

# What we learn from older people about resilience

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# Ageing, Older persons and the UN's 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

- Address exclusion, vulnerability and intersectional discrimination against older people
- Go beyond treating older persons as a vulnerable group
- Recognise older persons as active agents of societal development
  - to achieve truly transformative, inclusive, sustainable development outcomes
- Lifecourse approach to ageing
  - protect and promote rights of older persons

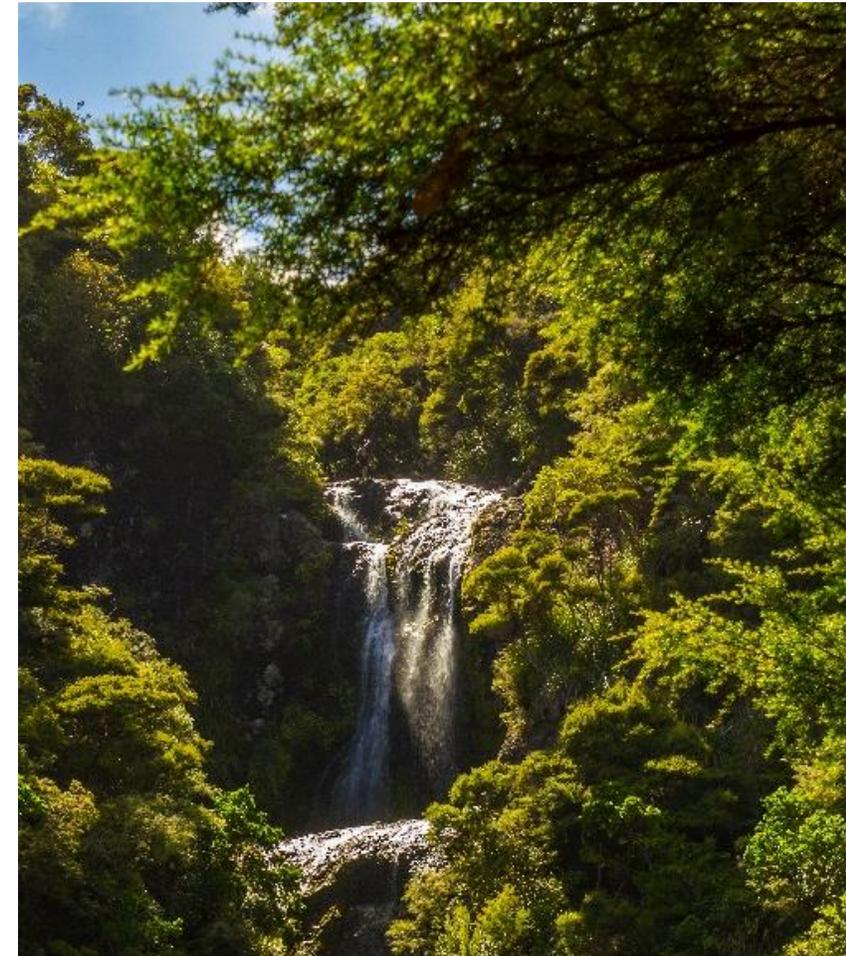
**AGEING, OLDER PERSONS  
AND THE 2030 AGENDA FOR  
SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT**



# What we learn about resilience from older people

## Outline

- Resilience instead of vulnerability / success
- Resilience as contextual not just individual
- Complex pathways to resilience
- Rethink vulnerability, frailty → inTERdependence

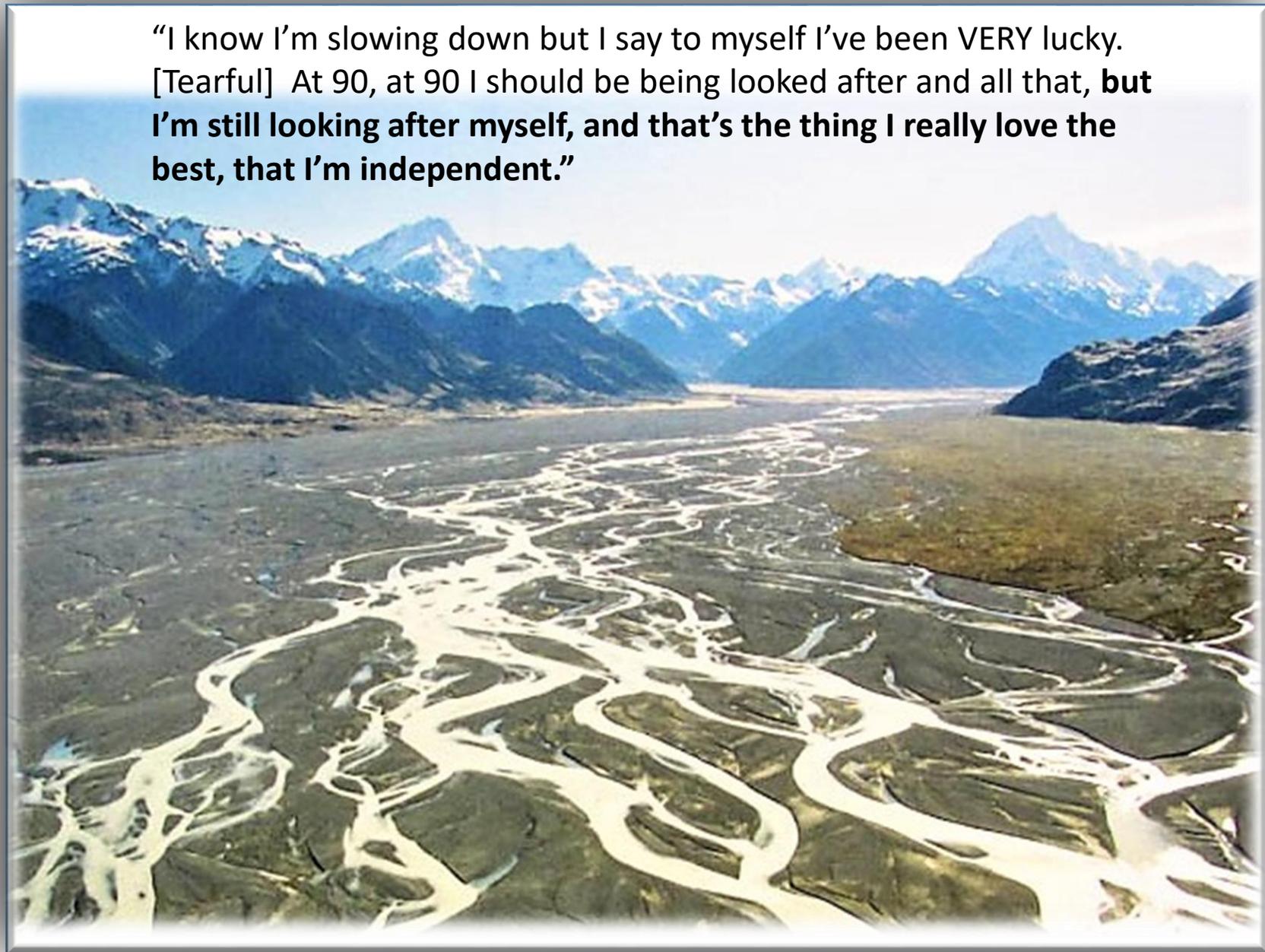


“[my son] wanted me to go to full-time care and we had some words over it...but yesterday he said ‘I’m much happier now Dad’. I go to [his] twice a week and he comes here every day on the way home. He picks up the [newspaper] which I give him **and it’s a system that works.**”

“My good neighbours give me four cooked meals a week ... I pay them something, but they’re not out to make money. **They’re good people.**”

“... the lady comes in every Friday [for last eight years] ... She does two and a half hours, and I pay her, and **we’ve become friends.**”

(TH, male, non-Māori, 90 years)



“I know I’m slowing down but I say to myself I’ve been VERY lucky. [Tearful] At 90, at 90 I should be being looked after and all that, **but I’m still looking after myself, and that’s the thing I really love the best, that I’m independent.**”

Cope  
Bounce back  
Flourish

Resilience

Adversity

Resources & assets

Individual

Environment

Process



# Resilience: Steering between perspectives

## Biomedical approaches to ageing

- Ageing as decline, frailty, disease
- Pathology oriented

Strengths perspective

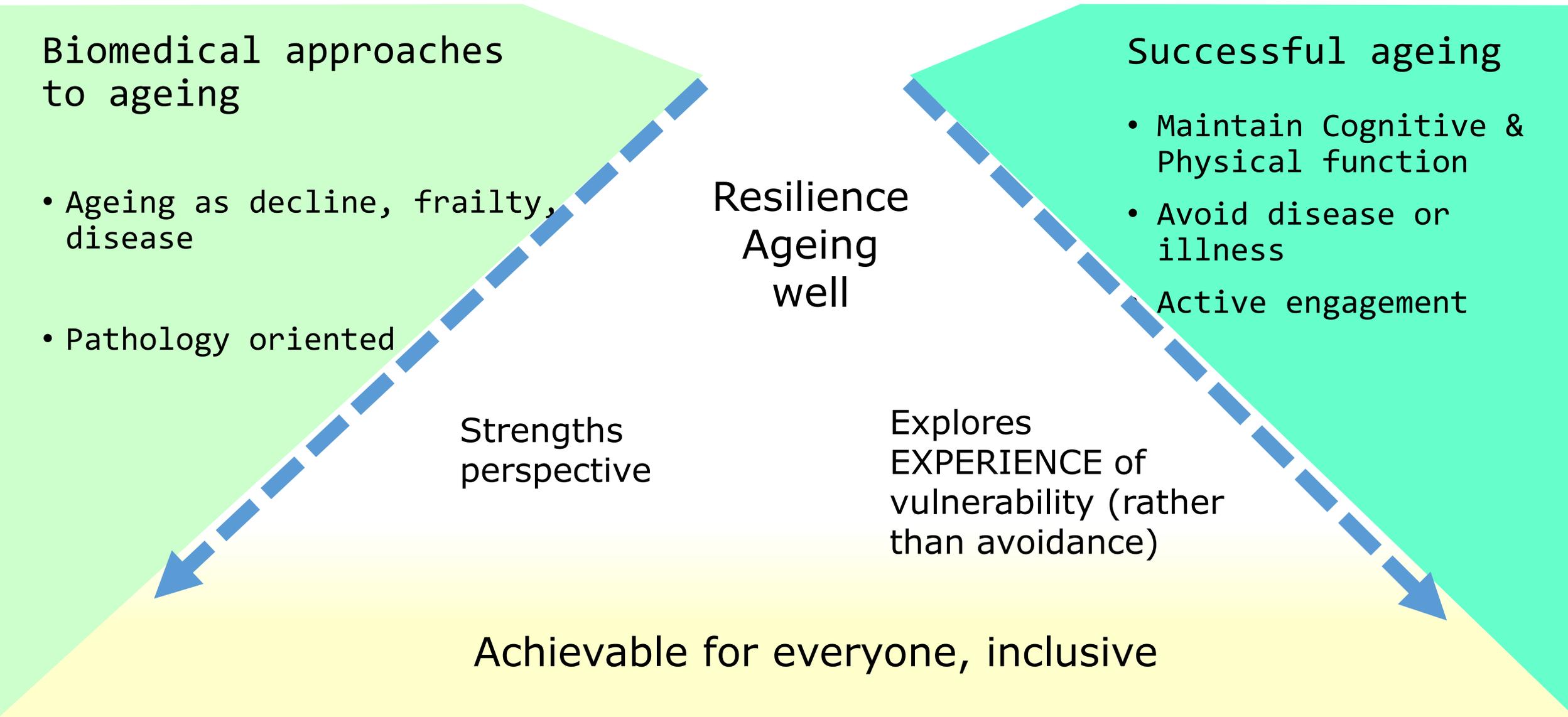
## Successful ageing

- Maintain Cognitive & Physical function
- Avoid disease or illness
- Active engagement

Explores EXPERIENCE of vulnerability (rather than avoidance)

Resilience  
Ageing well

Achievable for everyone, inclusive



# Popular Measures of resilience

## Wagnild and Young – 5 core values

- Strong sense of purpose, meaning, core values
- Perseverance, Determination to succeed (grit)
- Self-reliance
- Equanimity (Adjustment to challenge, resourcefulness, capability)
- Existential aloneness

## Friborg etc Resilience Scale for Adults

- Personal competence
- Social competence
- Social support
- Family coherence
- Personal structure

## Connor-Davidson Resilience scale

- Personal competence
- Acceptance of change and secure relationships
- Trust/tolerance
- Strengthening effects of stress
- Control
- Spiritual influences

...focus is on personal characteristics

# Resilience as older people define it

- Can live with adversity AND be well
  - Balance
  - Time
  - Different pathways
  - Attitude ... AND resources
  - Contributions

Wiles, Janine, Wild, Kirsty, & Allen, Ruth (2012). Resilience from the point of view of older people: 'There's still life beyond a funny knee'. *Social Science & Medicine*, 74(3), 416-424.

# Resilience as older people define it

“I like this statement, ‘one can have illness or disability but still be healthy’.

But you have to reach the place where you can accept that. ... my doctor reminded me, ‘you still have the basic disabilities and illness, and you’ve just reached a place where you’ve got it all in the right perspective’.

Two years ago I couldn’t have”

(Joy, in interview)

Resilience and ageing in place study



# Resilience as older people define it

Jane: If you get a funny knee and you have to walk with crutches, you can. There's still life beyond the funny knee, isn't there?

And be able to take, to accept help, like Meals on Wheels if you can't cook. To be able to accept that graciously rather than feel that it's a charity. But you know, you accept help and if you can, give it back. Even if you only smile.

Laurie: And I think you've got to be aware too of all the agencies around that can help you.

Jane: Yes. And be prepared to take advantage of them.

Jane & Laurie in interview

Resilience and ageing in place study



Adobe Images

# ‘Care for place’ – many ways older people contribute to their communities

e.g., driving Meals on Wheels

## Volunteering

e.g., collecting money to support local causes

e.g., helping people with access to benefits or care entitlements

## Advocacy

e.g., representing to local state providers like housing committees, raising awareness

e.g., painting out graffiti, helping in community gardens

## Nurturing

e.g., connecting and networking in groups and linking to other groups

e.g., legal action on environmental issues

## Activism

e.g., protests, letters to politicians, lobbying for better housing

# Social ecology model Resilience at micro, meso, and macro levels



“It is not just the existence of resources that matters, but **the ability to negotiate access** to them, and to **convert** resources into **personally meaningful** positive outcomes”

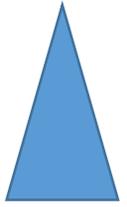
Wild, Kirsty, Janine Wiles, Ruth Allen (2013) 'Resilience: thoughts on the value of the concept for critical gerontology' *Ageing and Society* 33(1) 137-158

# Social ecology model Resilience in different domains

- Financial
- Emotional
- Environment
- Mental health
- Historical/ temporal
- Spiritual
- Cultural
- ....



Wild, Kirsty, Wiles, Janine, & Allen, Ruth (2011). 'Resilience: thoughts on the value of the concept for critical gerontology. *Ageing & Society*, 33(2), 137-158



# Diverse resources for resilience

- For Māori aged 80-90 years
- Active engagement in cultural practice  $\leftrightarrow$  better self-rated health & functional status
- Worse health associated with colonisation



Dyall, Lorna, Mere Kepa, Ruth Teh, Rangimārie Mules, ... Kerse, Ngaire (2014). Cultural and social factors and quality of life of Māori in advanced age. Te puawaitanga o ngā tapuwae kia ora tonu – Life and living in advanced age: a cohort study in New Zealand (LiLACS NZ). *New Zealand Medical Journal*, 127(1393), 62-79.

# What does this mean for gerontology nurses?

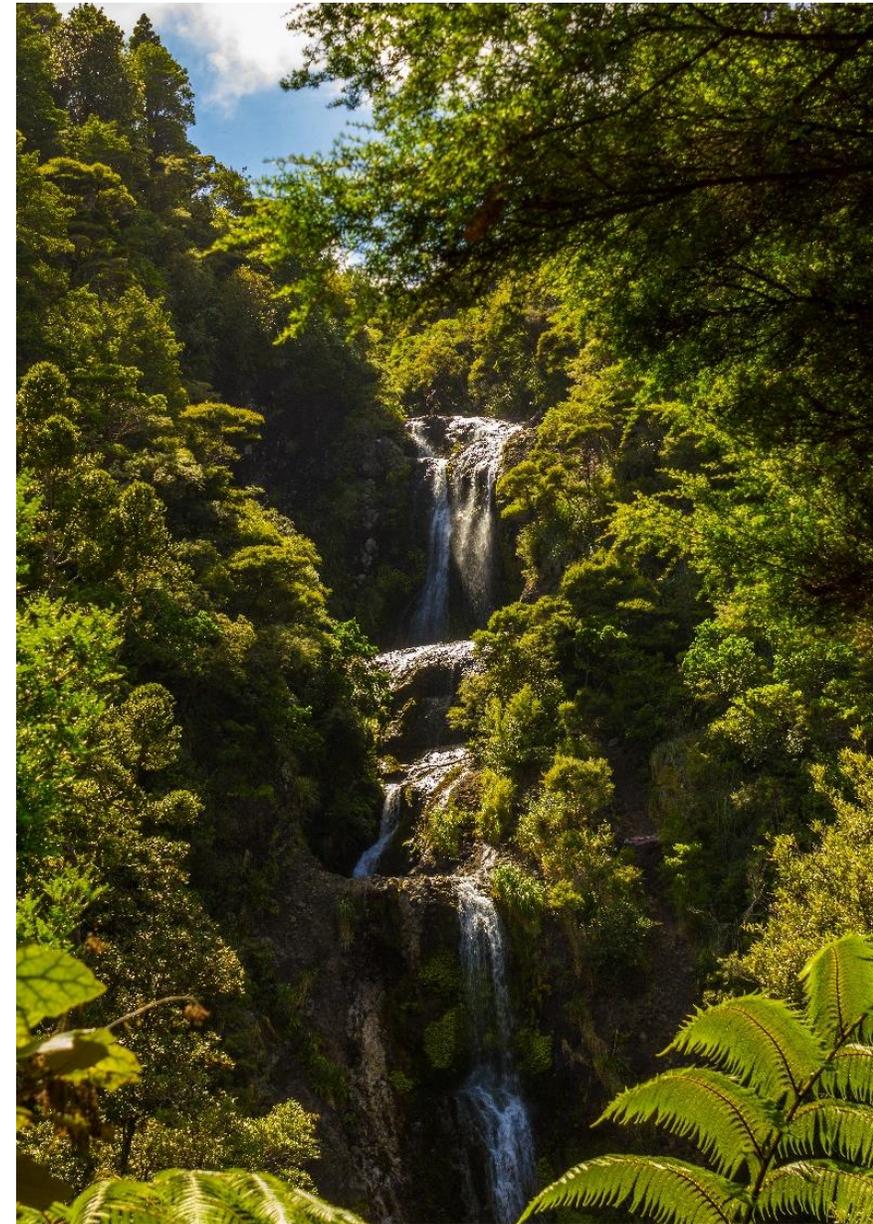
- Work WITH older people and supporters to support and maintain wellbeing
- Recognise, support, expand areas of strength and expertise
- Accept and support resilience as an ongoing process
- Help negotiate meaningful access to services and resources
- Encourage inclusion and connectedness



Source: [Gardenorganic.org.uk](https://www.gardenorganic.org.uk)

# What we learn about resilience from older people

- Resilience as a useful way to move past vulnerability-success divide
  - Recognise adversity, challenges, complexity
  - And contributions & strengths
- Needs to include personal characteristics & external resources
- A process, takes time, ups and downs
  - Different pathways
- Rethink vulnerability, frailty, dependence
  - InTERdependence



# Thank you and acknowledgements

- All our research participants
- Funders – HRC, NSC NZ
- Co-authors and co-researchers on projects