

the CANINE CORNER

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Kathleen's greyhound Izzy walking alongside her pram, and taking a ride.

The Ministry of Social Development has a Positive Ageing strategy for New Zealanders which aims to guide and maintain 'a society where older people are highly valued and recognised as an integral part of families and communities.'

Since a large proportion of my clientele are older dogs who are also valued family members, I decided to ask my human customers what Positive Ageing for their dogs meant to them.

Many equated positive ageing with quality of life and, in particular, a life without pain.

"I want my dog to be able to keep doing the things she loves without pain," said one respondent.

"Working with my vet, we will minimise her discomfort and use whatever services are needed."

Heather Murphy, creator of NZ-based Eezapet ointment, said "Positive ageing to me means ageing with minimum pain – or pain managed so the dog is the most comfortable they can be. And not just through the use of drugs, but also treatments like acupuncture, cold laser, hydrotherapy and massage."

Other dog parents talked less about pain and more about other factors in achieving quality of life:

"I want my dog to still enjoy her food, toys and our time together with both human and doggie friends," said one.

"Slowing down is okay," said another.

"Our dogs age must faster than we do, so acknowledging the different needs of an older dog is paramount," said another who

works in a (human) healthcare setting.

"My dog's needs are similar now to what my ageing mother experienced

including the need to reassess nutrition, take supplements, and use therapies like massage. All have proven important to achieving a comfortable and healthy old age."

Vulnerability was a key theme, too.

Dog parents recognise that their ageing and arthritic dogs may feel at risk in situations such as when they are confronted by off-lead or younger dogs, or with challenging surfaces such as stairs and steps. It was the human family's job to protect them from these risky settings.

Many dog parents are taking an occupational therapy approach to their older dog's care using aids such as folding ramps for getting in and out of the car.

In closing, I'll leave you with another aid — a pram.

My greyhound Izzy can't walk as far or for as long as she used to thanks to a combination of arthritis and painful corns. After three months of a desensitisation and counter-conditioning training program, she now uses her pram daily.

She will walk and toilet normally and then, as she slows down or starts to limp, she will ride the rest of the way home. 🐾