

# Age really IS just a number!



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Caerphilly is probably best known for its cheese, but a project set up to look at stereotypes of younger and older people has found that people from Caerphilly and across the United Kingdom are really cheesed off with how they are portrayed.

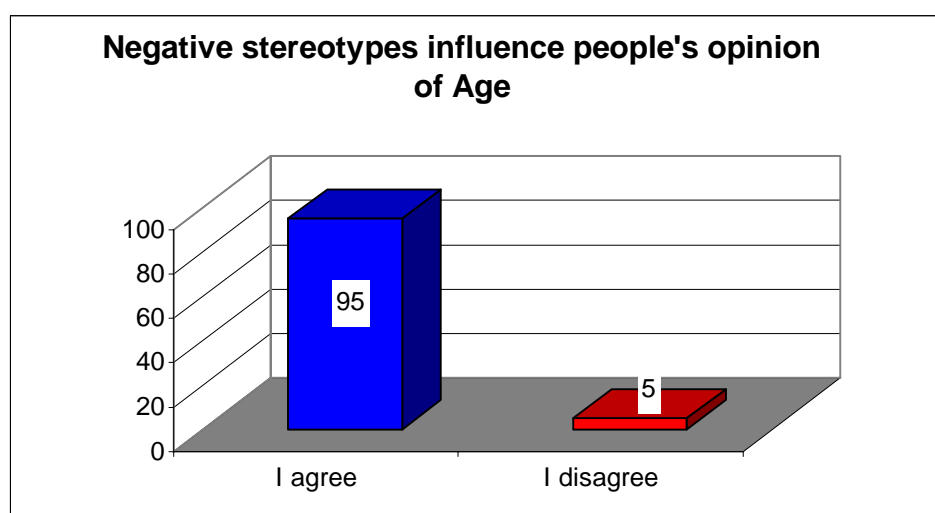
Age is Just a Number! is a local campaign in Caerphilly that has attracted interest from across Wales and beyond. The campaign aims to promote better understanding, improve tolerance, and help bridge the generation gap between older and younger people. The campaign uses powerful, positive pictures submitted by Caerphilly residents. The overarching aim of Age is just a number! is to encourage organisations and the Media to use more positive images, which in time it will begin to break down some of the negative stereotypes people have of younger and older people.

## THE CAMPAIGN

The campaign started in 2010 with a photographic competition themed “We are not as bad as you think we are!” to help find a stock of positive images that would challenge current stereotypes of young and old alike.

The competition was followed up with questionnaires that attracted over 650 responses from every part of Wales and across the United Kingdom. The results showed that people are very clear in their views on the impact of stereotypes and how they make them feel as individuals.

When people were asked whether negative stereotypes influence our perceptions of age and a staggering 95% agreed.



It was also shocking to see the range and number of negative stereotypes that people quoted when they were asked:

**'What is the most common 50+ stereotype that you have come across?':**

**Boring – 21 times**  
**Wee – 23 times**  
**Frail - 23 times**  
**Grumpy 38 times**

**“Always moaning, frail and afraid of young people”**  
**“Being ‘past it’, useless”**  
**“Out of touch”**

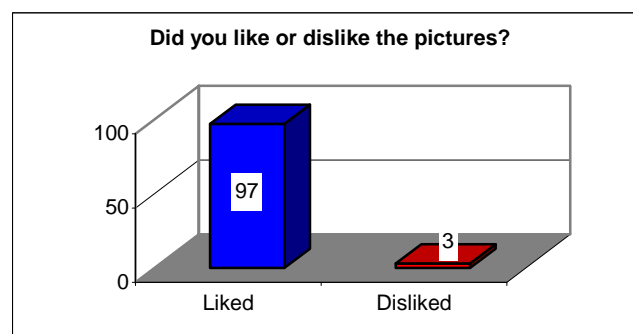
**When the respondents were asked how they felt about these stereotypes the most common responses were:**

**‘Angry’, ‘Annoyed’, ‘Depressed’, ‘Discriminated’, ‘Frustrated, Sad’ and ‘Upset’**

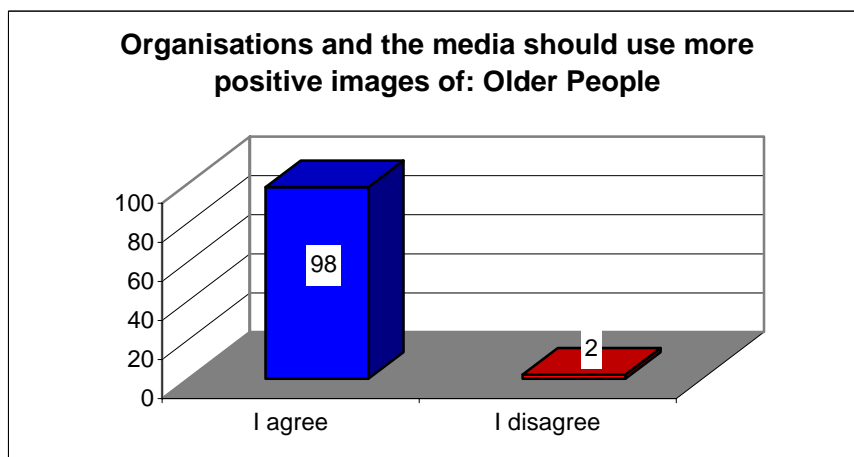
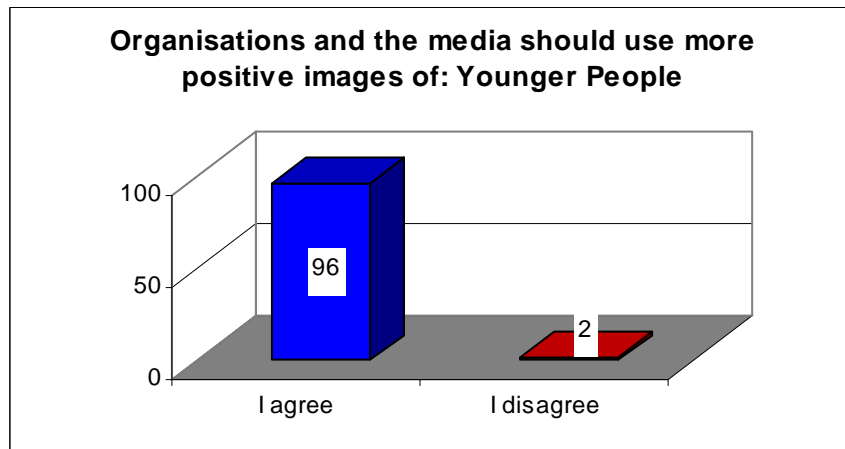
**“I feel frustrated. I want people to be seen for who they are, regardless of age”**

Out of the images entered, 12 finalists were selected. The 12 images were exhibited around Caerphilly County Borough, in the public gallery of the Senedd in Cardiff Bay and at the National Eisteddfod of Wales, which attracted over 160,000 visitors. Feedback from these exhibitions supported the responses in the questionnaires.

To ensure we were able to share these images with a wide range of people and to capture the views of a wider audience a website to promote the Campaign was created. Over 2000 people have viewed the online library of the photographs in recent months. The responses to the photographs have been overwhelmingly positive with 97% of people saying that they liked the photographs.



People were clear in their appeal to the media and organisations about the use of negative images of younger and older people. The majority of respondents called for more positive images to be used.



**'What is the most common stereotype 50+ you dislike?'**

**"On TV programmes it is usually either an eccentric, female grandparent or a cantankerous older male, grumbling about life"**

**'What is the most common stereotype of the under 25's you dislike?'**

**"Angry that media only concentrates on the minority of young people who inconvenience society"**

**'How do stereotypes make you feel?'**

**"Ageism is alive and kicking!"**

**"I feel frustrated. I want people to be seen for who they are, regardless of age"**

**"Journalists may not fully believe in the misrepresentation they are portraying, but the need to provoke an emotional reaction in their reporting overrides honest reporting of positive images and stories."**

## **CHANGING OUR VIEW?**

When respondents were asked 'What activities they enjoyed?' an amazing array of activities were reported. Hundreds of people aged 50+ told us they enjoyed: Athletics, Base-jumping, Burlesque dancing, Marathon running, Parachute jumping, Roller-blading and using Twitter. Common responses included Dancing, going to live music concerts, Horse-riding, Sex and Swimming. This reality offers a different picture when compared to how older people are stereotypically portrayed.

**'Tell us about one activity you at 50+ enjoy?'**

**"Dancing! There are so FEW opportunities for older people to dance! And I mean modern dancing. My era is Motown - not ballroom dancing (though that could be fun too!) The assumption is often that we all want to listen to blinking Vera Lynn!"**

**"I sail, ski, water-ski, run, play tennis, squash, go circuit training, go mountain biking, I follow the Cardiff blues, have 3 young children, work full time and still on occasion binge drink - what do you expect from people over 50? Do we all get a bus pass, suddenly take up gardening, going to the library and listening to radio 4?"**

Respondents were then asked 'How older people should be portrayed?'. The majority of responses sought an image of older people that recognised their contribution to society. Some suggested that this should include active older people, others pointed towards older people as sources of information, knowledge and experience. The terms 'friendly', 'fun', 'happy', 'kind', 'vibrant' and 'wise' came up several times. Two respondents repeated the phrase 'recycled teenagers'.

People were asked about how younger people should be portrayed, responses again looked to positive perceptions. These largely involved a recognition that the younger generation are our future and included terms such as 'approachable', 'caring', 'fun', 'hard-working' and 'helpful'.

**'What image or description would you like younger people to be known by?'**

**"A whole new generation full of promise, who are all individual and have a lot to give to the world in every sense"**

**"That we aren't all the same. We are all individuals who have our own lives to lead and want to be seen as important members of our communities"**

**"There are many young people going about their daily lives doing good works that are not recognised by the press or when they occasionally given some recognition it is portrayed as an exception"**

Young respondents were also asked about one activity that they enjoy and, like older people, unleashed a fabulous variety of interests. These included the stereotypical responses of dancing and sport, but also included a number of less predictable responses. Seven younger people reported that they enjoy playing bingo and three respondents reported ballroom dancing and bowls. Volunteering was the most popular recurring response.

**‘Tell us about one activity you at under 25 enjoy?  
Volunteering came up 21 times, Reading 12 times and Knitting 12 times**

## **NEXT STEPS**

The response to the Age is Just a Number! Campaign offers some clear observations and recommendations for the future.

- Younger and older people have reported that images portrayed of them are consistently negative and derogatory.
- The activities that our generations enjoy completely reject stereotypes and reflect the amazing diversity and difference that people enjoy whatever their age.
- Recent media stories have highlighted that age discrimination remains endemic in our society. New legislation that bans age discrimination means that we now have an opportunity to revisit the way in which we portray age groups.
- The challenge is now with you to reflect the diverse nature and interests of our generations and to avoid negative stereotypes.

Over 650 people responded to the questionnaire from across Wales and beyond. The respondents broadly reflected the age profile of the population and the feedback was consistent across all questions – Age really IS just a number!

This campaign aims to keep challenging organisations, local and national media to reconsider the way they portray younger and older people and get them to reconsider how they can more positively depict these valuable members of our society.

## WHAT CAN YOU DO?

### Questions you might ask as an organisation:

On reporting an item and using an image:

- Does reporting the age of a person add anything to this story?
- Does this image or story reinforce or challenge negative stereotypes?

When looking for, or at editorial content:

- Are you regularly reporting negative stories of younger or older people? If so why?
- When did you last run a positive story about younger or older people?
- Are your positive stories “patronising” in their nature?

When putting together any report:

- Can you use more positive images that more truthfully reflect the contribution and value young and old people bring to society.

If you, your team or organisation is able to address even some of the above you could make a really positive impact on the negative stereotypes that older and younger people suffer.

### As an individual you might consider:

If you would like to encourage people to read this report and act on the recommendations, you might want to send a copy of the attached letter to your Local Health Board, Local Authority and/or the people/ organisations list below.

Audience Council for Wales  
BBC Cymru Wales  
Broadcasting House  
RM E5108  
Llandaff  
CARDIFF  
CF5 2YQ

Director BBC Cymru Wales  
BBC Cymru Wales  
Broadcasting House  
Llandaff  
CARDIFF  
CF5 2YQ

Chief Executive  
S4C  
Parc Tŷ Glas  
Llanishen  
Cardiff  
CF14 5DU

Head of Content  
Media Wales  
6 Park Street  
Cardiff  
CF10 1XR

Head of News & Programmes  
ITV Wales  
Television Centre  
Culverhouse Cross  
Cardiff  
CF5 6SJ

First Minister for Wales  
Welsh Government  
5<sup>th</sup> Floor  
Ty Hywel  
Cardiff Bay  
CF99 1NA

Dear Sir/Madam,

I would like to draw your attention to the 'Age really IS just a number!' report that can be found via the following link:

[http://www.caerphilly.gov.uk/communityplanning/en/cross\\_themes/50plus/ageisjustanumber.html](http://www.caerphilly.gov.uk/communityplanning/en/cross_themes/50plus/ageisjustanumber.html)

The report details the results of the 'Age Is Just a Number!' Campaign that attracted over 650 responses from every part of Wales and across the United Kingdom. The results show that people have very clear views on the negative impacts of stereotyping and how it makes them feel as individuals.

When people were asked whether negative stereotypes influence our perceptions of age a staggering 95% agreed.

People were also clear in their appeal to the media and organisations about the use of negative images of younger and older people. 96% of respondents called for more positive images to be used.

The majority of responses wanted more images of older and younger people that recognised their contribution to society.

I hope you feel able to support the recommendations of the report and as a result will use more positive images, which in time will break down some of the negative stereotypes of younger and older people.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank you for your support and proving that 'Age really IS just a number'.

Your faithfully,