

## Congress of Older People's Voices from the Margins

This story was documented for the #Embolden2023 *Congress of Older People's Voices from the Margins*. A full report on Congress is available at [celebrateageing.com/margins](https://celebrateageing.com/margins)

Congress is an initiative of Celebrate Ageing Ltd. Thankyou to our 2023 Congress Principal Partner, Elder Rights Advocacy and our other partners, the Australian Government Department of Health and Aged Care, Older Person's Advocacy Network (OPAN), Australian Association of Gerontology, ADA Australia, The Older Women's Network NSW, QueerSpace Drummond St and Council on the Ageing.

### Ripplegrams and Trans and Gender Diverse people, by Kathy Mansfield

My name is Kathy Mansfield, at 76 years old, a Transwoman, married to Lynette for 54 years and we have 4 children and 13 grandchildren.

I'm happy to share my views on ageism and respect for older TGD people, but I want to clarify that I am **not** claiming to speak for the whole community. These are my observations; drawn from my active transition years (from age 62 to current), the people I know and the stories that they and I have shared often through tears and sometimes laughter.

There are increasing numbers of older people transitioning or living out their gender diversity in later life. The current generation of older people grew up with limited knowledge or choices for gender expression outside the gender binary.

Many older people who thought they might be gender diverse early on in their lives, knew that disclosure could result in rejection, incarceration, or institutionalisation. As a result, many tried (unsuccessfully) to repress their gender diversity, many married and had children and are now embracing their gender diversity in their sixties seventies and eighties. This is such a special time of our lives, and it is also a time of great challenge.

I see advocates trying to understand how best to support and care for older TGD people. I am also aware of two projects supporting older TGD people. That is good, but so much more needs to be done. There appears to be increased awareness; but I don't want to overstate that. Previously I have made the mistake of thinking things are changing; and then they don't. Expectations can be artificially boosted and that is damaging and unhelpful.

Valuable insights surfaced with funding of the Kinfolk project by the Australian Government Department of Health and Aged Care. I was fortunate to be a co-researcher on that project and developed a Ripplegram analysis tool, a process to help older people understand and adjust for the consequences of later life transition.

More work needs to be done exploring the depth and scope of Ripplegrams with older TGD people and their families. We need to find out what this analysis tool means to them and then utilise this information to educate service providers, so they can better support us.

The marginalisation of older TGD people is caused by the transphobic attitudes of political operatives, inflexible religious dogmas and of individuals feeling threatened. We are too often dis-placed on our journey by those who hold the expectation that we should be compliant with their personal expectations.

The traumatising and life experiences of older TGD people are unique and disparate compared to gay men and lesbians. There is less acceptance of TGD people, and more hate.

Older TGD people who are read as gender diverse are more vulnerable to violence and abuse. Making sure we are safe remains a constant and exhausting task. TGD people rarely receive equity; there are higher levels of poverty, poorer mental health, and higher rates of abuse – add ageism to that for older TGD people!!!

Ripplegrams demonstrate that there can be significant issues for adult children and married partners to adjust when an older family member transitions. Some family relationships fall apart, in other families there are restrictions on gender expression, including complete repression of gender identity. This unique form of Elder Abuse or Family Violence has escalated in recent times and is still not adequately recognised.

In LGBTIQ+ communities there is a significant focus on youth gender expression and safety. No one wants that to stop; we just want to expand the focus to include older TGD folk.

I want you all to understand our UN designated human rights are on the cusp of being threatened, even in Australia, by political forces using trans hate as a political / religious wedge. The gains we have made towards general community acceptance and support are at risk of being lost. Those of us who are old have encountered transphobia all our lives – and it hasn't diminished. We now battle both ageism and transphobia. I want people to understand too many of us have compound trauma and have had to build walls to protect ourselves.

I share my story to enable greater understanding and support across the political spectra and the Australian peoples. I want people to understand I / we, are human first and foremost. My gender is just a part of who I am.

I want to ask people to read the Ripplegram report and think about how they can support older people who have reached a period in their lives when they know it's their last chance to be their authentic selves [alicesgarage.net/kinfolk](https://alicesgarage.net/kinfolk)