

Following a relatively benign retirement process from his full-time paid career in the public sector, Brian has been able to devote more time to his work in the voluntary and community sector - a sector in which he has been heavily involved for many decades. His long experience of working in a voluntary

capacity, a commitment sustained throughout most of his life, has led him, post-retirement, to become even more engaged and he now finds himself busier than ever. Brian says that his interest in the Kestrel project arose from a desire to use his experience to challenge current perceptions of older people in the workplace, to engender the valuing of their knowledge, skills and experience, to maximise their opportunities for employment, and to enable them to positively manage change and transition - through understanding and supporting their career development and lifelong learning opportunities.

To Brian, "It's all about giving people who, for example, are being retired, or who have been retired early, an equal opportunity to be involved in the change to their environment, giving them self-esteem, encouraging them in their development of a new lifestyle and engagement in lifelong learning. It's also about providing stepping stone skills to enable them to, perhaps, become self-employed, perform community voluntary work - or equip them for new employment opportunities."

Brian, himself, by nature of the sheer range and multiplicity of the work that he has been, and is currently, engaged in - bringing the huge asset of years of accumulated knowledge and skills to the organisations that he is involved with - is an object lesson to other people in the Kestrel project's target age range who, for example, may be struggling to maintain, or re-acquire, their feelings of self-worth and establish a new life-role (in a new career, volunteering, or both) after having been made redundant, prematurely retired or who have undergone an extended period of unemployment.

Ken Orr



"Well", says Ken, "I suppose the phrase that describes my attitude to being, considerably, over 50 is *It ain't over 'til the fat lady sings*. I'm not Dylan Thomas's greatest fan, but I wholeheartedly agree with him when he wrote the line, 'Do Not Go Gentle into That Good Night'. I intend to follow that advice, to the letter."

Ken continued, "I think also of Buddy Holly/Rolling Stones singing 'Not Fade Away' (slightly out of context) and much of society's attitude to us 'ancient ones' - because, it seems to me, that's exactly what we're expected to do - 'fade away'. I won't be doing that."

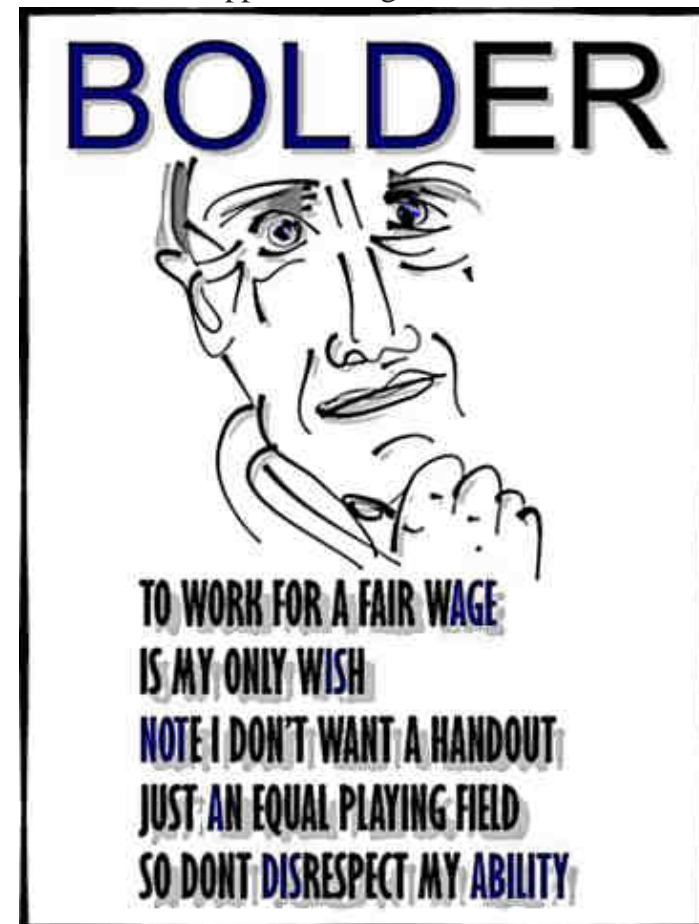
"The young fogies seem to think", he went on, "that when you suddenly change from being a vital-cog-in-the-wheel-49-year-old to a doddering 50 year old - a miraculous transformation that happens, apparently, on that, supposedly dreaded, birthday - you should really just crawl off to some darkened corner, gumming your thumb (no teeth, you see) and don't be an embarrassment. I didn't do that."

"So", continued Ken, "I haven't been living up to expectations - I guess I'm lucky I'm not living in the world of *Logan's Run*, with the Sandman on my trail. "Let's face it, our society has yet to get to grips with its negative attitude toward those of us who are mature and who want to continue to work, to contribute, to use our knowledge and skills, to offer access to our bounteous stores of experience and wisdom.

"Society has yet to fully grasp the enormous cost benefit to Treasury coffers realisable through enabling mature people to remain economically productive and, hence, happier - therefore, healthier for much longer (a 'no-brainer', really).

"Employers, in all sectors, if only in the spirit of enlightened self-interest, should examine and radicalise their corporate cultures concerning their treatment of the matured so that they are able to benefit from their undervalued qualities.

"I think we all realise that, presently, we're living through an economic ice-age and that at either end of the age spectrum - the young and inexperienced/the matured and very experienced, burdened by a number - employment prospects are forbiddingly bleak. Our project is, emphatically, not 'anti-young' (we were all young once) - it is, however, absolutely 'pro-matured'. Society must move away from its 'youth-centric' focus and adopt a more balanced approach to age."



Contact Details:

Editorial: ken.orr@gemsni.org.uk

General Information:

Jackie McGeown, GEMS NI, Tel: 028 9033 2313;

email: jacqueline.mcgeown@gemsni.org.uk



The Kestrel Has Landed!

Welcome to the first edition of the 'Kestrel Flyer' - the newsletter of the seminal Kestrel Project, determined to improve the prospects, and enhance the life opportunities, of individuals aged 50 plus. The Kestrel Flyer will be published quarterly, with the aim of keeping our readership informed of our project's progress and developments.

The Kestrel Project, funded by The Atlantic Philanthropies, is actively engaged in challenging the pernicious practice of 'ageism' that pervades our society and culture, the malignant, wasteful stupidity of relegating people, who have reached the chronological summit of 50 years, and beyond, to a twilight netherworld where they are expected to fade quietly away - and the short-sighted economic wastefulness of throwing away the immeasurable resource of many years of accumulated wisdom, know-how and honed skills.

What's The Kestrel Project about?

The Kestrel Project was inspired by, and is delivered under the auspices of, GEMS NI and aims to realise a lasting change in the lives of disadvantaged and vulnerable adults - through the Kestrel "Age Positive" threefold objective:

- ◆ Helping older people who experience labour market disadvantage to increase their employability, engage in learning and development opportunities and augment their employment and volunteering opportunities;
- ◆ Working with employers to improve how older people in the workplace are valued, how their career development needs and career-progression opportunities are met and how change is managed;
- ◆ Exploring how personal succession-planning can support, encourage and enable older people, who are considering retirement from paid employment, to challenge their own perceptions on ageing and create opportunities for lifelong learning and improved health and wellbeing.

Age is a question of mind over matter. If you don't mind it doesn't matter.

Our ageing population and ageing workforce present a myriad of challenges for us all. Culturally, we have some way to go in order to meet those challenges. When older age crops up in debate the images which spring to mind are, too often, based on myth and stereotype.

Too many of us, unthinkingly, associate increasing age with incapacity, inactivity and decline - when there is ample evidence to the contrary. Take, for example, the case of the Horndal steel mill, in Sweden, where productivity rose by 15 per cent as the workforce aged (cit. *New Scientist*, 10th April 2010) - showing the falsity of the presumption that advancing years automatically leads to a decline in productivity.

Many people have yet to realise that we are now living at



Kestrel Clients involved in GOALS ("Gaining Opportunities and Living Skills") training.

a time which is witnessing the advent of the 'longevity revolution' - people are, in general, living longer, not just in these islands, but throughout the world. For instance, since Lord Turner's 2005 Pensions Commission, the latest life-expectancy projections indicate that a 65-year-old woman in 2030 can expect to live until she is almost 91 (the earlier projection used by the commission envisaged this happening in 2050). "A baby girl born in 2000 in Japan, Western Europe, North America, Australia, or New Zealand has a 50-50 chance of seeing the 22nd Century." (Dr. James Vaupel, Max Planck Institute for Demographic Research).

Older people are also 'living actively' for longer. The Kestrel Project is committed to promoting a radical change in attitude to older people, through:

- ◆ challenging perceptions of matured people in the workplace;
- ◆ valuing matured people's knowledge, skills and experience and putting it all to good use;

KESTREL - The Acronym:

Knowledge, Experience, Skills, Training, Respect, Empowerment, Lifelong learning

KESTREL - The Bird:

The Kestrel, a *resourceful* bird of prey, is often cited in literature as a symbol of the *power, vitality* and *beauty* of nature.

- ◆ maximising matured people's opportunities for employment, paid and unpaid;
- ◆ enabling matured people to positively manage change and transition by understanding, and supporting, their career development and lifelong learning opportunities.

Recent CIPD research concluded that 'there are very few organisations who have examined their current total rewards approach in light of an ageing workforce'.

Kestrel is working with organisations who have examined their rewards approach with the aim of gathering, sharing, disseminating and further developing good practices.

Kestrel believes that the economic and social returns from its work will have tangible value for employers, communities and individuals alike.

What's Been Achieved So Far?

A key activity designed, to disseminate knowledge and learning from the Kestrel Project, has been the production of the DVD 'Back to Your Future - Retirement Choices for Change and Beyond' - developed by our Age Positive Champions, with input from older people and people in the public eye. The aim is to challenge the myths and stereotypes about older people, generally, and, specifically, in relation to older workers. **The DVD launch, on 17th September 2010 at the Long Gallery, Stormont, is sponsored by The First Minister, Peter Robinson MLA.**

Kestrel Age Positive Mentoring Service

Unemployed older people, aged between 50 - 81yrs, have been supported by the Kestrel Age Positive Mentoring Service since January 2010. All Kestrel clients have received one to one mentoring support - which improves their confidence and personal action-planning - further supported by access to learning and development opportunities. Whilst every client is supported in line with their individual needs, preferences and aspirations, there is a common thread emerging of a feeling of being "too old" to get a job, resulting in reduced self-confidence and, in many cases, isolation, loneliness and depression. Many Kestrel clients report an improvement in their general wellbeing as a result of being involved in the project and its activities. Examples of learning and development opportunities undertaken by Kestrel clients to date include:

SIA, CSR and HARTE Training

Clients completed Security Industry Authority training, achieving the SIA Licence; CSR licences were gained through Construction Safety register training; delivery of the HARTE Programme (skills for Hospitality/Retail) resulted in the achievement of vocationally-relevant qualifications.

GOALS

Clients undertook 'Gaining Opportunities and Living Skills' (GOALS) training. This includes: Positive self talk, acknowledge and affirm your strengths, clarify your vision, Plan your future, visualise and affirm your success. Kestrel client comments include, "Very effective and worthwhile training given by an excellent trainer". "It was a brilliant course to make you think about your life". "Great course... you come away empowered". "It made me look at myself and showed me ways of changing".



Sylvia Frew (top) and Beryl Ritchie (above) receiving their Belfast Citizenship Education Programme awards from Councillor Maire Hendron, Chair of the Good Relations Partnership, Belfast City Council, Thursday 24th June 2010.

Belfast Citizenship Education Programme

Kestrel clients completed the Belfast Citizenship Education Programme during which they explored politics, democratic choice, civic responsibility, city governance and the impact of sectarianism and racism. Some comments: "It got me thinking that we need to work harder at seeing the person not the stereotype". "You are never too old to find out about your prejudices and do something about them".

IT Skills Workshop

Clients are participating in basic IT Skills Workshops - designed to introduce those who have never turned on a computer to things like sending emails. These workshops have been a great success, with great camaraderie among learners, and have reduced the isolation and loneliness experienced by many older people. More IT Skills Workshops are in the process of being 'rolled out'.

VIS-AGE, Grundtvig Senior Volunteering Project

A successful application has been made, under the European Commission's Grundtvig Programme, to fund the VIS-AGE project. Through a volunteering placement with GEMS NI in Belfast, Northern Ireland and Association Adice in Roubaix, France (north-east of Lille), the project will afford older people opportunities to share their skills, knowledge and experience, and, on an informal basis, enhance their lifelong learning. A pre-departure training programme will be undertaken by VIS-AGE senior volunteers in preparation for the host country and organisation, together with an orientation and

induction programme. A personal mentor will provide support for each VIS-AGE senior volunteer, throughout the placement, in both workplace and social and cultural activities.

VIS-AGE senior volunteers will experience and contribute to a range of support and mentoring programmes, and services, provided by each organisation. These programmes promote the social inclusion and personal development, allied to training and employment access, of marginalised groups - particularly adults (including young adults) from newly-arrived, culturally and linguistically diverse communities. Additionally, the programmes will augment these groups' access to opportunities for full engagement as European Citizens.

A specific key task for VIS-AGE volunteers, during placement, will be the development of terms of reference for a volunteer mentor programme, in GEMS NI and Association Adice, directed at the recruitment and training of local community people to enable them to become volunteer mentors in support of the groups, referred to above, and to build personal capacities for learning and work.

The VIS-AGE Senior Volunteering project will enhance the non-profit activities of the organisations - contributing to the development of a longer-term collaborative partnership between GEMS NI and Association Adice, promoting the sharing of best practice and innovative approaches to working with marginalised groups, and increasing volunteer-involvement in the respective organisations.

Kestrel Age Positive Champions

The Kestrel project has looked at its own internal environment and challenged itself to include the experience, skills and knowledge brought by older people to project management and delivery, through the involvement of Age Positive Champions; four very capable, skilled and challenging individuals who have increased the knowledge capital of the organisation and the project and have been instrumental in helping to shape the overall project and support each specific area of work.

Paul Donaldson

Paul believes age is a question of mind over matter - if you don't mind age doesn't matter.

He says he went through what he calls 'normal life cycle conditioning' which told him that he should get educated young, try and stay in work through to middle age and retire as early as possible. That, he was told, is how life works.

The problem for Paul was that, as he got older, the traditional life cycle just didn't feel right. He says he didn't want to stop learning and didn't feel like retiring. He felt like staying active and engaged. Life felt better that way. At the same time, the (banking) world he was familiar with was telling him that over 50 was 'over the hill' and he should just drift off into the sunset.

Luckily, he met some people who made him challenge his conditioning and who offered opportunities to stay active and engaged. He has since discovered, and developed an interest in, social inclusion in employment. He has found that he is able to take his banking

experience and use it in the not for profit (rather than plc) world; he has taken his management experience and used it to help individuals and organisations create better and more effective working environments.

Paul does both paid and voluntary work, earning a living as well as a social return - and, above all, he says he feels fitter, stronger and more positive than when he was 30.

Paul believes that we all need to challenge our conditioning; demographics are changing and the economic, and social, dimensions of our world are changing.

He believes that, as individuals, we need to think hard about what really makes us tick as well as what others expect of us. As policy makers and practitioners, we have to get serious about age and find more new and innovative ways to turn on the tap of knowledge, experience and skill resting in the (50+ years young) people around us.

Michele Marken



"So - how do you put your day in - now that you're retired?"

In Michele's words, "Spoken gently, even sympathetically, the words carry a history of belief in the apparent rightness of 'end-stops' at various stages of our lives, and each time spur me on to defy the rules, attempt to break down the barriers and prove that

life is for living to the full, at all stages along our lifelines.

"As a teacher, and Principal for almost 16 of my 38 years in education, I know that each of us often has more to discover about our capabilities than we realise.

"Since I moved on from my first career in the classroom (while still making contributions to local radio/tv on education matters), I have had some of the best and most rewarding experiences working as an Age-Positive Champion for the over-50s, with the Kestrel project.

"I have been able to use skills in media/PR and negotiating (which I took for granted) to contribute to the development of our promotional DVD "Choices for Change", launched at Stormont on the 17th September 2010.

"I look forward to challenging the culture which says older workers are less valuable - leading to complacency about the long-term unemployed over-50s in our community and ignoring their ability to contribute to society.

"Kestrel offers a coherent response, with both strategic vision and practical help on offer in all aspects of getting back to work (whether paid or voluntary), for those who might otherwise think that life is passing them by in favour of younger workers.

We will, indeed, 'champion' the right of our older colleagues to be 'written in' to an employees' charter by employers. We will champion the wisdom and experience of the over-50s age group as valuable employment attributes which balance and strengthen any workforce.

"We want a positive status for their prospects, no matter how long the period of unemployment, and will seek to diminish any obstacles by means of re-training and re-skilling of clients - as well as mentoring.

"This project is really exciting and truly worthwhile. I am glad to have the chance to be involved, and to be able to reply to the well-meaning question: 'How do I put my days in?' by answering, 'With no difficulty and more fun than ever!'"