



Why have media awards?

by Val French AM
President, OPSO

PEOPLE no longer need to ask. The social abuses that arise from negative attitudes towards ageing are common knowledge.

Seniors rely on the media to help address these social problems. One way to do this is to portray us as we really are: a diverse group. Most of us age well, are active and contributing members of society. However, the negative attitudes of the community to ageing threaten this.

We rely on the media to act as our social watchdog, to be our voice when we fight for justice in our later years. Because this injustice is caused by these negative community attitudes towards ageing, the solution can only come from the community itself.

The media is our voice when we speak of ageism and mature-age unemployment. It is our voice when we try to educate the community on the horrors of elder abuse – one of our fastest growing social problems – or on poverty among those on a single pension; or when we promote solutions to social isolation, depression and homelessness.

With the media's assistance a new culture is growing – and a determination to turn these things around.

It is coming from two groups of people: the battlers of the older generation are being joined by the baby boomers. Both groups are determined to ensure the community's attitude towards ageing is changed – and changed soon.

OPSO is a part of this movement. We are finding these allies in this younger ageing generation, particularly those in the media who have both an understanding of our needs and a passion for social justice.

This is reflected in the increasing number of requests we have from the media to comment on these social problems. It is reflected in the growing number of profiles in the media on active and contributing older people; in stories on the growing number of news makers from the older generation: leaders in business, in the arts and social welfare.

As a journalist and as an advocate for older people I have always believed the media must remain the watchdog of the people.

The growing number of nominations portraying positive ageing and the increasingly high standard of journalism in these Awards each year shows that this has not changed. □



Winner of the 2007 national photography for metropolitan newspapers and magazines was Leila Amanpour of *The Sydney Morning Herald* with 'The Moment'. The judges said this photo "captures the essence of an emotional moment when, after a lifetime of waiting, an older man was able to fulfil his dream of an education. A superb photograph...".

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