

Towards a live streaming creative ageing movement for older people

By Elizabeth Brooke

Australian government COVID-19 advice to older people has oscillated between total lockdown of aged care facilities and concern over the social isolation of people over 70 in the community. At the end of April, the Prime Minister announced the critical need for social and emotional support to counter social isolation. Advocacy by peak bodies in the aged care sector is hamstrung between the poles of protective social isolation of older people and the consequence of a diminished quality of life.

Social support is vital but is not the whole story. Yet even if visits are permitted by an aged care facility, hour-long visits take up only a fraction of a day and residents then return to their rooms. The mammoth in the room is that creative participation opportunities igniting vitality and multiform self-expression as a source of older people's wellbeing are missing.

There is a massive groundswell of Zooms in the community with older people singing in choirs, joining art classes, taking exercise classes, and even performing grandparents' clubs (e.g. Peter Garrett), all self-generated from existing social capital. Great local initiatives are underway, such as live streaming East Arnhem Land music, with older and younger musicians transmitting culture within indigenous communities.

State government initiatives in Victoria, *The State of Music*, are live-streaming Australian musicians, and a Victorian state sponsored streaming portal to arts and entertainment organisations has been implanted. Nationally, the ABC website *Ageless Friendships* involving the Wiggles originated by a journalist, is reaching out to older people to join kindergarten children in a singalong. This connection perpetuates, '*Old People's Home For 4 Year Olds*', an intergenerational project between kindergarten children and aged care residents.

A policy schism exists between cultural participation as a positive vector and care policy towards older people. Bringing the cultural and arts sector closer to where older people live requires online accessibility. Digital connections are potentially accessible to older people through national broadband systems. Many residential care facilities have internet for staff which could potentially be adapted for residents.

At the broadest policy scale, new cultural germinations must thrive and resist cropping. Online content creators, mainstream and social media platforms have the daily capacity to saturate us with content, and yet those most requiring connection to this stimulation universe are sequestered and commonly shut out. It is time for sectors to work together and build an infrastructure for a live streaming movement.

After COVID-19 the risk is reimposing ageist segregation and shuttering rather than extending cultural participation which accessible to all ages. Reversion will rationalise segmented funding models which reinforce the social isolation of older people.

It is imperative to hold debates at a high level to support the creative transformations of older people in whatever settings they live.

This is a time of great opportunity to current crisis innovations. Access is the key.



BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

Elizabeth Brooke's research spans work, retirement and extending creativity at later stages of the life course. Recent publications include research on the Australian empirical landscape of older womens' extended working lives and a cost/benefit analysis of the contributions of mature age people as informal carers and volunteers. Her past work includes directing a five-year demonstration project trialling innovative aged care workforce policy and the Australian node of the cross-national comparative research study, Workforce Ageing in the New Economy (WANE). She holds a PhD in social gerontology, is a current Associate Editor of the Australasian Journal on Ageing and a Fulbright Award alumnus. She is currently based at Melbourne University School of Population and Global Health.

Elizabeth is currently writing a book to be published by Emerald on creative ageing. This book reframes 'active ageing' by examining opportunities for human development through older adults' cultural participation. Case studies were conducted in the United States, Great Britain, Ireland and Australia. The analysis inter-relates the micro-level of experience, meta-level organisational practices and macro-level structures, emerging with a framework for activating creative ageing.