

Age Proud Bristol



You've got something that someone else needs.

Catherine, Creator of BS3 Helping Others.

Age 65.



A common misconception about older people is that they do not contribute to society. However, far from being a 'burden' or a 'drain' on society, older people contribute more resources than they use. Research carried out by the Royal Voluntary Service identified that nearly half of people aged 55-74 volunteer, while figures from the Office of National Statistics show that over 50s make up nearly one-third of the entire UK workforce.

Age Proud Bristol is an awareness campaign that challenges perceptions of older people in Bristol and encourages people to feel proud of their age and experiences.

As a part of the Age Proud Bristol campaign, Bristol Ageing Better has gathered the views of a variety of inspirational people from across Bristol about their experiences and advice regarding later life. This article features Catherine Wescott (65), Creator of BS3 Helping Others and Zehra Haq (64), CEO of Dhek Bhal.

"The average 65-year-old still has an awful lot to offer in terms of wisdom, passion, love, care and, most of all, time." says Catherine, who set up BS3 Helping Others after asking in a neighbourhood Facebook group whether anyone needed any help. Within 24 hours, she'd received 350 likes and 60 comments.

"We must learn to befriend all those whom we meet in our daily lives and never assume that they are 'OK'. You can do this no matter how old or young you are and no matter where you are - at the bus stop, in a cafe, in a store," says Catherine. "You've got something that someone else needs."

Many older people develop close, supportive relationships with younger generations; from grandparents who look after their grandchildren, to older people who volunteer through community groups. Catherine has formed bonds with younger people volunteering as a part of BS3 Helping Others. "Lots of youngsters are looking for the company and knowledge of adults and lots of adults are looking for the company of youngsters. We can help each other." says Catherine.

For Zehra, who works full time as the CEO of Dhek Bhal, supporting the community is her lifelong work. Dhek Bhal means 'to take care of', and Zehra has been either volunteering or working in Barton Hill since 1986. Zehra has always encouraged the older women she works with to have their

say and to inform others. "I tell them, you are very lucky," says Zehra. "You have a lot of skills and knowledge you can contribute."

Zehra believes it is important for younger and older people to interact and to recognise the contributions each side can bring to their community. In the past, Dhek Bhal has set up intergenerational activities and events with local schools. "I would like to see older people going into schools more," says Zehra. "If a school does a cookery class, let older people teach it and show what we can do. Create opportunities for conversations - I think conversations are very important in breaking down barriers and sharing life experience."

As well as the contributions older people make in the workplace and volunteering, it is also important to recognise the unpaid caring roles that many older people undertake. Research from the national charity, Age UK, has shown that one in three people aged over 80 provide vital unpaid care for loved ones in the UK.

This is the second article in a series of three, inspired by older people based in Bristol. Find out more about the Age Proud Bristol campaign by visiting www.agefriendlybristol.org.uk or search #AgeProudBristol on Twitter and take part in the conversation about ageism in Bristol.