



Let's eliminate ageism



PEOPLE CAN FIND MEANING AND VALUE IN LIFE, NO MATTER WHAT THEIR AGE

Ageism may be the last acceptable form of discrimination, says HBH Senior Living CEO Bonnie Robinson.

"These days, most people know they should not discriminate or be prejudiced, but it seems we are still comfortable with ageism – and most of us are guilty of it, without realising it. In Western cultures we tend to value youth, but in doing so, we often discriminate against older people," she says.

How often, for example, have you heard or used the compliment, "You don't look your age," or "You're young for your age"?

"These phrases are well-meant and we certainly don't want people to stop complimenting older people, but within those compliments lies an attitude that getting old or looking old isn't good," says Bonnie.

We might even criticise ourselves for "looking old", or "having a senior moment", when what we really mean is that we look tired or have forgotten something. Such comments might seem trivial but they create the impression that being old is a negative thing.

Bonnie points out that how well we age is largely a matter of genetics – we can't do much about growing old, so why be

criticised for it? An ageing population does bring challenges, such as increased medical care, but this doesn't have to be negative.

"We need to start thinking about ageing as positive. Having a large population of people who live to over 80 is a sign that we're an affluent Western country with good healthcare!" she says.

"Often ageism stems from incorrect assumptions about growing older. For example it is assumed that older workers take a lot of sick leave, but studies show that they're less likely to take days off. It's also assumed that older people are not up with the play with technology or can't learn – yet people over the age of 65 have some of the fastest take-up rates of new technology and are as capable of learning as anyone," she says.

Another reason for ageism is that many of us dislike facing our own mortality. "We don't like to talk about it, therefore we don't like old age. These attitudes to mortality are

understandable, but not talking about it or hiding it away doesn't help either."

Bonnie believes that the Eden Alternative approach helps overcome ageism, because it promotes the idea that people can continue to find meaning and value in life, no matter what their age.

"It's about embracing age – not running away from it. Just because you're older doesn't mean you don't deserve joy and growth. You don't need to lose these things; you simply need to create opportunities for them in another way.

"Inevitably, the longer we live, there will be some ill health and frailty, and we will need more assistance, but that doesn't mean our lives are not valuable," she says.

"The Eden approach encourages the view that there are still things that you're here to accomplish and achieve. It puts value on your life, no matter your age or health – and that's a great way to think about living and dying."

Top marks for care

In the last couple of months, HBH Senior Living has received two endorsements that acknowledge the quality of care we deliver.

In mid-June, we were awarded the final two Eden Alternative principles. Once confirmed by the Eden in Oz & NZ board we will be a fully certified Eden home. The Eden auditors were extremely impressed with the way HBH has adopted and implemented the Eden philosophy.

A Ministry of Health audit in March also gave HBH top marks in quality of care. We have been certified for another four years and received recognition in seven areas of work that go well beyond the expected standards.

CEO Bonnie Robinson said residents, staff and volunteers had all contributed to these wonderful results.

"HBH has always been a very caring place and it's great to be recognised for going 'above and beyond' in our focus on optimising quality of life for each resident," she said.



STAFF ENJOYING A CELEBRATORY BBQ

Passing on the volunteering bug

John McKillop, our mini-van driver, is just one of our wonderful volunteers at HBH Senior Living. He helps out for about 10 hours a week, and enjoys it so much he's passed on the volunteering 'bug' to several friends.

John started volunteering with Riding for the Disabled after retiring as an accountant.



JOHN MCKILLOP, ONE OF THE WONDERFUL VOLUNTEERS WHO CONTRIBUTE SO MUCH TO HBH

He was a horse leader there for eight years until he broke his heel and couldn't continue walking the horses.

Next, he volunteered as a volunteer DJ twice a week at Howick Village Radio (now East FM) where he introduced a popular 5pm to 6pm drive time session, playing favourite classics.

Around the same time John also became involved in Crime Watch, which he continues with today. He assists the police by going on local patrol, keeping an eye on empty properties and looking for stolen cars.

John started volunteering at HBH Senior Living two years ago. He really enjoys taking residents on weekly outings all over the city and beyond.

"It's lovely to see people getting enjoyment from what you do. It's very refreshing and I can highly recommend it. I've passed on the bug to a few of my friends, who are now as busy as I am!"

"Volunteers are unpaid, not because they are worthless, but because they are priceless." – Anonymous

Cuddles with Coco

Sandy moved into the rest home at HBH Senior Living six months ago. One of the main attractions was that she could bring her dog with her.

"I'd had Piechi, a Chihuahua, for 13 years so it was unthinkable to leave her – she was like family to me."

Piechi had to undergo a six-week probation period, which she sailed through with flying colours, and Sandy and Piechi were both settling in well to their new life at HBH. Then, a month ago, Piechi fell ill, and Sandy made the heart-breaking decision to have her put down.

Just as Sandy was beginning to think she'd never be able to replace Piechi, Juliette Bell, the Eden Alternative coach at HBH suggested Sandy trial one of her three Chihuahuas, Coco. They got on famously so Juliette and Sandy "sealed the deal" and Coco now has the best of both worlds – two adoring mothers at HBH!



SANDY AND HER NEW COMPANION, COCO

"Coco keeps me busy and we enjoy the company of other residents here. Everyone loves to have a cuddle with Coco!" says Sandy.

Old and Yet New

Here I am; old and yet new.

Facing new fears

with renewed strength and confidence

Was this me?

No.

It is God who gives me strength to face the new reality of this day.

Here I am; old and yet new.

Learning to pray and talk with God.

Here I am; old and yet new.

Learning to see God in the everyday encounter.

Here I am; old and yet new.

God can reach me and teach me in so many different ways;

if I have the eyes to see God and the ears to hear God.

Hear I am; old and yet new.

Facing the fear of letting go and letting you

be the one who guides my life and soul.

Resident Rebels

Principle 8 of the Eden Alternative is about bringing decision-making closer to the residents. Last year, residents from each of the five communities in the HBH rest home joined together to become the Resident Rebels, a name they chose themselves.



THE RESIDENT REBELS REPRESENT ALL FIVE COMMUNITIES

The group is like a residents' committee, says Juliette Bell, the Eden Alternative coach at HBH. They meet every six weeks and discuss new initiatives, activities, and ideas for the home.

"We start with morning tea and then move into the meeting. It's very empowering for them to have the opportunity to contribute in this way and the group has come up with some wonderful ideas," says Juliette.