

## strategy for an aging population



by Ruth Gerzon

Ruth Gerzon from Eastern Bay Villages writes on the ever-changing challenges facing our older community.



**Will you still need me, will you still feed me, when I'm 64? Most people of my age will remember the lyrics from the Beatles song of the sixties. In those days, 64 was a lifetime away. I was sure I would be well into my dotage by then.**

Since those carefree hippie days, not only have I become older and maybe wiser, but health care has improved. Sixty-four no longer seems an advanced age.

The growing numbers of us living to our 80s, 90s and beyond is noted in the Office for Seniors' call for submissions to the new government ageing strategy. There may be only 747,900 of us now, but we will be 1,303,400 strong in 20 years' time.

What on earth are they going to do with us all? That question implies that we will be a burden. Fortunately this is not the reality, as the majority of people over 65 are healthy. So the question can be reframed: what are we going to do for ourselves and each other?

The discussion documents for the ageing strategy recognise this. Ideas are sought on how to support more active people who wish to continue working, to contribute their skills beyond the age of 65. Two thirds of us want to keep working but only 24 percent actually do.

Discrimination, workplace inflexibility, and need for retraining keep many of us under-employed. The huge amount of voluntary work we do each year attests to our skills. Volunteer work is estimated to be worth an annual \$3.5 billion. It is heartening to know someone is keeping count.

We also know that older people will be more diverse in the coming decades. More Maori will live long enough to receive the pension, but the rising number of older Asian New Zealanders will outnumber them by 2038.

The health of seniors is improving, but in many other areas, life for people over 65 is worsening. Home ownership is falling so, in future, fewer of us will have mortgage-free homes.

Already seniors take in flatmates to help pay for the mortgage, and others move to smaller homes. The Office for Seniors is seeking ideas for ways to improve the position of older renters as research shows that they have a poorer quality of life, wellbeing and mental health than homeowners.

Even Kiwisaver might not be able to rescue us from poverty in age. Forty-two percent of people in the scheme are struggling to get by and have taken a contributions holiday. They will have to be very frugal to get by on just their superannuation.

Safety is another concern, though I am reassured to learn that older people are less at risk than people of other ages. But danger can come close to home. One in 10 of us will experience elder abuse. In 80 percent of reported cases this is from family members.

Resilience is also an issue for which ideas are being canvassed. What could strengthen our adaptability to life changes and unexpected shocks? Loss of a partner, redundancy, injury or family moving away can all affect retirement planning.

As well as such individual life changes, community-wide disasters can strike, as Eastern Bay citizens know only too well. Emergency planners need to know that not everyone has a cellphone and some of us can't hear the warning sirens.

The Office for Seniors' discussion documents also note good ideas from overseas that we might implement here. In Australia there is a financial incentive for employers who take on older workers. Housing can be made easier by programmes such as Homeshare schemes where younger people share with older ones in return for housework, cooking or shopping.

If you want to learn more about the Ageing Strategy, then visit the Superseniors site, [www.superseniors.msd.govt.nz](http://www.superseniors.msd.govt.nz) and click on "Join the Conversation" for documents to download. Or go to their Facebook group: Office for Seniors New Zealand. If you prefer hard copies just phone 0800 504704 to ask for these to be mailed to you.

Sharing ideas with others is always a good start when considering what to submit. If that suits you, then come to a meeting Eastern Bay Villages is holding for people and organisations wanting to contribute ideas to our submission or make submissions of their own. Younger people are also welcome – this is your future too.

The meeting is on Thursday, August 9, from 10am to 12 noon, at Knox Presbyterian Church, 83 Domain Road, Whakatane.

Want to know more? Phone me on 027 4308149 or email [easternbayvillages@gmail.com](mailto:easternbayvillages@gmail.com).

I have had many responses to my last column on loneliness, which seems to have struck a chord. I think our need for community is behind

the recent objections to our council's plans to stop staffing their library's front desk. No machine can emulate the human response.

We might be able to scan library books and groceries but we miss talking to real people. The friendly staff at my local grocery store make my shopping much more rewarding than trips to a supermarket.

### Curves Whakatane has a new face

#### • ADVICE ABOUT EXERCISE

Introducing Louise Allen, who has recently taken over Curves Whakatane on King Street Kopeopeo.

Louise is a long term resident of the Eastern Bay and brings a wealth of knowledge with her, in the health and fitness field. A qualified Naturopath, personal trainer, Louise definitely practices what she preaches, having completed several half marathons, Toi's Challenge and an ocean swim event this year. She also completed the 100km Oxfam Trailwalker last year which she describes as "an incredible experience".

Louise is excited to bring her passion for a healthy lifestyle to Curves, and take Curves to a new level of service.

Curves is a facility specially designed for women, featuring a complete 30 minute workout, and weight management system that is fun, fast and safe.

"I am really excited about helping the women of the Eastern Bay of Plenty to reach their health and fitness goals, so they can feel great about themselves" Louise says.

"If you want to look good and feel great, come and see us today, where our friendly team will coach you along your journey".

Call 3088575 or online at [curves.com](http://curves.com) to book a FREE no-obligation consultation with one of the friendly team to see how Curves can improve YOUR life.



Louise Allen

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