

*Program 01*

## **Mind Your Step!**

*How we think about age and 'usefulness' can affect us all*

In Creative Male Ageing, a 12-part series on the Community Radio Network, we aim to challenge many of the assumptions about ageing men in our society, and explore some of the creative options for older men in the 21st century. In this first program, we begin with the experience of two men post-retirement and then explore some of the negative societal attitudes to ageing – including through the media – to set the scene in later programs for challenging those widespread attitudes around inevitable decline and decrepitude, and begin the journey best summed up in the words “Waiting for God or seizing the day”!

### **Interviewees**

*Dr John Ashfield*

*Dr Anthony Brown*

*Dr Tony Coles*

*Dr Don Edgar*

*Dr Patricia Edgar*

*Peter O'Neill*

*Professor Alan Petersen*

*Sue Ross*

### **Discussion Starter**

Years ago, there was a movie whose theme was that, once people reached their senior years, they were ushered into a picture theatre where idyllic images of swaying fields of wild flowers and calming music prepared the elderly to be euthanased, after which their seats moved sideways into a processing room where they were turned into green protein chips to be fed to the hungry poor. In the movie, the elderly were not merely disposed of, but put to ‘good use’.

Now you might say: ‘what a horrible thought’, yet in our society, not only are older people generally sidelined based purely on age (with little consideration of their experience and capacity to contribute), but are also actively encouraged in a multiplicity of ways to resign themselves to incapacity and deterioration, and an inexorable shuffle towards being of no further use. Perhaps we’ve allowed the ‘horrible thought’ to find some expression in contemporary reality?

Our cultural assumptions about age appear to be way out of step with the reality of the large number of older citizens now remaining healthy, capable, and with capacity of experience that can contribute immensely to society. Assumed inevitability of burdensome frailty merely based on age -though a major social injustice, curiously appears to have escaped not only the attention of political correctness, but even those with an intelligent and keen sense of a cause in need of support.

Stereotypes and generalisations often do have an element of truth to them, which is why we use them. But what if they serve to marginalise and discriminate against those to whom they refer; those who may in fact represent a contrary majority? This is a pivotal consideration, just as we have critically observed of some current affairs media reports where unscrupulous ‘beat-up’ journalism, instead of just reporting news actually creates it; the sensation and exaggeration actually outweigh the facts.

Well the facts are these: to squander potential decades of productive and creative individual capacity is silly. To arbitrarily attribute inevitable frailty and incapacity to age alone – in the face of disconfirming evidence – is ignorant. To treat people so shabbily places us all in a queue awaiting devaluation based merely on age. Now that is indeed a horrible thought!

### **Questions**

- 1. Debate in our society about issues of justice and ethics often revolve around our notion of the sanctity of life. Why doesn't this also extend to the sanctity of the capacity to live?*
- 2. In what practical ways on a day to day basis could we begin to speak and behave contrary to stereotypic notions of old age being synonymous with burdensome frailty, incapacity and decline?*
- 3. How can older people themselves begin to reclaim life they have unwittingly relinquished due not to ill-health or frailty, but suggestive cultural stereotypes?*

### **Related Resources**

Edgar, Patricia: *In Praise of Ageing*. The Text Publishing Company, Melbourne, 2013

### **Project Consultant**

*Dr John Ashfield*