

The Best and the Worst Times for Lifelong Learning

The Pass It On Network, a global peer-learning network of positive ageing advocates, sees this time as both the best and the worst of times for older adults seeking access to lifelong learning.

The Gap in Access to Learning

As illustrated by our Pass It On Network liaisons in 50+ countries, access to the Internet through a cell phone or tablet is adequate for every one of us to develop a world-wide learning community. With sufficient knowledge of English to communicate with one another, our liaisons co-create, share, and spread information about programs and policies and other resources that support wellbeing in later life.

For formal education, all of us who use the Internet have access to free online education courses (called MOOCs) that are presented by prominent universities around the world.

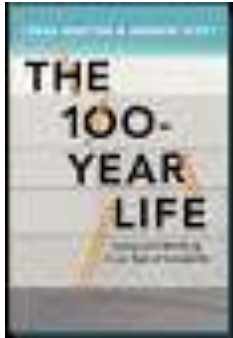
Regardless of income, we can participate in online peer-learning programs through Universities of the Third Age. For those who are homebound or otherwise socially isolated, virtual learning programs provide social connections as well as edifying learning.



On the other hand, in rural areas around the world where traditional agriculture has been replaced by large-scale industrial management and there is no universal income security program, young people have gone off to the cities and elders are frequently left behind without resources to satisfy basic needs. The Agewell Foundation's research in India, for example, shows that 20% of elders, either in rural areas or in big cities, have NO source of income and are reduced to begging. The gap between rich and poor is

increasing all over the world.....and affects both the very young and the very old most dramatically.

Education for Self-Empowerment Is Essential to Well-Being



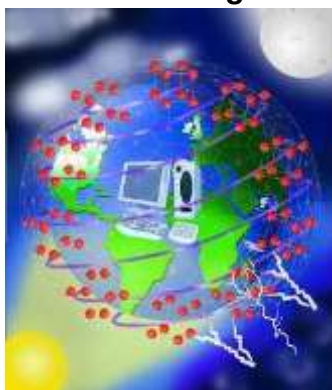
The function of the Pass It On Network is to connect positive ageing advocates with free or low-cost resources that empower the well-being of older persons. At this time when population worldwide is rapidly growing, much of the growth is due to increased longevity. Added longevity along with bulging post-World War II birth rates are outdistancing the capacity and security offered by individual savings and both public and employer pension funds. Social and economic shifts are diminishing the economic security of adults in cities as well as rural areas, and with that, challenging individual self-determination and well-being throughout the life span, not only in old age.

In many developed countries, older adults have relied on prolific public services, supplemented by affordable health care. But now, cutbacks in government budgets along with the increase in needy consumers and the shortage of low-paid caregivers have raised costs and reduced easy access to services.

Education that encourages individual self-empowerment is needed. Right now, we need to train both policy makers and service providers to be advocates for positive ageing, ready to prepare their older adult clients for self-empowered self-management. Every one of us should be encouraged to identify our needs, find the resources to meet those needs, and become self-advocates prepared to receive and make effective use of **all** available resources – including our own strengths.



Guaranteed Digital Access



Internet access is now ESSENTIAL for the self-determination and well-being of older adults. Digital tools with access to the Internet plus guidance for their effective use are needed by every individual. This is basic for the individual self-empowerment that underlies autonomy and independence. This is basic for realizing the desirable norms for autonomy and independence, economic and social security, and long term and palliative care being considered by OEWGA. First and foremost, universal digital access is essential to guarantee the right of older adults to education, training, and capacity-building services basic for self-determination.

What would guaranteed digital access for older persons look like?

Every older adult would receive a free smart phone with free Internet access and user training/support, in return for a commitment to fulfill conditions for use established by the local/regional/national jurisdiction.



The phone's software would include both individualized and standard elements:

- Standard – search engine, emergency help connection, translation to country's language (if needed), WhatsApp to promote community participation
- Individualized –
 - Direct connection with a minimum of two family/personal contacts
 - Local/regional Ageing Services Directory
 - Education/Lifelong Learning Directory
 - Individual banking

Supportive Public Policies/Programs (Resource List Available)

Pass It On Network's liaisons and partners are working globally on programs that foster digital access for older adults, including:

- Active Aging enabling legislation
- Ageing Service Directory formats
- Training programs to diminish ageist perceptions and expand self-empowerment
- Skills Bank for income-generating jobs
- Directory of Accessible Learning Opportunities format
- Third Age Universities worldwide connector
- Employer programs to boost retention of Older Workers
- Individual Banking software
- Virtual Reality training and support
- Intergenerational Digital Literacy Training programs

Rights for Older Persons Must Include Universal Digital Access

We are living the Longevity Revolution in real time. That means moving into the future prepared to develop a supportive, adaptive community for older persons worldwide. The Pass It On Network is eager to work with you on this effort.

Janet Hively, PhD, Co-founder
Pass It On Network
www.passitonnetwork.org