

Guy Robertson

Many aspects of life can be viewed as taking place along a spectrum. Very few things are black or white – there are shades in between. At Working with Older People we believe that this spectrum applies to the information that helps to inform more effective approaches to improving the quality of life of older people. At the one end of the scale are peer reviewed randomised control trials (RCTs) and at the other end are the points of view drawn from extensive experience and immersion in the subject area. Both are valid and both have a place in this journal. In this edition we are focussing on the viewpoints end of the spectrum.

Two papers argue for the importance of the arts in promoting the wellbeing of older people. Paul Cann draws on a growing research base to highlight the potential for a range of art forms to promote active ageing and greater wellbeing and goes on to argue that creative arts should become an integral and more prominent part of ageing policy. Murray and Seymour echo this point of view by reporting on a research study showing how enthused a group of older people were in being able to participate in poetry sessions.

Moving on to the housing agenda, Watts highlights the need for a longer term view of how to address the housing needs of older people, going as far as to suggest that we need to go beyond the obsession with “building houses” and return instead to the nurturing the development of intergenerational communities. Morrison focusses down on one aspect of housing need for older people and makes a strong case for the viability of the chalet bungalow as a desirable and affordable option which could attract older people to downsize from a family size house.

There is little in public policy which addresses the inner life of ageing. Hearn however provides a fascinating account of doing memory work with older men with a view to examining the making and un-making of older men’s masculinities through age, gender and other intersections. The process is offered as a potential for others to work with older people, specifically older men. Robertson goes on to look at a significant body of research, largely unknown in the mainstream ageing field, which highlights the detrimental impact that internalised negative ageing stereotypes have on older people’s health and wellbeing. There are significant implications from this research on what interventions should be developed to improve the health and wellbeing of older people.

Eley draws on her extensive experience at the highest levels of policy making around the dementia agenda to suggest practical ways to properly involve people with dementia and carers in policy making. Finally, Weil takes a bold stand to seek to reframe the parameters of the concept of “ageing in place” which has become such a prevalent policy position in relation to older people.

Not an RCT in sight, but nevertheless this edition offers some firmly grounded, intelligent, evidence-based and challenging viewpoints on some of the steps that could be taken to improve the quality of life for older people.