



Intergenerational Forum: 'It's on the Cards – Challenging Ageism through Intergenerational Dialogue' June 2026 Forum summary

Quick recap

This toolkit outlines the key insights, methodologies, and learnings from the Intergenerational Forum held on 3rd June 2026. Hosted by Flourishing Lives in partnership with [Magic Me](#), the session explored Magic Me's '[It's on the Cards](#)' project, a creative investigation into casual ageism through the lens of birthday cards.

1. The 'Co-Researcher' Model: A Blueprint for Equitable Practice

A central takeaway from the forum was the effectiveness of the **co-researcher model**, which shifts the dynamic from 'participants and artists' to a unified team of investigators.

- **Equal Authority:** The project treated 10-year-olds and older adults (aged 50–80+) as equal experts in researching ageism.
- **Checking Assumptions Early:** The process began with separate sessions for each group. This allowed participants to 'check assumptions' - realising, for instance, that they initially only knew generic things about the 'other' group based on their age.
- **Active Bridge-Building:** Facilitators intentionally used provocations and questions that everyone could answer equally, ensuring no generation was favoured. They also actively created 'bridges' to move participants out of age-segregated seating into intergenerational pairs.
- **A 'Design Studio' Approach:** The final output at the Wellcome Collection was framed as a 'Pinterest-style' design wall rather than a traditional gallery. This showcased the story of the research, including market research, prototypes, and rejected ideas, giving the public insight into the process.

2. Nuanced Insights: Deconstructing the 'Birthday Card Lens'

The forum identified that birthday cards often serve as a "cooking pot of assumptions". Participants identified several layers of ageism:

- **Internalised Ageism:** A "depressing" reality discussed was that ageist cards are frequently purchased by older people for their peers, reflecting how society's negative attitudes toward ageing are perpetuated by those most affected.

- **The Gendered Lens:** Ageism is rarely isolated; it is often wrapped in sexism and heteronormative tropes.
 - **For Women:** Cards for those in their 30s are obsessively focused on "Prosecco o'clock", pink themes, and physical attractiveness.
 - **For Men:** Cards often feature 'Antiques Roadshow' jokes, themes of 'conquering', or men 'telling people the rules'.
- **Banter vs. Teasing:** The 10-year-olds introduced classroom language regarding healthy relationships.
 - **Banter:** 'Mickey-taking' between friends where there is a shared experience and no one is the butt of the joke.
 - **Teasing/Ageism:** Occurs when a card tips into nastiness, especially when the sender and receiver lack a close relationship to provide context.

3. Creative Agency and Subversion

The project demonstrated that altering media is a powerful tool for empowerment.

- **Subversive Art:** One of the most successful exercises involved participants altering, destroying, or improving ageist cards using masking tape and pens. For example, one participant taped over the words "of your age" so a card simply read "People prefer cards", reclaiming agency over the message.
- **The 'Banana' Provocation:** A card stating "everything gets better with age except a banana" was identified as potentially harmful. For an older adult whose medical symptoms are being dismissed by doctors as "just your age," such a comparison can be deeply demoralising.
- **Freeze Frames:** Using green screens, groups acted out what they actually love to do, shifting the focus from "deterioration" to celebration and lived reality.

4. Systemic Impact: Why This Work Matters

The forum concluded by highlighting the real-world consequences of internalising ageist stereotypes:

- **Health and Longevity:** Research suggests that internalising negative stereotypes leads to higher stress, lower self-esteem, and a shorter lifespan.
- **Systemic Barriers:** Ageism manifests as hiring biases in the workplace and the dismissal of medical symptoms in healthcare ("just getting old").

- **Economic Factors:** The "economics of choice" means that cheaper, mass-market cards often rely on the most reductive stereotypes because they are seen as 'safe' cultural objects.

Core Principles & Key Takeaways for Arts & Wellbeing Providers

- **Foster Equitable Cognitive Horizons:** Providers must actively reject the 'future-past binary' - the assumption that only the young have a future and only the old have a past. Professional practice should be grounded in the belief that **everyone possesses a past, a present, a future, and an active imagination.**
- **Design for Structural Parity:** True intergenerational dialogue requires **equal provocations** - questions and activities that do not inherently favour the life stage or cultural capital of one group over another. Practitioners must act as bridge-builders, intentionally moving participants out of age-segregated comfort zones into collaborative pairs.
- **Maintain Intersectional Vigilance:** Ageism rarely operates in isolation; it is a "**cooking pot of assumptions**" frequently intertwined with sexism, classism, and heteronormative tropes. Providers should facilitate the deconstruction of these 'cultural objects' to reveal how they perpetuate reductive stereotypes, such as the gendered focus on 'attractiveness' for women versus 'conquering' for men.
- **Prioritise Relational Context:** Practitioners must distinguish between '**Banter**' and '**Teasing**'. While 'mickey-taking' can be a sign of a healthy, shared experience between peers, it tips into ageism or "nastiness" when the sender and receiver lack the personal relationship to provide context.
- **Empower through Subversive Agency:** A critical component of anti-ageist arts practice is giving participants the **agency to alter, repurpose, or reject** dominant media. This act of "creative rebellion" - such as taping over or amending offensive text - transforms participants from passive recipients of ageist messages into empowered social critics.
- **Position Anti-Ageism as Creative Health:** Challenging ageist stereotypes is not just a social goal but a **direct wellbeing intervention.** Because internalised ageism can lead to higher stress, lower self-esteem, and shorter lifespans, intergenerational arts practice serves as a vital tool for improving long-term health outcomes and dismantling systemic barriers in healthcare.