

Two Pillars: Security and Participation June 5, 2024

(Editor's Note: The following excerpt is taken from notes provided by Peggy Edwards for her presentation on the *Healthy Aging Panel – Grannyfest*)

Financial security

1. Financial security is a clear determinant of well-being as we get older. Too many older women I know have expressed concerns that can lead to anxiety and worse.
 - Do I have the resources I need to fund my retirement years?
 - If my partner dies, can I survive on OAS and my limited CPP?
 - What do I do about housing? Should I move or should I stay?
2. In terms of financial security, older women who live alone are at highest risk for poverty and homelessness. It is a shocking and disturbing statistic that the fastest growing group using shelters in Ottawa is older women who have been renocted or cannot afford rent increases.
3. What to do? Make a plan for your financial future. Consult with a financial advisor if you can or attend a session about financial planning put on by community and seniors' organizations.

Lobby for innovative affordable living accommodations such as home sharing or intergenerational living.

And look out for each other, especially when friends encounter "gray" separation and divorce, or the death of a partner.

Physical Security

1. Physical security also relates to the structure of our buildings and neighbourhoods. One of the best programs I have been involved in is the Council on Aging *Snow Moles*. We "moles" report to the City on icy and dangerous sidewalk conditions in winter. Our work has resulted in less falls among older persons and maintenance improvements that benefit all ages on our sidewalks, walkways and streets.

One useful way to look at this area is to think about enablement instead of disablement. Disabling processes increase the needs of older people and lead to isolation and dependence. Enabling “age-friendly” environments help restore function and expand the participation of older people in all aspects of society.

It may be as simple as holding meetings in an accessible facility like this one, or going virtual in winter months when members are cautious about driving. Or making provisions for members with hearing decline.

Or simply talking honestly. Recently a friend gave me a set of coasters that says: “*This getting old shit is growing old*”. That led to a hilarious but authentic conversation about what we share as we get older and how society views older women.

When she said “I mostly feel invisible”—raise your hand if you have felt this way—I told her there is actually a documented scientific theory called “older women invisibility”.

Now raise your hand if you want to remain “visible” to your family and society in general. YES. I say Go woman go!

The last important pillar determining well-being in older age is

PARTICIPATION.

This speaks to the ability and right to participate in familial, social and civic matters as long as you want to do so. For a lot of older women this plays out as volunteering—both in formal ways like in the Grandmothers Campaign and in informal ways such as caregiving for family members, friends and colleagues.

At this point, I would like to insert a strongly held personal view. And that is the importance of intergenerational connections and solidarity.

I remember with joy participating last year with my grandson in a climate change march organized and led by young people. I was so proud to be part of it and proud of him. Despite the fact this was the same kid who having only seen his mother’s thong underwear said to me after watching

me get into my bathing suit “But Grandma why are your underpants so big?”

The research is clear--continuing to participate as we grow older leads to enhanced well-being. Part of this is that volunteering in the Grandmothers Campaign and other social justice causes provides purpose and meaning in life. The other is the restorative value of social connections. For most people, networks tend to shrink after retirement. For me, the Grandmothers movement has expanded my network—of cherished colleagues and friends.

There are three African concepts that speak the truth about this:

One is the concept of Ubuntu. *‘I am what I am because of who we all are’.*

The second is the old African proverb: *If you want to go fast, go alone, if you want to go far, go together”*

The third is the theme of this GrannyFest Gathering. *Harambee*, the Kenyan word that means "all pull together"

I invite all of us to continue to participate as we can and to celebrate this participation on the road to active, healthy aging.