, Somerville and Balnarring. Other specific characteristics of groups are presented in Table 1.

**Table 1: Some Characteristics of Focus Group Participants**

Focus Group No.	Type	Gender/No	Where Raised	Current Residency Type
1	Living Independently	6M	Melbourne x3 Country Vic x1 Sydney x1	Own House x4 Retirement Village x2
2	Living Independently	4F	Melbourne x3 NSW x1	Own House x3 Retirement Village x1
3	Library Users/ Volunteers	4F, 1M	Melbourne x4 Scotland x1	
4	Library Users/ Volunteers	3F, 1M	Melbourne x3 Scotland x1	Own House x1 Retirement Village x1 Own House (HACC) x2
5	Low Care	4F	Melbourne x2 England x1 Scotland x1	All Nursing Home
6	High Care	3F	Country Vic x1 NSW x1 NZ x1	All Nursing Home
7	HACC	2F, 3M	Melbourne x3 England x2	Own Home x3 Retirement Village x2
8	HACC	2F	Melbourne x1 Country Vic x1	Own Home x1 Retirement Village x1

Table 1 indicates that about 2/3 were born and educated in Melbourne while the remainder came from Country Victoria (3), NSW (x2), New Zealand (1), England (2) and Scotland (3). This means that all participants were from English-speaking backgrounds. The table also reflects the various living arrangements already outlined above when selecting groups. 2/3 of participants were widows/widowers while the remainder still had a spouse or had always been single.

## Education Level

Focus Group members possessed a wide range of educational experience ranging from very basic education to University study. However, there were some common patterns across groups which reflected that many were affected or disrupted by the Depression and/or World Wars. For example:

*I left school at 15. I was one of six children and my father was killed during the War so I had to go out to work (FG1).*

*Things were tight in the Depression so after Intermediate I went straight into an office (FG2).*

Other points of interest were that:

### In relation to early education:

- Five people received the bulk of their education overseas
- One person brought up in the country received her education by correspondence
- Several left school at minimum age (x4)
- Two people attended independent schools
- Some managed to complete school but went no further (x3)
- Four gained a Merit/Leaving/Intermediate Certificate.

### Continuing Education

Post-school:

- Several men completed their education in evening school (x4) before launching into associated careers (e.g. in accountancy, engineering)
- Three took on apprenticeships (e.g. fitter & turner and tailors)
- One woman went on to Stott's Business College
- One woman achieved an HSC by attending night school with her son
- One achieved the Sterilising Research Council Technology Certificate.

### Higher Education

Very few had gone on to tertiary level:

- One person had undertaken teacher training
- Two men had attended University (to study dentistry and chemical engineering)
- One woman had studied Chiropody after her husband had been killed during the War and she had become the main breadwinner.

### Travel Connected with Study

Two men had been overseas to study:

- One had been sent to Europe to study Marketing
- One person had studied in Canada.

## Work Undertaken

Clearly men had received more education than women and interestingly those living independently were more likely to have gone on to further education. Also, not surprisingly, education level was reflected in the type of work undertaken later. Men spoken to tended to have ended up with higher status careers and to have been in them for many years. Such people had been:

- A professional engineer 46 yrs
- Testing jet engines with Commonwealth Aircraft 43 yrs
- General Manager and Director of Hilton Hotels 47 yrs
- In overseas telecommunications 37 yrs
- In dentistry for whole career
- 17 yrs in Chemical engineering
- A Sales Manager nationally
- Director of GE major appliances
- In the Police for 30 yrs.

Men's careers also had sometimes taken them overseas. One went to South Africa to build an oil refinery and another had been posted to England for 2 years.

Three had also been in the armed forces during the War.

Meanwhile, women had generally undertaken lower status work or gone into professions thought suitable for women. They had:

- Been a factory worker
- Stayed at home and worked on farm
  
- Managed businesses /worked in offices (x3)
- Worked in white-collar jobs such as a telephonist, telegrapher, insurance clerk
- Been a pharmacy assistant (x2)
  
- Worked in the clothing industry/dress-making business
- Been a silk-screen printer
  
- Worked as an air hostess, nurse (x3) or a schoolteacher.

On marriage many ceased working and:

- Carried out considerable volunteer work
- Helped their husband/father in business
- Moved around with husband following his career path
- Raised families.

Only one woman had travelled abroad. She had lived in Japan for 19 years as her husband had been Director of the Wheat Board.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Such trends regarding education and career of this age group are likely to be common to most municipalities.

## PART B: CONTEXT FOR THE PROJECT

### 1. THE DEMOGRAPHIC IMPERATIVE AND MATTERS ASSOCIATED WITH DEFINING AGE

#### General Trends

The 'demographic revolution' (Fisher & Wolf, 2000: 481) regarding the rapid ageing of the Western world is upon us. McNair states that is marked by features such as:

- The population is ageing as a result of rising life expectancy and improvements in health
- There are far more people in the 'third age' (active retirement) than formerly, with most people spending a much larger part of their lives in this stage than used to be
- There are more people in the 'fourth age' with more people reaching the final years of their lives being more dependent on others for some aspects of daily life. (McNair 2008:7).

As a result, McNair feels that there is need for a rebalancing of policy including: recognising that learning needs to continue throughout life and to consider how learning is distributed between the four major phases of life: 0-25, 25,-50, 50-75 and 75+.

This calls for change and the creation of better learning opportunities available for:

- The growing third age—to support people in establishing identity and finding constructive roles for the much longer period they will spend in active retired life.
- The growing 'fourth age'--to maintain identity, health, social engagement and well-being during the final stages of life (Findeisen, 2007).

Finally, he suggests more appropriate age-related monitoring of education expenditure by the four broad groups of adults including the 75+ group.

#### Numbers Aged Over 65 in Australia

What McNair outlined above was written with Britain in mind, but trends are very similar elsewhere. For instance it was reported recently in *The Age* (2009) that:

*A record one in four women in Japan is aged 65 or over...As of September 15<sup>th</sup> 25.4 of the female population was aged 65 or over, topping 25% for the first time since data collection started in 1950. Men and women combined had a record 28.98 million elderly people, up by 800,000 from a year earlier.*

Similarly, in Australia, the population has become older rapidly since the 1970s, (Rowland, 2003: 239) so that the Australian census has revealed increasing proportions of those over 65:

1976: 8.9%  
1981: 9.8%  
1991: 13%  
2004: 14%

This confirms Hayward & Zhang's forecast in 2001 that; "*within a few decades Australia will join a large groups of developed nations with an increasingly aging population*".

Indeed, according to the Australian Bureau of Statistics, projections up to the middle of

the 2000s are set to rise quite dramatically with proportions of those over 60 suggested to be:

2021: 18-19%

2051: 26-28%

2101: 27-31% (Borowski & Hugo 1997, ABS 2005).

### **Increasing Numbers of the 'Old-Old'**

Already by 1983, Espenshade & Brown were noting in the USA, that;

*The fastest percentage increase in the population is expected to take place among the 'old-old' or those in the 85 and over category (Riley et al., 1983: 27).*

This has proved to be correct as it has been reported that indeed, the 'oldest old' is the fastest growing segment of the older population amongst Western nations (United Nations, 2001).

More recently, Borowski & McDonald (2007) in Australia, echo this suggestion by reporting that; "a significant feature of population ageing in Australia is the aging of the aged population itself" and consequently; "there is considerable variation within the aged population in terms of age." Of particular interest to this project is that:

*Of the 2.6 million Australian who were 65 and over in 2004, 298,300 were aged 85 and over—an increase of 114% since 1984...*

*By 2051 the number of old-old is projected to be 1.6 million (6-8% of the population) and between 1.7 and 2 million in 2101 (7-10% of the population).*

*These proportions mirror the fact that this 'old-old' age group is projected to experience the highest growth rate of all age groups (Borowski & McDonald, 2007: 20).*

This state of affairs was also confirmed by (the then) Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST) figures where it was reported that "In 2000, 2.9% are over 80 in Australia compared with 1.6% in 1976. In 2051 it is estimated that a dramatic increase will occur in the oldest old jumping from this 2.9% to 9.4%" (DEST, 2000). [It also matches reports from other western countries that numbers and proportions of 'old old' (classified as being over 75 years of age) are increasing rapidly (Neikrug et al. 1995: 346)].

Other important associated factors that will affect any future planning for upper age groups in Australia are:

- Life expectancy at the moment is 78 for males and 81 for females (ABS, 2006)
- Life expectancy forecasts for the 'baby boomer' generation currently aged 60 in Australia is 84.4 years for men and 88.8 years for females (Booth & Tickle, 2004)
- There appears to be a narrowing of the gap between male and female life expectancy so that between 2005 and 2016 the population of men over 75 is projected to grow by 54% compared with 35% for women (Temple, 2005). Consequently, this will begin to reduce the current prevalence of older women.
- The number of aged from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) backgrounds is also growing (17.8% of older adults in 1996 to an estimated 22.5% in 2011) particularly amongst current Italian, Greek, German, Dutch and Chinese communities.

## Living Arrangements of Older Adults in Australia

Currently approximately 20% of Australia's population over the age of 70 use aged care services:

- 10% are in HACCC (home nursing, delivered meals, home help, transports and shopping assistance, respite care). In more detail:
- 5% are in Nursing Homes
- 4% are in Hostels
- 1% are in Community Aged Care Packages.

Thus, 80% do not use services and are therefore living independently in their own homes or with relatives.

Zadarni (1999) adds that:

- The vast majority of people living in a nursing homes are over 75
- $\frac{1}{4}$  of the elderly live alone (and  $\frac{3}{4}$  of these are female)

Whether these patterns are to continue is unknown. For instance, a number of care and housing agencies in Britain suggest that residential and nursing care is likely to be replaced by more 'very sheltered' housing schemes (Soulsby, 2000). What is known, however, is that the strategy aims to keep people in their own homes for as long as possible.

## Demographic Information in Relation to Mornington Peninsula Shire

From the Estimated Resident Population (ERP) figures from the Australian Bureau of Statistics, the population of the Shire has been increasing gradually each year since 2001 i.e. from a population of 132,500 in 2001 to 145,500 in 2008 (ABS, 2008: Cat. No. 3235).

The most important point to note (and reflecting patterns noted above) is the remarkable growth in the older age groups 2001-2006 and their proportion in the Shire population overall. Furthermore, this growth is projected to continue (Table 2).

The above figures indicate that about  $\frac{1}{4}$  of Mornington residents are over 60 years of age. In addition, while the proportion of the 60-80+ age groups has increased by over a  $\frac{1}{3}$  in eight years, **the over 80s have more than doubled and are projected to rise even further**. All these figures have considerable ramifications for the types of services and facilities required within the Mornington Peninsula Shire in coming years (including those associated with education).

Therefore, as Cusack (1999) outlines, this extended lifespan invites everyone to take bold steps to develop human potential for growth and productivity to the end of life and to empower people. Finally, not only are a substantial number of people living longer but they are living longer with good functional and intellectual health. Within this, it has to be borne in mind that there is also an increase in educational attainment in successive generational cohorts and this means that there will be increasing demands for older adult learning. This has been pointed out by Merriam et al. (2007) who state that the higher the educational level, the greater the likelihood of engaging in educational activities late in life.

**Table 2: Growth in Numbers and Proportions of Older Adults in the Mornington Peninsula Shire, 2001-2009 and Projected 2014, 2019**

<u>Age</u>	<u>Year</u>	<u>Number</u> (approx)	<u>% Shire Population</u>
50-59	2001	12,500	12.2
	2006	17,500	13.3
	2009	19,000	13.3
(Projected)	2014	20,500	13.6
	2019	21,000	13.4
60-69	2001	9,800	7.9
	2006	14,500	11.0
	2009	18,500	12.8
(Projected)	2014	20,700	13.6
	2019	22,000	13.7
70-79	2001	11,500	7.5
	2006	12,000	8.0
	2009	13,000	9.0
(Projected)	2014	15,000	9.7
	2019	17,500	11.0
<b>80+</b>	<b>2001</b>	<b>1,500</b>	<b>1.4</b>
	<b>2006</b>	<b>5,200</b>	<b>3.5</b>
	<b>2009</b>	<b>8,500</b>	<b>5.7</b>
<b>(Projected)</b>	<b>2014</b>	<b>9,500</b>	<b>6.1</b>
	<b>2019</b>	<b>10,000</b>	<b>6.3<sup>3</sup></b>

## **OTHER MATTERS ASSOCIATED WITH AGE**

### **The Concept of the ‘Old, Old’**

Since the mid 1970s it has been suggested that there may be some value in distinguishing between the ‘young old’ and the ‘old old’ (Neugarten, 1975). In fact, the very old have become the focus of interest for research in their own right—to the extent that studies have been carried out of centenarians (e.g. Poon et al, 1992, Zheng, 1993). In specific reference to acquiring knowledge Fenimore (1997) maintained that centenarians are actively involved in learning through hearing people talking, going out, watching TV or reading newspapers.

### **The Problem of Categorising All Those Over 60 As A Single Homogeneous Group**

Societal considerations so far have usually been based on a concept of age determined by chronology i.e. by date of birth, designated retirement age (usually set by governments) and date of death. However, there have been other ways of

<sup>3</sup> These are much larger proportions than most municipalities in Victoria

conceptualising an older person in comparison with an even older one:

#### a) Self-Definition of Ageing

Firstly, many who are defined as 'old' chronologically continue to view themselves as young or middle-aged. Furstenberg (1989), for instance, looked at the self-concept of older people and found that there is a considerable discrepancy between chronological age and how each older adult feels, acts or thinks. So those who feel, act and think without impairment can justify not perceiving themselves to be old but rather feel 'young at heart'.

This was borne out during interviews when one woman, aged 83, commented; "I've been thinking I might join Senior Citizens but then I look at them and think; 'They're much too old for me!'" (FG4).

They present a picture of activity, creativity and recent accomplishment and seem to feel younger. By contrast those who 'feel old' seem to feel worse. Therefore, there is evidence to indicate that self-descriptions create a type of self-fulfilling prophecy about 'age' (Kuypers & Bengston, 1984).

A piece of research that reflects the above was undertaken by Neikrug et al. (1995). In this instance, 40 people aged 81-91 who did not fit the stereotypes of old age (such as being ill and frail) were studied during a university-based lifelong learning program. Results showed that these people had continued the social contacts made in their earlier lives but established other supportive networks for meeting their current needs. They continued to live rich lives as active, intellectual adults rather than feeling and living as 'old people'. Implicit in all this is an idea that aging should be a social rather than a biological construction, thereby moving away from a disease-oriented model of old age to a more positive one.

The conclusion was that it should be pointed out to policy-makers; *"the importance of balancing the realities of the needs of the very impaired with the quality-of-life needs of the healthy old...such as access to the educational, recreational and social institutions of society"*. They also called for further research to investigate the barriers to such access and the relationship between lifelong learning and successful ageing (Neikrug et al., 1995: 354).

#### b) Concepts of 'Third Age' and 'Fourth Age'

Another redefinition of ageing has been through the introduction of the terms 'second age' 'third age' and 'fourth age' (Baltes, 1999, Baltes & Smith, 2003). In this schema, the 'second age' is applied to those still in the workforce; the 'third age' refers to those who finish work and have an active retirement; and the 'fourth age' refers to the final stages of life leading to death.

However, the age at which one enters each of these stages can vary. For instance, someone in their 70s can still be in the second age if still working, someone in their 90s can still be in the third age because they are leading an active life in retirement, while someone in their 60s can be already in the fourth age, requiring high care due to debilitating illnesses and approaching death (Laslett, 1981). As a result, the onset of dependency cannot be linked to any specific chronological age because some live totally independent lives into their 90s while some are totally dependent in their 60s (Nelson & Dannefer, 1992).

However, most commonly, as mentioned above, the third and fourth ages overlap because many people remain mentally active while becoming frailer physically. And importantly (as we shall see in more detail later) *'a good third age (which includes receiving education) can minimise the adjustments and deficits, and indeed reduce the duration, of the fourth age'* (Radcliffe, 1984:62). Indeed in the late life phase, learning can play an important part in deferring the onset of extreme dependence.

**As a result, learning in older age is valuable and constitutes a form of health promotion because it can lead to an extension of the third age, prevent the onset of dementia, and, as a result, lead to reduced costs in care for the community.**

Lastly, the term 'fourth age' has taken on a slightly different meaning when applied to educational contexts. Certainly in Britain, it has come to mean education that is delivered in nursing homes and so could be delivered to anyone between 60 and 100 living in high care situations. Also it might not be in the period immediately preceding death but could be long-term over many years.

### c) A Failure to Recognise Individual Differences Because of Stereotyping.

The main problem is, though, that society at large has failed to recognise these individual differences but rather tends to stratify and think of older people solely by chronological age and to think of all those of older age as having reached decrepitude. Thus, the 'old' are deemed to be: poorer; sicker; frailer; and more likely to be dependent on community support.

Butler (1975) wrote about these myths and stereotypes, stating that the public have an incorrect view of many older people and that these ideas denote confusions, misunderstanding and lack of knowledge about old age. In his book he notes and disproves specific myths including that all elderly are: unproductive; disengaged; inflexible; senile; and serene (pp16-26). Similarly, Withnall (2008) explores some of the myths about the impact of ageing on the ability, need and will to learn. She presents evidence to refute these myths and considers what the truth means for education practice.

McNair agrees feeling that public perceptions of the later phases of life are 'often out of step with reality' because many older adults are capable of continuing to live independently with relatively little outside support. For instance, contrary to popular belief, in the UK, the majority of people over 80 live in their own homes with some degree of support (often from relatives) and only about 20% live in permanent residential care or sheltered accommodation. Similarly, Bould, Sanborn & Reif (1989) were able to report that nearly a half of the 85+ age group they were examining were able live independently. Furthermore, the Audit Commission in England (2008) found that even after 90, less than a third of people are in residential care. Consequently, as Neikrug et al, conclude; *"That there exists a portion of old old who are not ill and frail is fairly clear"* (p 437).

Strangely, such labelling and 'lumping together' of all those over working age occurred when applied to a study of the portrayal of older adult learners in adult education journals over a period of 25 years. Chen et al. (2008) found that older adults have been considered *en masse* in such journals with recognition of few individual differences. They discovered that:

*Older adults have been portrayed as a homogeneous group in terms of age, gender, race, class, ethnicity and able-bodiedness. Second older adults have been viewed as capable and motivated learners with few physical limitations* (Chen et al, 2008: Abstract).

## A Need for Studies of Particular Cohorts of Older Adults

Having emphasised the need to recognise individual differences in older adulthood, there is an argument for studying groups by age. Specifically referring to age range of older adults (which may be between 60-100), Chen et al. (2008) have this to say:

*The majority of articles do not indicate any age range at all: rather the discussion is about 'the elderly', 'elders', 'older adults', 'the aging', 'retired', 'old people', 'seniors', 'the other side of sixty' or some combination of these.*

Furthermore, McNair (2008) points out that:

*One should not assume that people in the third age share common experiences as a 'generation'. The oldest man in the UK is 112 and the current estimates suggest that the first woman to live to 120 is probably now 60 and about to retire. This means that there will be families with parents, children and grandchildren all in retirement. To treat them all as 'old people' with identical interests, aspirations and or needs would be absurd (p20).*

This is important for this project which has been based on the idea that the education needs of those over 80 may be different from those just retired.

One of the few people to acknowledge age differences among older adults has been Thorson, (1989) who suggested that educators need to note that; “*the fastest growing segment of our population is the group 86+*” (p19).

The Extent to Which Focus Group Participants Considered Learning to Be Different at 80+ From When They Were 60.

To explore whether there are perceptible differences in learning between being 60 and 80+, participants were asked to compare the ability to learn now in comparison with when they first retired. Only one person thought that everything was just the same for them, while another pointed out that the amount and types of change are; “*very personal and different for everyone*” (FG6).

Others claimed that:

- It's more difficult to deal with new jargon (which those over 80 find hard to understand). This is indicated in the following conversation:
  - 1: *I have a set top box sitting next to me at the moment with the instruction book and I've been putting off connecting it because ...the words they use don't mean much. So I put it off....*
  - 2: *Texts are written more for younger people. ...The instructions need to be more detailed.*
  - 3: *I agree. I was thinking about the set top box—I was also thinking of buying one and I won't get one until someone can help me set it up because I know (and I'm being very negative) that I possibly wouldn't understand the instructions—even though I was in the industry! Certainly when you're older you can't understand the modern language (FG1).*
- The age group is a bit slower (FG1x2, FG4, FG8x2)
- Over 80s don't react as quickly (FG2)

- Older seniors can't concentrate as long (FG5, FG7, FG8) (so learning has to take place over a shorter time span) (FG7)
- Things become more difficult (FG2, FG3, FG5) e.g. spelling
- It's harder to retain/recollect information (FG3, FG5, FG6, FG7) for example:  
*I find my memory is not so good. Once I could reel off the name of everything in the garden but now I become frustrated because I can't remember. ...That's the big word: frustration. We want to remember but it's harder (FG5).  
  
It's a matter of retaining things too...Like when people give you a phone number. If I write it down I'll probably remember it. If they rattle it off I can't recall or repeat it quite often (FG1).*
- The hands are not so nimble for learning to do crafts etc. (FG2)  
Some people explained that they would become frustrated and lose interest if;  
*"my hands weren't mobile enough to do things I was trying to learn"* (FG2)
- Mental work is possible but the body is frailer (FG2, FG6).  
As one person explained:  
*The whole trouble at 85 is the physical body. It isn't what it used to be but mentally I feel as though I was only 65! I think that I still have the same ability to concentrate but the body is not always willing (FG2).*

Two interviewees described well the overall changes that had occurred for them over the last 30 years:

*When I was 60 I was travelling all around the world two or three times a year ...and I could do and learn a tremendous amount. And then at 70 I wasn't doing quite as much. It was getting more difficult. And then at 75 I'd slowed up a little bit more. And I did the last trip at 89 because I then couldn't see enough. I was still interested but at that stage I thought I would be a burden to other people. And I miss it so much, even at 91. I still want to do it (FG2).*

*It's different at 75 and again at 80. And if you get to 90 you are lucky if you get through the day peacefully and not having to take on anything else. It takes you very much longer to do the normal things and by the time you do the things you need to do, you haven't got the thinking power or the physical power to concentrate for another couple of hours on something that is quite, quite different (FG7).*

One person with increasing hearing difficulties also summarised how the delivery of learning has had to change for him over the years:

*I find (and I think most others of my age would say the same) most of the tutors I would have would be speaking. I do have a problem to a degree with hearing. I can learn just as quickly at 86 as I could at 60 if I can sit down and read it or I go to my computer. But if I have to go to a lecture—at 60 it didn't matter if I sat at the back or if he spoke quickly but it sure matters now. For that reason I would prefer to learn on the computer or by reading a book or in the front row with a good amplifier. Then I would be happy (FG1).*

Finally, one person made an interesting observation about increasing age and the capacity to learn:

*Those who seem able to learn more easily are people who have been learning all their life and have had the opportunity to extend their brain. I think that 85-90 is too late to start learning. You definitely need to have been doing it most of your life. You have to have a very keen appetite for it (FG7).*

## 2. COGNITIVE FUNCTIONING OF OLDER ADULTS

### Age in Relation to Brain Capacity and Cognitive Functioning

A point of great importance and relevance to this review is the misconception that cognitive decline is inevitable as we grow older and that the majority of older adults will have some form of dementia. However, the reality is that of those who are over 85 yrs, less than 1/3 will live with this condition. Nevertheless, the previous section of the report raised the issue of the ability of those over 80 to learn and remember, so it is not surprising that since the 1960s a great deal of research (especially in the USA) has examined the learning and memory abilities of older adults.

However, constrained by length, only some major findings can be presented here. Many of them are encouraging. For example:

- Older adults are quite capable of learning (Birren & Schaie, 1996).
- There is evidence to show that the older learners can acquire new skills (Naylor, 1974, Barton et al, Willis et al. 1981).
- While general age-related deficits have been observed by some, the magnitude of differences between young and old are often relatively small (Shaie, 1994).
- Performance curves of young and older groups overlap to the point where some older adults perform better than some younger ones and, overall, older adults' learning and memory performance remains relatively competent (Duffy, 2007).
- Although many scientists in the past regarded declining mental functioning in older adults as inevitable and irreversible, recent studies have shown time and again that older adults can learn to think faster, remember better and reason more efficiently (Duffy, 2007).
- The ability to be creative does not reduce and in fact can undergo a late-life resurgence (Simonton, 1990a).
- Also basic to the theory of older adult learning is the concept of integrity and intellectual development culminating in wisdom (Simonton, 1990b).
- Intelligence and memory are adaptive and the nature and requirements of intelligence and memory change with old age—a kind of 'intelligent pragmatism' (Labouvie-Vief, 1980:7).
- *"Learning with aging is not just about cognitive capacity"* (Cohen, 2008) but:  
*"Interest and motivation for learning in one's later years are also influenced by positive brain changes and psychological development that affect our readiness comfort level and courage to seek out new and challenging opportunities."*  
Thus, according to Cohen, the general perception is that cognitive capacity focuses too much on the negative but overlooks the new capacities of positive brain changes and growth that come with aging.
- Centenarians who still reside in the community, while maybe functioning at a lesser capacity than the 'young old' in memory, function similarly to 60 year olds in regard to problem-solving performance (Poon et al. 1992b).

- Research has shown that education is one of the strongest predictors of sustained cognitive functioning, intelligence and adjustment in older age (Rudinger, 1974, Helander & Thomaes, 1982, Rowe & Kahn, 1998, Shaie, 1994). This has also been demonstrated in many studies in Australia, Europe and the United States, (Granik & Friedman, 1967, Mol & Wimmer, 1971, Naylor, 1974).

As a result, several lifespan developmental psychologists have managed to obtain grants to carry out longitudinal surveys in order to evaluate the ageing process (the most famous of which was established in 1956 in Seattle, although other studies have been undertaken in Baltimore as well as in Gothenburg, Berlin and Bonn in Europe). The evidence is that only a small proportion of physical decline in old age can be attributed to inevitable physiological deterioration and that it is the duration and intensity of training and physical activity throughout life which determines the performance of many people as they grow older.

- Supporting the above point is that cognitive differences between older individuals relate little to age but much more to factors such as social class, education, health and environment (Glendinning, 1996:17).

### **Cognitive and Other Benefits of Educational Interventions in Older Age**

Some of the most exciting work though has been carried out within the last 30 years where it has been discovered that introducing educational activities during older age can be beneficial. For example, Walker reported that; *“great involvement in educational and socio-cultural activities in later life reduces the effects of various physical difficulties often faced in the declining years”* (1980: 154).

A few years later Riley (1983) presented an even more positive finding whereby:

- Intellectual decline with ageing (when it occurs) can often be slowed or reversed by simple training interventions
- Older people can learn to compensate through research-tested mnemonic strategies for declines in reaction time, memory and other age-related deficits<sup>4</sup> (Riley et al, 1983:2).

After 40 years of measurement the Seattle studies still show that cognitive decline is not inevitable and that where intellectual decline has been shown to exist, it is possible, through carefully planned instruction strategies, to reverse the process. So, Shaie, a leader in research on cognition and ageing, and his team have found that 40% of those older adults who declined significantly over 14 years were returned to their pre-decline state with appropriate educational activity (Shaie, 1990: 302).

However, Schaie, also emphasised that theories of intelligence must be ‘multidimensional’ (Shaie, 1990: 292) i.e. they must include spatial orientation, inductive reasoning and fluency (Schaie & Willis, 1986, 1996). In applied educational activities attending to these elements, it was found, even in the oldest age groups (over 80s), people remained stable or improved on specific abilities (Schaie, 1990: 296). Shaie concludes that:

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<sup>4</sup> Another related development is the use of Web-based interventions. Websites such as *Happy Neuron* and *Train my Brain* already exist. Rebok has been funded by the National Institute in Aging to develop a Web-based university that will deliver mnemonic training classes for older people.

*It's possible that healthy individuals who maintain an active intellectual life will show little or no loss of intellectual abilities, even into their eighties and beyond (Shaie, 1990: 319).*

Extending this work more recently, has been Rebok, a professor of Mental Health. He has raised hopes that cognitive training interventions can promote positive outcomes and delay the onset of dementia. He stated that;

*..older adults have much more plasticity in the cognitive system than we used to think. It's not just a matter of everyone going downhill as they get older and there's nothing to be done about it..(in Ball et al. 2002).*

Starting in the mid 1990s, Rebok embarked on the largest clinical investigations of such an intervention ever undertaken. With the acronym ACTIVE (Advanced Cognitive Training for Independent and Vital Elderly) this longitudinal study has been following the progress of 3000 participants who were placed in a control group or in one of three training programs. The first of the latter targeted memory skills by teaching mnemonic strategies, along with verbal techniques focused on word lists and blocks of text. Then a second program aimed to enhance reasoning skills by working on participants' abilities to find patterns in a series of letters or words. The third focussed on speeds of processing skills and involved challenging visual searches complicated by asking participants to tackle two searches simultaneously.

Each set of training lasted 10 hours and results were published in JAMA (Sherry et al. 2006). All three training programs succeeded in improving cognitive skills but importantly the study found gains in all types of training for at least five years. But the most interesting finding was associated with whether the cognitive gains helped participants lead fuller, healthier and more independent lives. At the end of five years all three intervention groups reported less difficulty than the control group. Participants are to be tested again in 10 years.

Brinn (2004) goes on to discuss how such research on the aging brain has shown that enriched environments (such as through education) are key to maximising quality of life in later years. Her article explores the possibility of applying this knowledge to some long-term care settings where frail elderly can be deprived of ongoing learning experiences.

Taking up the baton, Baltes suggests further that this involves renewed "*cognitive aspects of the self, self-development and self-management*" (Baltes, 1993: 581). The conclusion follows that educational interventions are needed that are specific, pragmatic and enhance the autonomy of the older person.

## **Why Is It Important to Keep Learning in Older Age?**

### Adapting to Change, Both Personally and in Current Society

The oldest people in the community have hardly featured in educational activity because retirement is often equated with 'leisure'. Therefore, it has been difficult to convince governments that education for this group is no less important than for others. So, up until recently, older adult education has been seen simply as an optional extra with a resultant low priority in relation to the allocation of resources. Yet Enmore (2000) points out that education is one of the key elements considered crucial in enabling people to encompass the pressures of rapid social and economic change that occur throughout life.

Hiemstra also points out that:

*Older individuals need to seek order in their lives, to find meaning and to satisfy physiological needs as well as to achieve self-actualisation in creative ways through the later years of life. Changing family roles, age-related losses and social commitments impel elders to seek information (Hiemstra, 1998; 19).*

He adds that the above involves problem-solving education which is self-directed and satisfying for older adults. This need for satisfaction is confirmed by writers such as Boggs (1992) Brockett (1985) and Long (1993). Such self-sufficiency and the ability to be in control of one's life is also a prime motivator for learning. When deprived of such 'locus of control' the elderly can be especially vulnerable to depressive and passive behaviours (Langer & Rodin, 1977).

**McNair refers to what is described above as acquiring 'identity capital'. This is related to developing and maintaining a sense of identity, self-confidence, control over one's life and engagement with other people. He agrees with Langer & Rodin that:**

***This is critical to well-being and mental health and includes developing powers of creativity and reflection. This sort of learning may be more important when people spend less of their lives in employment as it gives most people a sense of purpose and meaning (2008: 30).***

**In addition provision of education encourages: integration into society, civic participation and therefore the possibility of making a social contribution.**

McNair believes then; *"that there is a clear educational need here"*. Indeed, for some, learning may be one of the few areas in life where the individual older adult can continue to exercise control. It is therefore, very important that opportunities exist, and that they are designed appropriately to maximise learner autonomy and independence.

#### A Way to Maintain Mental Health

Following on from the above arguments, other recent research has shown that learning promotes positive mental health which is particularly important in the later years (Cusack & Thompson, 2003). Therefore any learning that is associated with physical and mental exercise, or the maintenance of independent living should be encouraged (Reingold & Werby, 1990).

There is also empirical evidence for the importance of education in connection with older adults Value of Life (VOL) scales. For instance, a large study of older adults demonstrated a strong positive relationship between personal goals and projects (i.e. actions planned and chosen by the individual and VOL (Lawton et al, 2002). VOL was correlated with specific actions such as intellectual activities such as engagement in education and reading. *"These were connected with meaning and purpose, futurity, agency and perseverance"* (Jopp et al. 2008).

Indeed such quality of life that education brings is well-documented in that it also satisfies needs for socialisation, intellectual stimulation and for new experiences (O'Brien, 1995; Penning & Wasyliv, 1995; Ruth et al. 1989)

In conclusion to this section, there are legitimate education objectives for learning in the later stages of life stage. It helps to: *"make sense of their own lives; link generations; and maintain the sense of well-being which comes from remaining mentally and physically active"* (McNair, 2008:57).

Focus Group members were also asked to consider why it may be important to keep learning once one is over 80. Many of the replies echo the points already raised. Interviewees felt that it was important to keep learning in order to:

- Keep the brain alert (FG6)
- Keep mentally active (All Groups):

*We're very keen, my wife and I, on codewords and crosswords and all sorts of puzzles. We think if we're doing something with our minds, we're not letting ourselves go backwards (FG3).*

*It goes back to stimulation. In old age you tend to sit in a chair—so you've got to do something to keep you interested in life (FG5).*

*It's like on the physical side of life there's the phrase 'Use it or lose it.' I think it applies equally well to your mental capacity....because once you lose it, that's it! (FG4).*

*We need to keep mentally active, even if we're not physically fit (FG6).*

- Keep up with the times (especially with the use of technology) (FG1)
- Keep up-to-date with current politics, world affairs (FG1, FG3)
- Keep up with a rapidly changing world (FG2); "*as that's what we are living in*" (FG3).

- Be able to hold an intelligent conversation with others (FG1)
- Be able to function with the rest of the family, including grandchildren (FG1):

*You need to keep up with the grandchildren and you can talk their language if you know what is going on. That's why I like to read and find what's going on in the world (FG3).*

*You've got to deal with your children and grandchildren and take part in their conversations. It's no good them visiting you and you don't know what's going on. You would cut yourself off. If they talk, you want to take part in what they're talking about and where they've been (FG5).*

- Be able to contribute to society (FG1)
- Help you to stay active which is good for your health (FG2)
- Keep you young at heart (FG2)
- Prevent boredom (FG6)
- Have fun (FG6)
- Gives people something to look forward to (FG2):

*I think interested people live longer. It gives them something to look forward to (FG8).*

- Maintain self-esteem (FG1)
- Ward off the onset of dementia (FG6)
- Prevent loneliness (FG4):

*I think you would be very lonely...If you didn't have any interests and weren't interested in learning in any way, you would be very, very limited (FG4).*

## Why Else Do Older People Want to Learn?

Motivation to learn in relation to age is certainly clear from the NIACE Adult Participation in Learning Survey (Table 3; adapted from Aldridge & Tuckett, 2005).

**Table 3: NIACE Survey Results about Why Different Cohorts of Older Adult Want to Learn**

	<b>55-64</b>	<b>65-74</b>	<b>75+</b>
<b>Rising Importance with Age</b>			
Interest in Subject	42%	51%	55%
Enjoy Learning	30%	53%	82%
Improve Self-Confidence	13%	14%	17%
Meet People	8%	16%	28%
<b>Falling Importance with Age</b>			
Help in Current Job	25%	8%	1%
Develop Myself as a Person	28%	20%	15%

The table above demonstrates that what increases with age is learning for interest, a desire to remain curious and for enjoyment. Also important is the socialisation aspect. In younger life social contact is often provided by work but those in retirement and well into old age see 'meeting new people' as a benefit of participation in order to combat the sense of isolation faced by many.

### 3. INTERESTS OF OLDER ADULTS AND ATTITUDES TO EDUCATION

#### What Subjects Do Older Adults Want to Learn as They Get Older?

Surveys carried out in the USA (AARP) and in the UK by the University of Sheffield (2003) revealed that the elderly want to keep up with the world around them and enjoy learning something new.

More recently, Duay and Bryan (2008) found that participants over 80 appear to choose topics in which they have some basis of knowledge or topics that seem pertinent to them. For example, when asked what new things he would like to learn about Howard, 86, responded:

*I am more interested in expanding my current interests. I wouldn't want to embark on a new language for example. I don't think I want to learn Russian at this stage in the game. I'd like to improve my German or improve my Italian as opposed to another language.*

Similarly, Susan, 81 said that she enjoys a topic when; *"it is in my experience and I can add to it."* So older adults appear to want to expand their existing knowledge.

Meanwhile, McNair (2008) reports that subjects of study also change with age and in Britain become steadily more concentrated into four broad subject areas: information and communication technologies, foreign languages, health and cultural subjects. However interestingly he questions; *"Does this reflect genuine interest or merely what is available?"*—and so feels that future research *"may identify a different pattern of real need or demand"* (p36).

## Participants' Interests

In order to ascertain interests of FG participants, they were asked several questions related to communal activity, past educational activity, hobbies and what they would still like to learn about

Firstly, interviewees were asked which groups they currently belonged to and also what they had been active in, in the past. Perhaps, seeing that agreeing to be in a focus group demonstrates 'community-mindedness', the bulk of participants belonged to (or had belonged to) some sort of group. Membership also revealed a wide range of interests and that many people had held office.

### Currently

Many belonged to senior-focussed groups with the main one being:

**Probus (x11)**. Four had also held office such as Past President, Activities Officer or Secretary.

Other membership was associated with:

Other older adults groups:	COTA (Council on the Ageing) x2, U3A, Senior Citizens x2
Men's organizations:	Lion's Cub, Freemasons (Secretary)
Women's groups:	CWA (Life member), Cooking group
Large national organizations:	The National Trust x2, Liberal Party
Health/Social welfare:	Red Cross x2, Hospice, Vision Australia
Religious Organisations:	Church Groups x3
Sports Group:	Golf Club
Outdoor Activities:	Bushwalking Club, Gardening Club
Reading Interest Group:	Library Group x3, Book Group
Community Hall:	Teaching Computers
Professional Association:	Mornington Police Association.

Many had also been in groups before retiring, when living elsewhere or when they had been less frail. Therefore, some organisations nominated included those already mentioned. Again the interest groups were wide-ranging:

Other older adults groups:	U3A, Senior Citizens x2
Women's organizations:	CWA
Large national organizations:	Guides (District Commissioner)
Health/Social welfare:	Vision Australia, Pink Group Hastings Hospital Hospital Volunteer x2, Meals-on-Wheels x2 (Treasurer) Red Cross (Regional Chairman 15 yrs)
Religious Organisations:	Church Groups x3, Church Choir, Women's Guild x2
Sporting/Recreation Group:	Golf Club x3 (Treasurer), Country Club (committee member), Dancing Groups, Bowling Club x2 (Secretary) Croquet Club, Bowling Club x2 (Secretary), Mornington Bridge Club
School-Based Groups:	PTA, Tuck Shop x2
Craft Groups:	Embroiderers' Guild, Craft Classes,
Other:	Writing Group, Nepean Historical Society, Animal Groups (dog shows), Horticultural Society (President),

Only four claimed not to have belonged to anything (x4). Reasons given for not joining organised groups included that; *“I was too busy working and raising a family”* (FG4) or that; *“I’m not a very social person”* (FG7).

## Hobbies

Reflecting the range of interests already indicated by group membership, hobbies were also diverse. However **gardening** was by far the most popular with over a quarter of participants mentioning it. It also seemed to be of particular interest to high care residents confined to nursing homes:

*I have a back yard and they help me to plant a few pots and there’s a rose garden. And they put a note on the wall saying that there’s to be gardening on that afternoon. And we have a cup of tea afterwards and that rounds off the afternoon. I like to plant pansies and things like that. One bed is for parsley and those sorts of things and the other is raised and has pansies in there. I’ve also got a window box outside my window which I love. And I had a volunteer help me to plant those sorts of peas you put in a salad while her little boy sprinkles water on them* (FG6).

Interestingly, five also nominated **computing** as a hobby with one person describing how she was on her machine; *“from first thing in the morning till last thing at night”* (FG6).

Other categories of hobbies comprised:

Arts and Crafts:	Painting, Sewing x3, Needlework, Tapestry, Knitting x2, Crochet x2, Toy making, General Craft, Woodwork x2, Photography
Music:	Singing, China painting
Physical Activities:	Bushwalking/Walking x4, Yoga, Tai Chi, Dancing x2 (One taught Senior Citizens), Tennis, Golf x3, Petanque, Netball (in past)
Games:	Mahjong x2, Playing Cards x2
Literacy Interests:	Learning a second language, Reading, Writing; Talking books
Other:	Animals.

Interestingly, one person suggested that if priorities had to be made about offerings for people over 80 then it should be gardening and cooking; *“as these are two essentials for elderly people to remain independent”* (FG7).

## Attitudes to Education

Interviewees were asked to give an immediate one or two word reaction to the words 'Education in older age'. This often revealed their true feelings about the topic. 20% gave a positive view straightaway, using words such as; "very good" (x2), "excellent", "beneficial", "very interesting", "leads to participation", "keeps you occupied" and "most important". A similar proportion were concerned with maintaining brain function stating that: "you need to keep the mind active" (x3) and "you need to keep alert" in order "to keep up with the young" and to "improve your memory".

Others had mental pictures of what they wanted to learn or the means by which to learn such as "IT", "computers", "books" and the "delivery of books". Another group thought immediately of organizations/location where learning takes place; for example, the U3A, Men's Sheds and "facilities for learning". Then a couple of people had the idea of continuation in mind with phrases such as; "continuing education" and "being a continual student".

Only four of the 33 had more negative perceptions suggesting that: "It's more difficult now" (FG6), "It's too late" (FG7), "It will cost" (FG7) and "I'm not interested at my age" (FG8).

Attitudes to education just outlined were confirmed when people were asked what they would still like to learn about. Responses went right along the spectrum from one person who was willing to study "Anything" to those whose response was; "Nothing" (x5). The person who was keen to learn anything and everything had this to say later:

*I think I might be a little bit slower at 92 but I still like books and have interests. I have arthritis in the knees which holds me back a bit but I do most things for myself. I'm still interested in picking up hints and learning (FG4).*

Meanwhile, explanations given for why some people said that they did not want to take on anything new included that they were content to sit back and rest on their laurels; "I'm quite satisfied with my lot having reached three score years and ten" (FG2). There were also those who were very active saying that; "I really don't want to take on anything extra. I've got so much going on now that I don't need anything new" (FG2, FG8). However, two also thought that they were "too old to learn anything new now." (FG4, FG7).

## Education Undertaken Since 60 Years of Age.

Those attending focus groups were also asked to nominate any type of learning that had they had undertaken since they were 60 (so in the last 20-30 years). They listed a wide range of activities, both informal and formal, including learning about:

- Computing (FG1 x2, FG2, FG7, FG8) (through Community Health in Rosebud, special program for the elderly in Berwick, U3A, Council program in Mornington)
- How to use other technologies such as I-Pods, MCT Players, mobile phones (FG1, FG7)
- Woodworking (FG1x3)
- Metalworking (FG1)
  
- History (FG7) (through Japanese university)
- Philosophy (FG1) (through U3A)

- Current affairs (FG 7) (through U3A)
- Literacy course (FG7)
- Short story writing (FG1)
- French (FG1) (through U3A)
- Gardening (FG8)
- Fishing (FG2)
- Business through how to manage a kiosk (FG2)
- Handcrafts (at Mt Martha House) (FG2)
- How to play Mahjong (FG2)
- Rules of bowls to become a bowling umpire (FG2)
- Rules of netball to become a netball umpire (FG3)
- Coaching (through a course) (FG2)
- Other places and cultures (FG2) (through travel).

Indeed, one person felt that; *“I think I’ve learnt more since 60 than at any other time in my life really”* (FG3).

However, three people said that they had not undertaken any specific learning but had learnt from life, mixing with people, holding office in an organisation, watching TV, listening to the radio, listening to music and from reading/talking books. Some also said they had learned a great deal from their children and grandchildren.

#### What Participants Would Like to Learn About Now

The range of activity associated with what participants would still like to learn about was similar to above, although there was less emphasis on physical activity and more on keeping abreast of the world and musical activity. However, the most common desire was to learn about **Computing** (x4). Other activities nominated were:

Arts and Crafts:	Painting, Sculpture, Cooking
Literacy Interests:	Writing Family History, Learning Foreign Language, Poetry
Music:	Singing in a choir, Playing the piano, Music Appreciation
Outdoor Activity:	Croquet, Gardening
Outside World :	Current Affairs, Learning about other countries, Geography, Astronomy.

In summary, what this reveals is that, just like younger age groups, these over 80s had a wide range of hobbies and interests and had belonged to diverse groups and organizations. They had also learnt in different locations. Therefore, diverse subjects need to be offered but particularly computing, gardening and music as well as arts and crafts.

## 4. HOW AND WHERE SHOULD LEARNING OCCUR?

### Strategies for Teaching Those Over 80

In the 1980s there were the beginnings of interest in considering ways to teach older adults. At this time appropriate strategies and models were put forward. However, most of these were directed at 50-70 year olds—for example Jarvis's (1980) designs for pre-retirement education-- although some were more embracing such as Yeo's ideas for 'eldergogy' (1982). Interestingly though, of the 93 adult education articles reviewed by Chen et al. (2008), since 2000 "*no articles discussed instructional strategies for older learners*" (p8). As a result what follows next are ideas that have been put up on the Web.

#### Adult Learning Principles

According to Lieb (1991) there are several recognised principles associated with older adult learning. These include that adult learners:

- Need to be autonomous and self-directed. Therefore, teachers need to serve as facilitators
- Have life experiences and knowledge to draw upon such as prior work activities, family responsibilities and prior education, Therefore, teachers need to value and incorporate this experience whenever possible
- Are relevancy oriented so learning has to be applicable to student needs and, if appropriate students should choose learning activities that reflect their own interests
- Require respect. Therefore, students should at least be treated as equals, allowed to express their opinions and indeed sometimes be seen to be the expert.

Similarly, 'eHow' (2009) suggests the following:

- Get to know your students' goals. Older adults can lose interest when the teachers' goals conflict with their own.
- Use activities that are designed for real life and that can be used immediately
- Plan for a slower pace. Older adults are generally as intellectually sharp as younger people but some may have less short-term memory capacity or less patience when deciphering confusing information.
- Present one concept at a time and be prepared to go over it many times
- Make sure all can see and hear comfortably
- Writing assignments should be kept to a minimum (bearing arthritis etc. in mind)
- Remember that some may not have studied for many years. Chat about ways to memorize and ask them to share any tricks for learning.
- Avoid tests and exams. It's better to give written feedback about how they can improve
- Make learning fun as most want to learn for pleasure
- Provide role models of successful learners as some may lack confidence.

#### Ideas Put Forward in the Literature by Those Being Taught

The ideas above have come from instructors but there have been some studies where older adults have put their ideas forward regarding how they should be taught. For example from research carried out by Duay & Bryan (2008) we have some insight into what over 80s think are best strategies for instruction. This is because authors carried out a qualitative interview study of effective and ineffective learning experiences with 36 older learners many of whom were over 80.

Participants in Duay and Bryan's study mentioned increasing problems with concentrating

and staying alert so active involvement in a learning experience can be especially important. Consequently, Howard, aged 86, offered this advice to instructors; *“Get students involved. Have them pick up a pencil. Have them tap in time to the music. Allow freedom of question and answer”*. Similarly, David aged 85, commented about the importance of a 10 minute question and answer time; *“because thinking is stimulating and grabs the attention.”*

However, they also wanted the instructor to be in control, otherwise a senior could hinder the learning experience. Charles, 83, stated *“Sometimes a teacher doesn’t control the class. Too many times a senior will ask an irrelevant question or get up and expound on whatever he wants to talk about”*. Sam, 85, made this suggestion for dealing with overly vocal seniors; *“At the beginning of the class put down the guidelines and then any intelligent person can abide by them.”*

Another theme that emerged from the study is that people want to learn in friendship groups. For instance, a group of three women, all in their 80s, were part of a group that gathers weekly at a senior centre. Margaret the leader observed that;

*You have some people who never raise a hand and never say a word but they’re coming to the meeting. They’re getting something out of it. Whether it’s the discussion, or just being with friends or going to lunch afterwards, it’s a day out. It gets them out of the four walls. It’s something for them to look forward to.*

As indicated earlier, learning in older age can be an important strategy for staying involved with the world. As Sarah 88, remarked:

*Even if I went and didn’t understand everything, I learned one thing—it was something. Just getting out and being with people and doing something different is important.*

The second finding of the study was that the instructor is all important and has to present well. The instructor has to be enthusiastic, interesting and knowledgeable. Alice 81, also believed that with teaching her age group teachers should be outgoing, know the subject and be able to make older adults understand it. There was also talk about the need to grab older seniors’ attention through humour and stories because; *“older people have a tendency to fall asleep”*. They also asked for: straightforward language; instructors to recognise their lifetime of experiences; and to respect their ability, enthusiasm and desire to learn.

Those attending classes also wanted a pressure-free learning environment with no reading requirements, assignments, having to memorise things or take tests. Thus Duay & Bryan conclude that instructors for this age group need to create enjoyable, stress-free learning environments that encourage rather than require seniors to focus, absorb and learn.

There was also discussion about hearing loss. Delores, 86 in the study mentioned that:

*A lot of seniors have a hearing loss. So they really should speak louder. I find with one lecturer that her voice drops at the end of a sentence so we don’t get the whole sentence”*.

### Other Studies on Learning Styles of Older Adults

Truluck & Courtney (1999) felt that, overall, very little is known about the learning styles of older adults. Their study therefore attempted to rectify the situation and also examined

the association of gender, age and educational level. They applied Kolb's (1985) Learning Style Inventory to 172 older adults. Results revealed that overall, older adults were evenly distributed across Accommodator, Assimilator and Diverger styles but few preferred the Converger style which involved thinking and doing while learning. However, when looked at by age there were some trends:

- 55-65s preferred the Accommodator style (i.e. learning by feeling and doing)
- 66-74s preferred the Diverger style (i.e. learning by feeling and watching) and pertinent to this study;
- The over 75s preferred the Assimilator style (learning by thinking and watching).

Therefore, it is suggested that not all older learners are active, hands-on learners as adult education literature suggests but rather, with age, there is a tendency to become more reflective and observational in the learning environment.

Meanwhile, Delahaye and Ehrich (2008)'s paper examines the literature of adult learning concentrating on presage factors, the learning environment, instructional methods and techniques for facilitators. Their own study went on to examine motivations to learn and techniques that facilitators should use with older adults. This was applied to those who chose to learn the craft of woodturning. Findings showed that there are complex learning bases among older people including actively seeking knowledge, independent learning, dependent learning and passively seeking knowledge.

Those in interview groups had quite definite views about how older adults should be taught. Some of their suggestions were to:

- learn in small groups of 4-5 so that teachers can give plenty of attention to students (FG8)
- hold lots of short quick classes with breaks (FG1)
- be taught one-to-one (FG1)
- go through steps slowly, one at a time (FG1)
- have notes for revision (FG1)
- have patience (FG1).

Some comments reflecting these ideas included:

*As far as learning computers are concerned you need personal contact with someone who knows what they're doing. Secondly I like the information written down so that I can refer back to it and revise (FG1).*

*You've got to get it in writing or get them to go through procedures slowly. I find that younger people cotton on to this new IT quickly but this isn't the case for me (FG1).*

- take into account that some people have hearing difficulties (FG1)

*I think it's mandatory that any speaker to elderly people should use a good microphone or lapel mike. So many people say; 'It was good but I missed half of it'... This is not recognised by younger speakers. So with me it has to be a good seat down the front or a good microphone (FG1).*

- recognise that like the general population older adults can have varying learning styles:

*I find that information can be transferred readily—at least in my case—by visual techniques such as drawings and diagrams (supplemented by words by all means) (FG1).*

## Where Should Learning Take Place?

One of the few studies about environments for older adult learning has been undertaken by Eaton and Salari (2005). Using participant observation and interviews, they examined three multi-purpose American senior centres. Designated areas were most successful while low participation was noted when multipurpose rooms were used for learning was compromised by distractions

Older adults in focus groups went on to make various suggestions about where education for older adults should take place. They nominated various locations on the Peninsula such as:

- Senior Citizens' rooms
- Community halls (e.g. Balnarring)
- Libraries
- Art Galleries
- Through older adult groups such as Probus
- Schools when not in use

In relation to the possibility of using local schools for older adult education, one of the Focus Group interviewees outlined how this was working both locally and overseas:

*Bendigo Bank gave \$300,000 to Rosebud Primary School on the condition that they make it available to the community outside school hours. I also spent time visiting friends in Canada. They took me to the local school where the idea of the Men's Shed had been translated into using the school workshop. The workshop wasn't used at night. In fact the community used the entire school building to run U3A, Men's Shed-type activity in the workshop and the computers. They were all available to the community—much like a public library (FG1).*

One plea about location though was to have learning near the home or in the home. This was because many interviewees said they no longer drive and so had no transport. Therefore, one of the most favoured ideas was to run learning which is integrated into living spaces. For instance, The Glen retirement village was held up as a model to follow because education is brought into the setting:

*Well in The Glen, U3A meet for family history, tai chi, strength ball training, weight bearing exercises, water aerobics, line dancing, pottery, painting, crafts, card games, mah jong, whist and solo. You can play golf, croquet and petanque and table tennis—and swimming. You could be out every day if you wanted to (FG8).*

However, wherever chosen, some were keen to add that if possible it should be in a location where people come together for social interaction:

*It's very good to do it at home but you could easily become a hermit if you wanted to. I think this something you have to be careful to avoid. With group activity like woodworking or discussion or a Mac Computer group like the one we've started at the Village Glen, the point is, it's a group activity. It gives a reason to get out and talk to other people. It's the social interaction. This is an important part because then you stay in contact with the world and with a variety of people and a variety of opinions. You can only pick these up if you go out and meet people (FG1).*

### **Knowledge of What's on Offer in the Mornington Peninsula Shire.**

All groups were asked to nominate what educational opportunities for older adults exist on the Mornington Peninsula. Many cited Probus, the U3A, Senior Citizens and Community House Groups. For example:

*There are a lot of places you can go to, particularly within our Probus group. They have book groups and discussion groups. They have gardening groups. So there are lots of places to learn to do things apart from the U3A. And there are the community houses—there's a lot on offer down here from craft to computers, exercises and fitness groups and wellbeing. And it's all very popular (FG2).*

*Well besides U3A and Probus there are all the community houses. They do everything from painting to cooking and computers and tai chi, mahjong, yoga. Then they do trips away to different things. They organise days out and have barbecues. So there are community things where they all get together and it's very reasonable to belong (FG2).*

However, some people were able to list a remarkable range of possibilities as this extract indicates:

- 1. If they are after community activity, there's plenty of community things they can do. But as for other things, I made quite a list. There's historical societies; garden clubs; bird-watching clubs; bush-walking clubs; handcraft clubs; vintage car clubs; book clubs; fine art societies. Then in our community there is wine appreciation; woodworking groups; and music societies. I think if anyone's interested they could find just about anything on the Mornington Peninsula that would meet their needs in the way of a hobby or a special interest that they might have. Now I rather fancy the U3A. So I think we're pretty well catered for really. Some of them meet in community halls, like for example, the historical society and garden clubs as well as the Probus club meeting. I know the Fine Arts Society meets in the school hall. The vintage car club meets in homes as do Book Clubs. Bridge clubs meet in community halls. So there are all sorts of activities one could belong to and be happy to be involved with without going too far. So you could be absolutely exhausted on the Peninsula if you wanted to be!*
- 2: There is a list of all the volunteer and other activity groups published by Council. It's 115 pages and I went through it one day to make an estimate of the number involved. Small groups might have 10 people and things like Red Cross would have many more. I estimated that there would be 10-11,000 people involved in the 100s of organizations (FG1).*

**However when asked if there was any exciting programs for Older Adults further afield such as Interstate or overseas, not one group could contribute except to mention bus or other trips abroad and painting trips.**

## 5. A CONSIDERATION OF THE USE OF TECHNOLOGY

An aspect of older adult education that cannot be ignored is the impact and demand for information technology. Certainly it is known that huge numbers of older adults have been hankering after computer skills for more than a decade (Hurworth, 1996). Motivations to learn how to use a computer include keeping up with the younger generation, maintaining contact with remote family and friends and finding information on the Internet.

While there is clear potential to overcome some education access problems by the use of information technologies and the Internet, it is known that access declines with age. For example in Britain, it was found recently that only 37% of people aged over 65 have Internet access in comparison with 67% of the population as a whole (HM Government 2008).

Meanwhile, among Australians over 75 in 2006, only 5% reported using a computer at home and only 3% used the Internet. However, as time progresses this will not be the case as there will be rapidly growing numbers of more proficient users. Certainly training of older adults has been offered by a wide range of agencies including the University of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Age, libraries and the voluntary sector. Programs are often funded through Government to counteract the 'digital divide'. There are also special initiative for Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Groups (e.g. Multicultural Senior Surfers and CALD Senior Surfers' programs, Hurworth & Rutter, 2009).

Connected with training there have been numerous studies (especially in the 1980s and 1990s) to ascertain the capacity for older adults to learn to use the computer in older age (e.g. Charness et al 1992, Jay & Willis, 1992, McNeely, 1991, Westman, 1983) followed by the suggestion that educational programs for elders should consider investing in staff and technology to create distance learning programs for this group (Craven, 2003).

Meanwhile, Sokoler & Svenson (2007) looked at technology for senior citizens with the idea that digital technology should be designed to help them stay in their own homes as long as possible and to live independent lives to the fullest extent. The authors suggest that technology could bring a better quality of life by developing relationships and connectedness including through education (although for many people more 'traditional routes' may be more acceptable. This is because of either lack of technical skills or preference for face-to-face contact which promotes social cohesion).

### The Value of Computers for Those Who Are Homebound or In Nursing Homes

One recent paper has also examined the information literacy needs of people in the fourth age in Australia (Williamson & Asia, 2009), as the authors reported that; *"this stage of increasing dependence has not been considered in the research literature"*. They determined that although information needs are fewer, they are still important to the people involved but existing definitions of information literacy need to be adjusted to the context.

Another piece of work that has been undertaken is that by McConatha et al. (1995). They looked at those who are not in their own homes but who are in care. The purpose of their study was to evaluate the effects of a psycho-educational model making use of computer interaction for the therapy, education and recreation of a group of elderly, institutionalised older adults. The results indicated that computer interaction proved to be an effective tool for increasing these older adults' cognitive abilities and daily living skills while decreasing their levels of depression.

Reference has been also been made to the use of computers in nursing homes in Victoria Rimmer (2007: 330) notes:

*Perhaps the most interesting development is the use of computers by people living in residential care. In Victoria, government funds were offered to 10 nursing homes in 2000 to encourage this change. Such programs add to the quality of life for residents. One 84 year old who visits her friends in a home declared; 'I don't worry about having to be in nursing home one day. I just look for where I will plug in my computer' (Scott, 1999: 28).*

In addition, Fokkema & Knipsheer (2007) have evaluated the effect that electronic communication can have on loneliness amongst older adults who live alone at home or have restricted mobility. The study recorded a significant drop in loneliness and an increased in self-confidence through a program called 'Esc@pe'. 15 older adults were taught how to use a computer and then were given volunteer home visitor support.

Although there was no specific question on personal use of computers within the Focus Group schedule, constant reference was made to the topic within transcripts. For instance, there were those who said that they had never learnt to use a computer to those who had helped install computer systems in their workplace. The keen ones explained how:

*I really concentrated on computer skills and I-Pods and MCT players. This has been a very important part of my life—and then helping other people with that. I learnt computing through Community Health in Rosebud. They have computers set up in a room with money provided by Bendigo Bank (FG1).*

*I also did a number of computer courses because we didn't have any PCs in my day—only the big mainframes. So I did some courses in the last couple of years at U3A. I also had an impetus because one of my sons, who is very senior in the IT industry said that he would provide a computer but that I must do a course first (FG1).*

*If there's anything I don't know I go straight to my computer—that lovely computer! (FG1)*

Some were keen on computing because it allowed them to stay in touch:

*I'm 91 but I spend a lot of time on the computer. I write a lot of letters to my friends. I used to live in Melbourne so now it's a matter of writing so that I keep up my friendships (FG2).*

*My main hobby is keeping in touch with my grandchildren. One is studying in Spain and one is in Mexico. I find it wonderful talking to them via Email. So the computer is a big hobby of mine (FG3).*

Another continued that it was important to learn computing in order to keep up with the times and to remain 'literate' in an increasingly technological world:

*If we hadn't studied computers after we retired we'd be so ignorant—because you can find so much information on www etc. Probably about 50% of our age group don't have computer skills at all and they must feel terribly ignorant. So you must keep up with the times and keep mentally active (FG1).*

## PART C: DIFFERING MODELS OF EDUCATIONAL PROVISION FOR OLDER AGE GROUPS

What follows are a number of older adult education models tried with those over 80 around the world. They include best practice in both large-scale and small-scale settings, consider the use of technology and show the attempts that have been made to address not only those who are independent but also those who are housebound or in residential settings. After each type, reactions to the concept from Focus Group members are presented.

### MODEL 1: PROGRAMS ATTACHED TO UNIVERSITIES

#### Special University Programs for Older Adults

- a) An example is Lancaster University's Senior Learners' Programme run by the Continuing Education Dept. This has various components including a lecture series, a Virtual Senior Learners' Computer Forum (with threads for particular discussions and guides on how to access it) and a Senior Learners' Society. The program offers older adults of any age the opportunity to explore how Lancaster University can be relevant to them and to take up new opportunities for learning and to create a stimulating and supportive learning environment.

The lecture series includes presentations of topics of interest to older adults. These are free and there is no need to book—people just turn up on the day. For instance, in May 2009 the topic was Learning and Neuroscience and how research is offering hope that brains can work well right through life. The Learner's Society is run by members and provides regular activities, ranging from trips to concerts (both locally and further afield) to physical activities such as dancing or walking. (<http://www.lancs.ac.uk/depts/conted/seniorlearners.htm>).

- b) A similar popular program for older learners in the USA is the University of Kentucky Donovan Scholars. Adults 70 and over may participate in graduate or undergraduate courses tuition free. Other Donovan features include courses for non-credit, a forum series, a discussion series and an annual writing workshop (James, 1991).
- c) Special Housing/Learning Communities  
In the USA particularly there are now a number of college/university-linked retirement communities. Panchuck (2002) described a number of such communities which offer their residents various opportunities for lifelong learning. One such location is Lasell Village, a continuing care retirement community located on the campus of Lasell College in Newton, Mass. The village has developed a learning program that integrates intellectual growth, creative development, socializing and physical wellness for the entire life span.

Another option has been to learn through distance learning. For example, this mode of delivery has made it possible to study for modules or a degree through the Open University in the UK.

This university link idea was debated by interviewees. The nearest University site would be Monash Peninsula which is quite a distance from most people's homes. It was therefore, thought that there would be difficulties with transport. In addition, Monash no longer has a Continuing Education sector on site. Some also felt that U3A fulfilled a 'higher education' function.

However, with Council assistance, there are possibilities to make links with either Monash University or Chisholm Institute of Technology.

## **MODEL 2: SPECIAL SENIOR CENTRES/COLLEGES FOR OLDER ADULTS, SUPPORTED BY GOVERNMENT**

### The Canadian Experience

Senior Centres are provided in Canada. Such centres are publicly subsidized and exist within local government areas with a mandate to serve the needs of local older adults.

The first of these centres opened in the 1950s with the focus on recreational activities. More recently as older adults have become healthier and better educated, a wider diversity of programs became available including educational classes for those up to 100. One of these centres carried out a needs analysis to determine the learning needs of members. Based on the report, the centre began to offer a wider variety of programs. Experimental programs are also being introduced in some centres. For example, Hori & Cusack (2006) describe the development of the *Mental Fitness for Life* pilot, designed purely for older people to exercise their minds, their ability to think, learn new things and avoid memory loss as they age (Cusack & Thomson, 2003, 2005).

### The Experience in Japan

Meanwhile, in Japan, elder colleges exist in prefectures throughout the country. Their primary function is to offer educational opportunities to Japanese with the first class being held in a rural private temple in 1954. From 1965 elder classes were subsidized by the Ministry of Education. Since then, many classes for older people have appeared throughout the country. Some learning centres have changed their name to elder colleges with each offering 30-50 classes. In 1969, colleges moved to a more traditional type of structure with the opening of Inamino Gakuen College—a huge elder college that offers classes to 2000 students. It has a 4 year program and a 2-year community leadership program with courses in gardening, pottery, health, cultural studies and education.

In addition, other larger institutions have emerged as a result of the enactment of the Lifelong Learning Act (Hori, 2004) and the restructuring of the Ministry of Education. In addition, the Health and Welfare Ministry began to recognise that learning opportunities for elders are a good vehicle for health promotion. As a result, many elder colleges were founded, organised and sponsored by the Welfare Ministry. What has been noted though (and relevant to this review) is that; *“data from seniors centres suggests that education is important for those in their 80s and beyond”* (Hori & Cusack, 2006: 478).

### The Experience in Korea

One government that has acted to promote later life learning is South Korea, a country with a rapidly ageing population. A scheme is being implemented in the capital Seoul to provide ‘cultural spaces’ for the ageing through a network of colleges established for the elderly. The colleges are planned to teach 70 subject areas including courses in foreign languages and philosophy.

Again Focus Group members felt that the U3A provided the equivalent and that it would be far too expensive to set up separate educational facilities for older adults.

### MODEL 3: SCHOOLS FOR SENIORS IN AUSTRALIA

In Australia, there are Schools for Seniors. For instance, they exist in Perth WA, Launceston, Tasmania and Wodonga. They offer companionship through learning and offer a variety of courses. Some details of the three mentioned are:

- Perth: Run by the Uniting Church there are 90 courses offered to more than 630 people across 3 days. Classes meet in a variety of buildings. Students can be from any suburb in Perth but must be able to get there on their own (<http://www.perthunitingchurch.com.au/viewStory/School>)
- Launceston: Organised by the Office of Adult Education. It provides about 50 different morning classes every day of the working week. These cover the Arts, computing, languages, games, armchair travel etc. A series of picnics and coach trips are also offered. ([http://www.tco.asn.au/oac/community\\_groups.cgi?](http://www.tco.asn.au/oac/community_groups.cgi?))
- Wodonga: Humming with activity, a multitude of classes occur through the working week day as the School for Seniors has taken over a disused primary school and uses all classrooms.

The idea of specialised schools for older adult learning was put forward to those in Focus Groups but there was little support for this concept because:

- Facilities already exist in the Mornington Peninsula Shire (such as libraries, community halls)
- Organisations such as the U3A already serve as education centres
- It would be too expensive to build a specialised facility
- It was felt that the population of over 80s is currently too small to sustain such schools.

## MODEL 4: PEER TEACHING

### a) Long-Term: University of the Third Age (U3A)

Rimmer (2007:327) states that; “the U3A is a particularly good example of senior self-help groups providing educational opportunities for all who wish to take part.” Originally a university extension program in Europe, it spread to the UK in 1981. There the teaching delivery format was reformed so that teaching was undertaken by volunteer members. Australia has followed the same pattern since 1984 (Hurworth, 2001) so that now in 2009 there are 84 U3As across Victoria with many thousands of members. Venues range from private homes to church halls and a disused railway station to retirement villages. Courses cover subjects as diverse as Bicycle Repairs to Aboriginal Land Rights and Science to Creative Writing.

The University of the Third Age was raised and spoken of positively in every interview as a model for older adult education. Four people were current members and another two were former members. They appreciated learning in small groups, informally and without stress. Here are some typical comments:

*The U3A is a pretty good model—laid back, two-hour classes. That’s a good way to go (FG1).*

*I’m a U3A man and find learning in those kind of groups good. One thing about U3A is it’s so informal and it’s fairly slow. You sit down and discuss subjects very informally. That’s a good learning process for our age. If we had a tutor standing out in front and lecturing to us about 80% of it would go over our heads. But the fact that you can sit down and discuss is good. So informal learning is important. It’s in a class but the class is structured differently. I’m 80 and it works for me! (FG1)*

### b) Short-Term Peer Teaching

Another possible method of teaching is by short-term peer education. One group that have tried this is the National Prescribing Service (NPS) in conjunction with the Council on the Ageing (COTA) National Seniors Partnership. This is a model using nationally coordinated peer education to reach seniors about medication management. This approach recognises that older adults possess valuable life experiences that place them in an ideal position to communicate important messages to their peers.

From 2005-6 214 older adult peer educators attended training at 39 NPS workshops around Australia. Those trained then ran 1381 sessions attended by 31,550 people. These participants agreed they: learnt something new; found the information relevant; and that it gave them ideas for change (NPS, 2006).

COTA, themselves, have also introduced computer classes for seniors using peer educators. For instance in Queensland they partnered with the State Dept. of Social Security Information Network and later obtained Rotary Support. Meanwhile, in South Australia COTA Clubs partner with the Flinders University program Seniors On-line. In Victoria, COTA has provided training sessions for older people in public libraries.

Interviewees considered that short-term peer teaching could be a good strategy for short-term, targeted learning (FG2, FG7).

## MODEL 5: LEARNING THROUGH THE USE OF TECHNOLOGIES

### a) The Use of IT/Computers

#### ***In the USA***

Lightfoot (2008) reports that sometimes education in formal settings ends when people get older and find travelling to centres too much so that can become isolated in their homes. She writes that:

*Some of the most poignant conversations I have had with older students have centred around how distressed they will be when they can no longer come to classes but the advent of new technologies has brought some hope into the conversation. (Lightwood, 2008).*

Therefore, for example, in 2002 A Californian University decided on take learning to older adults. Combining new information technologies, they created a virtual community to bring the learning experience to older adults unable to come to campus and who were also unfamiliar with computers and the Internet (Zitelli, 2007). A year later it was reported that 'Generations on Line' attempts to bridge the digital divide with a package of Web-based software, paper materials and training that is available to long-term care facilities, senior centres and libraries for helping older adults to use the Internet. This was developed as many elderly are afraid of the Internet yet it offers them wonderful opportunities for connecting with their families, friends and the outside world.

Similarly, Seals et al. (2008) describe how Senior citizens participated in workshops at the College off Engineering, Auburn University. These were designed to develop their skills in computing-but the potential significance of the project was to create a reliable model for outreach to retirement and assisted living communities and other centres for senior citizens.

#### ***In Australia***

Such technology is now being used to convey education in Australia. For example, a further expansion of the U3A movement in Australia occurred in 1999 when U3A on-line began at the end of 1999. This allows people to study at home or through community-based venues via the Internet (Brayton et al., 2005). Not only does the on-line mode deliver courses but also involve forums for discussion, news items and the posting of other useful information. This has been a boon for many elderly who are socially or geographically isolated. The program receives some Government assistance and is supported by Griffith University in Brisbane.

Indeed, on-line learning is able to open the 'educational door' for older people living in Australia's regional and remote areas (Rimmer 2007: 317). This could be encouraged through older adult Computer Clubs. For example in Tasmania the Older Persons Electronic Network (OPEN) caters for older people and the disabled (McKean, 2003) and the Australian Seniors Computer Club was formed to bring people together in 1998.

#### ***Multi-National Learning of IT***

Projects examining the best way to teach older adults about IT are sometimes large-scale. One involves a consortium from four countries (Ireland, the UK, Italy and Bulgaria). According to Fojk (2008), the project focuses on the learning potential, learning preferences and learning capacities of older adults in order to ensure participation to the fullest capacity in this digital age. It also aims to combat all forms of discrimination based

on age as well as to contribute to EU policies regarding the European Knowledge Society and Key Competencies (KC 3: Digital Competencies).

More specifically, the project addresses the needs of the oldest section of the population by designing innovative training programs and curricula that recognises their learning capacity. It requires no prior knowledge, and aims to be delivered in a relaxed, informal and fun environment.

In the development process, the priority is to be on creating a user-centred pedagogy designed and tested via a laboratory of learners drawn from the target group. Development has been informed by incorporating best practice. The first year ([www.seniorsproject.ed 2008](http://www.seniorsproject.ed 2008)) has resulted in outlining a 3-level curriculum that delivers basic computer skills, email and internet skills and social networking skills. In addition, there is a social network website for seniors that supports social interaction.

A group of older senior citizens completed the pilot course with an excellent response. The pedagogy and curricula will be finalised this year (2009) and training will be delivered to 1000 seniors. Tutors will be sourced from youth (50), long-term unemployed (50) and other senior citizens (10).

## **The Use of Other Technologies**

### **b) Radio For the Visually Impaired**

Vision Australia radio ([www.visionaustralia.org](http://www.visionaustralia.org)) is a network of community radio stations through Melbourne, regional Victoria and Southern SW. The service provides news and information for people who are unable to read standard printed material. Topics are wide-ranging; from current affairs to finding what goes on behind the scenes of a theatrical production and from views on the environment to sport.

### **c) Teleconferencing**

#### ***In the USA***

Teleconferencing can offer an ideal solution for those wanting to provide homebound older adults access to educational resources and support services. One example is the American University Without Walls which offers 240 academic courses, support groups and intergenerational opportunities to frail elders in Manhattan (Merges, 2003).

Another program using such an approach is Leisure Connection, based in Chula Vista California. This uses conference-calling technology to connect a facilitator and up to 11 individuals for a weekly group discussions and activities. Session topics include gardening, health, travel, music, games and finance. In addition, participants can join, via teleconference, the Singing Seniors, a popular group that meets at a local senior centre to make music (Solis, 2003).

#### ***Examples in Australia***

There are also possibilities of learning by telephone in Australia. For instance, Do Care at Wesley Mission in Melbourne and Vision Australia run tele-link programs that join housebound seniors together in order to foster social contact. However, they also run educational/recreational programs down the phone. These can be as diverse as: discussions on books; cryptic crosswords; history of Collins St; and exercises for arthritis. Do Care has even run a telephone choir and described Gallery paintings down the phone. Programs have been such a success that there are often long waiting lists to join.

Those in Focus Groups were in favour of the use of the telephone to deliver education as they realised that the discussion in which they were involved constituted a type of learning. They also thought that it could be appropriate for those confined to home. Consequently, they commented:

*I feel it would be good for me to be in a discussion group—like this—to have a leader and a small group to study a subject in some depth (FG2).*

*I mean this is a new experience this morning and it seems to be working very well and I've enjoyed it. So perhaps there should be something like this for discussions (FG1).*

*Although I'm not interested, I could see that it could be of benefit to those stuck at home or are alone (FG2, FG3).*

*I'm with such a group with Vision Australia. It's very good and casual. We discuss topical things and have a good laugh as well. There are also specific subjects too like gardening (FG4).*

#### **d) Mobile Audiovisual Unit**

In Israel there is an Audiovisual Centre for the Elderly where the objective is to use AV as a tool to disseminate information to older people (Brodsky et al., 2009). A unique feature of the Centre is a mobile unit which brings films to the elderly at social clubs, day centres and homes for the aged across the country where they lack the equipment and know-how to make use of the materials. Screenings are followed by group discussions, led by a trained member of the mobile unit's staff. One focus is on the dissemination of education and training materials on health promotion topics. Over 1800 films are shown to 60,000 viewers p.a.

One question that all Focus Groups struggled with was how technology could assist those over 80 to learn. Many were unfamiliar with computers or other technological advances and so could not envisage how technology could be applied to learning. As one person noted; *"We're a bit cocooned from all this and so most of us stick to reading"*. Thus many went off on a tangent and talked about technology they owned (such as mobile phones). As a result, ideas for the use of technology in relation to learning relied on technology that has been around for a while:

*Well. I think you can learn a lot from television. They have excellent programs on gardening and cooking. You can also learn a lot from current affairs (FG7).*

*You can do a lot of study using recorded programs. These people who are immobile and in nursing homes can sit and listen to them. Of course they can listen to it over and over again if they want to. We used to use it when I was President of the Victorian Assoc of Photographic Societies and we used recorded programs to teach people about photography. You could use DVDs now (FG1).*

*They could learn through videos. You can get videos on craft and other things. I've got a daughter in aged care and they use a lot on those sorts of things—like there are ones on gardening (FG2).*

It was rare for people to be thinking about cutting edge developments but there was one person who foresaw that:

*You could run a group using computer Skype kinds of technology. So you could get groups together for a discussion. This would be particularly good if you have a computer with a wireless connection on it because there's no need to sit in front of a desk. You can sit in an easychair with a laptop. Bu the first thing I would do is put a wireless hot spot in all nursing homes so that anyone could learn or use a laptop to communicate (FG1).*

Another reported that learning technology was soon to come to her and others in the nursing home:

*Something's going to happen with our school we're with. They're going to put something in and we're going to have it too. That's the way we're going to keep contact and learn. That's happening now (FG5).*

Finally, it was recognised that even if technology is not used so much with the current generation it will become a necessity as baby boomers, who are 'tech savvy' approach old age:

*With newer people coming in things will change...Residencies might have to think about this in the future...They are going to have computers in every single room maybe because new residents will have had them at school... I have heard about places now that have a computer room and the residents can just go along and have classes. It can be in any field that they wish—like photography or whatever. I think they have one in Baxter (FG6).*

## MODEL 6: PROGRAMS CONCENTRATING ON CREATIVE ACTIVITIES

There are programs which have been successful by having a creative focus:

### **a) Art Programs**

Durr, Fortin & Leptak (1991) describe an art program for older adults.

Focus Group participants thought this was a good idea. They thought hands-on art programs would attract many people on the Peninsula:

*They do have one class at the Community Hall and people have always enjoyed that down there. Art classes are always popular. It would be good for over 80s who are keen as they would thoroughly enjoy it (FG1).*

They also thought that art appreciation could be arranged through local galleries.

### **b) Writing**

The Morningside Gardens writing group run by 'Elders Share the Arts' in NY City meets weekly for six months every year. The group has held readings and published anthologies and has become a community in the process (Willerman, 2004).

Another interesting example has been that described by Nick Osmond (1995) who conducted a writing project with stroke survivors in Brighton, England. He convened a group of stroke victims who wished to talk about their experiences. The group decided to write book about themselves. A second project was then undertaken with carers.

### **c) Autobiography/Reminiscence**

Some gerontologists and adult educators (Butler, 1963, 1982; Jarvis, 2001; Kaminsky, 1984; Moody, 1984; Myerhoff, 1992) suggest that reminiscence and life review are pivotal to reaching integrity for older adults. In fact, authors such as Lowy & O'Connor (1986) and Merriam (1990) state that contemplative needs or needs to review life are unique to older adult education. Therefore, educational gerontologists suggest that activities need to be organised so that the aged can tell their life stories (Wolf, 1992).

Particular reasons for this were provided by Merriam (1981). She felt that reminiscence activities:

- Might lead to a better old age
- Appear to be therapeutic
- Provide a good way for professionals to know their clients
- Offer a good resource to help older people to continue their learning.

Actual programmatic responses have included oral history projects with residents of sheltered accommodation (Castle & Selby, 1987) and memoir writing workshops such as those suggested by Birren & Deutchman (1991). In the latter, guided autobiography sensitises older adults to the overlooked past and encourages private reflection. This is followed by the writing of two-page life stories and the reading of works in a mutually encouraging group. The process encourages creativity and divergent thinking (looking at old concepts in new ways). The text comprises a manual for people planning to create and conduct such groups in various settings.

Others suggest experiences that invite elders to connect the past with the present (Beatty & Wolf, 1996, Bornat, 1995, Haigh and Webster, 1995, Wolf, 1985). Adding to this, Glendinning suggests that; *“life experiences continue to be a learning process and reflection on these experiences can be liberating”* (Glendinning, 2000:18).

There are also various kits/books available to assist with reminiscences. Examples are:

- a) Bi-Folkal slide/tape kits which trigger memories and facilitate participation. Erickson & Leide (1992) state that older people with sight and hearing losses respond to these activities which provide touch, taste and smell stimulation. They add that; *“reminiscing with kits can reduce generation gaps, forge groups and move elders towards self-actualisation and empowerment.”*
- b) Another kit devised by the same people (Leide & Erickson, 1990) is specifically for visitors to use with those visited. The Kit contains cards, instruction sheets, props and a manual<sup>5</sup>.
- c) Topics and curriculum for successful 45 min reminiscing sessions (Karras, 1989). The kit includes suggestions for music, visual aids, activities, discussion questions and a resource list. The author report that it is suitable for us in nursing and retirement homes and in other senior groups.
- d) A book by Housden (2007) which provides ideas and experiences for tutors to draw on when using older people’s memory work in a learning context.

Such learning tools have also been evaluated and found to be successful (Stevens-Ratchford & Regena, 1990).

More recently, Zablotny (2003) describes a program that brought Brooklyn elders into public libraries to share their reminiscences and life experiences in 10-week-long story circles.

In another setting, a research study was conducted with 15 elders who have kept journals for long periods of time. The participants methods and practices differed but all agreed that journal-writing benefits elders in many ways.

Meanwhile, in another article, the Legacy Works program, through which volunteer and professional caregivers conduct simple but stimulating reminiscence activities with frail elders, is described. The project helps caregivers establish a sense of connection with their clients so that they can engage more meaningfully with each other (Older Learner).

Another reminiscence program with a twist has been described by Weiss et al. (1990). It brings together some of the considerations already made because it is (i) intergenerational (ii) has been run in nursing homes with fourth age residents and (iii) is practical as well as intellectual. The project was a Culinary Reminiscence Model. Fourteen nursing home residents and a group of therapeutic recreation students worked together. In addition, students helped residents to record and illustrate individual memories on foods and eating. Other elements of the project involved: a composite resident cookbook; hands on food preparation; creating food items as gifts; and inviting visitors to an exhibition of products and to sample them.

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<sup>5</sup> Kits a and b are available from BiFolkal Prod, 809 Williamson St, Madison, Wisconsin, USA WI 53703

Focus Group responses to the idea of discreet programs for memory work or reminiscence for the over 80s were positive saying that; “*I would be interested in writing life stories*” (FG1) and; “*It would appeal to me—it’s amazing the number of people writing family histories and stories*” (FG1). Some also thought it was important for people over 80 to do:

*I would like this as my son asked me to write all the history and anything about my childhood because once I am gone, nobody will know it. It will be forgotten. Having lived through the War the young people don’t know about that* (FG2).

[However, some respondents muddled writing with genealogy/family history run by U3A (FG7, FG8)].

## MODEL 7: INTERGENERATIONAL PROGRAMS

Around the world there have been quite a few attempts at integrating older adult and young people in learning efforts. Many are “one way”; that is where young people are there to help the older adult or vice versa. Below though are a range of examples where the benefits are mutual:

- a) In the USA Brabazon (2007) describes how in the Bronx, A New York City borough with high poverty rates and multiple social challenges works with the Millennium Art Academy which bases its innovative pedagogical model on intergenerational and arts paradigms. This School of Art is the only public high school in the city that requires all students to participate in intergenerational activities. The program is designed to improve the lives of elders and students through social interaction, storytelling, writing and art.
- b) Another example is through Ithaca College in New York which has formed an intergenerational programmatic partnership with Longview, a nearby residential facility for older adults. Each semester approximately 40 intergenerational activities take place with residents auditing or participating in classes and students teaching residents music, photography or computer use.
- c) In a different model according to Henkin (2007) ‘Communities for All Ages’ promotes a lifespan approach to community building. Currently operating at 12 sites across the USA, this initiative focuses on changing age groups from competitors into allies. Critical to the success of this strategy is the creation of spaces where cross-age interaction and learning can take place.
- d) Meanwhile, some initiatives have occurred in Australia. For example the *Glen Eira News* (2009) reported that the ‘*Time Flies*’ project was unveiled late 2008. In this case Warrawee Residential Community for Older Adults and St Peter’s Primary School have been working together. The project explored how life has changed throughout the years through the creation of a mural. During each school term, 25 Grade 4 students came together once a week with Warrawee residents in Glen Eira to discuss the topic and to gain an understanding of the social, cultural and historical aspects of the local community. Topics for the mural included transport, housing, music, dance, clothing, communication, sport and entertainment.

Warrawee Community Lifestyle Co-ordinator reported that the children developed close ties and friendships with the residents. The residents enjoyed sharing their skills and knowledge. The children also learnt new skills and now have a better understanding and admiration for the elderly members living in their community. The completed mural will be shared between the residential community and the school. A similar project is underway with the next set of Grade Fours during 2009.

- e) Somewhat similarly in Collingwood, elderly residents have been busy visiting students in the local primary school. In this instance they are jointly making and painting tiles in order to make a path and to decorate a wall together.

## The View of Focus Group Members in Regards to Intergenerational Activity

Focus Group interviewees were asked the extent to which they would be interested in intergenerational learning. Although they were aware of such activity, responses were somewhat mixed.

On the one hand some thought that; *“Learning together would help to keep us young and the kids perhaps would learn something about us”* (FG6). Several also thought that; *“it could be very nice for older people if it could be arranged”* (FG3). This was said to be particularly the case for those: who are on their own, do not have grandchildren; or for those who are unable to see grandchildren frequently (FG4).

Another person also thought it would work as older adults and children often get on well together:

*There is some hope as when they get together the youngsters get on better with the oldies than with the ones in the middle. Often the grandparent generation gets on with the youngsters—Why?—because there’s a common enemy in the middle* (FG7).

On the other hand, some (particularly those living independently) were concerned that from the older adult’s perspective:

- (Having watched their grandchildren) younger people aren’t as patient as older people (FG1)
- Children might outstrip the adults making older people look foolish (FG7)
- Older people are often set in their ways and don’t like younger people telling them what to do (FG2)
- The older adults see so much of their grandchildren they do not feel the need to interact with young people further (FG4).

There were also concerns that students would be bored with older people around (FG1). Consequently there was some cynicism about the extent youngsters would be interested in being involved. In fact two people couldn’t envisage how successful interaction could be arranged at all.

However, some did accept that there may be benefits if a student were to read to the older person (FG1), if they brought the latest ideas (FG2) or if the younger person was to ask older adults what it was like when they were young (FG1). Therefore, some groups considered the possibility and advantages of intergenerational learning further:

- 1: *Well, we have the facilities (at the Retirement Village) so if you could organise a school to come in, it would be possible*
- 2: *I would be interested in it if it was something like poetry.*
- 3: *Well if school kids came in, it might be good for them too* (FG3).

*Well the kiddies at the nearby schools have got a veggie garden going on and the oldies from our Retirement Village were going down and showing them what to do. It’s good for both sides* (FG8).

The older adults who really revealed possibilities came from residential homes. They related how intergenerational interaction already occurs, although regularity and continuity of contact can be an issue:

- 1: *It happens here! We're taken to Moorooduc—that's our school. We go to them. They come to us. There were two at morning tea this morning. We see the schoolchildren. They were here doing our nails this morning.*
- 2: *They come first in fear. They say; 'Oh, we don't want to go to an old people's place' and they expect you to be bedridden, sitting in your room knitting. But if they can see that you're active and doing things, that's good for the children. Then they take us in the bus to the school and we go to one class. Now the latest one we went to, they had introduced the new electronic board. They showed us that and we learnt how to use it. Then they gave us morning tea and scones. They made a cup of tea and served us. But you just get to know them and it's goodbye. So learning together is great but needs to be regular—not just a once off.*
- 3: *But we could do something like teach them about our past and that sort of thing.*
- 1: *But we have done things together—one of the staff brought flowerpots in and the children and us painted the pots and then we planted all these pots with succulents. Then we sold them from here. It worked very well, But nothing has happened since. It's a shame as it was very popular.*
- 2: *They also took us to the High School where the kids put pictures up on the wall and talked about them (FG5).*

*In nursing homes they have people coming in from Years 11 and 12 and they play educational games together such as Trivial Pursuit (FG7).*

One issue also is that the home has to have a group fit enough for interaction. Other foreseen problems were transport to get older adults to the schools and vice versa and whether schools would be 'impaired friendly'.

Some also thought that a one-to-one intergenerational activity might work but that a group situation might not be such a good idea (FG1). One person also recalled that when older adults went into Rosebud High School to help with remedial reading no reciprocal activity was suggested (FG1).

## MODEL 8: PROGRAMS FOR THE LESS MOBILE

Roth (2003) complains that most of the growing numbers of programs offering learning experiences to older adults are designed for, and marketed to, active learners. He feels that frail elders continue to be marginalised both by educators and by elders' self-perceptions. Other authors who complain that the frail elderly are often ignored include Maderer & Skiba (2006).

Roth goes on to discuss the ethical underpinnings of his search for developing educational programs for frail elders to improve their lives [building on the work carried out by Lawton et al, 2001, who looked at the valuation of life (VOL)].

VOL goes beyond Quality of Life to capture the; *"enjoyment and the absence of distress but also hope, futurity, purpose, meaningfulness, persistence and self-efficacy."* (2001: 427). According to Lawton, Moss et al. (1999) VOL is not only affected by health factors but also factors such as mastery, positive affect and quality of time use. Therefore, *"individuals should value their lives more strongly if they have positive social relations and pursue activities important to them"* (Lawton, Winter et al. 1999).

### Programs for Frail Older Adults

Some programs have been introduced to fulfil such a void. For example, Street (1982) described a program of luncheons and education organised for those who *"suffered from degrees of immobility"* (p 358) and were semi-isolated in the community. Older adults were collected from their homes to enjoy these luncheon clubs.

#### Learning for the Less Mobile (LLM)

Learning for the Less Mobile is a HACCC-funded educational program which aims to provide stimulating activities for isolated and housebound people run from the Hawthorn Community Education Centre in Boroondara. Programs are run in order to improve older adults' quality of life, maintain their independence and keep them involved in the community.

In order to attend, door-to-door transport is arranged for some via the Council's community bus service. Others are brought by taxi or car. Volunteers assist members in and out of the transport and also provide afternoon tea for participants.

There are currently five different LLM groups that meet at several venues within the LGA. A variety of topics are taught according to the interests of each group. Examples of subjects include: current affairs; music and the arts discussion group; armchair travel and gentle exercise.

Focus Group members thought this would be an excellent idea if Council and volunteers could arrange transport to where the educational activity was being held:

*I'm at home and don't drive. I find it's great if someone comes and takes me out, I love my home but I feel that when I'm taken out it gives me a new lease on life. It does me good to get out. That's a way to learn what's going on too (FG4).*

Another added that a form of LLM was already happening for respite and to get to libraries and suggested that it could be extended to academic activities:

*A neighbour here was a carer and the Community bus used to come and take him to one of the Community Centres for the day. And they'd play cards and have lunch and he would come home about four. That took him out of the house. So, you could do that for learning activities and it might go down well here I believe (FG2).*

Similarly, another described how her current going out with a volunteer could be extended to learning opportunities:

*I have a young lass who takes me to Mornington or Rosebud or Hastings. And Oh, I do look forward to it! Having a volunteer come for me is very rewarding. It's a young lass taking me to the different libraries. She's such a bright young girl and it is really a delight to go with her. So, perhaps this could change to being taken to learning events (FG4).*

## **MODEL 9: PROGRAMS FOR THOSE IN NURSING HOMES/ RESIDENCES (often referred to as Fourth Age Learning)**

Only a little of the older adult education literature has considered the differing living arrangements of older adults and how this might affect the delivery of learning activities. In fact, Williams & Montelpare (1998) noted that:

*What has yet to be examined is whether one's living arrangement—whether it be in an institutional facility, retirement community or typical household—has any impact on interest in, and delivery mechanisms for, older learning (1998:701).*

One early exception was Murray's (1981) comparison of reading needs and preferences between institutionalised and non-institutionalised older adults.

### **Education within Retirement Villages**

The impact of increasing numbers of retirement communities has led to the examination of the educational needs of this age-segregated population. Williams & Montelpare (1998) conducted a needs assessment of one such village in Ontario, Canada. Through focus groups the study examined educational interests, the most suitable educational approaches, environments and learning mediums of residents.

Most residents were found to be interested in education for leisure and personal development. Because transportation was a problem for some participants, on-site learning was suggested by many. Also experiential learning within a social environment, such as outings and field trips was a popular format whereas computer learning was found to be less attractive.

### **Education In Nursing Homes (4<sup>th</sup> Age Learning)**

The topic of education in residential settings was described by John (1988) who focused on the oldest-old, the frail, and those disabled elderly who need intensive assistance living in restricted environments as these are the ones; *"that most desperately cry for mental stimulation"* (John, 1988:14). Others adopting an educational perspective for frail residents through providing cultural activities or craft sessions have been Laming, 1980; Jones, 1980; and Poulden, 1980 (in Glendinning, 1980).

One who has considered learning specifically towards the end of life in the past decade is Jarvis (2001). He devotes a whole chapter in his book to 'Learning in the Fourth Age'—i.e. for those over 75 and remarks:

*We have to recognise that by this age, the desire to learn new things sometimes deserts people...However, for some there is still the desire to learn new things and for most people a great deal of incidental learning still occurs.*

He complains that:

*This is a period of life about which we do not know sufficient—about how and what people want to learn or do—since research about learning amongst the old-old is still very limited. Indeed, until recently, many have just been cared for physically with little reference to their mental activities.*

He goes on to provide models for continued learning and the empowerment of elders and concentrates on specific techniques such as programmatic direction, reminiscence and life history work.

Meanwhile, The National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (NIACE) began to place fourth age learning high on the agenda—particularly through their ‘Older and Bolder’ program. The first fourth age learning conference was mounted in 1999 during which fourth age learning opportunities in care settings were explored. This resulted in the first Fourth Age Learning Report (NIACE 2000).

Findings presented in the report revealed consistent findings about the benefits of later life learning in care settings. *“There was almost universal acceptance that engagement in learning and similar activities enhances quality of life, lessens dependency and improves well-being.”* However, the study also revealed that 4<sup>th</sup> Age learning provision is inconsistent in Britain. It was also apparent that many agencies were responsible for providing activities.

This has been followed by articles, reports and papers (Dutton et al, 2006, NIACE 2001, 2006). One particularly important report, funded by the Department of Education and Employment in the UK, was by Soulsby in 2000. Within this, a number of points were raised such as:

- The personal development of frail and older people is largely ignored.
- Individuality and potential is not acknowledged
- Where activities occur, it is because people are recognising that engagement reduces dependency and it also an effective marketing tool
- While funding is a barrier difficulties were more likely to arise because attitudes need to change
- Health, housing, social care and education sectors need to be involved but multi-sectors lack co-ordination or planned funding
- There are few qualified staff to deliver appropriate activities
- Curriculum developed has to be evaluated in terms of whether it considers cultural and religious factors
- In day care settings any gaining of new skills/experiences are not constructed in a way to maximise learning gain outside class time and finally:
- That further study is required into the impact of learning on this section of the older community (Soulsby, 2000).

This report also considered if it was worth investing in learning opportunities for a stage in life where there is some level of dependency on others for care. It also examines whether stimulating older adults through learning and other activities lessens dependency (and therefore care costs). Finally, it assesses the amount and quality provision in British residential care settings and the attitudes to that provision. This study and others reported that learning in the later stages of life can boost confidence, give a more positive outlook on life and delay the onset of dementia (leading therefore to huge cost savings in care).

NIACE also produced ‘Days Out, Days In’ (NIACE 2002) which gives guidance on engaging older people in learning activities in residential and day care settings. In addition, there have been two pilot projects involving NIACE (both of which have been evaluated). These include:

- a) *The Fanshaw Lodge Project* (NIACE, 2002) In this instance, artists from a local art agency were commissioned to undertake sessional work in a Council

residential home. The project engaged both staff and older people in fourth age learning.

- b) *The Carry on Learning Project* (NIACE, 2004). This involved two organisations (Bromley Adult Education and Age Concern Calderdale) developing a 'learning culture' in specific care settings and evaluating the success of engaging older learners and monitoring benefits and well-being.

#### Other Examples of Learning Activities Associated with Residences

- a) Extra Care Housing West Midlands, UK—Keeping a 'Life Book'  
Upon arrival frail residents are given "The Book of Life" in which they record their past, the present and the future in terms of unfulfilled ambitions, dreams and aspirations. The loose leaf book has space for photographs. This 'case history' is shared with a key worker.
- b) Balham, South London  
In Balham, there is a large complex comprising residential and nursing care, sheltered and day care for over 300 Jewish elders. The first house on site has been extended to incorporate a theatre and synagogue. There is a very well-appointed arts and crafts centre with two teaching staff. There is also a paid activity and leisure manager who facilitates or runs clubs, discussion groups and outings, the resident's forum, a magazine (containing poetry, reminiscence and topical articles produced by residents, visitors and volunteers) and a choir.
- c) Central and Cecil Housing Care Support, London
  - i) This housing group provides an Arts and Education program for its older residents in residential settings. The purpose is to enhance the quality of life and the idea of lifelong learning. Each residential home has a regular program of activities provided by paid-for leaders and care staff. Activities include art, exercise, reminiscence, music, entertainment, cooking and outings.
  - ii) In sheltered accommodation for older people the Group provides activities and entertainment. An example is a monthly film club run in collaboration with the British Film Institute. Tenants and members of the public meet in Maida Vale to watch a film and then have a discussion afterwards. As well as providing stimulation, the film club encourages older adults to socialise more.

Supporting such provision there are also now courses/training for carers (e.g. Lancashire County Social Services) and for activity organisers (e.g. National Association for Providers of Activities for Older People, NAPA).

In addition, the L4A organization (Learning for the Fourth Age; <http://www.l4a.org.uk>) was established in both Leicester and Leeds in England to provide educational and learning services for frail elderly in residential accommodation. The mission of L4A is to:

- Encourage older people to extend existing interests or develop new ones using multimedia
- Support learners with their individual needs by a trained learning mentor working with them on a one-to-one basis
- Promote the value of education as a tool for increasing well-being
- Work towards raising expectations for the quality of life and mental stimulus for the elderly.

All learning mentors are trained so they understand both the needs of elderly people and the nature of care homes. They are also skilled at relating to residents and designing appropriate sessions and materials. Topics they have led have included: Roman History, French, Literature, Theology, Knitting, Watching Ballet, Singing, IT, Karate and Film.

### **A Case Study of a L4A Resident**

John a resident is in a care home for older adults that has signed up with L4A. An interest assessor began through a social conversation which enabled John to feel that his life experiences were valued. He discussed his interests freely and reminisced about his earlier years

John was then placed with a learning mentor. This mentor meets John weekly for half an hour to an hour and she has planned the sessions to meet the John's interests in gardening, watercolours and social history.

The learning mentor talks and shows stimulus photos and materials at a slow pace which is appropriate for John. He is also encouraged to talk to others at the home, visitors and relatives about his interests and what he is working on with his mentor.

The learning mentor reflected that John was hard of hearing and found it difficult to distinguish between direct speech and background noise and so they moved to a quieter room and it was no longer an issue. Although John had been interested in gardening and found reminiscing enjoyable, he was reluctant to take it up again as he missed his former garden. So the learning mentor responded to this and turned the focus to another interest. [Based on [http://www.l4a.org.uk/pages/main\\_menu\\_pg\\_44.php](http://www.l4a.org.uk/pages/main_menu_pg_44.php) accessed 19/5/09]

### **A Cautionary Note**

Jarvis (2001) raises the issue that (with the best of intentions) many second age workers choose what they think will be of interest to nursing home residents. He comments:

*Empowering residents to run their own programs through residents' committees might help overcome some of the problems that occur, especially as older people come in with a wide range of abilities and expertise. It is so easy for the workers in the home to misjudge what might be of interest to residents.*

For example it is common to have 'popular old tunes played on the piano' when the residents might prefer to listen to Chopin!

Some Focus Group members went to some lengths to describe how well some residences were catered for on the Peninsula. For example, some outlined what was available at the Village Glen retirement village:

*We've got everything from a golf course to a library here. We've also got a craft room and a workshop for woodworking. But re learning all sorts of people meet to do craft work. That can be physically making something or talking about something. Our Mac computer group also meets in the craft room. And we do it all on a voluntary, self-organised basis (FG1).*

Meanwhile, others stated that while their nursing home did introduce some activities they were not for academic purposes but rather to entertain and amuse. For example;

*Well, various artists come in and sing and do exercises. And a group comes in to play mah-jong but I don't think there's any study group. But I would like discussions on history of a certain era. And perhaps somebody who knows about politics could come and talk to us—tell us what's going on now and what things are happening around the world (FG3).*

*They organise things for us. Like today we had our nails done and then we have easy exercise on Mondays. Then there's something on most afternoons. Yesterday the kitchen put on 'Christmas in July'. They also put up a bowling mat in the large lounge and up went the skittles. There's also a Happy Hour with drinks and nibbles (FG5).*

Another added:

*There's a committee running all the entertainment. Perhaps someone should suggest they get speakers on educational topics. They also should organise some educational trips from the home. We used to go to the theatre but they haven't done that for a while (FG3).*

There were also calls for people to come in and lead small group activity:

*I'd like for someone to come in and talk to me about something intellectual—something like we are doing now would be good—a discussion group on a topic of interest. Just look how quickly the time has gone! (FG5).*

Providing such activities on site would be a boon because it does not require any transport. As one woman explained:

*When you get over 80 most people don't drive a car and that is my problem now. I can't see well enough to drive my car and I have to depend on other people to take me to places—and it's not that I can't ask-- but you feel a bit of an imposition. So, I'm very happy doing things here in the Village Glen if I can (FG2).*

## MODEL 10: INDIVIDUALISED PROGRAMS FOR HOUSEBOUND OVER 80s

- a) The Bar-Ilan Program, Israel  
Some countries have instigated programs for the housebound. For instance, in Israel they have been reaching out to 'older shut-ins' since 1992 (Brodsky et al, 2009). An educational outreach service sponsored by Bar-Ilan University provides housebound elderly with an individualised one-to-one or small group learning program delivered in their own home or institutional residence. The project is carried out by trained, retired volunteers who provide participants with educational resources and encouragement. There is also a constant needs assessment process in place.
- b) The Wandsworth Housebound Learning Project, London  
This relies on volunteers to deliver education courses to housebound older people. Set up in 1988, it provides free adult education for housebound people. Each week a volunteer attends a free class at one of the centres of the South Thames College in a subject of interest and then passes on what has been learnt to the housebound person. Feedback and opinion from the latter is reported back to the class the following week. The Project Director ensures compatibility between volunteer and older adult learner.
- c) Homebound Learning, Canada  
Homebound Learning opportunities (HLO) are also described by Penning & Wasiliw (1992). One program is an innovative health promotion and educational outreach service for homebound older adults and their caregivers in Canada. It provides over 125 topics for individualized learning programs delivered to participants in their residences, an audiovisual lending library, educational TV programming and a peer counselling service. An evaluation revealed high levels of participation and satisfaction with the program.

Focus Group participants were keen on the idea of individualised programs, particularly for nursing homes and those confined to home. They felt:

*This would be ideal for nursing homes in the area (FG1)*

*This would be excellent for people like me. There are so few of us in here who can do anything now—most are very poorly with dementia—there are not enough of us to make groups. They do their best but we really need more stimulation. At 91 I feel as though I still need some stimulation of some sort as we tend to sit and TV doesn't interest me particularly. So I just scribble to fill the time (FG5).*

Others commented:

*U3A is good but I'm past that now—going out. I would like someone to come here in the nursing home to be with me (FG3).*

*To me, this is similar to food being brought by Meals on Wheels. If they can't cook, then meals are brought to them. So if they can't get out to education centres then somehow we have to get education to them—but you'd need some volunteers of course (FG1).*

*It would be good to do this—to spend time with people educating them. It would also give them some companionship because some don't have family close by or maybe don't have a family at all (FG2).*

They also thought it would be particularly helpful for those learning to use the computer:

*If you're on your own, it would be good to have someone of your own age come in with you to have a look and explain what you've done wrong. That would be a great idea (FG1).*

Again, the idea of education in the home won favour because of transport issues:

*I think that if anyone could come into your home that would be marvellous because as you get older you lose your driver's license. And so you do have difficulty getting to where something is being held (FG4).*

On the basis of what seems practical/economic and what Focus Group respondents thought to be a good ideas for their peers on the Peninsula:

Mornington Peninsula Shire Council could consider/encourage:

- The extension of U3A-type activities into nursing homes
- The use of the telephone to link older adults for discussions/programs
- Intergenerational programs, especially between schools and nursing homes/retirement villages
- A program similar to Learning for the Less Mobile
- Individualised programs for the housebound and those within nursing homes

or any combination of these.

The Council also needs to consider:

- The role that technology can play (especially as this will be expected by all older adults in next few years)
- The implications for: a) transport arrangements b) staffing.

## **PART D: THE ROLE OF LIBRARIES IN OVER 80s LEARNING**

### **Library-Based Programs**

Library programs for the elderly have been considered for quite a while. For instance, Eisman (1979) reviewed library services for the elderly, noting in particular: the areas and responsibilities of library involvement; the resources that are available for planning appropriate programs; and the variety of programs that can be offered by individual libraries such as bookmobiles, courses and outreach programs.

### **ASCLA Suggestions for Working with the Elderly**

Also at a generic level, the Association of Specialized and Cooperative Library Agencies (ASCLA) have put forward a whole set of ideas for offering library services that can serve the education needs of the elderly. These include:

- a) Homebound programs involving;
  - Book discussion groups which link homebound people with one another through the telephone to discuss topics of interest (Library providers get individual permission to exchange telephone numbers).
  - Program packages that allow homebound people and others to share a group topic with ensuing discussion. Library staff furnish the audio-visual materials and equipment for the patron to use.
  - Library program participation by bringing people to the library (using volunteer transport or handicap van service).
  - Special interest visits from library volunteers who share a hobby, interest or experience with the homebound person. Related book materials can be provided.
  
- b) Programs in Care Facilities (long-term, hospice etc) including:
  - Discussion groups about specific book titles, poetry or topics of interest that might provide for reminiscence, needed information or enjoyment. Books in large or regular print, AV material and discussion leadership training or facilitation may be provided by a library.
  - AV programs using films, CDs, DVDs or multi-sensory kits. In using these with the elderly, special attention should be given to the quality of sound and clarity of the projected image. Follow-up discussion is a must for active involvement with clients.
  - Talking Books or Radio reading that allow 3-4 elderly people to share a listening experience as well as discussion with, or without, formalised leadership.
  - Library programs which may also involve library materials and personnel in a structured therapeutic program (e.g. exercise, poetry, reminiscence, current events). If a program is identified by a facility, the library staff involved in presenting a program should be familiar with the objectives of the program, what the therapy entails and any reporting or credentialing involved (based on ASCLA, 2009).

The booklet also gives suggestions for locating clients such as through: census information; local agencies working with the elderly; services such as HACC and Meals-

on-Wheels; RDNS; Vision Australia. (They also suggest that any advertising may need to be effected through these groups rather than through the local press.)

ASCLA also remind those considering running such programs from the library that they may need to:

- Provide alternative transportation services to bring people to the library
- Encourage clients to ring the library with their needs
- Loan special aids and appliances such as magnifiers, telecaption devices, book-holder devices
- Recognise accessibility issues such as ramps, automatic doors, wheelchair-friendly access, accessible drinking fountains and toilets, visible signage, tactile signage, large print listing.

It also suggests that some staff will need specialised training and PD to work with the impaired elderly. (In the Australian context this could mean employing those who are/have been, for example, teacher librarians, social work librarians etc).

### **English Librarians' Ideas for Working with Older People**

In addition to the ASCLA suggestions, The Society of Chief Librarians in Britain has also released a good practice guide recently in relation to working with older people (Sloan & Vincent, 2009). It covers: why libraries need to work with the older generation; the policy background; things to consider; and examples of good practice. Alongside, links to many relevant information sources are provided. There is also an excellent section on how to develop library and information services for the older adult and suggestions to include activities such as memoir writing, film afternoons and a regular 'seniors day'.

A number of case studies of innovative practice in libraries, involving older adults, in are provided such as:

- **Library Clubs in Gloucestershire**  
Monthly clubs are run for 1½ hours for those who are isolated. Council pay community transport. Members appreciate having the help of the library staff and the chance to choose their own books rather than have them chosen by someone else. An important spin-off has been a bi-monthly newsletter which includes reviews from library club members (often sent in by Email). Also mini-clubs have started in more remote areas where agents organise events through a village venue.
- **Top Time in Felixstowe**  
This was piloted in a newly refurbished library. It comprises a wide-ranging weekly program shaped by the participants. Activities include talks, craft sessions, chair-based exercise and live music. Other groups have been set up for theatre, writing and reading.
- **Suffolk Reading and Writing Groups**  
There are reading groups but the service also offers creative writing with a poet sponsored to work with each group over two sessions. Last year a selection of poems was published.
- **Reading Chains in Middlesborough and Dorset (Teleconferencing)**  
Monthly telephone book clubs are run. A photo of all members is taken so during calls people know who they are talking to and the library supplies books.

- Leeds Libraries OnLine Centre for computer learning
- Lambeth Libraries Work with Black and Minority Ethnic Elders  
Lambeth has run reminiscence groups, art projects, oral history drop-in celebrating age and black history. One library also hosts a Caribbean Lunch Club and teaches genealogy. Connections have also been made with the West Indian Ex Service Association and the Black Cultural Archive to provide appropriate events.

## **Examples of Programs across the World where Some of these Ideas have Been Applied**

### **a) The Use of Mobile Libraries to Deliver Books and Other Materials**

The most common sorts of programs are those where library resources are delivered to people's homes or where a mobile library is taken out to regional areas (This is already occurring across the Mornington Peninsula Shire). Here for example is a call to older adults to be associated with such a program, from the West Warwick Public Library in the USA (2009):

*The West Warwick Public Library Outreach Program invites you to join the growing number of seniors and disabled residents who have books, movies and music delivered to their door every 3 weeks if you live in (certain suburbs). If you would like to take advantage of this service call.....*

### **b) An Educational Outreach Program for an Older Adult Housing Development in Kentucky**

In some places the idea of delivering books to outlying centres in an area has been extended to incorporate the delivery of educational programs. One interesting example is a program run by the Kentucky Department for Libraries and Archives. In this case a mobile library has facilitated a large-print book discussion group at a special senior citizen housing development. The Department created a number of large-type discussion kits consisting of 15 copies of a selected book. They also assembled a set of materials for the group leader, including possible questions for the discussion.

Titles from an on-line catalogue (and often requested by seniors) are chosen by the mobile library librarian. While the librarian delivers the kit to the office of the apartment complex, via the bookmobile, a resident leads a group of older adults who are already bookmobile users. The group sets the time of their meetings and posts signs in designated areas of their building. When they are finished, the leader of the group tells the librarian to organise book returns. As new tenants move in, members of the group invite them to join or come for a visit. The program has been so successful that regular large-type book discussion kits have been added to the main catalogue.

### **c) A Roving Program in New York State**

Some programs move beyond the provision of books. For instance, Gross (1990) reports on 'Lively Minds' a Travelling Library Learning Program for older adults in Nassau, NY. This comprises 1-hour continuing education programs which use library services and

materials. The overall purpose is to give seniors intellectual experiences. The manual is presented in seven sections:

- Why a library or community organisation should start a program in its community
- Roles of the library director
- Designing the program
- Marshalling materials and resources
- Promoting the program
- Costs involved, and
- Evaluating the program.

A detailed description of a model session is included.

#### **d) A Large-Scale Outreach Project in Florida**

In another state, Florida, Karp (2004) describes the Library Elderly Outreach (LEO) Project. In this case the outreach librarian and one library assistant conduct programs in 31 senior facilities across the area served. Sessions take place in: nursing homes; senior residential or retirement communities; assisted living facilities; Council on Aging programs; and in adult day care centres.

The LEO project is run from a complete library on wheels (with books, papers, CDs, music etc.). It comprises a van designed especially for seniors with a low floor and wheelchair ramp. In addition, four book carts are transported and then detached and wheeled into facilities if the patrons are unable to get to the van. The van also carries voter registration forms and local information brochures.

LEO also helps seniors to connect with technology. A grant enabled 10 computers to be placed in senior facilities and in 2003 computer classes for the elderly began on Internet Use, Email and catalogue searching. The elderly are also shown how to use the local social service data based maintained by the library. These lessons are also posted on the library web-site so that students can review what they have learned. Classes have expanded now to include sessions on spreadsheets and digital photography. With the help of volunteers, over 2000 elderly people have completed such computer programs.

To demonstrate how useful computers can be, the LEO Project has also developed its own version of the television program--the *Antiques Road Show*. Participants bring in an antique or collectible and students go on-line to find its history before accessing auction houses to determine its market value.

The LEO Project also use Bi-Folkal activity kits ([bifolks@bifokal.org](mailto:bifolks@bifokal.org)) for senior and intergenerational programs themed and holiday programs, visual and audio recognition programs, chapter readings, mysteries and memoirs.

#### **e) Library Outreach to the Elderly at a National Level in Sweden**

Describing what is possible at a national level, Irvall (2002) outlines what has been occurring in Sweden where the philosophy is; "*if you cannot come to the library, the library must come to you*" (p1). So, the libraries there are working particularly with those living in 'servicehus' or 'sjulhem' (residencies for the elderly) where many over 80s live. Sometimes the library pays for the services through its own budget (sourced from the local municipality) and sometimes the institution pays for services.

Irvall describes how in larger institutions there are often small libraries with a location

close to the main entrance, where use is free to residents and visitors. Such collections include fiction and non-fiction, picture books, large print books, talking books, music, video and reference works. Often the librarian in charge works part-time in both the local library and the institutional library. Meanwhile, in smaller institutions there is no actual library with its own books but a 'deposit collection' from the main library and this is changed 3 or 4 times a year (although heavy readers can order more frequently via a telephone call).

In order that collections meet the needs of elderly residents, help is often sought from relatives and friends. Visitors receive questionnaires to fill out about their relative/friend's interests, former work, whether the resident had spent their life in the city or country and their reading/academic ability. Then librarians try to find appropriate material. This has proved important for those who speak Swedish as a second language as they ask librarians to find material referring to their homelands or that has been written in their first language (p5).

Meanwhile, some Swedish residential facilities for seniors are fortunate enough to be part of central complexes with the branch library forming part of the complex so that those who can move a little are able to borrow alongside the general public. Librarians can also work with therapists eg at one site both types of professionals have worked together to mount book and memorabilia exhibitions (p3).

Irvall then goes onto talk about another aspect of the program, Reading Circles, where:

*The librarian reads aloud to the Circle and all members then discuss what is read... This is a very good way to train the memory and it is also good to be part of a group. In some cases actors do the reading and the librarian finds suitable books. Sometimes you can use parts of talking books and then look at pictures in the printed book (p4).*

She adds that in Eskilstuna, south of Stockholm, the library has trained care staff to read to the elderly because librarians often don't have time. In this way reading aloud to residents then becomes integrated into the caregiver's role.

In addition, some libraries also create project boxes for reminiscence sessions. For example, there is a woman's box containing a hat, curler, hairpins and books with pictures of the area in the 1930s. In the men's box is a shaving strop, fishing gear, tobacco etc. At the outset relatives supplied the items but more recently museums have become involved. Boxes are loaned to different older adult institutions.

One final point about the Swedish approach is that to get over the (worldwide) problem of budget cuts, 'cultural ombudsmen' from nursing homes etc. are used (rather than volunteers). To create such positions, personnel working with the elderly in various institutions were invited to seminars on library services, reading and culture. These seminars concentrated on services for the elderly. Those engaged then met regularly and passed on relevant information to colleagues and families.

In small institutions with deposit collections, the ombudsmen are also expected to keep the books in order and order new books, as well to inform new residents about the library. They have also helped to mount exhibitions, such as those displaying local history. Although training ombudsmen requires an investment of time and effort, it has proved to be successful (p5).

## Reflection on the Role of Libraries in Education: Material from Focus Groups with Interviewees Over 80 in the Mornington Peninsula Shire

### Interest in Reading and Reading Services

About a third of interviewees were not interested in reading or found reading difficult. One thing that was reported was that; *“it’s taking me longer and longer to read anything—just a page every day”* (FG1). Also in regards to reading newspapers; *“It takes me most of the day to get right through it”* (FG1). Another person also said that she was never able to read more than a page at a time as she always falls asleep (FG4).

The remainder of the 33 people interviewed in the eight focus groups had considerable interest in reading—in fact the first response by one person to the phrase ‘education for the over 80s’ was *“books”* (FG4). Not surprisingly then, others remarked later in interviews that; *“I am always reading”* (FG1) or that; *“reading has been a big part of my retirement. I’ve read an enormous number of books since being here (on the Peninsula)”* (FG3).

Interestingly, several people had also been involved professionally with one holding a library technician’s certificate, another having been a school librarian and yet another who had run a shop-front library.

Furthermore, four were now interested enough to promote reading to other elderly people. Indeed one person had set up a library for older adults. He described how:

*I’ve set up a library at the Probus Club. I’ve done this with the blessing of Rosebud Library. A lot of books are withdrawn so I take some from there and I’ve set up a library which has been quite interesting. We have about 300 books of all types--both fiction and non-fiction* (FG3).

Another four had become ‘reading volunteers’, often delivering books to local elderly. Others had also done so in the past:

*My wife and I used to pick up books from the mobile libraries for a woman in Flinders. She was unable to get out and we used to pick her books up and then take them back....The Red Cross had a list of people and they would ask if you could pick the books up for so and so. That was one of the services they used to do* (FG1).

### Favourite Reading Material

Older adults enjoyed a wide range of material. Types of books that were read included:

Autobiographies/Biographies (FG1, FG2, FG4, FG7)

General Fiction (FG1, FG2)

Detective stories/‘Who dun-its’ (FG2, FG3, FG7)

Adventure (FG4)

Mysteries (FG3)

Popular female authors (FG2)

Family sagas (FG2)

Genealogy (FG3)

Books related to prior employment (FG1)

Motoring (FG1)

Gardening (FG1, FG2)

Cookery books (FG2)

Travel books (FG2, FG3)

Books set abroad (FG3)  
History/Historical novels (FG1, FG3, FG7)

Several interviewees reported using large-print books only.

Other reading material that was popular included newspapers (FG1, FG2), including the local press. One person explained further; *“I read a daily paper, particularly the local paper. I like to know what’s going on in the community and local area”* (FG2).

Another person went on to point out that reading the paper also helped her keep up with her grandchildren adding; *You can talk their language if you know what’s going on. That’s why I like to read and find out what’s happening in the world* (FG3).

Others read/used particular parts of the paper e.g. crosswords and puzzles to keep their minds active. Then another two people in FG1 read (international) news more widely through the computer as:

*It’s possible to have a subscription to things like The New York Times or The Business Review or The Spectator or The Eureka Report. I subscribe to all of those on an electronic basis, as well as reading the local paper. I have selected certain subjects that I want them to tell me about and I cover quite some ground there because I’m just interested in how the world ticks* (FG1).

Others use computers to fill gaps in knowledge:

*I read the newspaper but really if there’s anything I don’t know about I go straight to my computer* (FG1).

### Use of What’s Read

Some people also indicated how they use reading material; *“as the best thing you can do is to learn by reading the paper and instructional books”* (FG1). However, one went on to say that; *“I apply things in my workshop”* (FG1) while another commented that; *“even though I’m on my own I do try the recipes”* (FG2).

Reading materials that seemed less popular were magazines with four people telling the interviewer explicitly that they never buy/read them; *“as many of them contain trivial articles”* (FG2).

### Use of Library Services

About a half of interviewees were members of either Rosebud or Mornington libraries. (with one person saying that she didn’t belong to a library as she bought all her books from second hand bookshops (FG2).

### Views on the Provision of Space, Programs and Facilities for the Elderly

Firstly there were suggestions about how library facilities and services could be extended to include specialist services for the elderly:

*When I go to the Mornington library (which is a very good library) I see young mothers with children in a group doing all sorts of activities. Thinking about it, perhaps we could have a special time for older people. They have a specific area where they could do this-- like conference rooms you could use. These are also used by the Council of course, but there are times when they are not being used* (FG1).

Others reported that library spaces should be used to their fullest capacity because there are often facilities available in the library and; *“we should use the facilities that exist”* (FG1). It already occurs to some extent. For example, it was pointed out that:

*At Rosebud they have an exercise room where they carry out exercises. They have instructors there. They go through exercises which keep elderly people mobile* (FG1).

People also knew that; *“they do computers at the library and I think it’s free”* (FG2).

Yet others discussed that there should be regular speakers in the library to run sessions on various topics:

- 1: *For those who could can get to the library they can get people in to talk about different subjects.*
- 2: *Well the Rosebud library have a room they let out for speakers and functions. So they could have a monthly speaker up there but they should make sure it’s well publicised* (FG3).

One person also reported that;

*The Mornington Library is about to extend again. I think they could give a lot of classes. They do have a room they use for some things. I think that could be extended a lot. They could do a lot more for older people* (FG7).

#### Library Space as Social Hubs Where Older Adults Can Meet

Group members often talked about how important the social aspects of educational activities. Consequently, one person thought that:

*There’s another thing that libraries can do. Mornington has a coffee shop there which makes it more likely that people will linger and talk and meet somebody. That hasn’t been extended, to my knowledge, to the other libraries at Hastings and Rosebud. But at Rosebud I noticed something new the other day. There’s something there called the ‘Lion’s Den’. The Lions Club donated some tables and chairs that men are expected to sit in to meet someone of a similar age or interest group. So all this could be extended elsewhere* (FG1).

#### Accessibility

One of the barriers to attending library activities was thought to be transport. As one person remarked; *“It’s always interesting to go to the library when they’ve got an author speaking but unfortunately many older people can’t get there”* (FG3). Therefore, it was suggested that libraries; *“should organise to bring in people in their wheelchairs into libraries (and schools) for relevant activities”* (FG2).

Actually this is occurring to some extent and is really appreciated when it can be arranged:

*I have a young lass who takes me to Mornington or Rosebud or Hastings. And Oh! I do look forward to it. Having a volunteer come for me is very rewarding. It’s a young lass taking me to the different libraries. She’s such a bright young girl and it is really a delight to go with her. She comes because the library has arranged it* (FG4).

Whatever ways people travel to libraries there was a reminder that; *“they need to make it comfortable and user-friendly for older people who want to study there”* (FG6).

### The Use of Mobile Libraries

There was also discussion about how outreach could be arranged for those who are confined to home or a residence by extending the use of the mobile library. What follows are the articulated thoughts of a group of independent liver:

- 1: *To me this is very similar to the people who have Meals on Wheels. If they can't cook, then meals have to be brought to them. So somehow or other we have to get education to people in homes. Why can't they organise programs? They have a mobile library that goes round and stays in various areas. Surely they can be contacted and can give these people what they require. So you could teach these people by giving them a book to read on the subject they're interested in...*
- 2: *You need some volunteers of course—similar to Meals on Wheels (FG1).*

The mobile library was raised in several groups. However, as the following extract indicates, knowledge about this service is variable:

- 1: *What about mobile libraries? I know the cost of running those buses is tremendous but they are very good for people who are shut in or can't get out.*
- 2: *They have the talking books and they have the larger print books. And it travels around all over the Peninsula on certain days.*
- 1: *Do we have them round here?*
- 2: *Oh yes. I go the one in Dromana. It's there on a Thursday afternoon from 3.30-5.15 and then it goes over to Hastings.*
- 1: *I've never seen it.*
- 2: *It's done this for quite some time*
- 1: *I must ask about it.*
- 3: *There's also a mobile library which comes to Rye each Thursday. It comes near the hotel at 11am (FG2).*

With regards to mobile library services there were also requests to; “*put a list out about what's available and new books-- or they could make suggestions about what to read when the van next comes round*” (FG3).

### Being Read To

There was also the suggestion that older people like being read to by volunteers and that this should occur (FG1). Others confirmed that this was already happening:

*Re nursing homes, they have a lot of volunteers who come in and spend time with people and read to them. I've been there and seen all this (FG2).*

*People come to read to us. They are reading to us about South Africa at the moment. I'm enjoying the stories very much. And then another person reads to us on two other different days of the week, if you're interested. ...Volunteers come in to do all this. Some of them come because they are visiting people and stay on. Also some of the professionals stay on. One person is also a retired professional (FG5).*

Another idea was to have presenters visit various forms of accommodation. So one person suggested that: “*perhaps the library could send a speaker to a place like ours (retirement village) and discuss a particular book?—especially a new one*” (FG3).

## How Technology Provided in Libraries Can Help Over 80s to Learn

Many people found talking about the use of technology for learning difficult. Although some reported that; *“we virtually rely on DVDs from the library and TV programs in general”* (FG3) others felt; *“a bit disconnected from all this and stick with reading”* (FG3).

However, when asked about how technology can help people to learn, mention was made in a several interviews about ‘Talking Books’; *“where they’ll read to you from start to finish”* (FG1):

*There’s also a new device for those who are blind. Vision Australia provide them. That’s a talking book that you can stop and start without losing your place—because people who use a CD a person without sight have difficulty in advancing it to where they were previously. This is readily available now and is good for those who can’t handle the technology easily* (FG1).

One person, who had sight problems and belongs to Vision Australia, spoke at some length about talking books which she described as; *“an absolute life saver to me... I’m learning through my talking books which give me a wonderful insight to everything”*. (FG4). Another person added excitedly; *“They are wonderful! Hours go. You don’t realise the time has gone!”* (FG5).

Here is an extract where vision-impaired members of FG4 described the technology that is available further:

- 1: *I read books from Vision Australia because they presented us all 3 years ago with what they call a Daisy machine. At the time it was \$550 to purchase. You had to have a special CD disc which Vision were providing. It was expensive but a couple of years ago they presented us all with one through some sponsorship and it does everything. It can record a 25 hour book on one CD disc. Also on the machine it talks to you again about speed of speech, tone of speech and you can put it on pause and stop it at any time. And when you restart it, it will be start at the same position and it also has a sleep button. I take my little machine to bed with me. It’s about 8” x 10” with a self-charging battery. You can take it anywhere. I can be cooking or crocheting—or you can take it out in the garden if you wish. When I take it to bed I put it on a 35-120 minute sleep pattern and it will turn it off if I go to sleep in the interim. You can play normal CD discs on it. You can also play MPD discs on it. You can choose any title through Vision Australia. You can ring up and if they have it in or ‘on the shelf’ as they call it—or they can burn off ones if they have been given permission. And you will get it within 48 hours.*
- 2: *Yes and the benefit from that machine is that you can stop and restart it again.*
- 3: *I too have a Daisy player and I get discs from Vision Australia and they’re really very good.*
- 1: *And if you want to slow it down and have the volume up, you can adjust anything like that if you wish....With the books from Vision Australia, they’re sent free through the mail and then you just have to give them to someone to post back again. You can have as many as you wish. Some books are not so well dramatised or the book is not what you’re interested in but then you just send it back.*
- 3: *But many of them are excellent. There are a wide range of books that I get—all themes* (FG4).

Talking books are also available through Peninsula libraries. However, not all residents know about this service as the following comment demonstrates:

*Well my wife and I have known this older lady for many years and we discovered*

*that she had no idea about the talking book situation. And so we got her joined and we get the books and take them down to her. So we need to get the information out to these people that things are available, even if they can't get to the library themselves (FG4).*

### Use of Computer Facilities

Some FG participants also talked about how they could learn more about computers by using the computing facilities at the various libraries. So, for example it was related how; *At Mornington they have wonderful computers in the library—perhaps they could do something with those for older adults?” (FG4).*

*The Rosebud library has an excellent computer section. If they are going to teach us, then lessons could be done in the library. They've got the gear there. So such places are the best venues for learning because they've got the equipment (FG7).*

### **Library Organisation of Book Clubs/Groups**

The idea of a book club produced mixed reactions. Some people were simply not interested and others perceived difficulties or barriers such as; *“It can be difficult to read for some and also you need to be able to read quickly” (FG1).* Meanwhile, others reported that they would be interested in this activity (FG3, FG7). Those in nursing homes suggested; *“Well they could come out to us more and perhaps have a discussion about books” (FG6).*

Yet others stated that such groups already exist within Probus or retirement villages (FG2). One such group which takes place in a nursing home was described:

- 1: *We have a reading group—a book group. Someone comes and reads us a chapter of a book or a short story. Then we have a little discussion about the book. She's a volunteer and comes every Monday.*
- 2: *I used to take such a group here when I first moved into the retirement village over the road.*
- 1: *I like all that sort of thing very much. She might read for 40 minutes and then talk about the book to us (FG5).*

So, book clubs were thought to be popular as two people interviewed were book club members. Another remarked that; *“My wife belonged to one and thoroughly enjoyed it” (FG1)* but added that for the age group under consideration; *“they would have to be large print books” (FG1).*

In relation to how to run such an activity, certain individuals also thought that; *“something like what we are doing now, meeting to discuss a topic, would be a good format for a book discussion. Just look how quickly the time has gone while we have been made to think!” (FG5).*

Similarly those in telephone focus groups saw the possibility of running book groups via the telephone:

*I mean this is a new experience this morning and it seems to be working very well and I've enjoyed it. So perhaps something like this could be used for discussions—it could be about books for instance (FG1).*

*Seeing what we are doing at this moment I could see that it could be a good idea for book clubs and could be of benefit to those stuck at home (FG2).*

### Involvement of Council

Group members also put forward ways that some of these ideas could be implemented through Council. For instance, one person suggested:

*Perhaps there should be a part-time person in the Shire Council, for example, to co-ordinate and organise volunteers and to allocate venues like the libraries. That would be a start—to start the ball rolling on all this. Otherwise it just won't happen (FG1).*

### **SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE ACTION REGARDING LIBRARIES AND THEIR ELDEST PATRONS**

- Make sure that library spaces are used to the fullest extent possible
- Increase specialist services for older adults
- Provide lists of new books or lists of suggested reading for older adults
- Encourage older adults into the library by providing 'social' areas
- Promote the library as a meeting place
- Continue bringing the frail and impaired into the library through use of volunteer transport or wheelchair-friendly transport
- Extend computer classes using library equipment
- Invite regular speakers to the library to speak on topics of interest to the elderly
- Ensure all events and activities are well-advertised
- For those away from major centres in the Shire, extend services and activities offered by the mobile library
- Promote the mobile library more
- Consider how more older adults can be read to
- Promote the use of talking books and associated accessories
- Consider introducing more book clubs especially for the elderly (These can be held either face-to-face or by telephone link up)
- Work more closely with older adult residencies.
- Market services for older adults well.

# **PART E: THE ROLE OF GOVERNMENT IN OLDER ADULT LEARNING**

## **HISTORICAL AND POLICY IMPERATIVES**

### **The Concept of Lifelong Learning (LLL)**

The term 'Lifelong Learning' first came to light when UNESCO considered lifelong education in the mid 1960s. It was stated that it should involve; "*the animating principle of the whole process of education and should be regarded as continuing throughout an individual's life from earliest childhood to the end of life*" and that this could be achieved; "*vertically through the duration of life and horizontally to cover all the various aspects of the life of individuals and societies*" (cited in Jessup, 1969: vii).

By 1979 the UNESCO Institute of Education published a discussion paper; *Life Transitions and the Older Learner*.

Definitions of lifelong learning included that it:

- Lasts the whole life of the individual
- Has as its ultimate goal promotion of self-fulfilment
- Acknowledges the contribution of all available educational influences including formal, non-formal and informal.

A subsequent document was the Faure Report (1972) which raised the point that lifelong education enhances the quality of life and is empowering to citizens. Then by the mid 70s there was a national conference on educational gerontology in Virginia which in turn led to the founding of the journal *Educational Gerontology*. Ten years later the *Association for Educational Gerontology* was formed in 1985 followed in 1986 by its own refereed journal the *Journal for Educational Gerontology*. By 1994 the journal changed title to *Education and Ageing* while the Association changed its name to *The Association for Education and Ageing*.

At roughly the same time, Europe took the idea on board so that the first international conference based on the topic of lifelong learning was held in Rome in 1994.

After that, associated terms for teaching and learning related to older adults then began to emerge such as 'eldergogy' (Yeo, 1982), 'geragogy' (Battersby, 1997; Glendinning, 1992; Formosa, 2002) and 'gerontagogy' (Lemieux & Sanchez Martinez, 2000).

Currently, there is an inquiry into the future for lifelong learning being undertaken by National Institute of Adult and Continuing Education (NIACE) in Britain. It was established in September 2007 and is to produce a major report in September 2009. The overall goal is to offer an authoritative strategic framework for the UK. The themes for the report are to include: issues to be faced in the next 20 years; expenditure on lifelong learning; and the impact of LLL on policy.

### **The Growth of Interest in Lifelong Learning in Australia and Associated Policy Developments**

In Australia the idea of lifelong learning began to be recognised about 30 years ago. For instance, the Australian Association of Adult Education (now Adult Learning Australia)

was set up during the 1980s, funded by the Commonwealth Government. Then State Departments were set up (such as the Adult, Community and Further Education Board in Victoria). Some important reports then started to appear including:

- *Come in Cinderella* (Senate Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training Report, 1991) For the first time, this report referred to adult and community education as a fourth education sector after schools, universities and TAFEs
- *Expectations of Life: Increasing the Options for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (House of Representatives Committee for Long Term Strategies, 1992) where it was emphasised that potential was being lost and wasted if people spent 20-40 years during retirement doing little or nothing
- *Report for Positive Ageing* (1996) in which a whole chapter was dedicated to Lifelong Learning
- *Towards a Learning Society* (Senate Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training Report, 1997). This was a follow-up report after 'Come in Cinderella' which identified benefits to health from continuing education and therefore, called for more support for adult education.

At the same time in the 1990s, there was the first serious research into older adult learning in Australia and Victoria (Crombie & Hurworth, 1995, Hurworth, 1996). Even so, only lip service was paid to much of what was written and with tougher times economically there was a shift away from 'education during the lifespan'. The emphasis swung to training and retraining the adult workforce and concentrated less on satisfying lifestyle preferences in later years.

However, more recent policies and reports have opened the door to focussing on late life learning once more. These include:

- The Victorian Parliamentary Inquiry into Planning for Positive Ageing 1997
- The *Commonwealth National Strategy for an Ageing Australia: An Older Australia, Challenges and Opportunities for All* (2001).
- The Victorian Government introduction of the *Growing Victoria Together* policy where one of the central directions was to 'support all older people to live active lives in the community'.
- the Victorian Government's policy statement; *Making This is the Age to Be in Victoria: A Forward Agenda for Senior Victorians* (2002, reprinted 2003). This identified actions to be taken by local communities in the development of an environment where older members of the community are valued, productive and active.
- The Institute for Public Policy Research report *Older People and Wellbeing* (2008) which looks at factors what shape wellbeing in older people.
- The World Health Organisation—*Active Ageing: A Policy Framework* (2002).
- The United Nations Principles for Older Persons (independence, participation, care, self-fulfilment, dignity)  
(<http://www.un.org/NewLinks/older/99/principles.htm>)
- *Positive Ageing: A Strategy for Current and Future Senior Victorians* (2004).

This was followed by The Victorian Government's release of *A Fairer Victoria 2005* and *A Fairer Victoria Progress and Next Steps* (2006) which described the Government's social programs over the four year period 2006-2010. Some of these were to assist older people in all aspects of their lives (thereby impinging on learning needs).

As a consequence of this Policy, the Office of Senior Victorians in the Department of Planning and Community Development (DPCD) received an allocation of \$5.1M over four years to implement initiatives that:

- Encourage positive ageing
- Encourage community projects that promote changes in attitudes to ageing
- Enhance technology usage by older Victorians.

In response to this, there have been several recent initiatives funded by the Dept of Planning and Community Development e.g.

- a) The Municipal Association of Victoria and Council on the Ageing: Positive Ageing in Communities Project. This \$1.4 million project aimed to build capacity of local governments in planning for an ageing population and to promote 'age friendly communities' which create opportunities for senior Victorians to live active and fulfilling lives (MAV/COTA, 2008). As a result of this program with 74 LGAs:
  - 11 Victorian councils now have a position dedicated to positive ageing
  - 57 councils have identified one or more staff with positive ageing as part of their role
  - Some larger councils are establishing positive ageing teams.
  - Over 10,500 older people have participated in 31 demonstration projects
  - Neighbourhood Houses and Community Learning Centres have changed their educational programming to include the needs of older people.
- b) Positive Ageing Projects funded between 2005-2010 (Hurworth & Rutter, 2009).

Five principles underpin such activities within the State of Victoria. These are that:

- Rights of older adults are to be upheld, autonomy accepted and their dignity respected
- They are to be valued and listened to
- They should be given opportunities to participate fully in their communities
- Access to information support and services to maximise their independence should be available to maintain health and wellbeing.

Most recently in May 2009, the Victorian Government released the discussion paper *Ageing in Victoria*. For this, older Victorians have contributed their ideas about how to make Victoria a better place for older people.

Many of the documents mention also align with community and education developments such as Learning and Education Networks (LENS) in Victoria, the work of WHO on 'global age-friendly cities' (WHO, 2006) or the idea of age-friendly rural communities in Canada (Federal/Provincial Ministers Responsible for Seniors, 2009). For the latter, seniors discussed and made suggestions about: outdoor spaces and buildings; transport; housing; health; respect and social inclusion; communication; civic participation; and social participation. Older adults wanted:

- Opportunities for physical recreation
- Activities for seniors offered in places of worship or schools
- Food-related activities
- Cultural events
- Indoor activities such as cards, games
- Courses on crafts or hobbies
- Activities to be held in convenient locations
- Providing activities that are affordable
- Offering intergenerational or multigenerational oriented activities.

## **THE ROLE LOCAL GOVERNMENT CAN PLAY**

As we have seen from earlier examples and models, local councils can play a role in supporting and introducing novel ways to support older adult education. For instance, the

Shire of Melton on Melbourne's fringes has an education plan that caters for everyone from cradle to grave (Shire of Melton, 2008) and Ferntree Gully U3A has received several large grants from the local LGA to develop its activities.

Focus Group members, all living in Mornington Peninsula Shire were asked to consider how they would organise education for over the over 80s in the area and how the Council could assist. **One major suggestion was that there should be:**

***....a part-time person in the Shire Council to co-ordinate and organise volunteers and to allocate venues like the libraries for example. That would be a start—to start the ball rolling on it (FG1).***

adding: ... *“otherwise it just won't happen!”* (FG1).

Whatever Council decides to do however, should be as a result of consultation at the grass roots level. As one person articulated:

*It should be consumer directed rather than centrally organised. It should be what people want. And the benefit has to be apparent otherwise it's yet another government initiative that I'm afraid most of us get disillusioned with* (FG1).

Therefore, it was suggested that older adults themselves have to be pro-active in asking for what they want and should be engaged in related planning/data collection activities. In this way older adults can be empowered to take the running and influence their own destiny (Hurworth & Clemans, 1996). One person indicated this kind of approach in reference to the introduction of more Men's Sheds on the Peninsula (FG1).

Otherwise groups had a limited amount to say about the role of (local) governments and could only suggest that they:

- Carry out a needs assessment to find out what people want (FG1, FG4)

An interesting suggestion to determine the needs of housebound residents using HACC services was put forward by one person who thought that those coming in to clean etc could forward information to Council:

*You could do it through the girls that help. Suggestions could be given to them and they could pass them on to the Council or the organisers. They also go into people who need help with showers—so they could find out what less able people need. They could perhaps give us a questionnaire or something like that* (FG8).

- Introduce a program similar to Hawthorn's 'Learning for the Less Mobile' (FG4)
- Introduce some 'at home', individualised education for those who request it for *“if that was done I think a lot of homebound people would be interested* (FG2)
- Arrange some outings for housebound people/low care nursing home residents (e.g. to Frankston Cultural Centre or other places of interest) (FG5).
- In order to achieve some of the above:
  - a) liaise/work with community-minded groups such as Freemasons, CWA, Lions Club:

*There'd have to be some close collaborations with Council. You could bring in local organizations like the Lions Club. They could become involved if it was once a month or so* (FG3).
  - b) advertise for volunteers.
- Provide more transport to take older people to educational venues (FG3, FG4)
- Provide transport that will hold several wheelchairs (rather than just one) as well as seats for carers (FG3) (along the lines of Ring-and-Ride in Birmingham, England).

- Use some of the rates to support over 80s education programs and venues (FG4)
- Wherever possible, provide venues free of charge or ask for low rents (FG7)
- Ensure all venues (such as community centres, Neighbourhood Houses and Senior Citizens) are utilised to the full and offer well-designed programs for over 80s (FG6, FG8).

- Supply information about what's available to residents. A typical comment was that:

*Information should be put in the Council News which arrives regularly in my letter box. That's the way to get information to everyone out on the Peninsula. That tells you what's happening and the future dates. That way every household will get one (FG4).*

However, it was suggested that these days with increasing technological literacy information should also be presented on a CD/DVD for as one person revealed: "I get all my Veteran's Affairs information that way" (FG4).

- Tell residents about the benefits of older adult education as many are unaware (FG1).

Finally it was pointed out, in the following discussion extract, that while there are plenty of facilities and programs available on the Western side of the Peninsula there are not so many on the East. Therefore, FG participants discussed how:

*More facilities are needed in Hastings...*

*Yes, because there's plenty here between Rye and Sorrento...*

*Yes, there's plenty over there but we're on the other side...and there's not that much around...*

*Council needs to ensure services are evenly spread amongst the communities (FG8).*

## **SUGGESTED ACTIONS REGARDING COUNCIL INVOLVEMENT IN PROVISION OF EDUCATION FOR THE OVER 80s IN MORNINGTON PENINSULA SHIRE**

### Provision in the Shire

- Carry out a needs assessment (reinforcing the suggestion already outlined in the Draft document Lifelong Learning on the Mornington Peninsula).
- Ensure facilities and programs for Over 80s education are available equitably across the LGA.
- Make full use of existing facilities (such as libraries, schools and community halls) for older adult education.

### Personnel/Assistance

- Consider employing a person to provide a focal point for education for the over 80s where the role would be to promote, liaise and organise.
- Consider employing a gardener and or cook to introduce programs for those over 80.
- Liaise/work with community groups to achieve aims.
- Create a pool of volunteers to assist with over 80s education.

### Programs

- Consider new educational options (such as education programs for the frail, individualised programs for those who need it, or group outings).

### Transport

- Consider potential transport options associated with the provision of various educational models.

### Marketing

- Market the idea of education for those over 80, emphasising benefits.

## PART E: SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Demographic changes raise questions about traditional forms of education. In addition, new ways of approaching ageing, known as 'successful ageing' in medical gerontology and 'positive ageing' in political terminology are part of understanding the changing role of the older adult. Thus, education to enhance autonomy and independence of older cohorts will be essential, especially now that the 'baby boomers' are moving relentlessly to swell the ranks of the over 80s.

This means that policy and planning will have to change. Those approaches which work for formal schooling in younger life do not work because the mix of providers, funding streams and personal motivation is much more complex. What is needed is a policy framework; *"which ensures that there are opportunities for people to learn what they need, when they need it* (McNair, 2008: 31).

Certainly with the growing numbers of 'top-enders' we must address educational needs in order to maintain identity, health (both physical and mental), social engagement and well-being during the final stages of life. This is because where projects have offered both physical and intellectual challenges for older adults there appear to be clear benefits in terms of improved quality of life, health and social connectedness (Withnall & Thompson, 2003:1-2). Indeed, there are several studies that have demonstrated considerable success of from educational and psychomotor interventions (Oswald, 2004, . Oswald, Rupprecht et al., 1996). In addition, Schaie (2005) has shown in the Seattle Longitudinal Study that intellectual decline with increasing age can be reversed by educational interventions.

Importantly, the conclusion is that; *"while education for people at this stage of life does not deliver economic benefits, it can contribute not only to the quality of life for the learners, but also reduce the costs of health and social care support"* (McNair, 2008: 44).

The challenge now is to:

- Improve the range and availability of opportunities for the over 80s age group
- Establish/continue appropriate linkages between Council, educational agencies and health/welfare agencies, without whose cooperation it would be difficult to make any long-term provision.
- Develop appropriate curricula
- Increase the quality of learning opportunities in late life
- Ensure that learning opportunities are accessible (both physically and financially) and
- Change policy and practice for all this to occur.

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# APPENDIX 1: SAMPLE FOCUS GROUP QUESTION SCHEDULE

## FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS CONCERNING THE EDUCATION FOR THE OVER 80s: HACC RESIDENTS

### Model Question

My name is Ros Hurworth. With regard to my own education after school in England I went to university and then did teacher training. I taught for a few years and then came out to Australia also to teach. I then moved into educational research and evaluation and did post-graduate work at LaTrobe. I have also learnt things at evening classes and about music from being in a choir.

**Now please tell me something about yourself and something short about learning in your life** (people usually follow the model!).

### Opening Question (Round Robin)

**(Prompt—say it is to be a one-two words only and that there is no right or wrong answer—it can be something silly or serious)**

- 1 a) What community or other groups do/did you belong to (if any)?
- b) When I say the words *Education in older age* what is the very first picture or idea that spring to mind?

### Introductory Question

**(Open for all to speak at any time from now on)**

2. a) Tell me about any learning or educational experiences you have had since you were 60 (prompt—about different types of learning—informal or formal)
- b) What kind of reading do you like to do (prompts: ordinary books; talking books; large print; readings on the radio; book discussions)

### Transition Questions

3. a) What kinds of other hobbies do you have?
- b) What would you like to learn about now?
4. Why may learning be important for older adults in the 2000s?
5. a) What are the best ways to teach people like yourselves?(prompt: could also mean teaching yourself)
6. a) What kinds of educational opportunities are you aware of for older adults like yourselves in the Mornington Peninsula area?
- b) Do you know of anything else further afield (in Melbourne, interstate or around the world?)
7. What do we need to think about regarding the education of those over 80 who
  - a) Are in residential care?
  - b) Have seeing or hearing difficulties?

8. a) How could new technology be used to help those over 80 to learn?  
b) What role could libraries play in older adult learning?
9. What do you think about intergenerational programs? (give examples)  
To what extent would you be interested learning alongside/with young people?

### **Key Questions**

Bringing things together:

10. How different is learning for you now that you are over 80?  
(How does it compare with when you were sixty or first retired?)
11. If you were left in charge of education for people like you over 80 how would you organise?
12. a) What role could libraries play in older adult education?  
  
b) What role could Governments (local, state etc) play in providing education for the over 80s?
13. Finally to what extent would the following be of interest to you:
  - (i) book clubs
  - (ii) telephone learning eg discussion of books/current affairs/Do Care learning modules (explain these)
  - (iii) bringing education to the individual (describe example)
  - (iv) taking people from their homes to a learning centre?