



**#Age
Proud
Bristol**

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

The World Health Organisation has described ageism as “the last form of acceptable discrimination” and according to research carried out by SunLife in 2019, 68% of over 50s in the UK say that ageism in everyday life has made them feel less valued. Age Proud Bristol aims to challenge this and encourage everyone over 50 to feel Age Proud.

The campaign is run by Bristol Ageing Better (BAB) and has gathered the views of a variety of inspirational people from across Bristol about their experiences and advice regarding later life. For this article, we spoke to Judith Brown (81), Bristol Older People Forum’s Ambassador and Niels Hansen (75), a champion skydiver.

Judith has always had an interest in campaigning, including for women’s rights, disability rights, gay rights, and more, so it is perhaps not surprising that her latest volunteer role is all about promoting the rights of Bristol’s older people.

“You’re still the same person you always were,” says Judith. “Later life is just a new phase of the adventure and old age is a time when you can really fulfil your potential.” Judith says that when she was growing up there were expectations placed on what women could and couldn’t do, but now she can follow her interests fully. Judith’s advice for people of any age is to “Be yourself. Don’t let anybody put you down. If there is something you feel you want to say, you should say it.”

Women are often socialised to be more self-conscious of their age and physical appearance. Whilst a man might be described as a ‘silver fox’ when his hair turns grey, women are described in less appealing terms, suggesting that a woman’s worth is measured by her age and appearance. Judith argues that people shouldn’t feel limited by stereotypes. “Wear what makes you feel good; we should accept people as they are and demonstrate how wrong the stereotypes are.”

Many people have outdated perceptions of what later life will look like, whereas the reality is that we are all individuals with different experiences and knowledge and that doesn’t change when we reach our 50s and beyond.

For Niels Hansen, later life has brought new sporting opportunities. Niels is a champion skydiver who first got into the sport in his mid-40s and has completed 1,259 jumps since. In 2012, he entered the Over 60s World Championships in Holland alongside a team of three other men and won gold.

“Everyone knows stereotypes are false,” says Niels. “Don’t let things stop you. If you’d like to do something, look into it and do it. There’s always a way to get around things and get it done.” Although not everyone is able to skydive, everyone is able to challenge themselves, suggests Niels. “If you aren’t physically able to do a strenuous challenge then do a mental challenge. Everyone has something they can do.”

Niels’s final piece of advice is for people to enjoy life. “Age 20, it would never have occurred to me to do a skydive. It’s better to grow old saying, ‘I’ve been there – I’ve done that’, than to say, ‘I wish I’d done that...’”

This is the first in a series of three articles 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.