

Growing Older **Growing Bolder**

Across differences of culture, language, race and gender, seniors from five neighbourhoods in Toronto came together to write this paper. One goal united us. We wanted to challenge the myth that older people have little to offer. By telling you what we, ourselves, are doing to overcome barriers, we aim to show that we have talent, skill, experience and spirit to contribute to society. We want our worth and capability to be recognized. We want opportunities to be active and involved in our communities.

And who is our message for? Other seniors, people who work with seniors and families of seniors.

If you are a senior, we hope this paper will help you appreciate your own value, encourage you to find support and speak out for what you want. It's time for all of us, older people, to get together and organize around our issues. If you work with seniors, we would like you to treat us as partners, and create more opportunities for us to be involved in making decisions. And if you have older people in your family, we hope you will find out what they want for themselves, and what you can do so that they have the space to use their abilities for as long as they can. We are asking these things so that older people may live life to the fullest, and for the well-being of the communities in which we live.

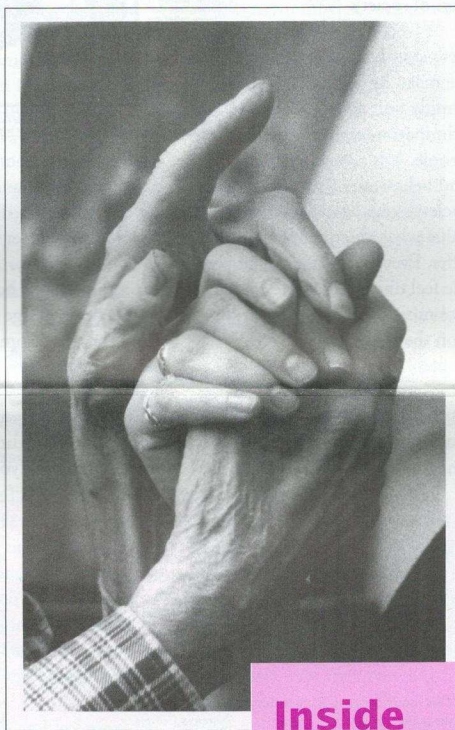


PHOTO: AMY GOTTLIEB

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Ageism: What keeps it going?

Here we are, a group of seniors, and we have a chance to use these pages to talk to you. We want to talk about 'ageism' in Canada and how it cramps us and squeezes us into dim corners of society. Our goal is to get you to look at us in a different light: as people who are still whole, capable, growing and contributing members of society.

Let's start by saying what we mean by 'ageism'. Simply put, ageism is discrimination against older people. It is a system of attitudes and behaviours that limit this society's capacity to recognize and value what older people have to offer. Everybody loses: older people feel discarded, while everyone else misses out on the contribution that older people could make.

At the heart of our society is a fear of aging and its mirror-image, the fear of death. Old age

is seen as the step before death. The changes that accompany aging are often seen as an enemy to be fought off rather than a natural part of the process of living

weak, you're not a sexual being any longer, your mind's too dull, you're stuck in your ways, you can't manage your own life. Move over. Make way for younger people. Let us take over your life. We'll decide what's best for you."

Face Shaper Program

Surgery-free facelift techniques to rescue sagging skin and control the visible signs of aging.

News for every one who is starting to see those tell-tale signs of aging on her recently introduced from Europe is a new little electronic device called the "F" facial toner by Rhone that works on a principle of exercise.

In her words, this gently exercises facial muscles back into position without your effort on your face. This battery



A regular workout with isometric program excellent prevention against sagging skin wrinkles.

The exercise program which takes about 15 minutes, leaves it feeling stimulated vibrant. This wonderful feeling is the result of the stimulation of pheromone blood vessels beneath your skin help give your healthy, youthful Anti-Aging In

Contrary to what most people believe, we make our most accurate judgments about age based on the contours of the

— witness the boom in 'anti-aging' cosmetics and the popularity of birthday cards that make fun of anyone over 29!

Even though our bodies and minds begin to age and mature from the very moment of conception on, there comes a certain point when society's collective attitude seems to say, "That's it. You've had your turn. You're of no use any more — your body's too

While in every other stage of life we tend to recognize and encourage what a person *can* do, old age seems to be the time when all that's noticed is what a person *cannot* do. In our old age we carry a heavy burden of damaging stereotypes. Everyday we hear ageist expressions describing people as "past their prime", "over the hill", "going senile".

What keeps ageism going?

Ageism is propped up by a general lack of awareness and by media stereotyping. Why is most of society so out of touch with the reality of older people's lives? Well it's

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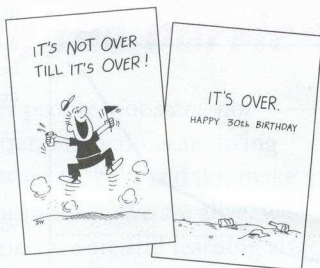
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pretty hard to know about our lives if you hardly ever meet or get to know us.

By and large, older people tend to be set apart from society. At 65, most of us are told we can no longer work. Many of us are in good health, enjoy working, or need the income. Often our jobs have provided us with both self-esteem and social contact — a sense of being productive members of society and a means of getting out of the house and mixing with people. Once we retire, we tend to be treated as if we're of no use any more and we feel shut out.

By the time we become seniors, most of us have spent many years raising our families. Yet, now, we may feel displaced. In these times of great economic change, increasing numbers of families become scattered as they move to wherever jobs can be found. Some adult children rarely visit or keep in touch with their older relatives. Back at home, we find ourselves alone in our old age without family to turn to for support.

Of course, there are older people who have family close by. But with changes in technology, family-life has changed so much. We used to tell our grandchildren stories, we used to hand down memories and history, linking the past with the present. Now we've been replaced by children's television programs, video-games, and other



high-tech entertainment. Some of us who live with our children are treated as if they own us and we don't have lives of our own. We are expected to cook, clean and take care of the grandchildren all day long. The more we depend on our children for housing, the harder it is for us to tell them we don't like the way they treat us.

Housing built especially for seniors does provide places where we can live fairly independently. Here, however, we can become cut off from the satisfaction of meet-

ing children and neighbours of varying ages. We may be separated from people of our own culture, racial background and language. Or, if we happen to live in culture-specific seniors' buildings, we may not get a chance to meet seniors of different backgrounds.

The segregation and isolation of older people — from the work-

force, from our families, from our communities, from other generations, from other cultures — contribute to society's lack of awareness about the lives of older people. Without awareness and knowledge it is difficult to recognize, let alone challenge, the negative stereotypes that keep ageism alive. Now let's look at the media's role in perpetuating ageism.

Media messages

Youth is divine in this society, or so television, movies, magazines and billboards tell us. Take advertisements, for example. Companies that want to sell something pitch their wares at those with the most money to spend. It's no surprise that they target people who are young enough to have most of their working (read 'money-spending') lives ahead of them.

"This product is *the* magic ingredient that will give you the kind of life you want, make you the kind of person you want to be." Advertisers feed

us their vision of the good life. First they shape our dreams and desires, then they tell us how their product will make our dreams come true. Over and over, we are blinded by images of slender, taut-skinned, firm-bodied, athletic, popular, care-free men and women whose personal success depends, almost entirely it would seem, on drinking the right beer, driving the right car, using the right deodorant, wearing the right briefs, using the right credit card, and above all, remaining young forever. How young you look and how much you own — these, the advertisers would have us believe, are the signs of success. No expense is too great to try to look as if you're in your early twenties, no matter how old you are.

All of us are bombarded by youth-worshipping messages everyday. It takes strength of character, a community of support, and some reminding, for

當我們耆老與子女住在一起，有時很難對他們說，不喜歡他們對待我們的方式。

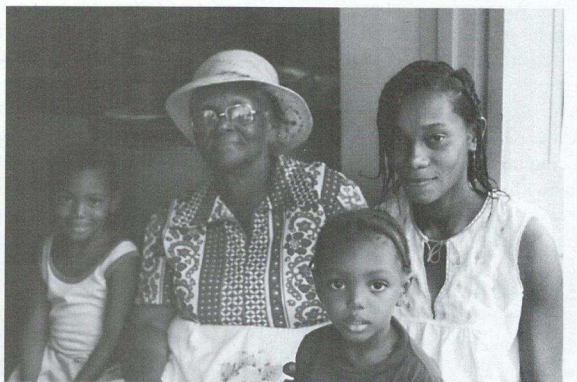
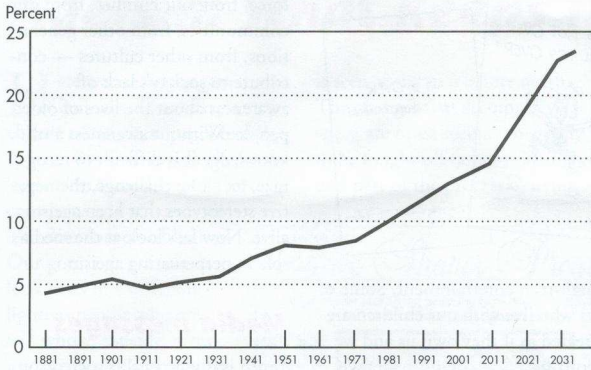


PHOTO: CHRISTINE ALMEIDA



Proportion of people aged 65 and over in the total population, Canada, 1881-2036

anyone living in this society to ask the question, “Never mind all that, what’s important to me? What kind of person do I want to be? What kind of world do I want to help build? What would make me say I’ve had a good life?”

do with the fact that the proportion of the population over age 65 is growing quickly. Statistics Canada’s 1991 census showed that over the past 40 years the percentage of Canada’s population aged over 65 had grown

from 8% to 12%. By the year 2036, the number is expected to jump to 23%. In other words, 40 years from now, the proportion of senior citizens in Canada will double.

What is the significance of the expected

increase in the older population?

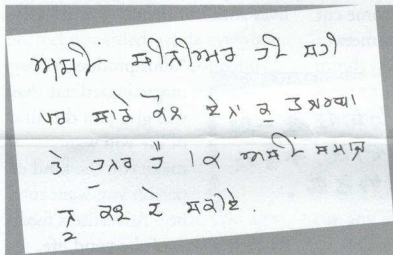
A caring society cannot ignore such a rapidly growing segment of the population. We need to work harder than ever to make sure that policy-makers involve seniors in decisions about the future of social programs that affect us; programs such as medicare, drug benefits and pensions. We, seniors, need to become more informed and assertive consumers of the health care system. Communities need to find constructive ways of integrating older people so that we can contribute our talents and experience. People who feel useful and involved are more

likely to enjoy greater physical, mental and spiritual health; healthier people are less of a burden on the health-care system.

The sheer force of growing numbers offers another possibility that fills us with hope. We look forward to rising numbers of seniors who won’t tolerate being put down, and will stir us all into taking action to get rid of ageism.

Older people have started this work of self-empowerment and social change already. As you read this issue of *The Moment*, you will find out what the seniors who put this issue together are doing to overcome the barriers of ageism. You will meet seniors who refuse to be shut out, seniors who stay actively involved. We do volunteer work in our communities, we test our physical limits, we initiate intergenerational programs, we work for racial equality, we demand a say in the running of seniors’ centres, we are working on changes within our families, we are educating our communities to prevent the abuse of elders, we are organizing politically to save public health care. Read on and meet us — older people who are helping each other to recognize our own value and strength. We aren’t just growing older, we’re growing bolder!

- Several seniors gave their ideas for this article to Arif Noorani and Christine Almeida, who wrote it. Special thanks to Florence Martyn, Surjan Singh Zirvi, Keith McNair and the Woodgreen Chinese Seniors’ Tai Chi Group.



Saying “No” to ageism

It’s encouraging to note that in recent years more TV shows feature older characters in a respectful way — as interesting people with strengths and weaknesses, still learning, still part of the world of the living. Writing in the January 10, 1994 edition of *Maclean’s*, Mary Nemeth tells of an instance when an ad for tortilla chips showing “a befuddled old woman getting steamrolled into wet cement” provoked public outrage. Consumer protest embarrassed the manufacturer into making a donation to a food-bank. “Advertisers now poke fun at the aged only at their peril,” says Nemeth.

No doubt, the high level of protest against insulting depictions of the elderly has much to

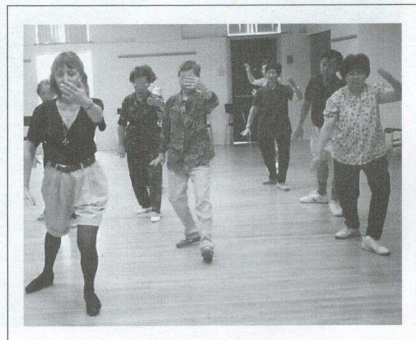


PHOTO: WOODGREEN

Overcoming the barriers of ageism

We are regular older people, not stars, not famous citizens. Yet, our actions are living proof that older people want to, can, and do, make a contribution to our communities. We are alive, we have talents and experience, we are still learning and growing. All through this section, we will tell you about things we are actually doing to overcome the barriers that ageism puts in our way. If you are an older person, we hope you will be inspired to take action too. If you are not yet older, we hope we will shake up some of those limiting ideas about seniors. Come now and see us with fresh eyes. Welcome to the movement to make way for grey.

OVERCOMING BARRIERS: COPING WITH CHANGE

We all start out young and grow old. Yet, when we are young, growing old is the last thing we think about. The years go by quickly. Old age creeps up on you. I know it did on me.

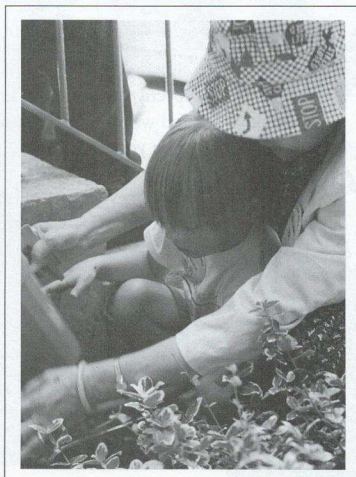
Old age comes to all people in all cultures. We all start out being born into the world. But from that point on, people are not the same. As we age, our lives differ in many ways. Some are born with disabilities. For others, their health can go wrong at any time. Some go to school and college, but many around the world don't get the chance because they can't afford it. If you owned a business that didn't make it, that could have changed your whole life. Sickness may slow you down. I had to quit working at the age of 60 because of poor health. This was not my choice.

Growing old can be a lonely part of life. Suddenly you find your-

self being classified in the 'old' age group. All of a sudden you are alone, your family are on their own making their own lives.

Don't knock being old. It will become part of your life, too. We can all make a contribution to life whether we are old or young or in between. I am sometimes amazed by the things I've been able to achieve in my senior years.

- by Ruth Bowen, Dixon Hall



Those of us who speak in this section come from the five community centres listed below. If you want to find out more about anything you read here, please don't hesitate to be in touch with us through our organizations:

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OVERCOMING BARRIERS: VOLUNTEERING TO HELP OTHERS

"I think volunteering is a responsibility for me. I will carry on!" says the 79-year-old Mrs. Wei Kwan Wong, who has been an active volunteer in Toronto's Chinese community ever since she arrived in Canada in 1969.

All her work is for other seniors. She has brought a lot of love and care to frail and isolated older people, delivering meals or visiting them in their homes, nursing homes or hospitals. The club for elderly Chinese that she helped start 20 years ago now has more than 2,000 members. Today she is helping to raise funds for a unique Chinese-language nursing home that will provide services relevant to the culture of Chinese seniors.



PHOTO: WOODGREEN

In recognition of Mrs. Wong's compassion, commitment and leadership, the Government of Ontario gave her a Senior Achievement Award in 1993. The Chinese community honoured the event with a big banquet.

At the banquet, Mrs. Wong said, "I do volunteer work not because I want to receive awards or honour — I do it simply because I want to serve someone in need. I just want to contribute whatever I can during my senior years, to bring hope and care to some other seniors. And then I will be comforted."

- by Michael Tong, Woodgreen Community Centre

我從事義務工作，因為我想在晚年盡力作出一隻貢獻。

OVERCOMING BARRIERS: SPEAKING TO PEOPLE WHO WORK WITH SENIORS

I work with seniors in a neighbourhood community centre. Several of us who work in seniors programs want to know how to improve our programs. So we asked some seniors, "What would you like program workers to do?" Here is what they told us:

- Believe that you are working with seniors, instead of working for us.
- Focus on seniors' talents and be patient with us. Listen to us more. Become aware of our abilities and encourage us to do our best.
- Create opportunities for us to participate, help us get information, and allow us to make decisions for ourselves.
- Regard seniors, especially those of us in executive roles at the community centre, as an integrated part of the program and the centre as a whole.
- Be sensitive when handling conflicts within seniors clubs and councils. Find out if we share your perspective as workers. Our expectations, aspirations and ways of handling situations may be different from yours.
- Seniors expect respect, particularly from young generations. Understand that we seniors have a lot of experience. So don't treat us like dummies or manipulate us.
- Remember that senior volunteers are your indispensable partners. We can help educate and mobilize other seniors more effectively than workers can.

یہ ہم طاعت میں کہ ہم بزرگ ہونے کی مگر ابھی تک ہمارا تجربہ اور مہارت ہے کہ اس سے سنا کر لو کہ یہ کچھ دے سکتے ہیں۔

OVERCOMING BARRIERS: TAKING SENIORS' CLUBS INTO SENIORS' HANDS

Seniors' clubs are a great place in the community for older people to socialize and plan activities. Some seniors take on the challenge of joining their club's executive committee where they are responsible for making decisions. Several seniors in executive roles were asked what motivates them. Here are some of their responses:

"My motto is 'Be with the group.' If there's a job to do, I join the members and do it. I don't mind if it's a dirty job or a handy job. I strive to be a good role model."

- *Wing Lo, on the executive of the largest Chinese seniors' club in Toronto.*

*Com'è membro dell'esecutivo
del nostro club d'anziani,
non è il mio ruolo imporre
le mie idee su gli altri.
Il mio compito è di lavorare
insieme agl'altri.*

"The major challenge for me is to encourage seniors who are shy or physically weak to participate. I love seeing seniors who are motivated to change their life for the better. I like the opportunity to meet seniors who come from various backgrounds and have different stories to tell, some good, some bad."

- *Margaret Rooker, seniors' club executive for 7 years.*

"Having a role in promoting services for seniors makes my life more meaningful. I have met seniors in a lot of tough situations. That has taught me to keep my mind open and face life with a positive attitude."

- *Grace Lawrence, 15 years on the executive of her club.*

"I want to be involved simply because I want to help others. The club is the best place to do that. I think of myself as an advocate. I push the club to respond to issues that affect seniors."

- *Lillian Campbell, 2 years on the executive of her seniors' club.*

"I learn from other seniors. Being an executive member, I cannot impose my ideas, but have to work with other people's ideas. I'm committed to that."

- *Dorothy Myles, 8 years on the executive of her seniors' club.*

- *interviews by Kam Lau with seniors from Woodgreen Community Centre, Davenport-Perth Neighbourhood Centre, Dixon Hall and St. Christopher House.*



PHOTO: ARIF NOORANI

PHOTO: DIXON HALL



OVERCOMING BARRIERS: UNITING TO SAVE OUR HEALTH CARE SYSTEM

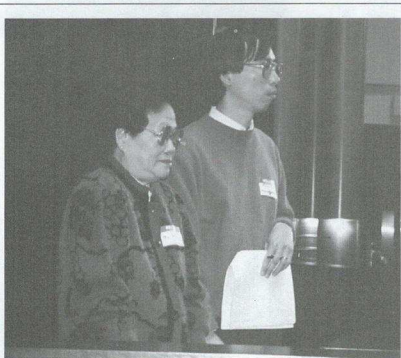
Health care represents a great sense of social security for seniors. As seniors, we have to be vigilant to ensure that health care and other social programs are not dismantled in the name of balanced budgets — these programs are our life-line.

Action Day

In February 1993, 230 seniors from across Toronto met to discuss why we want to save our health care system. Interpreters helped with the different languages which included English, Chinese, Hindi, Italian, Portuguese and Spanish.

We talked about the importance of the Canada Health Act, federal cuts to transfer payments, and why we must keep fighting and working together. A vote was held on demands to bring to the government. After lunch, we broke into groups and wrote letters in our various languages to the Prime Minister.

PHOTO: DIXON HALL



Our demands to the federal government

We, as seniors, believe that everyone in Canada, rich or poor, should have equal access to health care. We want the Federal Government to guarantee universal health care for the present and future of our children and grandchildren. We demand that the federal government share 50% of health care costs with the provinces. We also demand that seniors be fully consulted in future decisions on policies that affect our health and well-being.

Keeping the voice alive

We have a video about our Action Day. Narrated by two seniors, it explains the Canada Health Act and shows how seniors from different cultures can work together. We hope that it will encourage other seniors groups to take action and speak their minds. For information about this video contact Keith McNair at St. Christopher House, 248 Ossington Avenue, Toronto, ON M6J 3A2. Phone (416) 532-4828; FAX (416)532-8739.

Following the Action Day, seniors carried out other activities to put pressure on the federal and Ontario governments.

English, Italian and Portuguese-speaking seniors in one riding met with the local Member of Parliament. We asked for clear answers about his party's stand on transfer payments. He made a commitment to support our work and to be accountable to us.

In January 1994 we held a public forum with Ontario's Minister of Health, at which seniors from across Toronto expressed our concerns regarding user fees and the de-listing of drugs from the Ontario Drug Benefit Plan.

PUBLIC HEALTH CARE SYSTEM

Federal transfer payments

Much of the progress made in building our country's national health care system is due to the federal government's financial leadership. Federal contributions to the provinces to pay 50% of the cost of health services have guaranteed that the provinces live by the principles of medicare stated in the Canada Health Act.

The 5 principles of medicare found in the Canada Health Act

- 1. Universality**
means that all residents have access to health services on the same basis.
- 2. Accessibility**
ensures that, if a province allows hospitals or doctors to charge user fees, the federal government will penalize the province by withholding transfer payment dollars.
- 3. Comprehensiveness**
guarantees that provinces provide "medically necessary" hospital and medical care.
- 4. Portability**
means that a province or territory must cover the cost of services for residents who are visiting or have recently moved to another province.
- 5. Public administration**
means that health plans must be run on a non-profit basis by a public agency of the provincial government.

Noi anziani vogliamo salvaguardare il programma di assistenza sanitaria. È per questo che ci siamo riuniti con il nostro deputato al parlamento per discutere come può assisterci.

Health care in peril

In February 1992, the federal government passed legislation to reduce its contribution to the operation of provincial health care systems. By the year 2000, Ontario will not receive any transfer payments for health care. How will the federal government enforce the five principles of the Canada Health Act if it no longer shares the cost of these programs with the provinces?

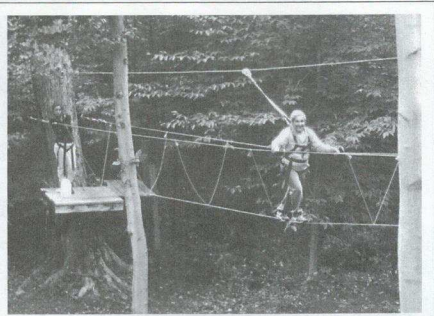


PHOTO: DIXON HALL

**OVERCOMING BARRIERS:
TAKING RISKS
TESTING LIMITS**

When we test our limits we discover our strengths. 'Journey beyond the limits' is the theme of Boundless Adventures, a five-day wilderness experience, conducted all year round by Boundless Adventures Association based in the Ottawa Valley. It gives seniors like myself an opportunity to test our limits in order to build confidence, communication and life skills.

There are many myths in society regarding seniors, our physical, emotional and psychological limits, our ability to learn new skills. Boundless Adventure dispels all these myths and shows that learning is life-long.

Several seniors from my community centre participated in the program. The experience went beyond our wildest expectations. Camping without city conveniences, we began each morning with exercises to prepare for the challenges ahead: canoeing over white rapids, walking across high wires and rock climbing.

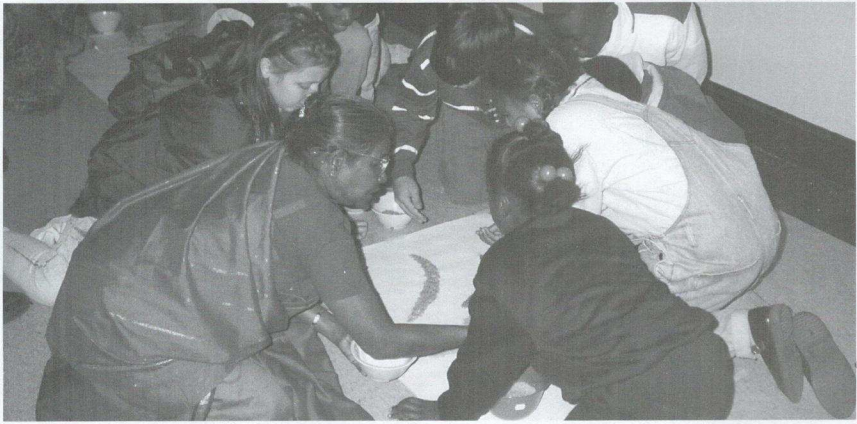
In gentler moments, we walked in the woods, held talks on nutrition and took lessons in massage. There were wonderful times of sharing with one another. Communication skills and lasting friendships developed.

There was no generation gap with the leaders, called 'buddies', who were young adults. All mingled freely. This is very important to cultivate harmonious inter-generational relationships in society.

The participating seniors proved that we can cope, meet new challenges and learn new skills to the end of our journey.

- by Ruby Nash with the Boundless Adventurers of Dixon Hall

For more information on Boundless Adventures, call Steven Gottlieb (416) 658-7059.



OVERCOMING BARRIERS: CROSSING GENERATIONS, CONNECTING CULTURES

In 1991 a group of us seniors at Davenport-Perth Neighbourhood Centre in Toronto launched an intergenerational program to bring elderly people and children together in an atmosphere of fun, affection and respect.

It all began at a discussion about safety issues, when several of us confided that young adults in our neighbourhood often intimidated us and made us afraid. We decided to have a hand in moulding our neighbours while they were still children, so that, by the time they grew up, they would have learned to respect their older friends. Carleton Village Public School and the Toronto Intergenerational Project supported the idea and got involved.

The children at the public school enjoy learning how to paint and garden with us. They love hearing stories about our lives and experiences. As one senior remarked, "It changes the children's perception of us as old, cranky, wheelchair-sitters when they meet us on the streets." And we seniors get a kick out of it, too. After sharing a playful workout during Fitweek, one older woman was overheard saying, "I felt like one of the kids."

Ageism isn't the only problem. Some seniors at our community centre experience racism too, from younger people and also from other seniors. We felt we needed to develop sensitivity and respect across both, generations and cultures.

We thought that celebrating cultural festivals with children would be an ideal way to mix people of different cultures and ages. So we started with events already familiar to the children, like Hallowe'en, Christmas, etc., and then introduced the celebrations of neighbours of Italian, Chinese and South Asian origin.

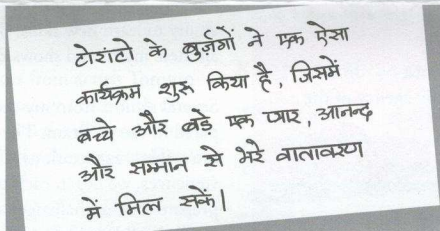
After celebrating the Hindu festival of Holi, to welcome Spring, a teacher said, "Getting a *bindi* marked on my forehead made me feel accepted in their culture." Our intergenerational program is good for

busy parents too. As one person put it, "Children don't have enough entertainment — parents can't afford to take time."

What makes an intergenerational program work well? From our experience we think that success

depends on taking a real interest in the boys and girls and getting to know them. You need to reach children at their own level. Preaching is definitely out. And, most of all, you need to use your imagination.

-by seniors at Davenport-Perth Neighbourhood Centre with Gulrukh Kashmeri



OVERCOMING BARRIERS: TELLING IT LIKE IT IS

My dear family:

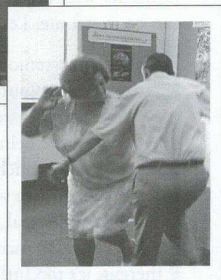
How happy I felt coming to Canada to live with you! I thought all my dreams would come true: Enjoying the company of my children, watching my grandchildren grow up, learning English, having a job, making new friends... Look at me now...

Oh! if you knew how many times I have tried to write this letter, my dear son, my dear daughter, my beloved grandchildren. But I preferred to hide my feelings in order not to make you suffer, too. Did you ever think of the consequences when you sponsored me to come to this country? Why didn't you tell me how things really were? Then I could have thought twice before deciding to make this enormous change in my life. Now it's too late. I don't have my house, my friends, my independence, I don't have money I can spend freely, and I think I'm also losing my family!

Please do not think I don't value your efforts. I know you have to work hard and don't have much time for house-keeping or taking care of your children. But I did not know you wanted

such help from me. It's my pleasure to babysit my grandchildren from time to time, but I didn't think this would be a daily obligation. When I told you that I wanted to learn English so I could go out by myself and feel more secure, your answer was, "Mama, you are very old, you cannot learn English. Besides that, I need you here." For years, I didn't venture to ask again. I thought the least I could do was help you, since I was already a burden on the family. But, to tell you the truth, I cannot stand it any more! I couldn't even go to church on Sundays, if your husband was tired or not in a mood to drive me there, because you were afraid that I would get lost if I went by bus.

You came to this country very young. You have already adapted to the culture and customs here. For me, as a senior, the process is very difficult. I cannot even communicate with my grandchildren because they haven't learned to respect the old ones. When I ask the eldest to go with me to a store, he refuses, because he doesn't want anyone to know that we speak Spanish. He's ashamed to go out with his grandma. I feel so lonely and frustrated... When I lived in my homeland I used to go everywhere, saying hello to everybody, solving problems, helping people, receiving friends in my home. Now, when your friends come over, I prefer to go to the basement and cry silently in my room, because your friends aren't mine and I do not feel welcome to join you. You don't seem to care about talking in English, although you



know I don't understand. And I don't have the confidence to invite over some people I have met at church. This is not my house. I just have a dark little room in the basement...

However, things are going to change now. A friend opened my eyes. She asked me, "Why don't you go to school? Why don't you have coffee with us when

we invite you? Why do you seem so sad?"

I know you were very surprised when I told you about my registration in a seniors' English class. I know you were mad at me because I wouldn't

have lunch ready for the family, or be home to babysit your daughter until you returned from work. But dear one, I need to have a life, too. I can help you. As your mother, I am willing to do that. But, you know, I need my own activities and friends, too. I know now that I'm capable of learning English, although you laugh at me and try to convince me not to go back to classes because "I'm wasting my time". Now I ride the bus, I have joined a seniors' club and I don't need anyone to take me to church. Certainly I am old, but I have rediscovered the valuable person inside me. I hope you'll understand.

I want to lead my own life, a life worth living, as long as I am alive. Let me live.

Your loving mother.

- composed by Elvira Herrera, Centre for Spanish Speaking People with contributions from seniors in five of the Centre's English as a Second Language Classes



PHOTOS: CSSP

OVERCOMING BARRIERS: SAYING "ENOUGH!"

Elderly people who don't speak English have an especially hard time finding out about services that are available to help them out of difficult situations. Yet with appropriate support, these barriers can be overcome. Let me give you an example.

I, myself, am a senior for whom English is a second language. I do volunteer work with other seniors. In the course of volunteering, I have known many cases of elderly people being abused by their children. I was particularly touched by one case. There was an elderly woman who was a widow. I'll call her Eva, but that isn't her real name. She lived in a country where there is no income assistance for seniors. Or, if there is, it's too little to live on. Eva had children in Canada and one of them, a daughter, had money. She sponsored her mother and the Canadian government allowed Eva to immigrate provided her daughter took social and financial responsibility for her. Under the circumstances, Eva felt she had to accept her daughter's help.

While living with her daughter for two years, she was made the family's housekeeper and babysitter. Eva decided to go and live with another daughter. Here she was expected to contribute money towards rent and food. But she had no money and could not work because of her age, state of health, and lack of English language skills.

Cuando hay servicios comunitarios en nuestras lenguas, ancianos podemos encontrar como resolver muchos problemas.

This daughter suggested that Eva contact a community centre, where she would be able to talk with a social worker in her own mother-

tongue. When the social worker checked to see whether Eva was eligible to get social assistance, the fact that she had been sponsored to come to Canada got in the way. The daughter who sponsored her was financially responsible for her.

When Welfare contacted the sponsoring daughter, she was willing to honour her contract with Canada Immigration as long as her mother came back to live with her. Eva refused, saying, "My enslavement years are over!"

Finally the social worker assisted Eva through a successful process of appeal with the Social Assistance Review Board. Eva was granted assistance. Today she is a happy senior, living in a seniors' housing apartment which the same social worker helped her to find.

-by Maria Martinez, Davenport-Perth Neighbourhood Centre with assistance from Working Women Community Centre

*முதியோராகிய நாங்கள், எங்கள்
வினாக்களுடன் வாங்கும் போது,
அவர்கள் எங்களை நன்றாக
படத்தவதில்லை, எனது அவர்-
களுக்கும் புரிய வைப்பது
கஷ்டம்.*

OVERCOMING BARRIERS: EDUCATING THE COMMUNITY ABOUT ELDER ABUSE

In January 1992, St. Christopher House, a community centre in Toronto, held a workshop on elder abuse. Some of us, Portuguese-speaking seniors, participated. During the workshop we exchanged cases of elder abuse we knew about. We came to the conclusion that someone should do something to alert the community that this is a problem and to help prevent it.

Who would that someone be? We looked around and saw that it had to be us, seniors. So some of us signed up to do something.

What is that something? Start talking about it, bring the issue right out in the open, break the taboo, help the victims and also the abusers.

We decided to get together. Soon our number grew to twelve.

With the support of a staff person, we made our plan of action:

- study elder abuse
- decide what message to take to the community
- choose our target groups
- select our methods of presenting the message to them (for example, workshops, skits, speakers)
- train ourselves in the chosen methods
- hold public education events
- evaluate our work

We followed our plan. First we studied. At each meeting, one of us would bring a case of what we believed was elder abuse. For each case, we discussed what types of abuse were involved, the causes, the consequences, and what could help prevent similar cases.

What should our message be? We believe that being part of our community, we know what the message should be and that we are the right messengers. We



believe we must be prudent and yet firm, not pointing fingers, but offering suggestions that could help prevent abuse.

We plan to go to senior centres, churches, radio, TV, and schools, where our message can reach seniors, families, children, and the community at large.

We used some of the meetings to learn about supports and resources for victims, and to meet some of the people who can help (lawyers and police, for example).

The fact that none of the members of our group (which happens to be all women) feel that we are victims, makes it easier, we think, to discuss the issue.

We are amazed that through being part of these discussions we have become much more aware of situa-

Somos um grupo de pessoas da terceira idade que informa e alerta a nossa comunidade sobre o abuso dos idosos.

tions surrounding us and also of our own rights. Some of us feel much more assertive.

For all of us this was a first: taking the initiative to educate our community.

- by The Elder Abuse Awareness Group (a joint project of St. Christopher House, Portuguese Women 55+ and Westennial United Church) with Odete Nascimento

What is elder abuse?

The term 'elder abuse' refers to violence against older people. The abuse can take many forms. An older person may be cheated of his or her money or possessions. This is called financial or material abuse. Or, a senior may be a victim of violent words. Again, an older person's body may be physically or sexually violated. But abuse can also be passive, as is the case when an older person is neglected by those on whom he or she must depend. Other forms of elder abuse are coming to light with more research.

How serious is the problem?

In 1990, Ryerson Polytechnical Institute published the results of a National Survey on Abuse of the Elderly in Canada. The study found that 4% of all seniors living in private dwellings in Canada had experienced some form of abuse in recent years. Most abuse came from someone within the family. Financial or material exploitation was

found to be the most common form of elder abuse, followed by chronic verbal aggression, physical violence and neglect. The problem of elder abuse exists in all parts of Canada: in cities, suburbs and rural communities; among people who speak English or French and those who speak another language; among people who have enough money to live on and those who don't.

What does the 4% figure mean? For one thing, it means that the other 96% of older people who live in non-institutional settings don't feel they are abused. However, the study points out that the suffering of the 4% who are abused is serious enough to require public attention and action. Four percent equals about 98,000 elderly people and that's a large number.

Remember that the study focused only on those elderly people who live in private dwellings and did not look at the situation of seniors who live in institutions. About 10% of all seniors in Canada live in institutions.

From ideas to action

Here are some suggestions to translate the message of this paper into action right where you happen to be. Most of these activities are best carried out in a group. There's more energy that way, and more fun!

Watch the media

When you see an ad or article that presents older people negatively, protest! Let your views be known. You can write letters to the maker of the product, or to the TV station or magazine where you saw the ad, image or article. Tell them what offends you, how you would like older people to be portrayed and why.

Companies that want to do business have to respond to consumer complaints. Send a copy of your letter to us at *The Moment*, 947 Queen St. East, Toronto, ON M4M 1J9

Name those barriers

How can you tell when ageism is happening? Seniors can have a discussion on ageism with other seniors or with care-givers. Start by going around and finding each person's perspective. Have participants complete the sentence: "I know ageism is happening when I see...", "...when I hear...", "...when I feel..." Then talk about what you'd like to do about it and what the first practical step is that you'll take, together or individually.

Celebrate involvement

Find ways to celebrate action by seniors. You can begin a newsletter. And/or make a display with photos and stories of things people are involved in. Decide together where you'd like to hang the display. Whenever possible, use people's own words. It's powerful and uplifting. Good themes are everywhere: hobbies, volunteer work, things people have done together.

Share memories

Bring seniors of different cultures together for an evening of sharing memories. They can bring in mementos, art, traditional fabric or clothing — anything that sparks memories that they want to keep alive. The group might want to invite family members and young people to listen and ask questions.

Seniors' expectations

People who work with seniors can find out how seniors see their role. Is there interest in starting a seniors' council or club? The article on page 6, "Speaking to people who work with seniors" could serve as a useful jump-off point to begin to talk about expectations.



PHOTO: DIXON HALL

Social action

Invite speakers from seniors groups that are taking action around government cutbacks to talk about the federal budget, what it means for health care in your province, what they're doing about it, what you can do. (See page 16 for a list of contact groups.)

Building supports

Seniors can come together to identify the supports and services that are now available to you. What's missing? Do you have services in your own languages? Think together about how you might organize and advocate to bring the services you need into being. (For support and ideas you may wish to make use of the contact groups listed on page 16.)

Learning circles

Find out who would be interested in forming a seniors' peer-support group to learn and educate about elder abuse. For a model of how to get started, take a look at what the Elder Abuse Awareness Group did — see "Educating the community about elder abuse" on page 12. (The Ontario Network for the Prevention of Elder Abuse at (416) 978-7910 can offer some resources.)



PHOTO: DIXON HALL

To find out more

Things to read

Aging: Canadian perspectives

edited by Victor M. Marshall and Barry D. McPherson, 1993. (Broadview Press, Peterborough, ON.) Examines aging patterns in Canada and their impact on family, work, leisure, community and institutions.

Amazing Greys

Maclean's, Jan. 10, 1994. The issue features Canadians who are defying old images of aging, talks to families of the frail elderly, and discusses the problem of elder abuse.

Fountain of age

by Betty Friedan, 1993. (Simon & Shuster, New York.) Friedan believes that we will have a healthy old age if we accept ourselves as we are.

Guide for senior citizens:

Services and programs in Ontario,

Government of Ontario. Describes the programs and services available to Ontario's seniors in a simple, easy-to-read style. (To order call: Toronto (416) 327-2422, elsewhere in Ontario (toll free) 1-800-267-7329.)

Look me in the eye:

Old women, aging and ageism

by Barbara Macdonald, 1984. (Spinsters Ink, Minneapolis.) A look at the social process of aging among older women.

National survey on abuse of the elderly in Canada

by Elizabeth Podnieks and others, 1990. (Ryerson Polytechnical Institute, Toronto.) Study examines the prevalence and circumstances of elder abuse in private dwellings in Canada. (Order from: National Clearinghouse on Family Violence, Health & Welfare Canada, Ottawa, ON K1A 1B5.)

Population, aging and the elderly

by Statistics Canada, 1991. Detailed statistics and information on population aging patterns. Catalog number 91-533. For more information call Statistics Canada (416) 973-6586.

Silver threads:

Critical reflections on growing old

by Doris Marshall, 1987. (Between the Lines Press, Toronto.) A personal account that argues against isolation and passivity and challenges the negative images of aging that are dominant today.

Women and aging

by Ellen M. Gee and Meredith K. Kimball, 1987. (Butterworths, Vancouver.) Examines how aging is influenced by gender, discusses health issues of older

women, the affects of poverty on them, their work and family situations.

Things to watch

All the videos and films listed below are available through the National Film Board. For more information on NFB videos about older people, write to:

The 50+ Collection, Studio D-5,

P.O. Box 6100, Station A,

Montreal, QC H3C 3H5

Or call, toll free:

Atlantic Canada: 1-800-561-7104

Quebec: 1-800-363-0328

Ontario: 1-800-267-7710

Western and Northern Canada: 1-800-661-9867.

A house divided: Care giver stress and elder abuse, VHS, 35 min.

Looks at various forms of elder abuse such as willful neglect, financial exploitation, physical assault and emotional anguish.

Calling a halt,

VHS, 27 min.

Highlights the issue of violence towards senior citizens.

Don't take my sunshine away,

VHS, 60 min.

Examines the innovative senior-care schemes of five North American and European communities focusing on the diversity of health and social services available to an aging population.

Standing up for yourself,

VHS, 13 min.

Shows how seniors can take control of financially abusive situations.

Stop the silence,

VHS, 20 min.

Primer on the definitions of abuse and neglect, with case examples, as they pertain to British Columbia.

The company of strangers,

16 mm film, 100 min.

Drama. Seven women, average age 71, get stranded at a deserted farmhouse yet turn the crisis into a time of humour and spirit.

The power of time,

VHS, 30 min.

Focuses on older women of various backgrounds and cultures and how they confront the challenges of advancing age.

The silence upstairs,

16mm film, 13 min.

Drama, looks at the tense relationship between an elderly woman and her son's family.

Seniors are organizing

National

One Voice Seniors Network
350 Sparks St, Ste 1005
Ottawa, ON K1R 7S8
(613) 238-7624

Seniors Secretariat
473 Albert St, 3rd Floor
Ottawa, ON K1A 0K9
(613) 952-7358

Newfoundland

Newfoundland & Labrador
Pensioners & Senior Citizens
Federation
14 Lloyd Cres
St. John's, NF A1E 2H8
(709) 364-2412

Prince Edward Island

Senior Citizens Federation of
Prince Edward Island
5 Langley Rd, R.R. #1
Charlottetown, PEI C1A 7J6
(902) 569-3806

Nova Scotia

Canadian Pensioners Concerned
P. O. Box 35
Halifax Shopping Centre
7001 Mumford Road
Halifax, NS B3L 4N9
(902) 455-7684

Federation of Senior Citizens &
Pensioners of NS
P.O. Box 500
Reserve Mines, NS B0A 1V0
(902) 849-6958

New Brunswick

NB Senior Citizens' Federation
Heritage Court
95 Foundary St, Ste 421
Moncton, NB E1C 5H7
(506) 857-8242

Québec

Federation des Clubs de l'Age
d'Or, Région du Québec
360 boul Charest est, Ste 101
Québec, QC G1K 3H4
(418) 529-6693

The Coalition of Quebec Seniors
5700 Westbury Ave
Montreal, QC H3W 3E8
(514) 739-4731

Ontario

Advocacy Centre for the Elderly
120 Eglinton Ave. East, Ste 902
Toronto, ON M4P 1E2
(416) 487-7157

Canadian Pensioners Concerned,
Ontario Division
51 Bond St
Toronto, ON M5B 1X1
(416) 368-5222

Ontario Network for the
Prevention of Elder Abuse
Studies of Aging, U of T
455 Spadina Ave, Ste 305
Toronto, ON M5S 2G8
(416) 978-7910

Ontario Coalition of Senior
Citizens' Organizations
530 Wilson Ave, 3rd Floor
North York, ON M3H 1T6
(416) 631-0969

Older Women's Network
427 Bloor St West
Toronto, ON M5S 1X7
(416) 924-4188

Toronto Intergenerational
Project
c/o Lakeview Resource Centre
Room 31
45 Felstead Ave
Toronto, ON M4J 1G3
(416) 461-5285

United Senior Citizens of
Ontario
3033 Lakeshore Blvd West
Toronto, ON M8V 1K5
(416) 252-2021

Manitoba

Manitoba Society of Seniors
803 - 294 Portage Ave
Winnipeg, MB
R3C 0B9
(204) 942-3147

Saskatchewan

National Pensioners and Senior
Citizens Federation

Box 1027
Nipawin, SK S0E 1E0
(306) 862-4717

Saskatchewan Seniors Action
Now Association
310 Ave 'F' South
Saskatoon, SK S7M 1T2
(306) 382-8530

Saskatchewan Seniors
Association
606 Spadina Cres West
Saskatoon, SK S7M 1P1
(306) 653-8851

Alberta

Alberta Council on Aging
10506 Jasper Ave, Room 501
Edmonton, AB T5J 2W9
(403) 423-7781

Alberta Pensioners & Senior
Citizens Organization
P.O. Box 1411
Claresholm, AB T0L 0T0

Canadian Pensioners Concerned,
Alberta Division
13923 - 108 Ave
Edmonton, AB T5M 2C9
(403) 454-9223

British Columbia

BC Council of Senior Citizens
Organizations
10580 Dunlop Rd
North Delta, BC V4C 8A7
(604) 583-0102

First Seniors Resources &
Research Society of BC and
Seniors Health Network
2182 West 12th Ave, Ste 105
Vancouver, BC V6K 2N4
(604) 733-2310

Yukon

Seniors Information Centre
106 Main Street, Suite 3
Whitehorse, YK Y1A 2A8
(403) 668-3383

Northwest Territories

Northwest Territories Seniors
Society
Box 2093
Yellowknife, NWT X1A 2P6
(403) 873-5571

