



## **VHS Annual Symposium: Health, Wellbeing and your Brain**

### **A response from the children's sector**

Prof Deary's work prompts so many thoughts that my most challenging task was to try and gather my response under three themes.

- 1. The changing world for young people**
- 2. The benefits of an ageing population**

1. The legacy inherited by our young people is at many levels shaming. A range of measures: climate change; inequalities and the economy suggest we need to act now to address this dismal inheritance.

Taking the impact of the recession on our young people in the UK, Britain's young workers have suffered above average falls in pay, have found it harder to find a job, and in many cases have been forced to stay living with their parents, according to a leading thinktank that conducted research into official figures from 2008.

July 2014: The [Institute for Fiscal Studies](#) (IFS) found that average incomes for people in their 20s fell by 13% between 2007/08 and 2012/13, compared with an average fall for all workers of 10%, and only 7% for 31- to 59-year-olds.

Finding a job proved to be a difficult task for those in their 20s, with the employment rate for 22- to 30-year-olds fell by four percentage points during the five years to April 2013, while the rate for the over-30s remained at pre-crisis levels.

"Young adults have borne the brunt of the [recession](#)," said Jonathan Cribb, a research economist at the IFS, and an author of the report.

"Pay, employment and incomes have all been hit hardest for those in their 20s. A crucial question is whether this difficult start will do lasting damage to their employment and earnings prospects".

### **2. The Benefits of an Ageing Population.**

#### **1. Introduction**

People in Scotland, as in most European countries, are living longer. Audit Scotland

predict that by 2035, a quarter of Scotland's population will be aged 65 or over, up from 17 per cent in 2010<sup>1</sup>.

People are living longer with more complex care needs and this has implications for organisations that provide services for older people. While a high proportion of older people are in good health and do not need access to intensive or long-stay health and care services, older people are more likely than younger people to be admitted to hospital in an emergency and to have multiple and more complex health problems.

This has spending implications. The Scottish Government predicts that spending on health and social care for older people will need to rise from approximately £4.5 billion in 2011/12, to nearly £8 billion by 2031<sup>2</sup>.

However, there is a growing body of evidence to suggest that far from being a drain on society, older people in fact make a net fiscal and social contribution, which both directly and indirectly benefit children and young people to a significant degree.

## 2. Paying their way

The aim of any society should be to ensure that each new generation of its citizens live longer, healthier and more included lives than the last. This is more than good social policy; this should be a central aim of any civilized society. However, it is also the case that there are a number of fiscal and societal benefits conferred when we, as a populace, live longer.

These may be summarized as follows:

- Financial contribution
- Community engagement
- Family support
- A link to the past

## 3. Financial Contribution

Economic analysts SQW have calculated the net contribution of older people on behalf of the Women's Royal Voluntary Service (now RVS) in 2011. Their report demonstrated that in 2010, over 65s made a net contribution of £40 billion to the UK economy through, amongst other contributions, taxes, spending power, provision of social care and the value of their volunteering.

In spite of future costs around providing pensions, welfare and health services to a larger and longer living population of older people in the UK, over 65s' net economic contribution will actually grow to £77 billion by 2030<sup>3</sup>.

This means that the total estimated benefit of older people in the UK will be £291.1bn, including almost £52bn worth of social care (ie. Contribution of social care, not social care received) and £15bn through volunteering, compared to projected welfare costs of £216.2bn

These figures may even be considered conservative, with independent experts including

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<sup>1</sup> [http://www.audit-scotland.gov.uk/docs/central/2014/nr\\_140206\\_reshaping\\_care.rtf](http://www.audit-scotland.gov.uk/docs/central/2014/nr_140206_reshaping_care.rtf)

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/newsandmediacentre/78399.aspx>

<sup>3</sup> [http://www.royalvoluntaryservice.org.uk/Uploads/Documents/gold\\_age\\_report\\_2011.pdf](http://www.royalvoluntaryservice.org.uk/Uploads/Documents/gold_age_report_2011.pdf)

Robert McNabb, professor of economics at Cardiff Business School stating that the value of their caring and volunteering may have been under-rated in the study.

#### 4. Community Engagement – Social Glue

In addition to these financial contributions, older people\_ make other contributions to their communities and neighbourhoods by being active members of the places where they live, which cannot readily be quantified in cash terms – what is sometimes referred to as ‘social glue’.

Recent research has shown that older people already have a greater propensity to volunteer, to be involved with community-based organisations. Older people make net contributions in the following fields.

**Pillars of the Community** – Older people have higher than average levels of engagement when it comes to community councils, local clubs, societies and faith groups.

**Leadership** – Older people have higher than average levels memberships and senior memberships in a number of important institutions, such as art galleries, museums, libraries and national trusts sites.

**Community Safety** – Older people engage positively in Neighbourhood Watch schemes and play an important role in keeping our streets and communities safe for children and young people

**Skills and Experience** – The level of knowledge and expertise offered to children and young people by the elderly cannot be underestimated. Formal and informal lessons and training conducted by older people confer real benefits to the young.

Without the direct involvement and assistance of older people, many services, community projects and institutions would simply not be able to continue. This would have a direct negative effect on children and young people, therefore Scotland’s aging population can be considered positive in these respects.

This community benefit that older people offer the young was noted in a Lord’s debate on older people in 2012.

Lord Wei (Conservative), Big Society government adviser and adviser for the Community Network Foundation, considered the contribution of older people and stated that,

‘Their energy and ideas, their leadership and resources can be a great benefit to this country. Let us find ways from within business, the voluntary sector and government local and central, to unleash on their terms their skills, energy and potential, to support them where it is needed, and to see later life not primarily as a source of decline and expense but increasingly as a rich source of wisdom and an asset - one which can benefit us all.’<sup>4</sup>

Antonia Cox, author of a ResPublica report on older people and the Big Society, stated that “as a group, [older people] do more than their fair share of volunteering, charitable giving, voting and other forms of civil engagement, from petitioning to becoming councillors. In doing this, there is evidence from social science and gerontology that they

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<sup>4</sup> <http://www.parliament.uk/briefing-papers/LLN-2012-043.pdf>

are not just helping others but also themselves<sup>5</sup>”.

## 5. Family Support

Perhaps the most significant benefit to Scotland’s aging population can be found in the contribution this group makes towards caring and supporting others.

Reports in recent years have highlighted that, in spite of the expansion of formal childcare, “parents have continued to use informal childcare arrangements provided by relatives and friends. In terms of regularity and hours provided, studies of these arrangements have shown that grandparents were undertaking most of this childcare”<sup>6</sup>.

Many older people provide care and support to others; there are an estimated 657,300 unpaid carers in Scotland, of whom 20 per cent are estimated to be aged 65 or over<sup>7</sup>.

In a UK context, the British Social Attitudes Survey found that in 2009 almost two thirds (63 percent) of grandparents, approximately 7 million, with grandchildren under 16 said they looked after their grandchildren<sup>8</sup>. The Childhood Wellbeing Research Centre corroborated these findings, and found that on average grandparents “provided 10 hours per week of childcare”<sup>9</sup>.

Despite the Scottish Government increasing the provision of free childcare, childcare in Scotland is among the highest in Europe, with young, working class and single parent families the worst affected.

The net gain to household income from having a grandparent (or increasingly, great grand parent) that can be relied on are huge.

The Daycare Trust found that “56 percent of parents who use informal childcare use it in the working day to enable them to work”<sup>10</sup>.

In terms of the economic value of this childcare, Age Concern has suggested grandparental childcare was worth £3.9 billion per year<sup>11</sup>. A more recent estimate by RIAS, an over 50s insurance provider, said that UK grandparents save families £1,888 each year in childcare costs or an average of £11 billion each year in childcare ‘wages’.

In terms of kinship care, older people also make a significant contribution. The number of looked after children placed in kinship care has been increasing and now make up a fifth of all looked after placements (over 3,000 children).

A study of the 2001 census found over 15,000 children in Scotland being cared for by relatives, with grandparents accounting for over 60% of the total figure.

Older people have an important role to play within the family unit more generally, often

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<sup>5</sup> Antonia Cox, Age of Opportunity, ResPublica, September 2011, page 5)

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.familyandchildcaretrust.org/Handlers/Download.ashx?IDMF=e6bdc0d7-73fa-4919-900d-3c262b0c4944>

<sup>7</sup> [http://www.audit-scotland.gov.uk/docs/central/2014/nr\\_140206\\_reshaping\\_care.pdf](http://www.audit-scotland.gov.uk/docs/central/2014/nr_140206_reshaping_care.pdf)

<sup>8</sup> Grandparent plus, Doing it all? Grandparents, childcare and employment: an analysis of British Social Attitudes Survey Data from 1998 and 2009, December 2011, page 12

<sup>9</sup> Childhood Wellbeing Research Centre, Grandparents providing child care, November 2011, page 2)

<sup>10</sup> Daycare Trust, Listening to Grandparents, 2011, pages 5–6

<sup>11</sup> Age Concern, The Economy of Older People, 2004

acting as role models to younger members of the family. For single parent families, the input of a grandfather or grandmother in family decisions and events can offer a useful gendered influence that they child may lack in their immediate family circle.

## 6. A Link to the Past

The fact that people are living longer means that children and young people have greater opportunity to benefit from the unique life experience many of our older people have to offer.

Older people are in many respects “living history” and can offer an account of our shared modern history from a unique personal perspective. This rich source of oral history has the power to inspire and enthuse young people in a way that history lessons seldom can. However, this is an ever diminishing resources that should be taken advantage of whenever possible – an increase in our older population means that children have greater opportunity than ever before to make connections with their elders and relive our history.

### **Some concluding points:**

- The division in thinking between children and family services and adult services in our services; our discourse and our public policy, is redundant.
- The challenges and solutions are inter-connected. We need to consider the issues and funding from the perspective of how we want to live, work and thrive as citizens.
- We also need to consider the key strategic issues facing our society from the perspective of the legacy we are bequeathing to our children and young people. Prof Deary’s research shows that the long-term impact of healthy ageing is laid down in children and young people from the early years. The social dimension of a child’s healthy development – talking and listening; engaging in a range of activities have a significant contribution. These are particularly important given we know that those children in our most socio-economically disadvantaged areas have more limited opportunities to develop these skills and experiences.

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27<sup>th</sup> November 2014