

#old is beautiful



BRISBANE

Older Brisbanites share wisdom on beauty and ageing

Contents

Foreword	5
Geoff Rowe CEO ADA Australia	5
Aunty Becky Thomson OAM	7
Uncle Gerard Bargo	9
Glenys Petrie	11
John Quinn	13
Sohair Elbagir	15
Cheryl Lee Player	17
Tony Robertson	19
Merry Cloutier	21
Naomi Jarvis	23
Helen Graczyk	25
Michelle Callard	27
Judith John	29
AnneMarie White OAM	31
Frankie O’Leary	33
Dubhglas Taylor	35
Eileen Taylor	37
Suzon Fuks	39
Carolyn Isdale	41
Bob Green OAM	43
Project overview	44
Aims	44
Participants	44
Activities	44
Evaluation	45
Discussion	46
Services for older people	47
ADA Australia	47
Brisbane City Council Support for Seniors	48



Please take a few minutes to give us feedback about this resource/project. Scan the QR Code or email: admin@celebrateageing.org



Dedicated to a better Brisbane



Project partners

The Old is Beautiful, Brisbane project was hosted by ADA Australia, in partnership with Brisbane City Council and facilitated by Celebrate Ageing Ltd

About the authors

Dr Catherine Barrett: CEO of Celebrate Ageing Ltd; Matilda Marsh, Community Development Officer ADA Australia; Narelle Kerr, Marketing and Communications Officer ADA Australia; Isabel Stankiewicz, Community Development Officer Seniors, Access and Inclusion Brisbane City Council.

Acknowledgements

Special thanks to the Brisbanites who participated in the Brisbane project, we are grateful for your generosity and wisdom.

The #OldisBeautiful Brisbane project is one of six being hosted across Queensland by ADA Australia in 2025. The project is an initiative of Celebrate Ageing Ltd.

Special thanks also to photographer Jade Ellis for the stunning portraits
www.jadeellisphotography.com/

Contact ADA Australia

Narelle Kerr,
Marketing and Communications Officer
email: narelle.kerr@adaaustralia.com.au
post: 121 Copperfield Street, Geebung Qld 4034
web: www.adaaustralia.com.au

More info on #OldisBeautiful

www.celebrateageing.com/beautiful.html

Suggested citation

Barrett, C; Marsh, M; Kerr, N and Stankiewicz, I. (2025). Old is Beautiful, Brisbane. Older Brisbanites share wisdom on beauty and ageing. Published by ADA Australia, Queensland.
Available at: <https://adaaustralia.com.au/>

BRISBANE

Older Brisbanites share wisdom on beauty and ageing

Rethinking the word beautiful is an innovative entry point into understanding ageism and valuing ourselves as we age. Such a mindset shift is not a 'nice to have', its a critical step in promoting health and wellbeing and protecting against Elder Abuse



**#old is
beautiful**

Foreword

Geoff Rowe

CEO ADA Australia

Some may be challenged by the assertion in this resource that old is beautiful. Others may be surprised to learn the Old is Beautiful project is an approach to preventing Elder Abuse in Queensland. I hope this resource helps to build a shared understanding of how powerful this approach is in helping to prevent Elder Abuse before it starts.

As the CEO of ADA Australia, Queensland's aged care advocacy service, I know firsthand the extent of Elder Abuse. The National Prevalence Study estimated 15.9% of older Australians experience Elder Abuse. That's around 150,000 older Queenslanders every year.

The cost of Elder Abuse in Queensland is significant. Elder Abuse can destroy the lives of older people, shatter families, devastate communities, consume health services and drain our economy. We must prevent Elder Abuse from happening in the first place.

The World Health Organisation notes that Elder Abuse prevention must recognise that ageism is a significant risk factor and prevalent in around 50% of the population. We need to build cultural beliefs and practices that value older people; and we need to value our own ageing.

We have partnered with Celebrate Ageing Ltd to roll out the Old is Beautiful project in Queensland. The project facilitates workshops for older people to build their knowledge of internalised ageism, Elder Abuse and how to protect themselves. Workshop participants were also invited to document messages about what beautiful means to them, and what makes them beautiful. These messages, and portraits of older people are shared in this resource.

Reading through the messages in this resource is an uplifting experience. What I learned from the 19 older people who shared their messages, is that what makes us all beautiful is who we are, not what we look like. Many participants describe how beautiful on the inside - radiates to the outside. That's something we can grow into. These messages are important for all older people to read, and also for the broader community.

The evaluation of the first workshop in Brisbane was very positive and is described in more detail at the end of this resource. We now look forward to sharing these images in a series of exhibitions and launch activities and to rolling out the remaining workshops.

The #OldisBeautiful project is a powerful primary prevention approach. We need much more and look forward to sharing that with you.



Geoff Rowe
CEO ADA Australia



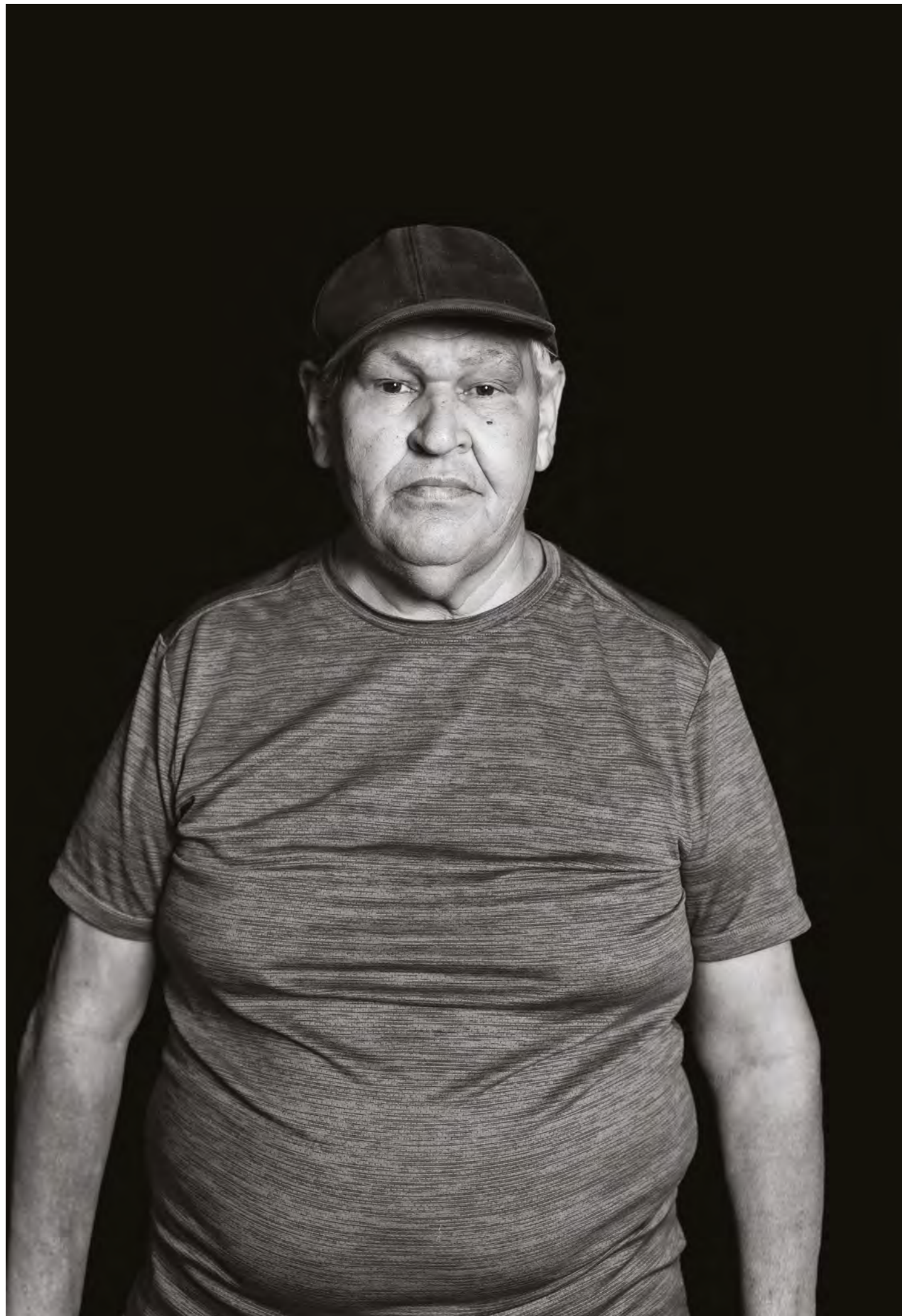
Auntie Becky Thomson OAM

Beautiful isn't what I look like. It's not about my reflection in the mirror; it's about the reflections of how I live my life and how I get through difficulties.

Beautiful isn't what I look like. It's not about my reflection in the mirror; it's about the reflections of how I live my life and how I get through difficulties.

Beautiful is keeping busy, having a purpose in life and having the time to reflect on one's life. I've had a busy and fulfilling life, luckier than most of my friends; though I had to conquer the loss of my husband at age 36, and had to re learn and rebuild my life. Although it was tinged with sadness, I had three children to rear, so with the support of my family and friends I had to put my best foot forward so to speak.

I surround myself with positive people. I have learnt the art of grounding oneself and I do this often. I enjoy my own company but also love socialising.



Uncle Gerard Bargo

What makes me beautiful is the way I share my stories to show people I'm beautiful my way.

I always thought beauty was like a star in the northern sky.
This is where I was given my heart.
In different ways I search every part of the universe to reach out and touch beauty.
To hold it, receive its blessings, to cherish it every day.
Forgive us for what we expect of beauty.
Beautiful is sharing our love.

What makes me beautiful is the person I am today.
When I was a boy, I knew child things.
As I grew into a man, I believe in beautiful things.
I could change and see the world in a different way, I see the star ☆, where my beautiful life comes from.
Deep blue ocean, a mountain view is where my spirit lives. I can see deep amazing beauty where my spirit lives.
Beautiful to me is the way I share my stories to show people I am beautiful my way.



Glenys Petrie

Beauty evolves as you grow older, and it begins at a very early age. What I have now, I had in the beginning of my life, but it has evolved. I am evolving as a person and my evolving continues.

I don't believe I judge people according to their looks, or in any other way. I tend to look at people and life from a positive perspective. I am sensitive to other people who are important to me. So many people are kind. I have an innate ability to read a person. I can look into a person's eyes and see who they are as a person.

My husband says I have a smile that brings light to a room. He says that it's contagious and draws people to me. I have a compassionate nature and that comes across through the way I interact with others. I am prepared to drop everything I am doing to help other people. I always put other people first. What makes me beautiful is the time I spend trying to improve the lives of other people. I have built beautiful memories of the work I have done and of the people I have met.

Sometimes I see people aren't kind. When I was younger, I didn't have the knowledge, skills or confidence to deal with difficult people and situations. Now I do. If there are people in my life that are harmful, I cut them out. That is part of my evolving as a person. I am a positive person, and I try to surround myself with people who are kind and caring and gentle. That's what makes life beautiful.

Something that makes my life beautiful is learning to appreciate the simple things. Recently on a beautiful sunny day, I was looking at the cloudless blue sky and then saw two butterflies dancing around the garden. It opened something in my heart. It gave me perspective. I would rather watch butterflies dancing than people fighting on social media.

When I was diagnosed with cancer, I spent two months in hospital. One day I was sitting in the hospital garden watching a storm roll in and I saw a glimmer of sunlight glistening off rain drops on the underside of the leaves. It gave me so much joy. My life experiences have helped me to appreciate the simple things and that makes my life beautiful. I am frailer than I used to be. I acknowledge my circumstances, and I accept them. I'm not going to be angry, that's not what beautiful is to me.

John Quinn

When I think about what is beautiful, I think about what radiates from within as we age. One of the great things about ageing is worrying less about what other people think of me. I don't feel the same pressure to conform, as I did when I was a young person. I am more myself. Beautiful is being able to be myself.

Beauty is not about how I look, it's about my inner being. Beauty is what people see from the outside – but it's on the inside.

What makes me beautiful is the wisdom I have accumulated over my life. I have a great sense of humour. I am willing to have a go at most things. I can laugh at myself if I make mistakes. What also makes me beautiful is the way I treat other people, with respect.

Sometimes I come across as a very serious person, particularly since I was diagnosed with dementia. Dementia changed my personality a bit. I can oscillate from being kind to being a bit of an arsehole. Sometimes I make excuses for my behaviour, but I have the courage and willingness to reflect on how I can be a better person.

With dementia a lot of people lose insight, but I have insight, that helps with being a better person. I can reflect on my behaviour.

People living with dementia are beautiful. If a person living with dementia has changed behaviour,

that doesn't make them less beautiful. There are lots of people who don't have dementia who behave badly – and they don't have insight or willingness to change.

Sometimes I forget my social graces. Sometimes I say things I shouldn't say. I have to be careful I don't offend anyone. Sometimes I try to be clever, to show other people I am not stupid. But because I believe beautiful is about the way we treat other people, and because I have dementia, I have to work at it.

What is in my heart makes me beautiful. That doesn't change because I have dementia. I am still the same person, even though people look at me differently.

There is a mindset in the community that people living with dementia are not beautiful. That is wrong. There are also unhelpful beliefs that a person living with dementia is less of a person, a shadow of a person, a vegetable, an empty shell, a fading human on the long goodbye. I challenge those unhelpful stereotypes by saying I am still a human being, and I am still beautiful.





Sohair Elbagir

Beautiful is not my nose or my mouth or my eyes, it is how people around me love me and how I make them happy. I work in the community, and they tell me I am beautiful. It is not because of my makeup it is because I help them. I give them hope. It's a light coming from me. Beauty comes from inside and it's about how you make people positive and happy and feel good.

To me beautiful is not how I look like. Beauty comes from inside. Beauty is to have a positive energy and be confident of myself. It's not my nose or ears. It comes from inside. I see beautiful women, but they are not very happy. They want to make their lips bigger and put false eye lashes on, but it doesn't make them happy.

What makes me beautiful is that I am always not thinking of myself; I am thinking of people around me. I am accepted by people because of how I treat them. When my community is happy, and my family is happy - then I am happy and then I am beautiful

I come from Sudan and our culture is African-Arab, and some Indian as well. Henna is part of our culture. A married woman has to be wearing henna all the time. When I am in Australia I am with pants and shirt. When I am in Sudan, I wear a sari and I always have henna, I renew it every two weeks. We also use henna at the end of Ramadan.

As women get older the henna is simpler. Older women still wear henna and saris and jewellery. The sari fabric is different for older women, not so much chiffon or silk, more fabrics that are easy to wear. My grandmother loved henna and when she put it in her white hair it turned orange. It was very beautiful.

Twenty years ago when I came to Australia one of my children came home crying because another child at school told her they didn't like her skin because it was like mud and poo. My daughter was very upset, and she was crying. I told her she was beautiful. The school was wonderful. They had an assembly and at it they told my daughter she was one of the most beautiful girls at the school. Sometimes people have that pressure, and they want to change their skin colour and make it lighter – but we need to remember that when we are beautiful from inside - it appears on the outside.



Cheryl Lee Player

My personality and my attitude make me beautiful. My joie de vivre makes me beautiful. I expect to be happy, and I expect to be beautiful. When I wake up the first thing in the morning, I look for the sound of the birds. It makes me happy. I can still get up and put on makeup and catch the bus with a song in my heart and wings on my feet. It makes me happy, and I make other people happy.

I collect keys, because they represent unlocking a door, opening the possibilities. I used to have a key hanging off my bag and my granddaughter wanted to know what it was. I told her it was the key to my imagination.

I love colour and vibrancy. I 100% believe that I am a strong, beautiful, positive, proactive person totally involved in my community. I love the possibilities of life. I like me, I want to be happy. I want to appreciate life.

My acceptance of things makes me beautiful. I don't think you have to change things to appreciate them. A rose is still beautiful when it has lost a petal. Everything brings a sense of beauty if you stop and look at it.

I think decades ago, the accepted beauty for an older woman was the blue rinse set. Today we care about ourselves in a different way. Older women have taken their power back and shaken society up, we are taking back our authority to be ourselves.

I was a dancer and always had a beautiful body. The thing I love best about my body is my eyes. They sparkle when I laugh. I still have a reasonably nice figure, but it doesn't make me light up when I laugh like my eyes do. There is too much emphasis on body shape and not the joy of living.

When I look in the mirror, I see my eyes and my smile. I can stand naked in front of the mirror and it's my smile I see. Whatever I put on I know I will look fabulous, I know I look good. People stop me in the street to tell me I am beautiful. I think people sense that I care about myself. It's palpable. They react to my positive energy. It's not about ego. My projection is me, my positivity and energy. This is me. I have earned the right to be me. I am beautiful.



Tony Robertson

Beautiful is what you bring to the world. I think of myself as beautiful. I would call myself a beautiful gay man. I am not the run of the mill type beautiful, like Brad Pitt. I have uneven teeth and glasses – but I still think of myself as beautiful.

People don't come up to me and tell me I am beautiful, but I get a lot of affirmation about who I am as a person.

I am an extrovert and a confident person. I always have been. I see the beauty that is in me. I engage with people and the world. People comment about my smile, that is one of my gifts. I say "hello" to people in the street and I don't get negative responses. Mind you, I know who not to say hello to.

Beauty is more than physical. It needs to be embraced as the whole self. People expect perfection, but a flower that is missing a petal is still beautiful. In Japanese culture it's called Wabi-Sabi, the cracks in ceramics are painted with gold to show how beautiful they are.

When I look in the mirror, I see a body that has carried many stories. I am proud of my body. I have to look after it. I can't do what I did 20 years. I live with the physical challenges. But I am proud of it.

When we went to school, beauty was never on our spelling list, but we grew up in a climate of appreciation. In Australian culture, 'beauty' is a term that is deep in our colloquial conversation. To say 'beauty mate' is to say something is great. It's interesting the way this expression is used by men in our macho

culture. Since participating in the Old is Beautiful workshop, I have told a couple of my mates they are beautiful. They smiled.

I have learned a lot about beauty as I have aged and through living in counterculture situations. I have had the privilege of experiencing life in urban squatter camps in the Philippines and in remote villages in Papua New Guinea where I was welcomed, and I learned the beauty of diversity.

I spent six years as a member of a religious community of Catholic men. They were a wonderful group of men, loving and accepting, across cultural diversity. Living intimately with that group of men helped me with my self-understanding.

I have an online collection of **songs of a lifetime** that have inspired and nurtured my life journey. Among them is Ray Stevens 1970 release, Everything is Beautiful which captures a core value to which I am committed.

I am 72 and 3 weeks old and I feel 72 years old. I am not 72 years young. I have a shit load of experience and a senior's card that I flash with pride.



Merry Cloutier

For me, beautiful is about confidence. It's about being visible. It's about curiosity and being interesting. The type of beauty that draws people in. I think of myself as vivacious, interesting and having a presence. Beautiful is all about the persona, a twirling in a room.

I was looking back at old photos recently and I thought in some of them I looked hot. I don't mean hot like the social media influencers; I used to wear a lot of hi vis and steel capped boots for work. Hot is a confidence in what you are wearing and what you are doing. It is a willingness to stand out and a look that says, where to next? I am a dynamic person, an adventurer and an explorer. I mean hot like a whirlwind, like a person doing things and going places. People wanted to know me.

The celebrity version of beautiful is about physical beauty and facial symmetry. Those celebrities are gorgeous, but I am not beautiful in that way. I think of beauty as being more about an aura now. Dry humour. Holding my own. I would never say I was celebrity gorgeous, but everyone always knew me, because I drew people in.

Whether you are beautiful or not depends on what you define beauty as. Some older people are very beautiful. By beautiful I mean shining. Some older women shine. They have a smart little mouth on them, and they can demolish someone in a couple of words. They have an aura of, I am how I am, and I am quite happy with myself. That's what beautiful is.

There is a difference between someone who is being beautiful and someone who is beautiful. Some people are very beautiful people because they are kind.

Some people accept ageing stereotypes, they follow what everyone expects ageing to be. They don't expect to be beautiful. They expect to shuffle. We are our own worst enemy.

Beautiful is about confidence and curiosity. Being an interesting person. I see the group think, the way older women are expected to dress and present themselves. Beautiful is being confident in who you are. Who you have become.

It is the confidence and the curiosity that makes me beautiful. I am a questioner. I am also a fixer of problems and issues. As a consultant I was confident enough to challenge the status quo and be curious about things. I go to lectures on space law and have interesting conversations with people. I love asking people about themselves. I love learning about people. It can be mind blowing. We have to be interested and interesting.



Naomi Jarvis

I think what makes me beautiful is me being me. It's about adapting to ageing, accepting changes as we age and looking after myself. If I can't look after myself I can't be there for other people. That's why I have to keep my mind and body in tuned.

I think adapting to and accepting the changes as we age is what makes us beautiful. It's not all about the physical look, it's about accepting who I am and feeling comfortable with who I am and how I look.

Beautiful means me being me. I don't need to fit in. I know I am a good person. What you see is what you get. I wouldn't have surgery to stop my ageing, no way! I have earned these wrinkles.

I think there are different pressures on older women that come from ageism and the ways we are expected to present ourselves. We are expected to be more in touch with how we look. Men can just throw on a tee shirt and shorts. Some older women think they have to look nice to keep their man. That's not how it is for me. My husband and I work at our relationship, and it seems to keep going. Being in a relationship where I am valued helps with me feeling good about my age.



Helen Graczyk

Some of what makes me beautiful is to do with my caring abilities and quirky ways. It has taken me a long time to discover that. I am a problem solver; it's one of my strengths. I am also colourful. Being colourful makes me confident and confidence makes me beautiful. I am an individual. I am no longer hung up on what people think of me and how I look.

When I was younger, I cared about being judged. I am not hung up on that now, but it is still there and makes it harder for me to say I am beautiful. We used to get told that you are not allowed to pat yourself on the back. If you did it would be considered big noting yourself.

I like to do my own thing with fashion, but I feel like I get judged, like people think here comes that colourful woman again. My thing is colour. I love colour. My house is painted bright colours. I love it. My outfits are quite colourful.

When I feel good about myself is when I have gone out and given help to other people. When I care for other people, it makes me feel really fantastic about myself.

What makes me beautiful is also the wisdom I can impart to the world. You can't keep it in, it's not wisdom if you don't share it. I am a cheery person, positive disposition – not always, because I have lots to deal with. But

I try to be. That's one of the things that makes me beautiful. It draws people in, starts conversations. As my life has progressed, I have found it easier to go up to people and speak with them. In the past I would be worried about what I was saying and whether they were judging me

Beautiful also means kindness. I am a great person for talking in elevators, with a smile on my face. There are lots of people with mental health problems and it can change their day. I look at them in the eyes and give them smile. Just a smile. I rarely get a smile back, but I do it anyway. My smile is not conditional. I might have touched someone's day in a positive way.

Beautiful is also about finding who I am. Dressing the way I want. No outside expectations. Just how I feel beautiful. Not being judged by anyone else. I am not afraid of trying. That's it – I'm not afraid of putting myself out there. I could not have done that as a younger person. But now I'm shining from within.



Michelle Callard

I think beautiful is an attitude. I am quite self-reliant and independent. I stand up for myself and advocate for others. That attitude comes through as a presence. It's not always the physical that is beautiful, but how you stand and present yourself. I'm not overbearing. Some older people become withdrawn as they age, but I don't think I ever will.

There are stereotypical ideas of beauty. Nicole Kidman and other fashion icons look fabulous, but they've had work done. Smooth face. Beautiful complexion. Good hair. Fabulous body. But as I have gotten older, I realise it isn't the outward appearance that makes someone beautiful. Physical beauty is only skin deep. You can't tell a book by its cover. The beauty is on the inside, not the outside.

I see that I have aged. I have become paler and have more wrinkles. Those things go with getting older. That's how it is. You change from when you are a baby till now. You progress through the ages. We get told by the beauty industry that we should look like this or that. But now I think beautiful is more my attitude. I am very outgoing and friendly. I like talking to people, I'll talk to anyone. It's a great attribute to have. I am an optimist and a positive person. I take opportunities to meet people and do different things.

Beautiful is embracing the changes you experience in life and living it to the best you can. I take every opportunity I can. It's about finding the joy in everyday things. It's about being happy. That's what beautiful means to me. I see the beautiful in people and things.

I see things in a different way as I have gotten older. When I was younger, I was so busy rushing around I didn't take time to smell the roses. As I get older, I am more appreciative of the things people say and do.

My friends would say what makes me beautiful is my friendliness, my outgoing personality, my kindness. I am a considerate and helpful person. I am a good friend. I try to be a good friend. A good friend is someone you can call on for support, someone who isn't judgemental, someone you can go out and do things with, someone who is a good listener.



Judith John

Beautiful has something to do with people who have survived. Beautiful is coming out the other side of life and you are not embittered. You are still beautiful and giving. People who are beautiful have an energy about them. They are not defeated by life.

I am still on the journey and haven't quite come out the other side yet. But I am strong.

I see myself as someone who has lived and survived. I feel strong and I remind myself that I can keep doing what I need to do and whatever else comes along.

Beautiful is tied strongly to resilience and gratitude. Beautiful is the people that get through the trials and tribulations of life, with a smile on their face. It gives them beauty. I would like to think that is what I have.

I think beautiful is akin to a calmness and serenity in the face of everything life throws at me. My friends tell me my calmness is evident to them all the time and is valued, given the sorts of things my life has included in it.

Beautiful for me is also about a connection into faith. That is the underpinning that allows me to have calmness. Other people gain it from somewhere else, but for me faith is an important part of developing that inner beauty.

I think beautiful is the ability to pass on skills to the next generation, about how to face problems, how to prioritise and not sweat the small stuff. I think of

my grandchildren and the challenges some of them face. I want to offer my wisdom to help them get through the difficult stuff. The older I get, the greater my perspective. I have an accumulation of experience and have learned to be firmer in my beliefs and trust what they teach me.

I think there is an element of choice to beauty as we age, that is not the same as physical ageing. There is a difference between saying you are beautiful and saying you are a beautiful person. Our attitude to beauty can flavour our ageing. I know there are older people who are not beautiful people, but our attitude to life can make us beautiful. We can choose our attitude.

As a funeral director I have listened to thousands of eulogies about older people and have learned about the value of older people in families. I hear about the positive impact older people have had on their families, especially their grandchildren; and that reminds me of the positive aspects of being an older person.

I have learned not to worry about my ageing, and to continue to be the person I am and allow people to be who they are.



AnneMarie White OAM

I wouldn't say I was attractive in a traditional way. I know I'm not Miss Australia, or a model or a drop dead gorgeous physical specimen. But I'm attractive. I laugh with my whole body. I'm a bit too loud, and I have a BIG personality that oozes out of me. I have a persona and a look that is welcoming and happy.

I have a feeling that as I get older, there is more elegant beauty. I have a feisty attitude; this is me and this is the best me I can be.

I have kind eyes, and I attract people to me. I remember a woman once said to me, "I just want to get to know you". I love that I have energy and passion with a compassionate heart that seems to show before anything else.

My body shows ageing, my skin is saggy, but my vibrant spirit is still there. The energy and happiness are still there. That means I am differently beautiful to how I was as a younger woman. When I look at me, I like me. I like who I am and what I have become.

Being a sports journalist changed what I thought of as beautiful. Forty five years ago, I was one of the few women journalists. I was lucky I was in sport then, because I didn't have to be a pretty girl; I just had to

be happy and intelligent. I had to be approachable and just be me.

Being in sport, I see women who are proud because they are athletes and that's what they've done with their bodies. The rugby girls are huge, and they are so proud of their bodies and what their bodies have done for them. I'm a triathlete and it's a different ask of my body.

I'm grateful for my age. I'm still here! I have a wisdom I can share if I'm asked. Three times in my life I was told I was going to die. I told one specialist I was feeling 'mucky'. He told me, don't talk about 'mucky', talk about 'lucky'. He reminded me it's a blessing to be alive.

What makes me beautiful: I'm sassy; I'm smart; I'm fit; I'm alive!

I love people and I love life. I love being me. I have a good soul and am a good person and that makes me beautiful.



Frankie O'Leary

Beautiful is a feeling I get when I make other people smile. I wear a lot of bright colours and a Frida Kahlo head piece to match. I get lots of positive comments from people about how they love my hair and the colours I wear. It makes them happy and that makes me feel beautiful, because it puts a smile on their face.

People tell me I remind them of a mermaid. When my grandchildren were younger, I made a fairy garden for them and would dress them up in bright colours and blow bubbles with them.

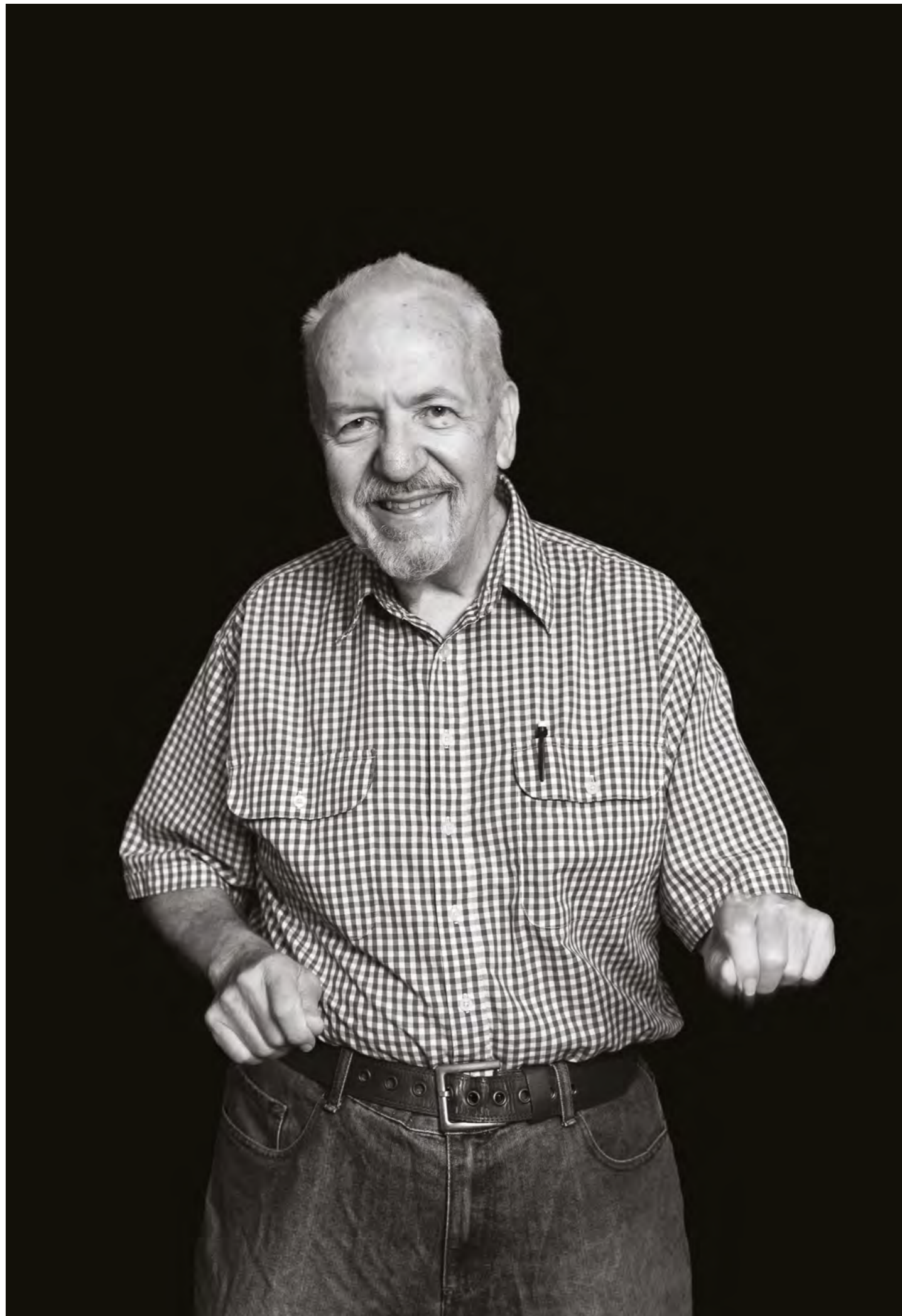
I met my husband when I was 17 and it was love at first sight. We were married for 56 years. When I turned 60, I was working in aged care, and I started bleaching my hair; and I went to a hairdresser who has pink streaks in her hair, and I loved it so much she did some for me. That's how it started. The older people I was working with loved the bright colour. My husband also said it looks beautiful, and that made me happy as well.

I love to see older people walking hand in hand. My husband and I always used to hold hands when we were out walking. It's so lovely to see older people still caring for each other. It makes me sad and happy.

Colour makes me happy. When it is a dark and dismal day, colour brightens me up. It lifts me. It makes me feel beautiful. Mostly colour makes me beautiful.

I have lots of things wrong with me. I was recently diagnosed with breast cancer, and I am about to start radiotherapy. Every day I wake up I thank God I am still breathing. I am thankful for that. I can still walk around independently. I am still in my own home. I am grateful for what I have.

For me, beautiful is not about physical beauty, it's about how we are on the inside. What makes me beautiful is the goodness I have on the inside and that comes from caring for other people. I have good neighbours who care about me, bring me meals and helped me when I was caring for my husband. I also care about them. I decorate my garden and veranda to brighten life for my neighbours. My caring for my neighbours is one of the things that is beautiful to me.



Dubhglas Taylor

I believe my beauty comes from the journey I've crafted throughout my life. Though I faced difficult experiences in my youth, I survived and learned valuable lessons through the grace of God. Not everyone is as fortunate, as some carry their struggles throughout life. I recognized that I had a choice in who I wanted to become, which motivated me to nurture my growth.

As I've aged, I've learned that true beauty lies in who I am as a person. In the past, I equated beauty with looks and physical attraction, influenced by popular culture. Now, I see beauty as the sum of my life experiences, beliefs, and personal growth. My choices, relationships, and experiences, both good and bad, have shaped me, and I appreciate that beauty is deeply rooted in my inner life.

I liken the aging process to the creation of a work of art. A sculptor shapes a rough piece of marble into something beautiful over time, just as we sculpt our lives through learning and self-discovery.

Beauty is not only about appearance; it also encompasses behaviour, relationships, and communication. Aging brings wisdom and emotional maturity, leading me to appreciate the present and advocate for the underdog.

For me, being beautiful means drawing from my life experiences and recognizing that my wrinkles and grey hair reflect a life well lived; a visual legacy of all the love, struggles, and joys I have experienced.



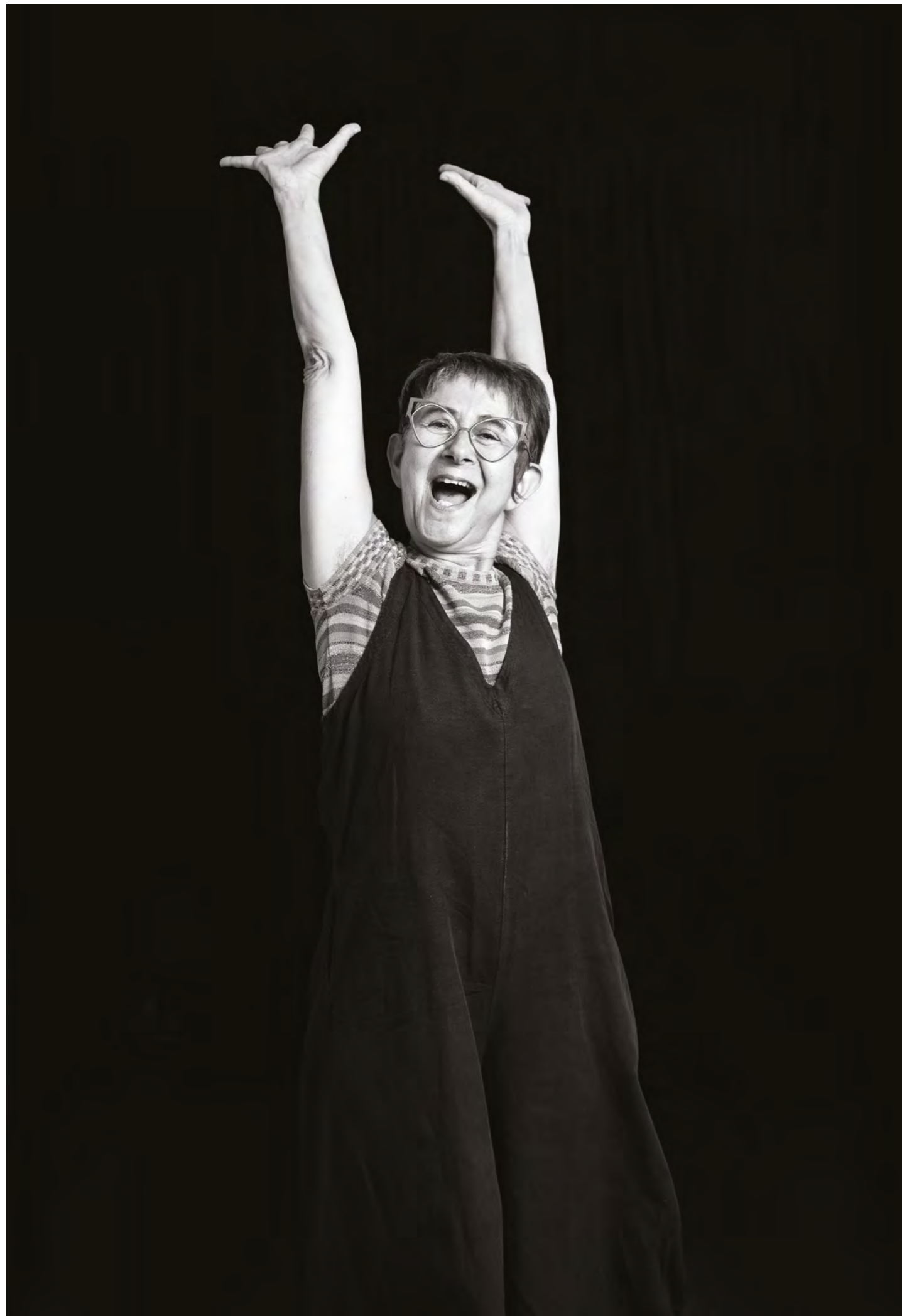
Eileen Taylor

What makes me beautiful is I am a giving person. I have empathy for other people. I will do anything for anyone, if I can. I don't think of myself when I am doing things. My husband says I have a quiet and unassuming beauty, and I am one of the most caring people he has ever met. It's about inner beauty.

Dementia has not changed whether I am beautiful. When I am struggling with my health issues, I don't feel beautiful, but I am still beautiful. I sometimes struggle accepting myself. There have been times when I get dressed up and am ready to go out and I ask my husband if I am okay. He tells me I am looking lovely or pretty. Sometimes I don't accept his feedback. I say thank you, even when I don't believe it. I have to remember beautiful is about who I am. Beautiful is about my whole being.

Older people are beautiful. It's not just about our face; it's about our whole person. How we are in the world. The things we do.

When I was growing up nothing was said about being beautiful. Everyone was accepted. I grew up with my grandmother being very present in my life. My family lived with her for the first five years of my life. She was a significant person in my life. I didn't see her as beautiful, and I didn't see her as ugly. Acceptance is part of being beautiful. Accepting people as they are. I am not making any judgements about people in that way. I have always been that way.



Suzon Fuks

I feel a big presence when I see someone beautiful. They emanate some kind of positive energy; they have a strength that is a space around them. Maybe this is what makes me beautiful at times.

People look to external beauty to be soothed, for example if they go to an exhibition, a show or to nature. When we see external beauty, we can be struck by it immediately. Beauty is also internal, something less accessible and that you discover with time.

I have done a lot of travel in my life - on the inside and outside. Inside me is a reflection of the world around me. Travelling in real time and inside is a metaphor. Travel is important for me. "Travel" is close to the French word "travail" that means work. These two words are very similar, in their sound and writing. And for me, to travel is work and work is travel.

Beauty can be a weapon too.

"Old is beautiful" has a few aspects. When I look at an older person I find beauty in the skin, the wrinkles and ripples on the skin. It's quite amazing to see and to explore. My skin is ageing a bit around my eyes, my mouth and on my neck.

When I think about "old is beautiful", I see an elephant. They grow really, really old and they keep their memories. They have enormous memories and dignity and lots of wrinkles. Their eyes are tiny in their enormous bodies, and these tiny eyes are full of energy, they emanate so much energy.

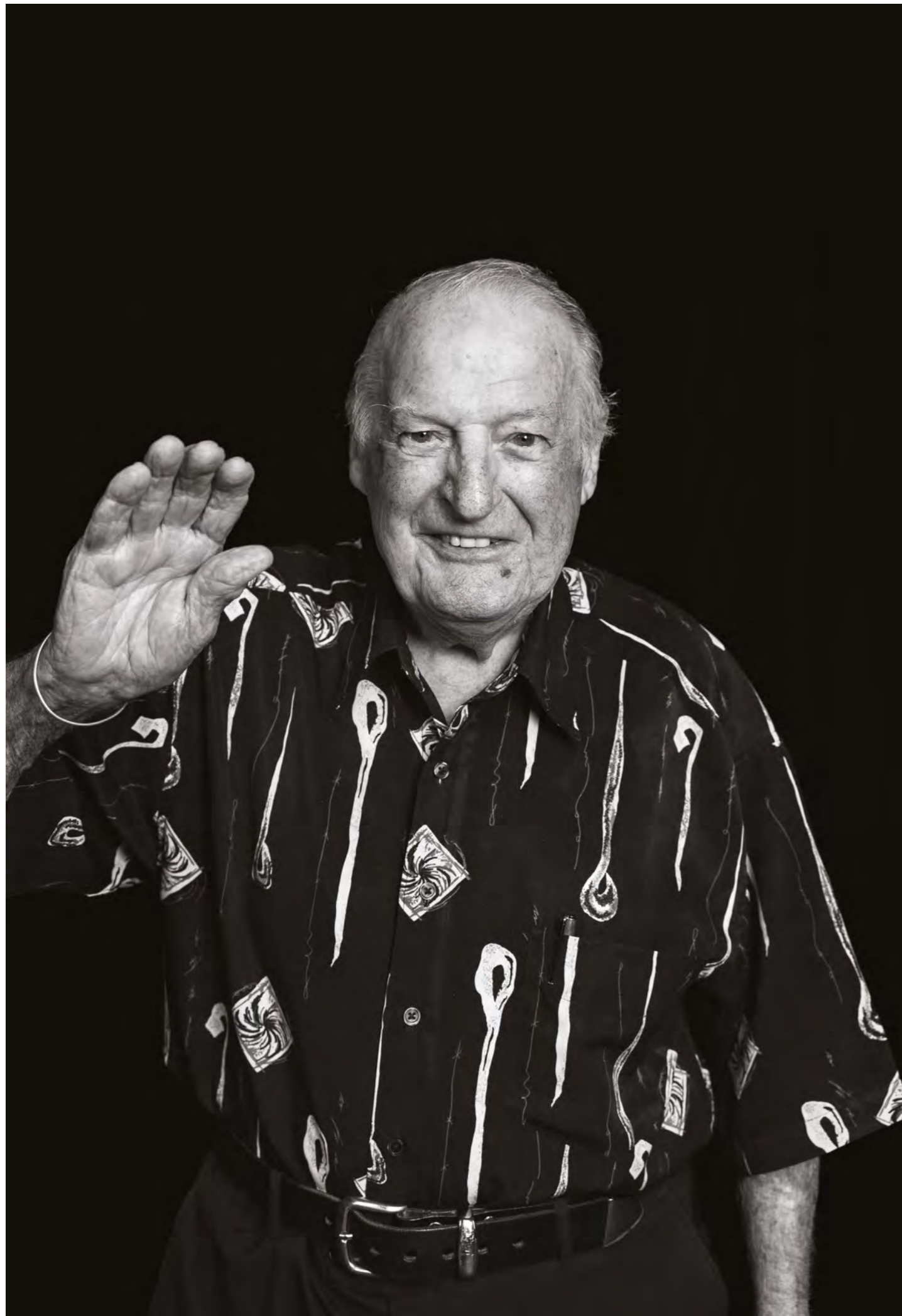


Carolyn Isdale

What makes me feel beautiful is when I can do something for someone and their face lights up. It makes a difference in their day. That makes me feel beautiful. I don't compliment myself well, so it's hard to think about what makes me beautiful.

One thing that I have always tried to do is to be kind. I try a little kindness, it's so good. Kindness overpowers everything else. When things are difficult, I pull myself together and draw on my strength and take the focus off me and do something kind for someone else. I don't expect anything in return, but if I see someone's face light up in response to the kindness, that makes it feel so worthwhile.

I don't think I am physically beautiful, but it depends on how beauty is defined. I scrub up okay and I can feel confident to go out in the world. I have never really thought about myself as beautiful. When I meet people, I pick up if they are kind or thoughtful or genuinely interested in others. Beautiful people are the ones who come and ask how you are and then wait for the answer. That's what beautiful is.



Bob Green OAM

Beautiful to me is my family. I believe in the three Fs of faith, family and friends. I endeavour to live my faith. My family is everything to me and my friends keep me happy.

Beautiful is about being able to continue doing the things that make me happy. I was very honoured to be awarded an Order of Australia Medal in 2014 for services to the community. I have been working with St Vincent de Paul for 60 years and we help people that need assistance, mainly with food and rent and utilities. It's important that we don't judge them. I try not to criticise others, sometimes in my mind I do, but I treat people without judgement.

I am also involved with Southside Community Care, who provide housing for people who are homeless. I have been doing that for 40 years. I am also a fire warden at the retirement village I live in, and I am on the residents committee and body corp.

I believe life was meant to be happy, with responsibilities. Being involved and helping others keeps me active in mind and body. I try to live one day at a time. I try to treat people as I would want them to treat me.

Before I participated in the Old is Beautiful workshop, I didn't think about older people as beautiful. I thought beautiful was just younger people. But you have helped me

to reflect on that. I think beautiful is about what you do and the way you do it. There are some wonderful older people around the place, they are beautiful.

I would say that beauty is in the mind of the beholder. I would like to say to my grandchildren and great grandchildren, in my eyes you are beautiful. I love you very much. I am very proud of you and what you achieve. I hope that you understand this. Not everyone can be beautiful in the way we are told in the media, but that's only skin deep. What makes you beautiful is the way you treat other people and the way you respond to your family. I want you to know I love you and I am proud of what you have achieved. In my mind, you are beautiful because of who you are and what you do.

What makes me beautiful is trying to set an example for others on how to live life. Whether I do or not that's up to others to decide. I like to set an example to my family through my volunteering. You could call that beautiful. I try to lead the best possible life I can. The project has expanded my vision in a positive way. I think in life you got to do the best you can, and it will come back to you. That's what beautiful is.

Project overview

The #OldisBeautiful Queensland project is led by ADA Australia in partnership with Celebrate Ageing Ltd. This section of the resource provides an overview of the Brisbane component of the project, which was facilitated in March 2025, in partnership with Brisbane City Council.

Aims

The aim of the #OldisBeautiful Brisbane project is to help combat ageism and Elder Abuse, through the following activities:

- a workshop for older people to build their knowledge of internalised ageism, their rights, support services and how to protect themselves from ageism
- sharing photo portraits of older people and their messages about what makes them beautiful as older people - to help build intergenerational connections and promote respect for older people.

Participants

Nineteen Brisbanites participated in the project, with an average age of 73 years. The oldest participant, who was 92 years old, participated with his daughter. Two couples also participated.

Activities

A call for project participants was disseminated by ADA Australia and Brisbane City Council. People who expressed interest were provided with an information sheet and required to return a signed consent form before participating.

Prior to the workshop, phone interviews and a survey were conducted with participants to document their baseline knowledge, against which project outcomes could be measured and described. Interviews also began the process of exploring what beautiful means to each participant, and what makes them beautiful.

A three-hour workshop was facilitated at The Brisbane Powerhouse, simultaneously with the photoshoot. Sixteen participants attended in person and one through an online platform. Two participants who were unable to attend the workshop were photographed after the workshop.

The phone interviews and survey were repeated a month after the workshop to refine participants messages about beautiful, repeat the baseline survey and gather feedback on the workshop and project. Participants messages about beautiful were transcribed during the interview and emailed to them after the workshop for verification.

Participants portraits and messages are shared through this report, and a series of community launch and exhibition activities have been planned to engage the community in reflection on ageing and ageism.

Evaluation

The evaluation approach was adapted from The Kirkpatrick Model,¹ focusing on workshop participant's learning and planned behaviour change. All participants provided feedback on the workshop and project, and eight were able to complete pre/post interviews and survey.

In post workshop interviews, 92% of participants reported learned something new at the workshop. When asked to describe what they learning, most reflected on the value of peer learning, with one participant saying, 'each person was a teacher' and another noting 'we had a common goal and very different personalities.'

The pre/post survey explored increases in knowledge, using the Expectations Regarding Ageing survey.² The survey measures expectations regarding physical and mental health and cognitive function. Twelve statements about ageing are scored on a 4-point scale ranging from definitely true to definitely false. Higher scores indicate more positive ageing expectations and are associated with better health and wellbeing,³ and lower levels of ageism.

The average mean scores shifted from 2.6 to 3.3 (out of 4), with the most significant increase in expectations of cognitive function. Overall, there was a 22% increase in positive expectations of ageing. While the sample size is small (8 participants) the outcomes are potentially significant for individual participants.

In interviews, participants were also invited to describe any changes they had made in response to the workshop. Most participants reported talking to friends and family about ageism and several participants had been wearing an #OldisGood badge provided to them at the workshop - as a conversation starter.

Two participants requested more information to assist them further explore expectations of ageing. One participant asked for assistance to identify structured activities to facilitate conversations about ageism with peers.

Participants also reported the workshop had encouraged them to act to better prepare for their ageing, be their authentic self, and remind themselves that they are beautiful.

1 Chonody, J. M., & Teater, B. (2016). Why do I dread looking old?: A test of social identity theory, terror management theory, and the double standard of aging. *Journal of Women and Aging*, 28(2), 112–126. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08952841.2014.950533>

2 Ibid

3 Ibid

Discussion

The Brisbane workshop resulted in 19 powerful portraits of older Brisbanites and their messages reclaiming beautiful as a term to describe older people. Participation by a diverse group of older people provided a valued opportunity to define beautiful as encompassing all ages, skin colours, sexualities, genders and abilities.

Participants broadened the definition of beautiful to encompass ‘what is on the inside, that radiates to the outside.’ Beautiful was also defined as a life lived, a compassionate heart and a curious mind and spirit – unconstrained by an ageist world.

The workshop had positive outcomes for participants, with increased knowledge and more positive expectations of ageing linked to improved health and wellbeing. The workshop raised conversations about Elder Abuse and connected participants with local older person’s advocacy and support services.

The next stages of the project involve sharing the Brisbane portraits and messages to encourage shifts in the ways older Queenslanders are perceived. Activities to achieve this include exhibitions, launch events, and the dissemination of this resource.

The uplifting stories shared in this resource provide an opportunity for those who are not yet old to see their own ageing in more positive ways. The resource also provides a means for older Brisbanites to encourage their peers to more positive expectations on ageing.

Rethinking the word beautiful is an innovative entry point to understanding ageism and valuing ourselves. Such a mindset shift is not a ‘nice to have’, it is a critical step in promoting health and wellbeing and protection against Elder Abuse.

The task of combating ageism and preventing Elder Abuse is an enormous one. It requires a large toolkit of strategies and millions of allies. The #OldisBeautiful Brisbane project is one valuable strategy to help older people protect themselves against ageism and abuse. Our task now is to engage allies across Queensland in promoting the respect that older people deserve.

Services for older people

ADA Australia

Aged and Disability Advocacy Australia (ADA Australia) is a not-for-profit, independent advocacy and information service supporting and improving the wellbeing of older people and people with disability in Queensland.

Our services are free, confidential and independent – and include the following:

Aged Care Advocacy & Care finder

Assist with accessing and getting the most from your aged care services, including help to access support through the care finder program
Support to express your views and wishes and to work through care related issues with your aged care provider
Assist you understand aged care provider agreements and costs.

Elder Abuse Advocacy

Help to address issues of elder abuse in aged care.

Disability Advocacy

Assist with accessing disability support services, including the NDIS
Support to work through issues with your service provider, the NDIS or other services
Assist with disability discrimination and unfair treatment
Disability advocacy support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Queenslanders with disability.

Community Legal Service

Help with Enduring Power of Attorney, guardianship and administration matters
Help to resolve issues with your Attorney/s
Representation at the Queensland Civil and Administrative Tribunal (QCAT) and the Mental Health Review Tribunal (MHRT)
Legal support to people with mental health conditions to navigate the justice system
Seniors Legal and Social Support Service providing access to legal advice across outback Queensland.



Contact details

Phone: Call 1800 700 600 Aged Care Advocacy Line
8am – 8pm Mon – Fri | 10am – 4pm Sat
Website: www.adaaustralia.com.au

Brisbane City Council Support for Seniors

Every day, Brisbane City Council works with residents and local communities to make sure the Brisbane of tomorrow is even better than the Brisbane of today.

Brisbane City Council recognises the important contribution that seniors make to the city and offers a range of services and activities to support the participation of seniors in our community, including:

- Free and affordable active and healthy programs for seniors
- Free and affordable creative programs for seniors e.g., Lord Mayor's City Hall Concerts (weekly February-November)
- Seniors Month Suburban Concerts and Lord Mayor's Senior Cabaret
- Lord Mayor's Seniors Christmas Parties
- Council Cabs - a shared low-cost taxi service taking you to your local shopping centre
- Free off-peak travel on buses and ferries for Maroon Card Holders
- Grants and awards including Cultivating Community Gardens Grants and Lord Mayor's Australia Day Senior Citizen of the Year award.

To receive copies of activities for seniors (GOLD) booklets or What's On in Libraries call Council on 3403 8888.

Stay up to date with what's happening around Brisbane by signing up to Council's e-newsletters. Visit Brisbane.qld.gov.au and search for 'newsletters' to subscribe to a variety of topics.

Council also supports community services that offer help for seniors. The 50-Plus Centre at Brisbane City Hall offers low-cost activities such as art classes, dancing and Tai Chi.

For all enquiries contact them on 3403 4319 (9am-1pm) or by email fiftypluscentrebrisbane@gmail.com



Dedicated to a better Brisbane

For more information about any of these services, visit brisbane.qld.gov.au and search for 'seniors' or call Council on 3403 8888.



**#old is
beautiful**

www.celebrateageing.com/beautiful