



COUNCIL ON
THE AGEING
NEW SOUTH WALES

Golden Eras

THE JOY OF AGEING

In New South Wales



Golden Eras:

The Joy of Ageing in New South Wales

This report examines the concept of the joy of ageing within the context of New South Wales (NSW).

It profiles some excellent examples of NSW citizens embracing ageing and finding joy in activities small and large.

We hope that the report invites reflection, but also acts as an inspiration for others, be they policymakers or older people.

Council on the Ageing New South Wales



Contact:

Phone (Toll Free):
1800 449 102

Phone (Office):
02 9286 3872
02 9286 3860

Email:
info@cotansw.com.au

Website:
cotansw.com.au

Address:
PO Box Q349, Queen
Victoria Building, NSW,
1230

Council on the Ageing New South Wales acknowledges the Traditional Owners and Custodians of the lands and waters on which we operate throughout Australia. We pay our respects to Elders past and present, and recognise the continuing connection to country of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Content

2	Introduction	20	People in NSW finding everyday joy
6	Ageing well in NSW		Joy of nature journaling and meditation
	Policy Context		Joy through discovering new cultures
	Health and wellbeing		Joy in checking in with friends
	Social connection		Joy in giving back to others
	Housing and Environment		Joy in performing
10	An Indigenous approach to joyful ageing		Joy in creating arts and crafts
	The Transformation into Eldership		Joy in companionship and community
	The Joy of Being Needed: Relational Connection	28	Other inspiring ideas on creating everyday joy in ageing from our members
	Connection to Country: The Source of Spiritual Health		
	Reframing the Narrative: From Burden to Asset	32	Resources for joy in NSW
	The Universal Lesson of Contentment		
16	Conversations on the joy of ageing	36	Odes to Joy – what could we learn from other countries?

1. Introduction



"Joy does not simply happen to us. We have to choose joy and keep choosing it every day."

Henri Nouwen

We all age, every day. Yet from a certain period of our lives, ageing can sometimes be framed in terms of decline and loss. As a society, we generally do not describe the period between turning thirty and forty in negative terms but often do for the period between eighty and ninety. And yet both periods are exactly the same length of time.

Too often we narrowly focus on some of the physical, cognitive and social restrictions that might accompany growing older. Of course, ageing is not without its challenges. Health issues, loss, and social isolation are real and growing problems across Australia and globally.

However, many cultures associate ageing with increased wisdom, dignity, community support, and a life full of pleasure and enjoyment. Ageing can also be understood as a profound expansion of joy, one that is rooted in perspective, connection, and meaning. Around the world, many traditions honour later life not as an ending, but as a stage of deep growth and fulfilment. Perhaps even the best years of someone's life.

In places like Japan, ageing is closely associated with respect and social value. Celebrations like the Respect for the Aged Day reflects a cultural belief that older people are custodians of wisdom. This perspective allows ageing individuals to experience joy through purpose, offering guidance, preserving traditions, and remaining integrated within community life. Similarly, in parts of Africa, elders are seen as living libraries, and their presence is tied to identity, ancestry, and continuity. Joy here is relational, emerging from being needed and valued.

Across Europe, especially in Mediterranean cultures, ageing is often intertwined with a vibrant lifestyle. In countries like Italy and Greece, daily



In places like Japan, ageing is closely associated with respect and social value. Celebrations like the Respect for the Aged Day reflects a cultural belief that older people are custodians of wisdom.

rituals such as shared meals, time outdoors and strong family bonds contribute to a sense of enduring wellbeing. The joy of ageing is a slow accumulation of small pleasures, supported by family and society.

However, in some societies including Australia, narratives around ageing can too often centre on retirement and withdrawal.

Ageing is something to be endured, perhaps even dreaded. The narrative follows that ageing can be a time of social isolation, reduced independence and the slow realisation that “everything starts to hurt”.



However, in some societies including Australia, Ageing is something to be endured, perhaps even dreaded. The narrative follows that ageing can be a time of social isolation, reduced independence and the slow realisation that “everything starts to hurt”.

However, this narrative is shifting. Increasingly, ageing is being reclaimed as a time of reinvention, in what some call the “third age.” Older people pursue travel, learning, volunteering, and creative expression. With longer life expectancy and better healthcare, later years can offer a rare freedom of fewer obligations, greater self-knowledge, and the ability to prioritise what truly matters. Joy in this context often comes from autonomy and rediscovery.

Scientific perspectives increasingly support this more positive view. Research in Gerontology suggests that emotional wellbeing often improves with age¹. Older adults can experience greater emotional regulation, gratitude, and resilience. Freed from the urgency and stigmas of youth, some report a deeper appreciation for the present moment.

There is also a joy that comes from having perspective. Ageing can bring a long view



of life, including an understanding of what endures and what fades. It can bring an inner calmness. Achievements may matter less than relationships and possessions less than experiences. This shift can be liberating. It allows individuals to let go of perfection and embrace authenticity.

Ultimately, the joy of ageing lies not in resisting time, but of embracing it and growing into it. It is found in connection, reflection, and the quiet confidence that comes from having lived. Across the world, despite cultural differences, one idea remains consistent: ageing, at its best, is not simply about adding years to life, but adding depth to those years.

Research in Gerontology suggests that emotional wellbeing often improves with age . Older adults can experience greater emotional regulation, gratitude, and resilience. Freed from the urgency and stigmas of youth, some report a deeper appreciation for the present moment.



2. Ageing well in NSW



This report examines the concept of the joy of ageing within the context of New South Wales (NSW). It profiles some excellent examples of NSW citizens embracing ageing and finding joy in activities small and large.

We hope that the report invites reflection, but also acts as an inspiration for others, be they policymakers or older people.

We hear a lot about the 'ageing society'. In NSW, increasing life expectancy and declining fertility rates are reshaping the age structure of society. The ageing of our population is one of the most important demographic changes of the modern era. NSW has a rapidly growing population of older people. By mid-century, approximately one in four residents will be aged 65 or over. This shift has implications for healthcare, housing, labour markets, and social systems. In addition, regional areas tend to have higher concentrations of older people, which creates unique service delivery challenges.

Historically, ageing in Australia has too often been associated with dependency and decline. This report seeks to reframe ageing as a stage of opportunity and discovery, as well as exploring how policy and social structures can support joyful ageing in NSW.

Policy Context

The NSW Ageing Well Strategy is a 10-year plan by the NSW Government to respond to an ageing population and improve quality of life for older people. It recognises that NSW has a rapidly growing older population, that older people are a major social and economic asset, but that they also face risks like loneliness, poor access, and elder abuse. At its heart, the strategy is about maximising the positives of ageing while reducing the risks.

The strategy promotes the joy of ageing in many ways, including the building of age-inclusive environments and communities, promoting healthy and active activities and supporting financial and logistical processes involved in getting older.



NSW has a rapidly growing population of older people. By mid-century, approximately one in four residents will be aged 65 or over.



**3 in 4 Australians
aged 65+ say
their health is
good, very good,
or excellent.**

We highlight some of the activities available through the strategy in section 5 of this document.

From an Indigenous Australian perspective, “ageing well can focus on connection, role, and continuity, to Country, family, culture, and community. Older people are not seen as “retired” in the Western sense, but as Elders, a respected status earned through lived experience, cultural knowledge, and responsibility.

In many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, Elders are central to community life. They hold and pass on cultural knowledge, stories, and language, teach younger generations through storytelling and lived example and guide important decisions and resolve disputes. We explore what ageing means to Indigenous Australians in further detail later in the document.

Health and wellbeing

Health is central to quality of life in later years. Many older people remain active and healthy well into their seventies and eighties. According to the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare², about 3 in 4 Australians aged 65+ say their health is good, very good, or excellent. Many older people in NSW have access to a warm climate, outdoor spaces, fresh food and local health and fitness amenities, which all support good health in old age.

However, ageing can also bring challenges to physical and mental health. Chronic conditions such as cardiovascular disease and arthritis can

be common and loneliness and social isolation can exacerbate health problems in both body and mind. According to NSW Health³, older people who were aged care facility residents had on average 7 times the rate of ambulance episodes; 4 times the rate of emergency department presentations and 6 times the rate of unplanned hospital admissions.

Social connection

Social connection is one of the strongest predictors of wellbeing in later life. Older people contribute significantly through volunteering, caregiving, and community engagement. Intergenerational relationships provide meaning and strengthen social cohesion. NSW Health estimates⁴ that 11% of people aged 75+ report high psychological distress.

The Council on the Ageing NSW has found that 60% of people aged 50+ report feeling lonely and 50% are socially isolated⁵. This is much higher than general Australian averages (around 16% reporting loneliness across all ages⁶), suggesting older adults in NSW are particularly affected.

Housing and Environment

Age-friendly environments, including access to amenities, public transport and green space, often support independence and wellbeing. We also know that housing affordability is a major issue in NSW, particularly in urban areas. In addition, regional areas also face challenges related to infrastructure and service access.



The Council on the Ageing NSW has found that 60% of people aged 50+ report feeling lonely and 50% are socially isolated.

This is much higher than general Australian averages

3. An Indigenous approach to joyful ageing



For many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, ageing is not a period of retirement or withdrawal; instead, it is a focused expansion of one's role within the community, centered on connection, continuity, and the sacred relationship with Country.

This model suggests that the “joy of ageing” is rooted in a deepening appreciation of life as it is—a grounded contentment that remains more solid than the highs of youth.

In Western societies, the period between turning eighty and ninety is frequently described in negative terms, despite being the same length of time as the more celebrated decade between thirty and forty. Indigenous cultures reframe this timeline entirely. Ageing is understood as a transition toward the status of “Elder,” a position of immense respect and social value.

This status is not granted simply by reaching a certain birthday; it is a rank earned through a lifetime of lived experience, the accumulation of cultural knowledge, and a demonstrated commitment to community responsibility.

The Transformation into Eldership

Elders are the “living libraries” of their people. Their presence is tied to identity, ancestry, and the survival of culture. Unlike the narrative of “retirement,” which can lead to a feared loss of identity, the role of an Elder provides a renewed sense of purpose.

They are the custodians of wisdom, tasked with maintaining the integrity of stories, language, and traditions that have existed for millennia.

“



Elders are the “living libraries” of their people. Their presence is tied to identity, ancestry, and the survival of culture. Unlike the narrative of “retirement,” which can lead to a feared loss of identity, the role of an Elder provides a renewed sense of purpose.



The Joy of Being Needed: Relational Connection

One of the strongest predictors of wellbeing in later life is social connection. While many older adults in NSW struggle with loneliness—with 60% of those over 50 reporting such feelings—the Indigenous framework provides a built-in defense against isolation. Joy in this context is inherently relational. It emerges from the deep satisfaction of being needed and valued by the younger generations.

Elders remain central to the daily flow of community life. Their responsibilities are diverse and vital:

Cultural Transmission:

They hold and pass on sacred knowledge and language, ensuring that the younger generation understands their place in the world.

Mentorship and Guidance:

Through storytelling and lived example, they teach children and young adults about resilience, ethics, and history.

Conflict Resolution:

Elders often guide important community decisions and act as mediators to resolve disputes, drawing on a “long view” of life that understands what endures and what fades.

Connection to Country: The Source of Spiritual Health

This constant interaction fosters intergenerational relationships that provide meaning and strengthen social cohesion.

By remaining integrated within the community, ageing individuals experience joy through purpose and the quiet confidence that comes from having lived.

Central to the Indigenous experience of “ageing well” is the concept of Country. For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, the land is not just a physical location but a living entity entwined with their spirit and history.

Ageing well involves maintaining a continuous connection to one’s ancestral lands, culture, and family.

In NSW, access to outdoor spaces and nature is a key supporter of health in old age. For Indigenous Elders, this goes deeper; being on Country is a form of healing and a source of “inner calmness”. It allows for a “profound expansion of joy” that is rooted in perspective and connection.

This spiritual health often supports physical resilience, as individuals find

“

the Indigenous framework provides a built-in defense against isolation. Joy in this context is inherently relational. It emerges from the deep satisfaction of being needed and valued by the younger generations.

“
Ultimately, the Indigenous approach reminds us that ageing is a time of “reinvention” and “rediscovery”.

It is a period where regrets soften and one makes peace with oneself.

the motivation to remain active—walking the land, gardening, or participating in traditional practices—well into their later years.

Reframing the Narrative: From Burden to Asset

Historically, ageing in Australia has often been associated with dependency. However, the Indigenous perspective views older people as a major social and economic asset.

This shift in thinking is critical for policymakers and social systems. When society views Elders as “custodians of wisdom” rather than recipients of care, it changes how services are delivered.

The NSW Ageing Well Strategy acknowledges this by aiming to build age-inclusive environments that maximize the positives of ageing.

This includes supporting programs like the Social Connections Program, which specifically recognizes the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people by providing support from age 50.

These programs help combat the risks of high psychological distress and isolation, ensuring that Elders can continue their vital work of leadership and contribution.

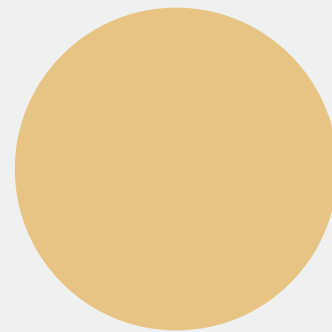
The Universal Lesson of Contentment

While the Indigenous approach is culturally specific, its core tenets offer lessons for all residents of NSW. It teaches that the joy of ageing lies not in resisting time, but in embracing it and “growing into it”. It suggests that “you stop chasing happiness” and realize it was in the “ordinary stuff”—connection, reflection, and community—all along.

By adopting an “Elder mindset,” individuals can find freedom from the pressure of career expectations or the need to be “productive” in a traditional sense. Instead, they can find a deeper, more stable kind of joy.

Whether it is an 85-year-old deriving joy from daily contact with children or a retired teacher finding a second life in volunteering, the goal is the same: adding depth to the years, not just years to the life.

Ultimately, the Indigenous approach reminds us that ageing is a time of “reinvention” and “rediscovery”. It is a period where regrets soften and one makes peace with oneself. By honoring the Elders and the wisdom they hold, we ensure that ageing remains a stage of deep growth, fulfillment, and “grounded contentment” for the entire community.



By adopting an “Elder mindset,” individuals can find freedom from the pressure of career expectations or the need to be “productive” in a traditional sense.



4. Conversations on the joy of ageing



As part of this project, the Council on the Ageing NSW brought together representative groups of older people who live in NSW, to talk about the joy of ageing. The conversations took place both online and in person and were guided by a moderator.

Here is a flavour of some conversations about what brings joy to our members.

A participant in her early 60s said that the greatest joy is no longer caring so much what other people think. In her 30s and 40s, she felt pressure from career

expectations, parenting, and social attitudes. Now, she feels lighter. "You sort of come back to yourself," she says.

A man in his late 50s reflects that time feeling different. Not necessarily slower, but more valuable. "You stop assuming you've got endless years ahead," he says, "so you make decisions differently." He describes finally having time to take trips along the NSW coast to places like Kiama and Jervis Bay.

Someone else reflects on relationships. The group nods as she explains that her circle has gotten smaller, but stronger. "You don't have time for nonsense anymore," she says. "The friendships that remain are the real ones." There's agreement that joy increasingly comes from simple things such as coffee with a friend, time with grandchildren, or a quiet morning walk.

Health inevitably comes up. A few people acknowledge aches, pains and the need for surgeries. But interestingly, this doesn't dominate the discussion. Instead, someone reframes it as: "You start appreciating what your body can

still do." Another adds, "You're kinder to yourself. Or you learn to be."

A retired teacher in her mid-70s talks about purpose after work. She feared losing identity when she stopped working, but instead found freedom through volunteering, mentoring, and taking courses through groups like University of the Third Age. "You realise you're not done," she says. "You just get to choose differently."

There's also a sense of perspective that only comes with time. One participant puts it simply: "You've seen enough of life to know that most things pass, whether good or bad." That perspective seems to create a quieter, steadier kind of joy. Not excitement, but contentment.

As the conversation flows, a theme emerges around freedom. This includes freedom from proving yourself, freedom from other people's timelines and freedom to say no and mean it. One participant sums it up as: "When you're younger, you're chasing happiness. When you're older, you realise it was in the ordinary stuff all along."



I think the biggest change is you make peace with yourself... You stop replaying things so much.

You understand why you did what you did back then."

A participant in her early 70s says that the joy of ageing isn't about denying difficulty. It's about clarity, connection, and a deepening appreciation of life as it is, a kind of grounded contentment that feels more solid than the highs of youth.

Someone reflects that there's grief in ageing too, for younger versions of themselves and for paths not taken. But interestingly, this doesn't dampen the mood. Instead, another person responds, "Yeah, but you stop fighting it." There's a sense that acceptance itself becomes a source of peace and even joy.

A man in his mid-60s talked about work no longer defining him. "For 40 years, that was my identity," he says. "Now... I'm just me." At first, that felt unsettling. But over time, it became liberating. He describes rediscovering old interests such as fishing, music, even just sitting and thinking. "You realise you don't have to be productive all the time to have a good day."

A woman in her mid-80s quietly shared that: "I think the biggest change is you make peace with yourself." She explains that regrets don't disappear, but they soften. "You stop replaying things so much. You understand why you did what you did back then."

The topic of time comes back, but in a more philosophical way. Someone says, "You become more present, not because you've mastered mindfulness, but because you have to." There's less rushing, less multitasking. Even small routines such as gardening, walking along the beach or

cooking, take on more meaning.

A few people mention living near the coast and how being close to nature has become more important with age. "You notice things more," one says. "Sunrises, birds, the weather...you didn't have time for that before."

The conversation shifts again to confidence. Not the loud, ambitious kind from earlier in life, but a quieter version. Someone describes it as "not needing validation anymore." Another adds, "You trust your own judgement more because you've tested it over decades."

Then comes an unexpected theme: lightness. One person laughs and says, "You actually get sillier again." There's agreement. With fewer pressures, people feel freer to be playful, spontaneous—even a bit rebellious in small ways. "It's like coming full circle," someone says. "You're not trying to impress anyone anymore."

Toward the end, the conversation becomes more reflective and philosophical. A participant says: "When you're younger, life feels like it's about building something. When you're older, it feels more like experiencing it."

Another adds: "The joy isn't as intense maybe—but it's deeper. More stable." And perhaps the most honest comment of all comes from someone who says: "It's not that everything gets better. It's that you get better at life."



The joy of ageing isn't about denying difficulty. It's about clarity, connection, and a deepening appreciation of life as it is, a kind of grounded contentment that feels more solid than the highs of youth.

5. People in NSW finding everyday joy



1. Joy of nature journaling and meditation

Tony was not always a fan of the outdoors but now finds contentment and happiness in the natural surroundings of his home near the Ku-ring-gai Chase National Park. After a long career that was enjoyable but came with stresses, he takes joy every day in nature journaling and eco-mindfulness environmental meditation.

Nature journaling is the practice of recording observations, questions, and reflections about the natural world using words, pictures, and numbers. The journaling is often quite unstructured, sometimes involving writing, sometime tracing leaves, or sometimes sketching with coloured pensions. It has deepened Tony's engagement with nature – as he puts it being a part of nature not apart from nature.

During his career he travelled and appreciated the uniqueness of natural environment and the role of First Nations people in acting as the custodians of the land. Over time he developed an interest in eco-meditation, which has helped to deep a sense of connection with nature and helped to reduce anxiety and increase gratitude. It took about three years of meditation to get awareness, pause and respond. As he has got older, meditation has helped him become get more confident and grounded in experience.

Tony also passes on the joy of nature through his community group, Our Little Blue Green Dot of Earth, which works to enhance the natural environment of Australia by promoting sustainability and sustainable development.

Tony now takes “joy in small things that I had previously taken for granted”. What would his advice be for people who live in more urban environments with less access to nature? By themselves and care for a pot plant. Open the window of their apartment and let the fresh air in. Find a tree to observe on the way to work or find and explore a local park. Nature is everywhere and can be enjoyed by everyone.



Nature journaling is the practice of recording observations, questions, and reflections about the natural world using words, pictures, and numbers.

The journaling is often quite unstructured, sometimes involving writing, sometime tracing leaves, or sometimes sketching with coloured pensions.



2. Joy through discovering new cultures

Joy came in an unexpected way for Julia during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdowns. Like many people, she struggled with the social isolation of lockdown conditions, but one day chanced upon Korean drama series on Netflix. This began a fascination with Korean drama, often referred to as K-Drama, which has brought new travel experiences and lots of social connection.

Julia is 65 and has been widowed for 17 years. She lives in a rural area in NSW and in the past, she has experienced loneliness and isolation. However, a random introduction to K-Drama has transformed her life. After watching her first series called 100 Days My Prince, she has now watched over 250 episodes of different K-Drama programs. She describes many of them as well-polished and beautifully acted with superb music and amazing story plots.

After a short while, she also discovered other people near to her who shared a passion and interest in K-Drama. The group meets regularly for social gathering to catch up over recent episodes and have a drink amongst friends. Julia has found that K-Drama makes her feel less lonely and that she can relate to the characters in many shows.

Her interest has also sparked a joy in travel, and she has now visited South Korea on four different occasions. Both of her sons have also visited Korea with her, where she has explored most of the country and enjoyed wonderful museums and local cuisine. She even found time to visit the DMZ demilitarized zone with North Korea and to practice her language skills with locals.

After a short while,
Julia also discovered
other people near
to her who shared
a passion and
interest in K-Drama.
The group meets
regularly for social
gathering to catch
up over recent
episodes and have
a drink amongst
friends.

3. Joy in checking in with friends

Aster takes great joy in what some might call simple social interactions. But to many people that Aster engages with, she provides invaluable company and support. She checks in with friends in person and by phone every day. She makes house visits, including to friends who have dementia every Saturday and others living in care homes.

She also goes out for Sunday afternoon drinks with friends and enjoys playing Scrabble with a close friend. Aster also volunteers for Kuring-Gai community transport outings and takes great pleasure in helping others enjoy days out and socialising with others.

Gardening also brings Aster enormous joy and pleasure. She began cultivating plants in pots during the COVID-19 pandemic and now has over 100 pots, including many succulents and bromeliads. The garden is now an oasis of green and is a sanctuary for Aster to find peace and enjoyment through nature. She also makes ceramic teacups and mugs and puts miniature plants in them to give away to friends.

She also finds great joy in listening to the wonderful and varied bird life in her garden. It is home to two resident lorikeets and some King Parrots that are friendly enough for Aster to feed them sunflower seeds by hand. There are also butcher birds and magpies in surrounding trees. Aster loves to sit in the garden and listen to the birds sing.

Her interest has also sparked a joy in travel, and she has now visited South Korea on four different occasions.



She began cultivating plants in pots during the COVID-19 pandemic and now has over 100 pots, including many succulents and bromeliads.

The garden is now an oasis of green and is a sanctuary for Aster to find peace and enjoyment through nature.



4. Joy in giving back to others

Wendy finds joy in bringing kindness, hope and dignity to many people in need. She volunteers to help people who are in distress through illnesses, disasters and tragedies. In doing so she makes a huge difference to the lives of others and offers a helping hand when people need it most.

Wendy is ably supported by her dog, Sunny, a Maltese-Border Collie who is a trained therapy dog. They both visit hospitals and aged care homes, to see patients and residents and provide some joy and comfort through Sunny's love and affection. A visit from a therapy dog can bring a smile to an elderly resident feeling alone and a child in hospital worried about an injection. Sunny also gives carers a chance to unwind for a time by playing with him.

Wendy also offers comfort and compassion as a Palliative Care volunteer. This involves providing a range of support to help patients and their carers and families as a person comes to the end of their life. Simple acts make a huge difference. They may just involve taking a person shopping or for coffee, walking their dog or taking them for a drive. It may just involve talking to them about their life or giving their carer some time off to rest. Wendy also makes photobooks for people who are dying and their families, which act as a wonderful keepsake of remembrance. It is hard to imagine a more touching gift to bring everlasting joy in difficult times.

Wendy also volunteers for Anglicare's Disaster Recovery program. This involves helping people when they are in crisis following a disaster like

a bushfire or flooding. She will work in recovery centres that donate food, bedding, clothes and cleaning equipment to those in need and help people get back on her feet. She says that Country people are often motivated by kindness and looking after their neighbours. Wendy is a shining embodiment of that.

Wendy has found that part of experiencing joy is the satisfaction from leading a life with meaning and purpose, and from feeling that one can still make a worthwhile contribution to one's community. Even doing some small acts can make a difference to people. She has made a huge difference to so many people's lives.

5. Joy in performing

Mary is no stranger to performing. As lead singer of the band Even As We Speak, she has played music venues across the world for over 30 years. However, it still might sound surprising that at the age of 55 she decided to join the circus and learn the trapeze.

Motivated by the lack of opportunities for older people to perform and showcase their circus skills, she has since established 50-Up Circus, a not-for-profit group for people aged 50 and over, where individuals can explore their creativity, build confidence, and develop new skills.

Through a collaboration with Sydney Trapeze School, 50-Up Circus provides

“



A visit from a therapy dog can bring a smile to an elderly resident feeling alone and a child in hospital worried about an injection.

“

Motivated by the lack of opportunities for older people to develop circus skills, Mary Wyer has since established 50 Up Circus, a company for people aged 50 and over where individuals can explore their creativity, build confidence, and develop new skills.

opportunities for beginners to learn circus disciplines like trapeze, acrobatics and aerials. The activities not only build physical strength, flexibility and balance, they give older people an opportunity to challenge stereotypes about ageing and rewrite the limits others place on them.

50-Up Circus has so far performed three self-curated shows at the Sydney Fringe Festival, as well as other community settings. Their motto is “It’s never too late to run away with the circus.”

6. Joy in creating arts and crafts

Diane finds joy through creating amazing arts and crafts. Following retirement, and finding herself with more time on her hands, she took up knitting and crocheting through courses at the University of the Third Age. This then led to creating handicrafts for personal use or to give to friends and other residents at the retirement village in which she lives.

Diane then moved on to designing mosaics by hand, including decorating pots, tables and plant stands. Her output was so prolific that she was able to sell and give as gifts some of the many beautiful artifacts she created.

Always up for a challenge, Diane then began to create sculptures using large Hebel blocks of concrete. This was quite a physical challenge for someone in their 80’s, as the work is dusty, dirty and involves heavy objects. However, Diane derived great enjoyment from carving away with everyday tools such as saws, hammers and chisels, then refining the sculptures with sandpaper. In more recent years she has been using resin to

make various items for use or decoration, including cheese boards and trays. Diane explains that “being creative keeps me on my toes and ensures I have no idle moments”.

7. Joy in companionship and community

Monir derives great joy from taking part in many varied activities at her local community centre in Glenwood. Now in her 70s and retired, she splits her time between looking after her grandchildren and spending time with friends at the centre.

There are many different activities available at the centre, including dancing, music, meditation, painting, Tai Chi and learning how to play music instruments. Monir particularly enjoys dance classes, which bring younger people into the centre to teach, and where Monir often chooses the background music. She says that “music is the best medicine” and talks about how visitors with dementia have connected with pieces of music they know.

The centre brings together lots of different groups and a mix of different cultures and ages. Monir’s oldest friend at the centre is aged 95. The facilities also allow her to meet friends for coffee and a chat. Monir thinks that there are many positives about getting older. She says that “you have time to learn lots of things that you don’t have to do when you work”. She also has an excellent sense of humour, quipping that “I have to age gracefully because I can’t afford plastic surgery”.



In more recent years Diane has been using resin to make various items for use or decoration, including cheese boards and trays. Diane explains that “being creative keeps me on my toes and ensures I have no idle moments”.



6. Other inspiring ideas on creating everyday joy in ageing from our members



I am 81 and keep active through walking groups, table tennis, learning the piano, and playing brain games. I volunteer with bingo at a nursing home and help organise events for Probus. Living with three generations of my family and taking quiet “me time” in my leafy surroundings brings me deep contentment. Ageing, I have discovered, is about finding balance: staying socially connected, physically active, and mentally engaged while enjoying peaceful, reflective moments.

For over ten years, I have convened an online social group for older adults. The average age of our members is now almost 90. Over the decade, we have shared both joy and sadness, supporting each other through the challenges of social isolation and loneliness. This experience has shown me the power of older people working together to maintain connection, demonstrating that community, friendship, and shared purpose can thrive at any age.

A bunch of friends and I got together in 2021 and started writing short stories, which we now publish for free to our readership on www.themovingpen.com.au. We aim to do one story each per month, with a monthly mail out (at no charge), and we have self-published three books of our work, in 2021, 2022 and 2024. Another book will follow this year.

The joy lies in the many layers of the endeavour. First, the creative process, working towards a narrative, unravelling the story as it is written. Second, in sharing drafts with members of The Moving Pen on the back of the website before we publish. Thirdly, in occasional group writing sessions we have. Fourthly, in the feedback we get from our readers, bringing joy to the community.

Joy came into my life unexpectedly on Valentine's Day 2025 when I adopted a one-year-old short-haired moggy from the RSPCA. At the time, I was feeling sad, missing friends and family who

“



A bunch of friends and I got together in 2021 and started writing short stories, which we now publish for free to our readership on www.themovingpen.com.au.

“



Annie, my kitten, brought boundless energy, companionship, and laughter.

were unwell. Annie, my kitten, brought boundless energy, companionship, and laughter. Pets, I've learned, can enrich the lives of older adults immensely, offering daily delight and reducing loneliness.

At 80, I am actively involved in my community. I chair a body corporate of 162 units, serve as a consumer representative on four health-related groups, and host medical students every six months for their studies.

These roles give me a profound sense of purpose, showing that ageing can be a time of leadership, learning, and ongoing contribution to the wider community.

I have a hobby that brings me great joy! It is based on photography - simple, from my mobile phone. I get these photos printed and use them to make cards which are used as greeting cards, for correspondence and for gifts.

I use them online to make calendars to give as Christmas gifts, to make invitations to a lunch gathering or a dinner party and make photobooks to create memories.

I have just learnt about using pressed flowers to make candle holders, bookmarks and tags for the pantry cupboard or for luggage. There is no end to the joy these things bring - they continue day after day, month after month, year after year. And you don't have to be

"arty"! I couldn't draw to save my life. All that is called for is a little creativity and imagination.

Even at 74, I continue to work full-time as a teacher. My greatest joy comes from helping others, visiting people in hospital, assisting at two local churches with residents in difficulty, and serving as a Justice of the Peace. I still find ways to be active and give back.

Volunteering brings purpose and deep satisfaction, reminding me that ageing can be a time of continued contribution and connection.

Since moving to country NSW, I have found joy in simple yet meaningful experiences: waking to birdsong, spending time with family, volunteering at my local craft group, and connecting with people in my community. These small daily moments provide a sense of belonging and highlight the richness of ordinary life.

At 85, I derive immense joy from staying connected with my children. Two of my adult children call daily to check on my well-being, while the other two, though working or travelling overseas, maintain regular contact. Their love, care, and attention are a constant source of happiness and comfort.

You don't have to be "arty"! I couldn't draw to save my life. All that is called for is a little creativity and imagination.



7. Resources for joy in NSW



University of the Third Age

There are over 60 autonomous U3As throughout NSW, who are dedicated to providing life-long learning opportunities for their members in their 'third age', "The Age of Retirement".

Retirees, using the skills and interests gained during their working years either participate and/or present for the sheer pleasure of affordable “learning for fun”, engaging in physical activities and the resultant social benefits from meeting like-minded people. You can find out where your nearest U3A is here: <https://u3anet.org.au/find-local-u3a/>

NSW Seniors Festival Grants Program

The NSW Seniors Festival Grant Program provides \$200,000 in funding for community events and activities to be held during the Seniors Festival, enabling older community members to remain active, healthy and engaged.

Applications can be for small scale; multiple and larger activities held during the festival period. Events should align with the objectives of the NSW Seniors Festival, which empower seniors to participating in their communities and stay safe, active and healthy.

Aged Care Volunteer Visitors Scheme (ACVVS)

The Aged Care Volunteer Visitors Scheme (ACVVS) in NSW is a free Australian Government-funded program matching volunteers with socially isolated older people



The NSW Seniors Festival Grant Program provides \$200,000 in funding for community events and activities to be held during the Seniors Festival, enabling older community members to remain active, healthy and engaged.

in residential care or receiving Home Care Packages. Volunteers provide friendship through regular, one-hour, fortnightly visits to enhance the quality of life, offering companionship like chatting, walking, or sharing hobbies

Volunteering NSW

Volunteering NSW hosts many opportunities to make a difference to local communities in NSW. You can find out more here: <https://www.nsw.gov.au/community-services/volunteering>



Volunteers provide friendship through regular, one-hour, fortnightly visits to enhance the quality of life, offering companionship like chatting, walking, or sharing hobbies

Playgroup NSW – Timeless Play

Timeless Play Intergenerational Playgroups bring together three generations – seniors, children and their parents. Interacting with seniors adds a new dimension to the playgroup experience for children, and can be especially enriching for children who don't have access spending time with their grandparents.

Located in both aged care environments and community settings, these playgroups are a joyful celebration between multiple generations.

Social Connections Program

Uniting AgeWell's Social Connections Program helps people over 65 (and 50+ for Aboriginal/Torres Strait Islander people) stay connected, independent, and socially active. Supported by volunteers, the program offers home visits, phone chats, group outings, and centre-based activities to combat isolation and improve wellbeing.

Trained volunteers provide companionship, including one-on-one home visits or phone calls through initiatives like the Chat-a-Ring program. There are also opportunities including local group outings, special interest groups, and social support in community or home settings.

The Stitch Community

Stitch is a community that helps anyone over 50 find the companionship they need. They aim to help improve the lives of older adults in every country around the world and provide an answer to the social isolation and loneliness that everyone ultimately faces at some point in their lives, whether they're seeking friendship, romance, or anything in between.

Uniting AgeWell's Social Connections Program helps people over 65 (and 50+ for Aboriginal/Torres Strait Islander people) stay connected, independent, and socially active.



8. Odes to Joy – what could we learn from other countries?



No two places are the same, but as part of this project we have looked at how older people in other countries embrace joy through ageing. Here are some case studies for reflection and consideration.

Japan

Ikigai is a Japanese concept that roughly translates to “a reason for being” or “that which makes life worth living.” It’s about finding a sense of purpose that gives your life meaning and motivation.

A popular way of explaining ikigai is the intersection of four elements: What you love (your passions); What you’re good at (your talents or skills); What the world needs (a sense of contribution or purpose) and What you can be paid for (sustainability or livelihood). Where all four overlap is often referred to as your ikigai.

The concept is particularly associated with long-lived communities like Okinawa. In these areas, people often continue working, contributing, and staying socially connected well into old age, partly because they have a strong sense of purpose.

In addition, Japan has a network of Silver Human Resource Centres (SHRCs), or Silver Jinzai Centers, which are of over 1,300 organizations providing part-time, temporary, and light work for residents aged 60 and older. Founded in 1974, they promote active aging, community service, and social engagement, allowing retirees to maintain health and wellbeing while assisting with community needs, such as gardening, cleaning, and caring for others.

Denmark

Bofællesskaber cohousing communities in Denmark are a popular, sustainable housing model for ageing populations, featuring private homes clustered around shared, community-

“

In long-lived communities like Okinawa people often continue working, contributing, and staying socially connected well into old age, partly because they have a strong sense of purpose.



Denmark focuses on enabling seniors to remain in their own homes longer via technology, home care, and community support, rather than immediately shifting to institutional nursing homes.



oriented common spaces to combat loneliness and promote active, independent living. These communities, which include specialized senior, or *ældrebofællesskaber*, have grown to include around 250 sites with over 6,000 residents, often prioritising social interaction and self-governance.

The primary goal of *ældrebofællesskaber* (started in the 1980s) is to reduce loneliness, boredom, and isolation, allowing older adults to live comfortably together. Some models, like the “House of Generations,” promote mixing families, students, and seniors needing care to foster mutual support and community.

Denmark also focuses on enabling seniors to remain in their own homes longer via technology, home care, and community support, rather than immediately shifting to institutional nursing homes. Residents are also active in decision-making and often govern their own communities, promoting independence.

Singapore

Kampung Admiralty is a pioneering “vertical village” in Singapore, specifically designed for seniors to age in place with easy access to healthcare, social services, and amenities. Opened in 2018, the development features 104 specialized, barrier-free studio apartments for seniors, alongside a medical center, active ageing hub, childcare centre, and a rooftop community farm to promote intergenerational bonding and active living.

An Admiralty Medical Centre on-site provides specialist outpatient care, rehabilitation, and day surgery, reducing the need for hospital visits. There is also an Active Ageing Hub, offering daily activities, social events, and care services and a childcare centre located near the active ageing hub fosters interaction between seniors and children, promoting a vibrant community atmosphere.

Residents have direct access to a hawker centre, grocery store, and a community plaza on the ground level, often referred to as a “community living room”. In addition, “buddy benches” in shared areas and community gardening opportunities encourage seniors to socialize and stay active⁷.

Netherlands

Humanitas Deventer in the Netherlands addresses elderly loneliness and ageing challenges through an innovative intergenerational program. Students live rent-free in a nursing home, providing 30 hours of monthly companionship (activities, tech support) to elderly residents, improving mental health and fostering community connections.

Six students from nearby institutions like live alongside approximately 160 senior citizens. Students pay no rent in exchange for 30 hours per month of social interaction such as shared meals, playing games or just chatting. The program aims to combat the health risks associated with senior isolation and loneliness. It brings joy to residents and provides affordable housing for students.



Humanitas Deventer in the Netherlands addresses elderly loneliness and ageing challenges through an innovative intergenerational program.

Students live rent-free in a nursing home, providing 30 hours of monthly companionship (activities, tech support) to elderly residents, improving mental health and fostering community connections.

There is strong community support and regular social interaction, entwined with the spirit of “Plan de vida” (reason to live), which keeps older residents motivated and engaged.



Costa Rica

Nicoya in Costa Rica is one of the world’s five “Blue Zones” where residents often live longer than average.

There are just five Blue Zones on the entire planet, and research suggests that they are caused by a combination of factors, which range from diet and weather to religion. Centenarians here thrive due to a strong sense of purpose, daily natural movement, tight-knit community, and a healthy diet.

Older people engage in regular physical activity, such as farming or walking, well into old age. There is strong community support and regular social interaction, entwined with the spirit of “Plan de vida” (reason to live), which keeps older residents motivated and engaged.

1. <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC3332527/>
2. <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/older-people/older-australians/contents/health/health-status-and-functioning>
3. https://www.health.nsw.gov.au/lumos/Pages/healthcare-usage-for-older-people.aspx?utm_source=chatgpt.com
4. https://www.health.nsw.gov.au/surveys/methods-results/Pages/2024-key-findings.aspx?utm_source=chatgpt.com
5. https://www.cotansw.com.au/media_releases/report-reveals-an-epidemic-of-loneliness-amongst-older-people-in-nsw/?utm_source=chatgpt.com
6. <https://www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/lcdocs/inquiries/3066/>

- Report%20No.%2065%20-%20Standing%20Committee%20on%20Social%20Issues%20-%20The%20prevalence%20of%20causes%20and%20impacts%20of%20loneliness%20in%20New%20South%20Wales.pdf?_cldee=KWQ3OLjFI5p2hOgnJK357p4Kk8TB5mmc33pAU_GrKBZab1TdTN-EankfsPQnu3YL8RIPAqtm4PQfReTuJLjaTQ&esi d=6ff69412-5372-f011-b4cd-000d3acbacc1&recipientid=contact-04fbd4d7ba9ec1198400022481854cd-e-a9623c9354741389f174f8911c65408&utm_source=chatgpt.com
- 7 <https://www.forbes.com/sites/yjeanmundelsalle/2025/03/20/find-out-how-this-development-redefines-senior-urban-living/>

“

rehearsals begin at forty
i ripen with age
i do not come with an expiration date
and now
for the main event
curtains up at fifty
let's begin the show

– Rupri Kaur

We would love to hear from older people in NSW about what brings you joy in life.

You can join the Council on the Ageing NSW for free at <https://www.cotansw.com.au/>.

“Golden Eras
**THE JOY OF
AGEING**
In New South Wales



A report by
the Council on the Ageing NSW

COUNCIL ON
THE AGEING
NEW SOUTH WALES