



OPSO

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People's Choice Media Awards launched

A new People's Choice Media Awards have been launched jointly by OPSO and the Federal Department of Health and Ageing.

The awards are part of the annual Older People Speak Out National Media Awards, which encourage the Australian media to break down negative stereotypes by portraying the positive contributions made by older Australians.

The Minister for Ageing, Julie Bishop, who launched the inaugural People's Choice Media Awards at Parliament House on August 11, said she hoped that all Australians could become "media watchdogs".

"The People's Choice Media Awards have been jointly developed by OPSO and the Department of Health and Ageing, and I call upon

members of the public to nominate examples of positive media coverage of older people," Ms Bishop said.

"The OPSO People's Choice Awards will be presented in four categories – photograph, advertisement, electronic (radio or television), and print article. Nomination forms will be placed in all national daily papers and can be found on the Australian Government's seniors' website at www.seniors.gov.au."

The media awards promote positive ageing on one hand by encouraging the media to portray older people as they really are – active and contributing to society – and on



Minister for Ageing Julie Bishop and OPSO president Val French at the launch.

the other, reduce the negative stereotyping of ageing.

More information is also available from www.opso.com.au. ❖

OPSO People's Choice Media Awards nomination form – see next page

Why reporting must come of age

The following is extracted from a speech by OPSO President Val French AM at the launch of the People's Choice Awards.

By the age of 10, I had seen and lived with the worst of what was known as the lunatic asylums in New South Wales in the 1930s.

I had lived among overcrowded, vermin-infested wards where beds were jammed together with a seatless open toilet at one end.

The inhabitants sat listlessly day after day, forgotten and unmotivated.

From the time I could walk, my father took me on his

rounds through these hospitals as he fought a never-ending battle to clean up the mental health system, hampered in the early days by an unsympathetic media who saw efforts for reform in terms of sensation, screaming "You could be sitting next to a loony at the pictures" or "Loonies allowed to have a dance".

His response was to seek out journalists with integrity and reward them with in-depth information and anecdotes which enabled them to produce high-quality journalism.

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It's time for you to have your say



Australian Government
Department of Health and Ageing

Older people in general just do their bit and get on with life. However, negative media reports can encourage negative feelings about ageing and older people in the community.

We need your help to find the best of the positive media – so now it's time for you to have your say.

Just select one or more: newspaper or magazine article; photo; radio or television interview; news and current affairs story; or print or electronic advertisement. Then tell us in 50 words or less how you think your choice shows one or more older people enjoying themselves and/or contributing in some way, and why you think it should win an OPSO People's Choice Media Award.

The judging panel will select one winner each under four award categories, and both nominators and creators of the four winning entries will receive a prize, and as well, they will be flown to the OPSO Media Awards presentation function to be held in Brisbane on 18 October 2005.

Prizes include iPod minis, portable DVD players and digital cameras. Nominations close 23 September 2005.

OPSO is Older People Speak Out, a voluntary non-profit organisation which provides lobbying services on behalf of older people. The OPSO People's Choice Media Awards are supported by the Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing, through the Office for an Ageing Australia. Terms and conditions and awards selection criteria are available from OPSO on 07 3219 2572 or online at seniors.gov.au or opso.com.au

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Gradually, the attitude of the media and the public changed and this led to a Royal Commission on mental hospitals. It is a credit to the integrity of journalism that, in the end, it was those newspapers which had initially sensationalised the issues that serialised his book, 'Patients are People'.

It is little wonder that, for over half a century, as a journalist, I have worked with and for journalists for social justice.

In 1992, a Commonwealth survey showed that more than 80 percent of seniors believed the media responsible for the negative attitudes the community had about ageing and the consequences of physical, emotional, and financial abuse, marginalisation and disempowerment.

In Queensland, angry seniors' associations met with the media to demand change. The media replied that they had no idea how to present their material.

Media and community groups alike asked me to take up the challenge. I gathered a group of colleagues and we set up Older People Speak Out with two aims. The first was to teach seniors how to work with and write for the media. The second was to conduct media awards so that by awarding the media for getting it right about older people, we would call attention to the reality of ageing.

Positive reinforcement

OPSO has always believed that positive reinforcement is the best way to teach and that negative criticism only leads to a negative response. The awards have gone from a few dozen tentative entries talking about what older people did in their youth to thousands of entries showing the involvement and achievements of seniors today.

However, we have still a long way to go. There are still those in television who believe – perhaps correctly – that their ratings will drop if they dare employ a woman with wrinkles. Magazines scream to us that wrinkles are a fate worse than death – but when they come, we really don't care. We have more interesting things to think about – like doing our bit and having fun.

There are still unscrupulous journalists who see mileage in deriding or sensationalising older people and their issues. This leads to negative ageing, mature age unemployment, emotional, physical and financial abuse, depression and social isolation. That's why we want you to join us in these OPSO Peoples' Choice Media Awards. ❖

Nomination Form

Your name: _____

Phone number or email address: _____

Title or description of entry: _____

Date of broadcast or publication: _____

Name of newspaper, magazine, radio or TV Station: _____

People's Choice Media Awards categories (please tick relevant category)

- Photo Advertisement
 Radio or television Magazine or Newspaper article

On another piece of paper in 50 words or less say why you chose your entry or entries.

You can also nominate online via the Australian Government Seniors Portal seniors.gov.au

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So, who wants to be a volunteer?

What is so important that I have to put an expensive silk suit on lay-by, buy two scarves because the first one is a less than perfect match, two pair of pantyhose in case one ladders, and withstand torture more real than the dentist's drill to put new earrings into newly pierced ears?

It's our big 'do' at Parliament House – the culmination of 12 months' ever-increasing pressure by the hidden complexities of judging hundreds of entries for short-listing in the OPSO Media Awards. OPSO? Older People Speak Out, of which, for my sins, I am vice-president.

A not-so-ordinary voluntary not-for-profit organisation, OPSO strives to inspire journalists, photographers, advertisers, TV and radio producers to present to the world images and stories of older people as they really are, and the concerns that affect their lives.

Prizes for the best entries in all categories – which include Queensland and national intergenerational ones – are brand new must-have electronic fashion accessories.

The criteria we use every year are intended to encourage media and advertising people to convince their audiences that they find older people more inventive, useful, fun-loving, wacky and altogether more fascinating than any other sector of the population, especially when involved with the young ones.

Invitation list

So here we are – everyone who's anyone – from the Minister and head of department, journos, advertisers, photographers and sponsors (most important of all!) to friends of OPSO members who have somehow escaped the chop when the invitation list had to be savaged.

The mezzanine floor of the Annexe resembles a football scrum, except that the gropings are harmless and friendly.

Drinks and nibbles often don't reach



by Ilma Ferguson

the tables before being whisked off trays and scoffed.

I can barely manage to do my job – taking photos of guests for OPSO's CV – the crush is so tight. This means that, just when I snap, in perfect focus, a pair or group in vital interaction, someone else's arm, elbow or ear appears in the developed photo.

The decibel-fraught volume of conversation has been known to drive those people used to an ordered life into a quiet corner where they can recover their equanimity listening to the pianist on the grand piano doing his or her soothing stuff.

Latecomers who have missed out on their drinks, imbibe a few gulps of fresh air before joining the throng inside – VIPs and finalists in the front row – naturally.

The formal speeches, as short as some of the dresses on women of all ages, soon give way to the *raison d'être* of the evening, the naming of runners-up and finally, winners. These last don't know which is which until the emcee in overdramatic tones announces, "And the winner is . . ."

Winning entries are flashed onto the PowerPoint, high on the wall behind the dais and winners are escorted, some stunned into sudden silence, to the stage to receive their prize from the Minister or someone almost as famous.

Amid the cacophony of clapping, dazed and often teary winners find their way back to their seats, sometimes forgetting to make their obliga-

tory few words of thanks. Maybe it's just as well. If we overshoot the deadline here, we miss out on supper.

Sometimes an entrant wins a prize in both Queensland and National sections of the awards; but not often.

Then it's the sponsors' turn.

I stand near the dais in my new purple suit with a slash of lime green scarf, handing Christmassy-looking wrapped bottles to our chairperson to present to each sponsor. Inadvertently, I brush against a floor lamp which is very hot indeed.

'Ow, that's hot!'

"Ow, that's hot!"

"I thought you were talking about me," says the emcee.

"Not in public," say I, quick as a flash.

He walks, grinning, back to his seat.

At supper, everyone renews acquaintances and makes hopefully useful contacts.

This night lots of people say nice things about our efforts to change attitudes towards older and younger people, especially members of the media, who say our awards night is the only opportunity they have to meet and greet members of other media: otherwise it's 'no speak'.

Another awards night under our belts – how many is that now?

I inspect the spot where I burned my leg, straighten the scarf which has shown a tendency to strangle me, and fall into the car under the lightning flashes of a hovering storm. The only thought I'm capable of is that no rain spots fall on my new suit. Maybe I can wear it next year? Perish the thought!

I wait impatiently to get home, get my shoes off, put the flowers in water, do a quick post-mortem and fall into bed.

Who wants to be a volunteer? I do. ❖

The decibel-fraught volume of conversation has been known to drive those people used to an ordered life into a quiet corner . . .

The reality of grandparenting

While most of this section of the OPSO Action Research Report applies specifically to grandparents who are raising their grandchildren in lieu of parents, some of the following recommendations apply to grandparenting in general – some important matters are touched on below. They require attention.

Early intervention into dysfunctional families can reduce child abuse. Parent training for grandparents caring for grandchildren and a cohesive intergenerational community can reduce the need for child protection agencies. This should be the chief aim in the new Child Protection Department.

At the same time, legislation should recognise that grandparents have rights of access to their grandchildren, not only that grandchildren have rights of access to their grandparents.

Research into grandparents looking after grandchildren for long hours while their parents work has shown a higher rate than normal of heart and back problems. For these grandparents and for full-time relative carers there needs to be appropriate and affordable child-minding facilities to give them respite. Leaving children with grandparents for long hours beyond their mental and physical coping strength, with little or no time for themselves, could be regarded as elder abuse.

Emphasis needs to be placed on parent training and updating of parenting skills of grandparents involved in the parenting role.

Grandparents bringing up grandchildren outside the Department of Child Protection need legal recognition of their status and an allowance equal to the Foster Care Allowance. They need such benefits as will guarantee specific education for

children with special needs and access to trauma counselling.

Funding needs to be given to research into the emotional needs of these children and their grandparents, and appropriate services set up to deal with the results and findings.

Unaddressed issues

Issues that remain unaddressed:

1. Peter Wellington MP is raising a private member's Bill to try to get similar payments for grandparents who are raising grandchildren full-time as those available to foster carers.

This payment would assist grandparents to maintain a suitable standard of care for their grandchildren. There still appears to be no movement from the state or Commonwealth Departments towards addressing this issue.

2. Some Legal Aid issues may be resolved under changes to the federal *Family Law Act*, which is under review. There has been no indication in it that special assistance would be made available for grandparents, though closer study of the final document may have some indicators.

3. The setting up of a helpline for grandparents was considered in 2002 during consultations but so far nothing has been done about it. Some projects have received some funding from the Commonwealth Government for information strategies, but these have largely had a purely local focus.

4. Crisis care and access to respite areas is needed. In larger centres precedence is given to existing clients and there is a certain reluctance to acknowledge that grandparents need respite, especially when raising children with challenging behaviours that result from parental drug and alcohol abuse.

5. The development of a network

of peer support groups for grandparents has been hindered by the total lack of resources in most areas. The formation of a statewide peak specifically for grandparents should be a primary focus for government.

The existing Council of Grandparents should be resourced to take on this role, as it has been working collaboratively with a number of groups and services to establish itself without resources over the past 18 months.

It meets once a month and has the capacity to distribute a newsletter by email, which would be used to inform grandparents about assistance and resources available to them.

There is little evidence of a concerted effort by the State Government to develop a network of professional service providers to assist grandparents.

6. The development of two departments to address children's issues has further disadvantaged families who do not fit the category of reported abusers but who still need support from the department as primary providers.

A case in question is the issue for older parents and grandparents who need support to care for their disabled children; the department response has been to deem them unfit and take over the whole role instead of providing the requested support.

7. Fear of losing their grandchildren if grandparents seek assistance from government services is widespread. These carers are also adversely affected by long waiting lists for much needed general health services provided by the State Government. ❖

