

## 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.

### Our Time, Kerrie Timms

I was born and raised on my Mitakoodi ancestral lands, adjoining the lands of my Kalkadoon ancestors in northwest Queensland. In my early twenties I was told that because I'm Aboriginal I would not live a long life. I decided to plan to live to 120.

I've had an extraordinary life so far: fantastic family; stimulating and rewarding work, and; a lifetime commitment to humanitarian work. But the next sixty years are all mine. I'm trying to figure out what this will mean. For now, I'm guided by a couple of questions: What am I willing to risk becoming the person I want to be? What am I holding onto right now that is holding me back? How has my family impacted how I see and exist in the world?

This is Our Time

Being an Elder can vary depending on class, culture, and other factors but currently it usually begins between 50 and 60 years of age. Living a long life is a gift. Many before us have worked hard to enable us to live long lives.

Many people, including Indigenous people, do not get to become elders due to hardship and exploitation. Yet, Elders are the fastest growing age group globally. All of us in this room are the result of a dream hard fought for.

We are a strong bunch, energetic, and intelligent. We have spent decades working on behalf of loved ones, humanity, and all life. In the process, we've amassed a tremendous amount of much-needed knowledge, experience, and perspective.

Still though there is massive misunderstanding of what it means to be an elder and this oppression hits us hard. We experience being ignored, dismissed, pitied, and treated disrespectfully. We are considered a burden to our families and society. Our generation is blamed for current world problems. If we can afford it, we are expected to retire, to leave important matters to younger people. Increasingly elders

are segregated from families and communities, resulting in isolation, vulnerability to exploitation, desperate loneliness, and lack of lifesaving help.

We are having to come to terms with declining health, disability, dying, and death. Our fears about illness, dementia, disability, dying, and death become attached to being an elder. Such fears can occupy large amounts of attention.

Yet these fears will yield to facing them. Opportunities to talk about them and to laugh and cry about their impact on our lives can leave us with a better picture of reality, more resilience to face difficulties, and more hope for the future.

We can find new and creative ways to continue to live big lives, to think well about our health, successfully respond to changes in our abilities, and when needed, thoughtfully prepare for death.

There are tough challenges in ageing but there is also joy, intelligence, and courage - needed to continue to grow and to think about what we shall do with the rest of our lives. There are big problems - climate emergency, pandemics, racial injustice, violent conflict, and economic inequality - that require immediate, creative solutions. We elders have the experience and perspective to join with others to become a powerful force in restoring the health of our planet and lead people to a rational, peaceful society.

Indigenous elders inherit responsibilities that come with moral obligations. Indigenous leadership is life-long: it's based on life-long learning; it is relationship-based; it considers positions of leadership as well as the responsibilities that come with the practice of leadership; and it places on us an obligation founded in responsibility for those who come behind, for all life, and for country.

We connect with you and other elders in a special bond: elders are as precious and essential to human society as all other humans. Society would be lost without our contribution, without us!

The future of humanity needs us, and we need to be intelligent and in good shape to respond. We need to be well rested, well nourished, well exercised, well organised, and well connected to others. This is our time.

Warm regards,

Kerrie Tim