



**#Age
Proud
Bristol**

People seem to dread getting older, despite evidence that shows we tend to become happier at this stage of life. This comes from a variety of studies looking at the ‘U-Shaped Curve of Happiness’, which found that self-reported happiness levels are often highest in early childhood and later life.

As a part of the Age Proud Bristol campaign, which challenges negative perceptions of older people, Bristol Ageing Better (BAB) spoke to Joyce Montague (62), Coordinator of the Malcolm X Elders Group and Colin O’Brien (71), Chairperson of Gaywest, about their experience of getting older.

“I don’t let anything stop me,” says Joyce. “There’s good and bad about getting older, but if you’re positive about life, you shouldn’t be scared of getting older.”

Joyce came to Bristol in 1971 and worked all her adult life in a job she loved, as a nurse supporting people with learning difficulties. Due to health conditions, Joyce needed to retire early. Unfortunately, Joyce’s condition worsened and she made the decision to have her left leg amputated below the knee. But Joyce didn’t let the operation hold her back.

Joyce is out and about most days of the week, enjoying her role as the Malcolm X Elders Coordinator. “I love talking, meeting people and having a good laugh, it makes my day. You have to make the most of every day as you see. I enjoy my life. Every day, every year counts.”

For Joyce, getting older is a celebration. Her mother died young, and so every year Joyce experiences she is grateful for. “I still have life. I have it really to the full. I just want to live it and live it, and do it and do it and enjoy it and enjoy it. In the club, there is a lady in her 90s; I just hope I get there!”

Having a positive outlook on later life can affect how you age. A 2014 review of multiple research studies found that people who perceived later life in a more positive way tended to live longer and experience better health.

For Colin, later life hasn’t been what he expected. “I didn’t expect to be getting married and having a swell time!” Colin says. Colin came out as a gay man in his 60s. He fell in love with his now husband, and together they run a social group for LGBT+ people of all ages.

Colin said that for him, later life has been a period of joy. “One of the brilliant things about reaching later life is that you stop caring so much what other people think of you, and understand better what you need in order to feel content. It all depends on your circumstances, but for me, getting older has meant I’m a little more financially well off, I’ve got the time and the money to pursue my hobbies - like photography and oil painting.”

Every person’s experience of ageing will be different of course, but BAB hopes that following this series of articles, readers will challenge more of the negative stereotypes about older age and look forward to a period of time when they can continue to enjoy life as they choose.

This is the third 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.