



Rethinking Later Life



Online events held via Zoom
26th October and 2nd November 2021

Summary Report

SOPA and u3a joined forces to host a two-part event entitled Rethinking Later Life. The event featured a varied programme of talks, activities and debate to challenge perceptions of growing older.

Rethinking Later Life – Part 1 (26th October 2021)

Val McDermid gave a captivating talk on her life and career as a journalist and author.

"Val McDermid was outstanding! Inspiring, entertaining, insightful and an absolute revelation to me," (feedback from event participant).



University of Strathclyde Senior Lecturer, Dr Louise Nicholls outlined recent systematic research which showed that overall, older people (aged 70 plus) tended to be happier than other age groups. When the research was further examined it also highlighted that

- If a person was inclined to worry then increased levels of anxiety in later life may impact the ability to focus and recall information
- This situation could be helped by taking up activities which built up memory, self-confidence, and reduced stress and anxiety
- Recent intergenerational engagement work based in Scottish primary schools signalled improved rates of wellbeing among older adults involved in these school visits. Spending time in the company of young pupils boosted positivity

"A celebration and a challenge"

- We should recognise and celebrate the positives of ageing (UN & HelpAge International, 2012)
- but also address social and economic challenges
- There is an urgent need for public health action for healthy ageing (WHO, 2015, 2021)
- e.g. "which interventions work to foster healthy ageing?"

and the outlook of these older people, as well as having a positive impact on the children involved.

Ongoing research by Dr Nicholls will further explore the significance and benefits from connectivity between younger and older generations.

University of Strathclyde Senior Lecturer, Dr Alexandra Mavroei discussed a key way to stay well in later life. Her presentation focused on

- Recent studies revealed that being immobile or sitting down for long periods of time do not help the skeletal frame
- In later life, taking short breaks to stand up or be active can positively help with the ageing process
- Introducing small changes to become more physically active, even at an advanced age, is always better for bone health. In fact, there can be significant improvements over a few months just by doing a little and then doing a little more
- Dr Mavroei cited several websites and sources of help, including YouTube videos, to encourage a less sedentary lifestyle.



David Paterson, Chair of SOPA's Health and Wellbeing Group, presented findings from a survey undertaken by SOPA earlier this year on people's experiences of accessing healthcare during the pandemic.

A report of the findings is available on SOPA's website:

Access to Healthcare Survey

David Paterson
Chair, Health and Wellbeing Group
Scottish Older People's Assembly
26th October 2021

<http://www.scotopa.org.uk/news.asp?intent=viewstory&newsid=108983>

Rethinking Later Life – Part 2 (2nd November 2021)

University of Glasgow Research Associate, Dr Valerie Wright detailed some recent project findings on what older adults want and need from their futures. This (Economic and Social Research Council) ESRC-funded project: 'Reimagining the future in older age' involved:

- Looking at diary documents in the Mass Observation Project, started in the 1930s, in which ordinary people recorded their lives/dreams
- Noticing generational divides were emphasised sometimes in the media, seeming to pit older and younger people against each other
- Testing the assumption that growing older was just something you got on with, and whether that same view was shared today
- Asking a sample of older people about their aspirations for the future
- Exploring significant books on intergenerational relationships and using drama to convey these ideas for future older age.



University of Stirling Research Fellow, Jade French, who works alongside Dr Valerie Wright, gave an update on the next stage of the 'Reimagining the future in older age' project:

- Filming and editing of the different dramatic scenarios suggested by the research participants was underway
- The final film would be made available to policy makers, politicians and older people's organisations for feedback and comment
- Information on the book list about intergenerational relationships would also be made available
- This artistic slant sits alongside very practical suggestions made by older adults in the research project as they envisaged the future.

Active sessions - Attendees were given the chance to try one of the following practical sessions:

- Qigong & Tai Chi – u3a's National Subject Advisor, Pat Ryan
- Meditation/mindfulness – professional therapist and Life Coach, Joyce Bunton
- Laughing yoga – laughter yoga teacher, Judith Walker

Debate - 'You cannot teach an old dog new tricks'

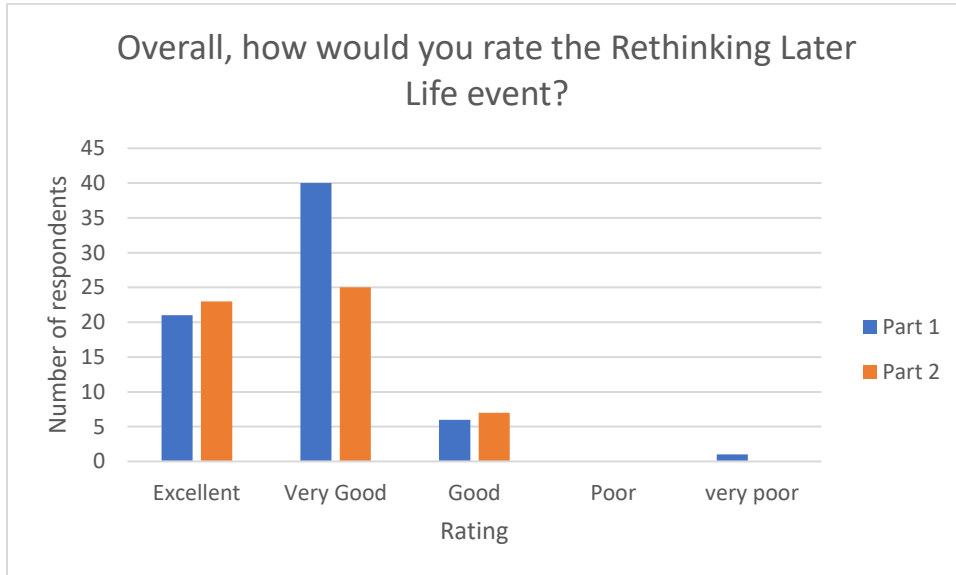
Speakers of different ages, including pupils from Wade Academy and u3a, participated in a lively and thought-provoking debate, chaired by former BBC Scotland political editor and journalist, Brian Taylor.

Event Evaluation and Feedback

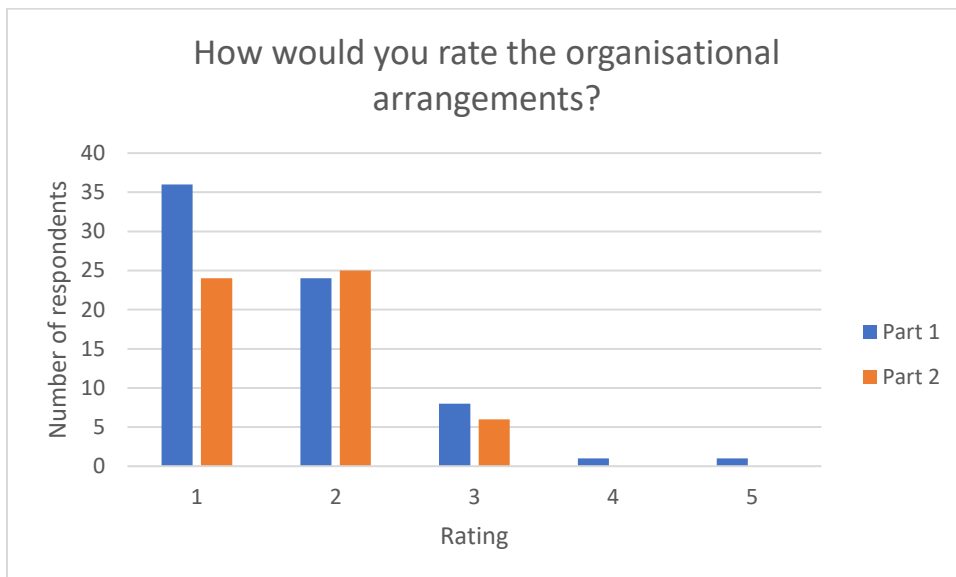
125 attendees from across Scotland participated in the first event and around 100 at the second event.

124 people provided feedback following the events (69 for Part 1 and 55 for Part 2)

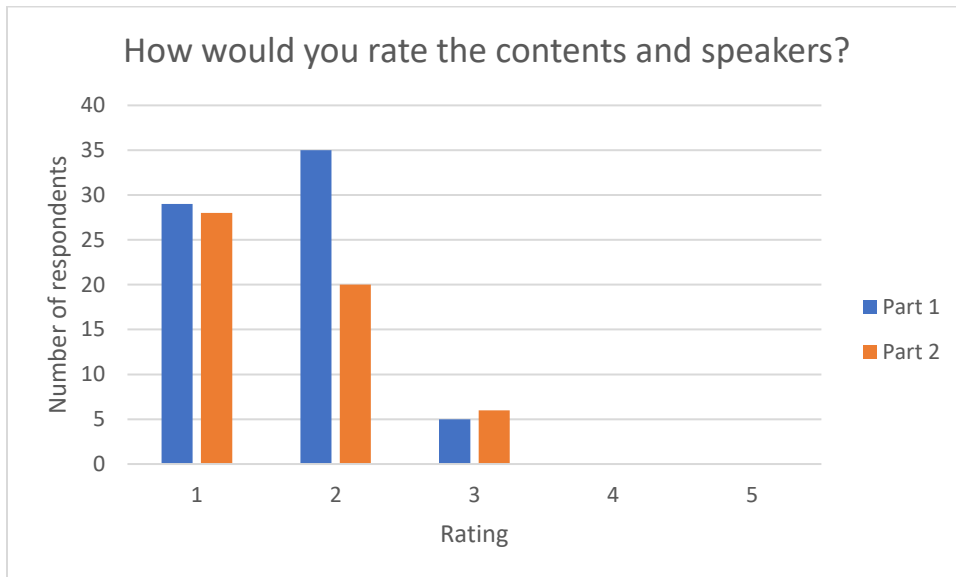
Overall, 99% of respondents rated the events as Excellent, Very Good or Good.



When asked about the organisational arrangements, 98% of respondents rated them as Excellent, Very Good or Good.



In relation to the event content and speakers, 100% rated the events as Excellent, Very Good or Good.



Comments from feedback

94 comments were provided in the free text field (54 for Part 1, 40 for Part 2).

General comments

Twelve people noted that they found 3 hours too long to be online, some suggested 2 hours max, or having programmes that people can dip in and out of or activities that get people moving are appreciated.

Many people provided positive comments about the event and the varied programmes:

“I really enjoyed the event and found all of the content extremely helpful and relevant .I will certainly join another event and encourage others to do so too. Thank you to everyone who organised the event.”

“The mix of speakers was good and informative.”

“A very interesting and worthwhile event.”

Content and speakers

Sixteen people especially enjoyed Val McDermid's talk,

“Val McDermid was excellent, really enjoyed listening to her life story and she came across as down to earth, witty and not at all vain about her success.”

Three people said that it was disappointing that there was no Scottish Government representative to respond to the SOPA presentation.

"Only disappointment was that the government official who was to respond to SOPA's Survey on Primary care service during COVID was unable to appear. It would have been good to hear her response to David's very good presentation."

Many enjoyed the breakout sessions, one lady has already joined a u3a laughing yoga group as a result of the taster session.

Ten people mentioned how much they enjoyed the debate:

"Lively debate with added input from youngsters. Helped us examine some of our own thinking."

"The younger debaters were excellent and Brian Taylor made hosting look effortless."

Learning and improvements

Joining instructions

The event link for the Part 1 event was sent a week prior to the event, but a number of people could not find the link and had to get in touch with the organisers at the last minute. Prior to the second event, the link was sent one week, one day *and* one hour before the event and far fewer queries were received. This shows the importance of sending the link multiple times and just before the event so people could find the link at the top of their inboxes.

Breakout groups

The organisers had not used breakout groups on Zoom for so many participants before. The simplest option of automatically assigning participants to groups was chosen to minimise the risk of technical failure. The lack of choice was disappointing to some participants (7 respondents). We would like to offer a choice of breakout groups in the future, so we will definitely look into the options on Zoom to allow this.

Thank you to everyone who participated in the event.

Particular thanks to:

Speakers/ activity leaders: Val McDermid, Dr Louise Brown-Nicholls, Dr Alexandra Mavroei, David Paterson, Dr Valerie Wright, Jade French, Pat Ryan, Joyce Bunton, Judith Walker, Brian Taylor, John Danzig, Tom Berney, Lesley McIlhagger, Ed Link, Sophie Cameron, Rosy Singleton, Ian McKie

Organisers: Ann Keating, Allana Parker, Julie Travers, Diana Findley, Caroline Clark