

agender

gender discrimination and ageist perceptions
newsletter

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welcome...

...to this issue of **Agender**. In our leading article **Dr. Diane Grant**, Project Manager, examines a recent report which compares the incomes of women and men. On page 2 **Diane Cragg** reports on the vital community role played by two volunteers, whilst on page 3 **Helen Walker** examines the experience of an Asda store in recruiting older workers. Finally, page 4 contains a report on the **Age Works** conference and details of some of our recent presentations.



gender pay gap

The recent report on individual incomes, published by the Office of National Statistics and the Women's Equality Unit, makes interesting reading. In the run up to the new legislation on discrimination due in 2006, this report highlights the differences in income between men and women.



The main factors which influence both women's and men's individual incomes include age, economic activity status, children and whether they are single or partnered.

The weekly median total individual income for all women in 2003/04 was £161, only 53% of that for all men (£303). Compared to men, the corresponding median net (£151) and disposable (£121) individual income measures for women were slightly higher at 60% and 58% respectively.

The key findings indicate that the weekly median total individual income for all men is almost double that of all women. When looking at age profiles the most stark differences are shown for women in pensioner couples, with women only having individual income amounting to 37% of men in pensioner couple households.

The statistics also highlight the differences in disposable income between women, with approximately a third of women having a total net disposable income of less than £100 per week. At the other end of the spectrum, 14% of women had net disposable income in excess of £400 per week.

Income differences between men and women show that for every pound a man earns, a woman earns around 80p in comparison. The differences in pay level out somewhat when men and women work in part time employment but still a gender difference is apparent with women earning 94% of that of men.

The report continues to highlight the difficulties faced by single women without dependent

children, working full or part time, who still continue to have less individual income than all other household types. This group will largely comprise of women over the age of fifty who form the army of part-time workers in the retail and service industrial sectors or people giving their time in the voluntary sector, without whom many of these services would cease to function.

This pay gap, according to the Women and Equality unit, indicates that the abilities and skills of women 'are not being fully utilised in business and in the economy'. Such differences need to be understood within the context of the experiences of those who are in work, participate in the voluntary sector or who would like to access employment or enhance their careers through promotion.

The research to date has highlighted that many factors can impact on the opportunities for women (and men) when they reach their fifties and over. Women in the pilot study for GDAP faced both gender and age discrimination as well as internal barriers as they struggled to gain acknowledgement or recognition in the workplace (see <http://cwis.livjm.ac.uk/olf/gdap/agender/issue105.pdf>). However the research element now investigating the perceptions of employers and volunteers in the community and voluntary sectors highlights the valued attributes of the more mature worker.

If you fit any of the above categories please complete an online questionnaire at <http://cwis.livjm.ac.uk/olf/gdap/OnlineQ1.htm>.



what generation gap?

Nestled in heart of the Isle of Man is Foxdale, known locally for its strong sense of community spirit, generating mostly from the small village school. The school itself has 90 pupils, many of whom are prepared for school by the local playgroup. The playgroup has been resident in Foxdale for the past 20 years. At first the playgroup was based in the old railway station, next to the school. When the new school was built in the early nineties it moved in and established itself as a welcome haven for the village mums.

Joan Eisinger, aged 62, has been working at the playgroup for over twenty years. Joan started helping the local teacher, Mrs Grindle, two mornings a week. Joan was at the time caring for her sick mother and started to help as a hobby and a way of getting out of the house. Joan realised she loved being with the younger children and began courses to become qualified. Five years later Joan took over the running of the playgroup and has been running it ever since.

'Big Joan' as she is affectionately known in the village takes no payment for her time as playgroup leader and up until two years ago had to hire the hall from the school, using the money from the children's £2.50 fee. Out of this Joan also provides refreshments for the children at 'half time' and also buys each of them a small gift at Christmas. As there is no preschool in Foxdale, Joan's time and effort is greatly appreciated by all the children, mums and teachers alike. Joan herself is a warm woman whom the children all take to instantly, and having spent some time with her during playgroup it is easy to see why: she teaches them much needed social skills and always encourages the children to join in the many activities she has planned for them.

Joan is also a member of the Rushen Rotary Club, and helps to raise money for many worthy causes including the playgroup: last year the club raised three hundred pounds for the group. Joan involved everyone when deciding what to spend the money on and some outdoor play equipment was purchased. One of Joan's hobbies is painting and she has so far sold over eight hundred of her pictures!

Joan is helped in the playgroup by one of her closest friends Joan Allen. The locals call her 'Little Joan' and although quite shy about her age she will admit to being in her seventies. Little Joan's input into the playgroup is extremely valued: she sets up the play equipment ready for each session and supervises the children on their many toilet trips. Thanks to her lovely way with the children, she has also become a fixture and has been helping for fifteen years. Both women are also parents and their wisdom and sense of having seen every situation at least once before leaves them completely unfazed. The school itself has no intention of replacing either of them and neither of them has any intention of retiring.



leading by example

Asda's commitment to older workers ahead of the new legislation



From right to left:

Maureen Ready; Sue Blundell; Lynn Stuart; Maureen Harris; Rose Griffiths; James Mansell; John Doherty

On 14 July 2005, the draft regulations for the 2006 legislation were announced, placing 'age' on an equal footing with gender, race and disability discrimination. The message to employers is clear: tackle age discrimination as early as possible. But the smarter companies are already reaping the benefits of employing older workers.

Asda, one of the UK's largest employers of the over 50s, has made positive steps to promote age equality in the workplace. We visited a local Asda store to find out more about their employment policies and practices.

Asda, Sefton Park, believes that there are proven advantages to employing workers aged 50 and over. These include lower staff turnover, greater flexibility, raised staff moral, emotional sensitivity, loyalty and higher productivity. Lyn Stuart, Asda's training co-ordinator, said: "Older workers are warm and friendly and have a positive approach to work. They make a huge contribution to the store".

This age-positive approach is good for older workers too. James Mansell, communication co-ordinator said: "I've been in this store since it opened and I haven't had a day off. I see a challenge all the time, and when I stop seeing challenges or I can't make a difference then I'll stop working".

Asda's commitment to its older workers is part of its wider value system, which includes respect for the individual. Lyn Stewart explained: "There's an emphasis on missions, values and respect and so we don't talk about age. It's a very friendly place to work." She continued, 'Employment decisions are based entirely upon who is the best person for the job'.

The company is also aware that many older people want more choice in respect to their hours and the opportunity to combine work and family life. So it provides flexible work options and benefits such as "Benidorm Leave" (three months unpaid leave for a long winter break between January and March) and "Grandparent Leave" (a week unpaid leave to celebrate the birth of a grandchild).

Since the store opened in 2000, it has reported a steady increase in the number of over 50's applying for work, which is good news for the company's younger workers who benefit from their maturity and experience. Older people also relate well to customers because they have an interest in and knowledge of the products on offer.

Both Lyn and James agreed that older workers have an important role to play in the store: 'There's an awful lot that older workers can offer as well as life's tapestry, of course'.

"Older workers are warm and friendly and have a positive approach to work. They make a huge contribution to the store"



age works conference

Over the past few years, age and gender-related issues have moved up the policy agenda, resulting in some interesting programmes, events and conferences taking place in the area. One such event was the Age Works conference, held in Manchester Town Hall on 10 May 2005. The one-day event brought together employers, voluntary organisations, employment agencies and academics in the field. The message promoted by the speakers was that 'age diversity makes great business sense' and there was ample evidence to support this claim.

Sue Yeandle from Sheffield Hallam University presented a very

illuminating paper on older workers and the work-life balance. The paper focused on men's and women's attitudes towards work and retirement, identifying the need for flexible employment to accommodate out of work interests. The paper was part of the Joseph Rowntree Foundation's Transitions After 50 Programme.

There was also a number of workshop sessions, providing employers with the opportunity to share examples of good practice and offer practical tips on how to attract and retain a diverse workforce.

Finally, Patrick Grattan from the Third Age Employment Network gave an update on the consultation phase of the age discrimination legislation due in October 2006. Whilst legislation should provide blanket protection for all ages and cover both direct and indirect forms of discrimination, there is some debate over what might constitute indirect discrimination (for example, long service awards) and whether voluntary workers should be included.

Please see www.taen.org.uk and www.jrf.org.uk for more information on the issues covered at the conference.



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During the 2nd International Institute of Consumer Sciences Research Conference, members of the project gave the following presentations:

Introduction to the issue of gender and ageism in the UK

D. Grant

Older women's experiences and perceptions of age discrimination in paid employment: Towards a research agenda

H. Walker, D. Grant, M. Meadows and I. Cook

Factors affecting older adults' employment and voluntary participation in the voluntary and community sector

N. Butler, D. Grant, M. Meadows, and S. M. Maxwell



Finally as part of the fourth European Conference on Gender Equality in Higher Education (31st August – 3rd September 2005) the team will present a paper entitled:

Too old to study?: Internal and external barriers to participation in Higher Education

D. Grant, H. Walker, M. Meadows and I. Cook