Emily Evans

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To: Emily Evans
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International Longevity Centre UK

Latest news

ILC Friday three

- Reasons for optimism - the benefits of animal companionship
- Lifelong learning - why aren't more of us going back to school?
- ILC at the party conferences - see you there?

Reason for optimism - the benefits of animal companionship



This week, some of the team were in Tokyo to conduct further research for ILC's Mental Health Matters project, supported by Boehringer. While there, Patrick Swain, ILC's Research and Development Manager, ticked off something at the top of his bucket list: a visit to a capybara café.

The first capybara café opened its doors in the early 2000s, and since then, these cafés have gained immense popularity both within Japan and internationally. Apparently, capybaras hold a special place in Japanese culture, with their popularity boosted by anime characters; they are often considered symbols of relaxation and tranquillity.

Research has long suggested that humans benefit physically and emotionally from spending time with animals. Lower blood pressure, reduced stress, and more exercise are just a few of the benefits. Other advantages may include preventing the development of allergies and, of course, pet ownership provides companionship and enriches socialisation and quality of life.

In the UK, around 400 care or therapeutic farms of all shapes and sizes provide health and social care, mental health and wellbeing support, rehabilitation, or specialist education support. Treatment often involves taking part in agricultural tasks, and similar provisions are replicated across Europe and in the USA. Additionally, prisons have programmes that pair inmates with dogs from local shelters to train them to be well-behaved and more adoptable, or, in some cases, to work as service dogs.

A variety of animals also provide pet-assisted therapy in hospitals, hospices and assisted living or care facilities. Patients who may not respond to staff or relatives can be delighted by a visit from a dog or cat. While more research is needed, visits from animals can help people living with dementia find focus and calm when little else does.

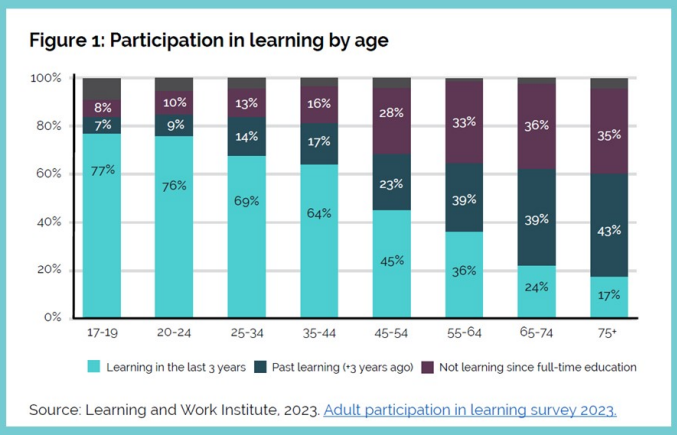
As we age, and particularly as fewer of us are having children, our reliance on animals will grow. However, despite the many benefits, caring for a cat or dog comes with its own set of challenges as individuals age. Physical limitations, memory loss, behavioural changes, and financial constraints may complicate caring for a pet. Further ethical and moral challenges might arise as more of us desire and demand novel experiences and seek to interact with exotic animals.

Our route map for long lives covered a wide breadth of themes but made scant mention of the vital role played by animals across these. It is an area that the ILC would be very interested in exploring further, and if you might be interested in working with us on such a project please contact us via the button below.

These giant South American rodents have become something of a viral sensation, with a deluge of photos, videos and memes online racking up millions of views – and it seems likely that the capybara café concept will spread. In the meantime, here at the ILC we can attest to the joy they bring – we've never seen Patrick look so happy.

WORK WITH US

Lifelong learning - why aren't more of us going back to school?



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Phoenix Insights

This week, thousands of 16-year-olds began their A-levels, including some ILC summer interns and work experience students. Each year, over 500,000 students sit their A-level exams, and 700,000 people apply to universities through UCAS. But as we age, we engage with learning less.

This year, a data analyst from Portsmouth got his Maths GCSE at the age of 42. In 2022, a 92-year-old became the oldest person to sit a GCSE exam (and he passed with flying colours!). However, these stories are seen as heartwarming anomalies, when in fact, they could be the norm. Why aren't more of us going back to school?

In 2021, nearly one in five people in England and Wales reported having no qualifications. Whilst learning is often seen as an act reserved for the young, the need for education and the ability to learn don't diminish as we age.

Qualifications can lead to better employment opportunities and higher incomes, but it goes beyond that. Lifelong learning can improve life satisfaction, mental health, and self-esteem. It's even been linked to strengthening entire economies. However, learning for older adults often remains underutilised – it can be expensive, time-consuming, and nerve-wracking. In 2023, only 36% of people aged 55 to 64, 24% of those aged 65 to 74, and 17% of those aged 75 and over said they'd taken part in any kind of learning in the past three years in the UK.

ILC's previous work on lifelong learning calls for shifting cultures around learning in the UK, increasing the range of learning opportunities, and boosting investment in continuous education. It is, of course, wonderful to see stories of people succeeding, but adults continuing to learn should not be considered an anomaly.

READ MORE

ILC at the party conferences - see you there?

Party Conferences

This autumn, members of the team will be heading to Brighton, Liverpool, and Birmingham for the Liberal Democrat, Labour, and Conservative party conferences. If you are going to be at any of the conferences, please let us know via events@ilcuk.org.uk—we'd love to catch up over a cup of tea or coffee at some point.

Alongside the Labour Party Conference, we will be holding an invitation-only breakfast meeting, supported by Brightwell, to help us identify politically workable solutions to better enable the UK to realise the economic and social opportunities of longer lives. What more might we need from our private and public services over the next five years to address the challenges of an ageing society? How can we better plan to ensure we all benefit more from the opportunities of our longer lives?

Solution-focused breakfast at the Labour Party Conference:

Date: Monday 23 September
Time: 8:00 am – 10:00 am
Location: Liverpool

This is a limited-capacity event at a venue near the conference centre. If you are going to be in Liverpool and would like to join us, please email us via the button below.

In our meetings with policymakers across all three political parties, we'll be reiterating our key messages, urging a holistic vision and action to ensure we address the challenges of our ageing population and harness the potential of longer, healthier lives.

CONTACT US HERE

To keep up-to-date with ILC events throughout the year, please continue to check our website on a regular basis.

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