



A Legacy Document of **Health Service Executive, Age Friendly Ireland & Other Initiatives**

Ireland's Response to Older People During COVID-19





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Dr Colm Henry
*Chief Clinical Officer,
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Foreword

In March 2020, Ireland began implementing a range of restrictions to reduce the spread of COVID-19 in the population. Many of these restrictions focused on keeping the older population safe, advising those over 70 years not to leave their homes (cocooning) and to limit all contact with others beyond that required for essential care. The report on The Impact of ‘cocooning’ measures on older people adopted in March 2020 produced by Dr Siobhan Kennelly, the then National Clinical Advisory Group Lead for Older Persons (NCAGL) identified the unintended consequences and health issues of these measures. Social isolation and loss of social links was having a negative effect on the overall health and wellbeing of those impacted by these measures particularly those who were hard to reach.

In November 2020 as we faced into the second wave of COVID-19 the recommendations in that report set the direction for focus not just on the medical needs of the older person but on their overall physical and mental health and wellbeing. As the HSE’s Chief Clinical Officer I approved a joint project with the HSE’s National Health & Wellbeing Division and the National Integrated Care Programme for Older Persons to intensify and scale up supports to older people in the community and to align very strongly with the cross government, local authority led Staying Connected strand of the Community Resilience and Wellbeing programme which was included in the Government’s Living with Covid-19 plan. The Staying Connected strand was to establish a means to ensure that anybody who is isolated is supported to have that addressed appropriately which included older people.

The process undertaken as part of this project is commended. The analysis and evaluation of resources already in place with the identification of gaps provided robust information for the development of an online repository of resources for older persons on a county by county basis. I am delighted to welcome this legacy document presenting the health and wellbeing supports available for older persons as well as letting us hear the voice of the older person on what makes a difference to their

health and wellbeing. It highlights the importance of appropriate easy to reach health and wellbeing initiatives for older persons. Focusing on the holistic health and wellbeing of the person has emphasised the importance of the environment and social connectivity for our older persons. We need to continue to create awareness of the importance of the areas as set out in this document and support initiatives that address them.

I would like to acknowledge the contributions from so many who made this production possible. Sincere thanks to the National Integrated Care Programme for Older People, Health & Wellbeing Strategy & Research, Age Friendly Ireland and the Older Persons Representatives. I thank in particular Dr Stephanie O’Keeffe, former National Director for Health & Wellbeing. I also thank the members of Working Group with a special mention for the co-chairs of the Working Group Dr Siobhan Kennelly (former NCAG Older persons), Sarah McCormack, Healthy Ireland Health and Wellbeing and Des Mulligan (NICPOP) together with Catherine McGuigan, Age Friendly Ireland and her team for their significant contribution.



Executive Summary

This report, commissioned by the HSE Health & Wellbeing Division, in partnership with the Age Friendly Ireland National Programme, was undertaken to capture the breadth and array of initiatives undertaken by Statutory, State-funded and Community & Voluntary groups to support people to come together, while staying apart throughout these extraordinary times.¹ It is a review of age friendly and HSE-led initiatives identified during Covid-19 which have been collated and uploaded onto a repository so that it can be used in the future to support the work of key practitioners working with older people in the community.

The report showcases initiatives undertaken to support the needs of older people during Covid-19. It looks at the challenges and some opportunities that arose over the last two years since the start of pandemic. It highlights the resilience of older people in the face of adversity. It also shows what can be achieved when service providers and the community and voluntary sector come together with a common purpose for the greater good of the community as a whole.

The Covid-19 pandemic has had a massive impact on every aspect of our lives. Words and phrases such as '*lockdown*', '*cocooning*', '*level 5 restrictions*', '*social distancing*', '*quarantining*' and '*bubbles*', have become part of our new everyday vocabulary. We became familiar with a new routine of washing our hands and wearing face masks. Acronyms such as PPE

(Personal Protective Equipment) and PCR (*Polymerase Chain Reaction*) became familiar to us through daily news broadcasts. We met each other in a virtual capacity, took part in online activities, carried out contactless interactions, and adhered to the two metre rule. Everyone had to adapt their lifestyles to the new norms of Covid restrictions, however for some people – particularly older people with additional needs – adjusting to the changes and the restrictions represented a significant challenge.

Over the past two years, the pandemic challenged all of us, it forced us to rethink how we live our lives. It required the business community to demonstrate creativity and flexibility in order to stay viable, meeting the needs of people compelled to stay in their homes due to Covid-19 restrictions. It required us to find new ways to stay active, stay creative and, most importantly, to stay in touch with our families and friends and our community.

Over the last 15 years, the Age Friendly Ireland National Programme has consulted widely with older people on matters of concern to them. This commitment to consultation was again applied when collating the examples of initiatives/ models of best practise for inclusion in this legacy document. A consultation process was undertaken with the support of representatives from Age Friendly Older Persons Councils (OPCs) country-wide. Using the Department of Health's Healthy Ireland 'Keep Well' Campaign themes - '*Keeping Active*', '*Staying Connected*',

¹ It also includes initiatives external to the HSE, delivered by local authorities, other state agencies, community and voluntary groups and national organisations such as NGOs.



'Switching off and being creative', 'Eating Well' and 'Minding your mood', three workshops were held with Older People's Council members (sample size 45), to discuss initiatives, identify challenges and make recommendations. Working with key HSE staff, older people's feedback informed co-design of HSE resources making them more Age Friendly. Two Focus groups were held with the Age Friendly Programmes Manager's and Healthy Ireland Co-ordinators, to identify key initiatives being delivered in local communities to address challenges associated with cocooning and isolation during this period. Challenges were discussed along with recommendations based on experiences. The HSE national leads for policy priority programme areas were consulted to communicate gaps and agree actions to address needs. In addition to this, older people were consulted by means of an online questionnaire (sample size 89) along with 5 two-hour Focus Group Sessions (sample size 35). In addition, a series of over-the-phone interviews circa 8, were carried out with vulnerable older people outside of the system to ensure the views of the marginalised were reflected in the report. This process fulfilled two functions - to ascertain the views and experiences of older people during Covid-19 and to establish initiatives considered to be age friendly models of best practice by older people themselves. The Age Friendly Ireland Shared Service established a repository on the Age Friendly Ireland website to log projects, while collecting data from statutory and community & voluntary sector service providers to share models of best practice and communicate available resources to older people themselves. Feedback from the analysis process support the following findings, recommendations and conclusions.

Key Findings

The consultation process revealed a number of interesting findings and gave rise to recommendations:

Keeping Active: Two thirds of respondents said they walked during the pandemic. Many continued to keep as active as they could, especially in the initial stages, keep doing their shopping, walking and gardening. While the introduction of Level 5 Restrictions had a huge impact upon them, most accepted that the action was taken to protect them. Almost half of respondents availed of online classes while others, not online, took to walking in the local park or completed laps in the garden. Many rediscovered their local amenities and were quick to applaud the local authorities for the maintenance of the local parks.

When selecting age friendly initiatives supporting older people to stay active, it is interesting to note that the assessment group unanimously voted for initiatives such as Donegal's *'Physical Activity Awareness Raising'* which used the power of local radio to engage with older people. The group also selected Age & Opportunity's *'Fitline'* Physical Activity programme. This over-the-phone fitness programme was selected not only for the physical activity element, but because of the social connectivity. All agreed that radio is inclusive, giving the sense that someone is in the room with you.

Staying Connected: Ninety percent of respondents said they used their phones to stay connected. Participants in focus groups and over-the-phone interviews concurred with this finding also. 46% said they used WhatsApp or Zoom to facetime family and friends.

Participants in the focus group were divided in their feelings about technology. All appreciated the opportunity that technology afforded them to stay in touch as a group in their local Older Persons Councils. Some felt that technology could not replace the camaraderie of volunteer groups or friendships and networking opportunities that face-to-face meetings offer. They were in agreement that consideration needed to be given to other ways of staying connected for those older people who are not online.

Switching off and being creative: Two thirds of respondents said they read more. Over half said they took up online classes. All of the people consulted as part of the review process took the time during the pandemic to catch up on reading and television programmes. Others took to gardening, knitting and baking while a lot of those consulted undertook DIY jobs in the house or garden. The list of creative initiatives rolled out during Covid-19 is to be commended. Virtual concerts and online painting sessions, along with creative writing and webinars, were among the many creative opportunities available. Most of the initiatives required access to a smart device which excluded older people who are not online and don't want to be. There is clearly an enthusiasm amongst older participants for interactive, intergenerational creative projects. Initiatives such as Kildare's *'CovidNotebook'* project and Monaghan's *'Song Ties'* are great examples of creative initiatives that are interactive and inclusive.

Eating Well: More than half of people continued shopping for themselves. A minority of respondents shopped online. Approximately one third of respondents had family members or friends shop for them when the restrictions were introduced.

All of the people consulted continued to eat well during the pandemic. Most continued to shop for themselves until level 5 restrictions were introduced and then family, friends and neighbours did the shopping for them. Most said they realised how lucky they were to have family and others thanked the emergency services for stepping into this role on behalf of people who had no family to look out for them. Local community and voluntary groups were also acknowledged, in particular the GAA who organised at parish level to provide a fuel and food delivery service to those that were cocooning in the early phase of the pandemic. All who took part in the consultation process praised agencies and organisations who provided them with information packs and goodie bags.

Minding your mood: Approximately two fifths of respondents indicated that they felt some level of anxiety due to the pandemic.

The impact of Covid-19 on the positive and emotional wellbeing of older people cannot be overestimated. While many of those consulted indicated that they just got on with things and didn't think too deeply about it, others who would normally be volunteers in the community found themselves overwhelmed and many are still struggling to come out of it. Participants have lost family and friends and feel that they have been unable to grieve for them.



Key Lessons to be Learned

Staying Active

Consideration should be given to:

- ▶ Continuation of the use of radio recognising that radio is still a powerful medium to raise the level of awareness of older people about Health and Wellbeing initiatives
- ▶ Greater benefits could be achieved by involving older people when planning physical activity programmes for older people

Staying Connected:

Consideration should be given to:

- ▶ Rolling out more practical household maintenance projects e.g. Care & Repair and Helping Hands across the country
- ▶ Promoting greater awareness of IT supports and training
- ▶ Using other alternatives to online in order to reach vulnerable older people
- ▶ Developing more peer-to-peer and inter-generational IT support initiatives

Switching off and being creative

Consideration should be given to:

- ▶ Developing and adapting more interactive creative projects
- ▶ Providing more support to agencies and organisations who support the ageing agenda
- ▶ Recognising that consultation with vulnerable older people is vital to the development of creative programmes

Eating Well

Consideration should be given to:

- ▶ Retaining the structures of the Local Authority Community Response Teams
- ▶ Repeating the 'Healthy Foods Made Easy' programme²
- ▶ Developing a 'Healthy Food Tips' programme for radio
- ▶ Exploring opportunities to develop 'Meals on Wheels' as a local development social enterprise model, in conjunction with volunteers
- ▶ Exploring opportunities to develop community cafés

² Nineteen new Slaintecare Healthy Community initiatives have been established. Each will provide Healthy Food Made Easy to their communities.

Minding your mood

Consideration should be given to:

- ▶ Supporting an advertising campaign to promote awareness of the Irish Hospice Foundation's Bereavement Helpline
- ▶ Developing a '*Minding Your Wellbeing*' programme for broadcast on radio or podcast
- ▶ Providing support services/counselling for the volunteers who supported others to get through Covid-19
- ▶ Collating all leaflets, booklets and information covering all Health & Wellbeing thematic areas
- ▶ Exploring other ways of reaching vulnerable older people other than by smart devices
- ▶ Continuing to maintain the structures of the Local Authority Community Response Teams



The Challenge

“2020 was the year that Covid-19 and Zoom took over our lives”

Eileen Doyle, CEO Cáirdeas, Co Carlow

The past two years have been the most challenging of times. During this period we were forced to think differently, about how to deliver services to the wider public as a whole but in particular how to support marginalized communities including our vulnerable older population to stay active and connected to family, friends and the wider local community.

Covid-19 restrictions, while necessary to keep us alive, left older people completely disconnected from everyday life. Those in nursing homes or being cared for in their own homes were launched into a world of silence as they were no longer able to meet in the community areas of nursing homes and more importantly could not have visits from family or friends. Moreover, during Level 5 Restrictions, those over 70 years were advised not to go shopping and had to rely on family, neighbours or community volunteers to shop of their behalf. In addition, agencies and organisations providing care services for vulnerable people found themselves struggling to keep in contact with their clients. Community Day Care services were forced to close their doors, leaving many day care clients with little or no communication with people other than the postman

Digital Solutions Supporting Marginalised Communities – Interim Report May 2021 ACORN

The pandemic presented us with a huge challenge but the national response through the Community Call and Community Response Fora demonstrated vision in collaborative action and responses. The following are some examples of initiatives rolled out in response to Covid-19 that helped to support people to stay active, stay connected, switch off and be creative, eat well and support positive mental health and wellbeing.



The Response

Global Response

‘COVID-19 is changing older people’s daily routines, the care and support they receive, their ability to stay socially connected and how they are perceived. Older people are being challenged by requirements to spend more time at home, lack of physical contact with other family members, friends and colleagues, temporary cessation of employment and other activities as well as anxiety and fear of illness and death – their own and others. It is therefore important that we create opportunities to foster healthy ageing during the pandemic’

WHO 2020

In January 2020, the World Health Organisation (WHO) declared the Novel Coronavirus outbreak a public health emergency of international concern. In February 2020, a Global Research and Innovation Forum was convened, bringing together key experts from every part of the world, to assess the level of knowledge about the virus, identify gaps and work together to accelerate and fund priority research, with equitable access as a fundamental principle underpinning this work.

The WHO, together with partners, continued its commitment to providing guidance and advice during the COVID-19 pandemic for older people and their households, health and social care workers and local authorities and community groups.

National Response

“We are all finding it very strange to be home and to be keeping away from our family and community. But those that are vulnerable or in need of a bit of help need to know that they are not alone. The government is tapping into the reach of our local authorities in every corner of Ireland, as well as the extraordinary dedication of a legion of voluntary groups and charities. For those who need some help, it is there for you.”

Minister Simon Coveney, April 2020

In response to the impact of COVID-19 on the health and wellbeing of Irish people, the government recognised that the COVID-19 pandemic illustrated the strength and depth of community life in Ireland. It acknowledged that the resilient solidarity that helped to withstand the pressures of the lockdown emergency was drawn from a deep community life and pride of place.

In April 2020, the government launched ‘The Community Call’ in a major nationwide volunteering effort. The purpose of the ‘Community Call’ was to co-ordinate community activity, direct community assistance to where it was needed and marshal the volunteering

energy of the country. Local Authorities were tasked with setting up a Community Response Forum in each administrative area.

Alongside the ‘Community Call’, government launched the ‘In This Together’ campaign, which aimed to help everyone in Ireland to stay connected, stay active and look after their mental wellbeing throughout the Covid-19 emergency. On foot of the success of these two campaigns, the government reiterated its commitment to supporting the health and wellbeing of everyone by rolling out the ‘KeepWell’ Campaign in October 2020. Building on the success of the earlier ‘In This Together’ campaign, the new campaign focused on 5 key themes - Keeping Active, Staying Connected, Switching Off and Being Creative, Eating Well and Minding your Mood.

HSE Older Persons Health and Wellbeing Covid Response

The HSE established a working group in November 2020 to focus on older people's health and wellbeing during the pandemic, in particular older people who are hard to reach. The HSE built on an existing working relationship with the Age Friendly Shared Service, developed a formal partnership, and contracted an experienced Age Friendly Programme Manager to identify and recommend initiatives to be scaled up and replicated in other areas based on the success they achieved and to advise on the targeting of resources and initiatives for at risk groups or areas around the country.

Health and Wellbeing

Healthy Ireland, A Framework for Improved Health and Wellbeing 2013-2025, a cross-government wellbeing policy, lays the foundations to improve the health and wellbeing of our nation over the coming generation. It gives significant emphasis to improving wellbeing across the life course, addressing key lifestyle challenges, health inequalities and the wider determinants of health. The Healthy Ireland Framework is further enforced by the Sláintecare Implementation Strategy and Action Plan 2021-2023 and the Healthy Ireland Strategic Action Plan 2021-2025.

Health and Wellbeing, Strategy and Research is focused on helping people to stay healthy and well, reducing health inequalities and protecting people from threats to their health and wellbeing. It focuses on prevention and early intervention, aims to reduce obesity, alcohol misuse and smoking, improve sexual health, promote positive mental health, and invest in the foundations of good health for all children. Individuals are empowered to take greater control of their physical, sexual and mental health, through supporting behaviour change, and giving them tailored and targeted information, tools and support to make healthier choices throughout their lives.

One of the first initiatives delivered through this partnership during the pandemic was when the HSE provided funding for Acorn digital tablets which were distributed to long term residential care facilities via local Age Friendly Programmes.

Age Friendly Ireland Shared Service

Age Friendly Ireland is the organisation responsible for the national Age Friendly Programme, affiliated to the World Health Organization's [WHO] global age friendly network. The programme involves a multiagency, multi-sectoral approach to age-related planning and service provision. Age Friendly Ireland supports cities and counties to be more inclusive of older people by addressing their expressed concerns and interests under the eight pillars of the WHO programme. Age Friendly Ireland operates as a shared service centre of local government hosted by Meath County Council. The shared service centre supports a network of 31 local Age Friendly Programmes which are led by local authorities and which involve many stakeholders from other public bodies, community and voluntary and private sector partners. The Shared Service supports a number of strategic national structures and provides technical guidance to its networks.

Under the leadership of the local authority governance is anchored in the multi-agency

Age-Friendly Alliances, supported by broadly representative Older People's Councils actively engaged as codesign partners.

Successful Age Friendly City and County Programmes are working to create the kinds of communities in which older people live autonomous, independent and valued lives.

To date, the local government led Age Friendly Programmes across Ireland have implemented real change in imaginative and cost-effective ways. Health and wellbeing is fundamental to the vision.



The HSE document 'Interim Report on Impact of "Cocooning" Measures on Older People Adopted March 2020 in response to COVID-19 Pandemic' (S. Kennelly 2021) describes 'The significant ask placed on older people and other vulnerable and at-risk groups who self-isolated during the cocooning phase of the COVID-19 pandemic'. The report also provides a good description of the various measures stood up throughout Ireland by the whole of Government, the Third Sector, the business community and wider society in ensuring no-one was left behind. In describing the HSE response the report highlights the following key programmes that worked to support older people:

Mental Health

- ▶ National Social Prescribing Programme
- ▶ Minding Your Wellbeing- tips for maintaining Mental Health being run in conjunction with ALONE/ Age Action and others
- ▶ HSE Mental Health promotion Plan
- ▶ Creative Arts Role

Health Promotion

- ▶ Smoking Cessation
- ▶ Key coordination with Heads of Service in Health & Wellbeing to drive national health promotion campaigns within communities
- ▶ Strength & balance at home campaign
- ▶ 'Go for Life' campaign with Age & Opportunity
- ▶ Care Pals training with carers working in residential and day services to integrate physical activity into everyday activity. Now running online sessions 3 times weekly

Nutritional Response Programme

- ▶ Health Eating Campaign during Covid-19
- ▶ Developing appropriate information and signposting for at-risk groups vulnerable to malnutrition
- ▶ Vitamin D Supplementation as part of Covid-19 response

Office of the Nursing & Midwifery Services Director (ONMSD)

- ▶ Get Up Get Dressed Get Moving campaign- national campaign to promote activity and messaging that physical activity is key for mental health

National Integrated Care Programme for Older People

- ▶ Extensive links with community and voluntary agency sector including Age friendly Ireland and agencies working through 'Community Call' response
- ▶ Providing important feedback pathway for dedicated helplines e.g. ALONE on impact of cocooning including alcohol abuse and domestic abuse / elder abuse

Communications

- ▶ Covid 19 campaign, Cocooning advice

In addition to these measures it is also worth mentioning the significant steps forward taken by the HSE in the digital transformation of services in adapting to meeting the needs of patients in the extraordinary circumstances presented by the pandemic including the deployment and adoption of video conferencing for remote clinical consultations including BlueEye and Attend Anywhere Video Consultation solutions.

Other digital solutions rolled out included, TriMedika, Tritemp digital infrared thermometers enabling remote temperature taking, electronic prescriptions (requiring a piece of secondary legislation to be passed in the Dáil Éireann) and a remote monitoring solution to measure oxygen saturation level for Covid-19 patients with built in clinical alerts.

Local Government Response

When Covid-19 restrictions were announced on March 27th 2020, people aged 70 and over and those who were medically vulnerable were advised to stay at home at all times. Each local authority was tasked by Government with providing a local response to meet the needs of those restricted to their homes. This included, for example, providing deliveries of groceries, fuel, medication, meals and other essential items. The response also required supports to combat social isolation and to provide relevant information and sign-posting.

Each local authority established a Community Response Forum that involved community, voluntary and other relevant groups in the area to coordinate community supports and resilience. All local authorities also established internal teams to manage the Community Call helpline and Forum, all of which was created and activated over a single weekend after the announcement on Friday March 27th.

Local authorities operated the Community Call helpline service seven days a week, taking calls from those who needed help or reaching out to vulnerable members of the community. The helpline teams harnessed services and volunteers of Community Response Forum members and other local community and voluntary groups, to arrange or provide supports for those in need. The Community Call helpline was also cross-referenced with a national helpline operated by Alone, a charity for older people, to ensure those requiring more complex supports in relation to social isolation could

be appropriately directly and supported. From March 31st to June 15th 2020, Community Call helplines responded to over 48,000 calls.

‘The Community Call has proven to be hugely successful in meeting the needs of those who required support during Covid-19 restrictions and ensured that government advice could be followed. Feedback from the Community Response coordinators indicates that the Forum structure has been particularly successful and provides an excellent example of what can be achieved when local authorities and the community and voluntary sector work closely together’
(‘Overview of Local Authority Covid-19 Innovations’

LGMA May 2020).

Summary of local authority Health & Wellbeing Initiatives

Carlow

Theme | Physical Activity

Operation Transformation

Access to facilities for physical activity at a local level for everyone in the community (Ireland Lights Up). Online virtual challenge and linked community programmes. Signposting NGB and Sport Ireland online physical activity videos, including targeted videos for specific parts of the population, such as: active during pregnancy, new mothers, people with disabilities, teenagers, families, older people, adults 30 years +.

Theme | Positive Mental and Emotional Health

***"In This Together"* Campaign**

The Carlow Age Friendly Committee developed Age Friendly Wellbeing Packs, which focused on the Governments *"In This Together"* Campaign.

Focusing on positive mental wellbeing, staying active and staying connected. The Age Friendly Wellbeing Pack aimed to bring together resources, activities and opportunities for people to mind their mental health and wellbeing in an interesting and engaging way. There was an *"Active at Home Booklet"* included which gave fantastic tips, advice and guidance on staying active. The booklet was a collaboration between Carlow Sports Partnership and Kilkenny Sports Partnership. Carlow Library Services included a Covid 19 Time Capsule.

Theme | Staying Connected

Bubble Buddy

The Bubble Buddy initiative will support the vulnerable person/household in the bubble in a number of ways including telephone calls, 1-1 visit, shopping, dog walking, accompanying individuals on a walk, support with IT setting up Skype/Zoom.

Cavan

Theme | Eating Well

Food Hubs

A rural local development company Cavan County Local Development (CCLD) have developed a Food Bank initiative in response to Covid-19. 'Food Hubs' have been developed in various centres across County Cavan and provide food parcels to older people and to those who are self-isolating. Local food producers, suppliers and supermarkets are supplying food on a weekly basis. Local volunteers and members of GAA clubs help to pack food parcels on a daily basis. These food parcels are then delivered by the Gardai, Civil Defence and volunteers. There are over 600 deliveries being made each week. The Food Hub initiative grew from a food bank programme which started in St Bricin's College in Belturbet.

Meals on Wheels

A Meals on Wheels service which started in Cootehill had been expanded to the rest of the county by Cavan County Local Development. Working with a local food production company, local volunteers and Civil Defence the local development company were supplying cooked meals twice a week, to older and vulnerable people across Cavan. This service replaced other meals on wheels services which could not operate due to Covid-19 restrictions. The service was being supported by the HSE, who also refer patients in need of the service to the Local Development Company.

Theme | Positive Mental and Emotional Health

Keep Well Radio Campaign

Radio campaign in conjunction with Healthy Monaghan, Mental Health Ireland, Positive Age, Healthy Ireland at your Library, Cavan sports partnership. 2 speakers each week under each of the themes, signposting adverts for local services and supports. 3 x four week slots of interviews and inspiration to improve both physical and mental health of listeners and encourage engagement with 2 prize draws each week. Cavan Library headquarters and Monaghan Library head quarter shared their services being offered and speakers on mindfulness, positive mental health and the importance of physical activity as well as a balanced healthy diet to help with overall wellbeing.

Theme | Staying Connected

Its Good To Talk GAA

Cavan GAA, in conjunction with the Cavan Age Friendly Programme, has launched the 'Its Good To Talk GAA' initiative. Cavan's GAA stars have volunteered to make phone calls to people who are "cocooning" and have a chat with them about GAA.

Theme | Physical Activity

2020 Clare Clothesline Championship

Clare Sports Partnership created a new initiative which could be completed at home, so it was perfect for those still cocooning. The 2020 Clare Clothesline Championship set out to find the person who could *'peg the most socks on the clothesline in one minute'*. The rules of the Clothesline Challenge were that the clothes basket had to be placed on the ground at all times, only one sock to be pegged at a time with one sock per peg. The time started when the first sock was picked up and ended at 60 seconds. It was open to men and woman aged 55 and over, with prizes for the *'most pegged socks in one minute'*.

Theme | Positive Mental and Emotional Health

'Here Comes the Sun' Project.

This project fostered creativity across the generations connecting communities across Co. Clare. This Age Friendly intergenerational project brings together primary schools, secondary schools, nursing homes, virtual day centres, and families. It is a Keep Well Initiative broken into two parts, Part 1 was released on 19th March 2021 and paints a bleak picture of the realities faced by people during lockdown. Part 2, released on 26th March 2021 celebrates communities across County Clare, filling us with hope and instils pride in our county. The project has been a resounding success with people from Killaloe to Kilfenora contributing video clips, poetry and short stories and our very own President Michael D. Higgins too is involved. Music plays a central role in this project which features musical performances from the Farrell family in New Quay and Craig Pete from Shannon. The Here Comes the Sun Committee worked in conjunction with the Clare Education Centre, Clare Sports Partnership, Clare Age Friendly Programme and Clare County Council.



Theme | Staying Connected

Free Smartphone Classes

Clare Library Service hosted a series of free smartphone classes for older people commencing during Positive Ageing Week and running for a 4-week period. This was in response to issues raised during the lockdown period where older people felt isolated and unconnected to their families & communities.



Cork City

Theme | Physical Activity

Simple Exercises from your HSE Physiotherapist

In partnership with Cork Learning City, Cork Healthy Cities, Cork Sports Partnership and Cork Age Friendly City Programme a brochure *“Simple Exercises from your HSE Physiotherapist for you to do during Covid-19 Cocooning Phase”* was distributed with Meals on Wheels and was free to download from the website of the ISCP. A video was also available to watch on the ISCP website.

Theme | Positive Mental and Emotional Health

Digital Partner Park

Cork City Council Sports Partnership has linked with the HSE to produce and provide a Digital Partner Park which included brochures and videos on how to look after your mental health during Covid-19. Cork City Council, Coiscéim, also offered a coordinated Helpline for anyone

who is experiencing anxiety or mental health issues. 2500 Well Being packs and hampers were distributed out, with a hope to distribute more in January/ February.

Theme | Switching Off & Being Creative

Outdoor Movie

A group of residents in Cork held an outdoor movie night by projecting movies onto the gable end of the adjoining terrace and broadcasting the audio to people’s radios.

Mobile Bingo

Mobile bingo was organised by a small group of Gardai. They were supported by Age Friendly and the event was run by community Gardai.

Theme | Positive Mental and Emotional Health

Blue Bibs

Cork City Age Friendly's Blue Bibs initiative came about through the Cork City Council Covid19 Community Response Forum. Following a number of calls from older people who were nervous about going out into the community again after cocooning, Cork City Age Friendly came up with a solution. They are providing blue hi viz vests that older people can wear to indicate a request to other people around them to keep their physical distance while they are out and about.

Theme | Staying Connected

Age Friendly Seating

Two beautiful wheelchair-friendly benches were in situ to create happy moments in Midleton, County Cork. These were handcrafted by the very talented Paki O'Mahony from Killeagh. With support of Cork County Council through the Town Teams Committee, Midleton Support Team and Cork County Age Friendly Programme.

Project ACT

Activating County Towns to aid businesses and communities in the COVID-19 pandemic. Project ACT was ran across Cork County Councils Eight Municipal Districts with the support of Elected Members. The Project saw the creation of multi-sectoral teams with a targeted focus on rebuilding the economy and community life in each area. OPC representatives were central to each of these committees (23 in total) to serve as the voice of the older person in re-opening society after the first COVID-19 lockdown. Project ACT recognised the significant impacts that the COVID-19 pandemic had on older people in particular. Some of the immediate actions taken by Project ACT were: A deep clean of the main retail and pedestrian areas. Decluttering and fixing street furniture. Replanting of trees and flowerbeds. Additional road/pavement markings. Measures to improve public space utilisation for pedestrians and business. Results delivered included age friendly seating, age friendly parking and enhanced public realm for older people in particular.

Donegal

Theme | Staying Connected

Timeout for Tea

An initiative to encourage people across Donegal to reach out and meet up outdoors with a picnic hamper or a backpack and rediscover your local area while reconnecting with someone.

Minding Your Wellbeing programme

This programme provided a unique opportunity for people to learn more about key elements of mental wellbeing such as mindfulness, gratitude, self-care and resilience. Minding Your Wellbeing aimed to provide simple tools and guidance for people to develop and maintain a positive outlook by looking after their mental health and wellbeing. 5 videos are available on www.yourmentalhealth.ie and on YouTube under HSE Health and Wellbeing.

Theme | Switching Off & Being Creative

Echoes of the Decade

Donegal County Council Archives launched an oral history project as part of their (Peace IV) funded 'Echoes of the Decade' project. They asked children and young people to reach out to grandparents or older people in the community who were confined to their homes.

Ceol le Chéile

The Choir continue engagement / lessons via videos from choir conductor Veronica McCarron. Through the Age Friendly Alliance, Donegal County Council in collaboration with IDP for Technical Guidance and ETB for providing laptops were able to keep the choir connected for weekly sing along through Zoom. Ceol le Chéile recorded three little birds for the Virtual home Bealtaine Dusk performance at the end of May. Choir rehearsals continued to the end of June where they broke up for the summer break.



Dublin City

Theme | Eating Well

Ranelagh Community Response

A voluntary initiative and the organisation were responsible for the delivery of more than 6,000 meals to older people in the Ranelagh and surrounding areas during the first Covid19 lockdown. Philip and Veronica Daly along with Grace Maguire, who are active in the Ranelagh area and with community in groups such as Beechwood Meals on Wheels, active retirement events and the 'Friends of Woodstock' initiative, decided to take action. They immediately set up Ranelagh Community Response from Woodstock community centre, utilising the resources and the kitchen to help feed those desperately in need of community. This was initially a scrappy-but-effective approach, enlisting support from local restaurants and pubs in the area to get the premises at the centre to the highest sanitising standards possible. Within 10 days they were preparing 20 meals a day, seven days a week. Philip initiated a targeted response to reach out to people who needed support while cocooning and also reached out to the HSE, Dublin City Council, Environmental Health and volunteers to support the project as it grew rapidly.



Theme | Physical Activity

Stay Home, Stay Active, Stay Healthy

Dublin City Council developed exercise guidelines 'Stay Home, Stay Active, Stay Healthy' for older people during the Covid -19 pandemic. The guidelines, which were developed by Dublin City Sport and Wellbeing Partnership and Dublin City Age Friendly, recommend that older adults should aim to be active for 30 minutes a day doing moderate intensity activity for 5 days a week. The booklet was distributed to older people in Dublin city through the Staff and Volunteer Network. A follow -up information booklet, Let's Get Moving Again was also distributed throughout the city.

Theme | Staying Connected

Near FM Cocoontunes!

Near FM were working steadily with its staff and volunteers to keep their service on air during the current restrictions. Starting Thursday, the 14th May, every Thursday from 3.30 – 4.30pm, Madeleine Ebbs and Michael Sullivan (Chair of Dublin City North Central Area Older People's Council) presented

Near FM Cocoontunes! The idea was to try include a lot of older people who perhaps don't have access to modern technology with a radio programme for those who are cocooning, with music from the 50's 60's and 70's.

Theme | Switching Off & Being Creative

The Alzheimer's Café Glasnevin

Reopened 'virtually' in June, with Bex Townley as speaker. Bex is an exercise specialist of 30 years and Director and Tutor for 'Later Life Training' based in the UK, who spoke on the topic of 'Make Movement Your Mission'. The Café was based on an international model and provided an informal way to meet others living with dementia and to meet health and social care professionals.

Dun Laoghaire Rathdown

Theme | Physical Activity

Dun Laoghaire Rathdown Sports Partnership Workouts

Dun Laoghaire Rathdown Sports Partnership were running a number of online workouts and challenges including the 'Grandparents 15 Minute Challenge', 'Scrambled Leg Challenge', 'Fighting Fit Challenge', and 'Move to the Rhythm Dance Challenge'.

Guided Eco-Therapy Walks

Walks were offered, when restrictions allowed, in a joint initiative from Libraries and DLR Sports Partnership along with Kinship Psychotherapy & Counselling. The walks were aimed at adults who had previously been isolating or those who just want to improve their mental well-being. A mindful way to experience your local DLR parks.

Theme | Switching Off & Being Creative

Swap

Senior Wellness and Activity Programme (SWAP) - Flower Arranging Programme - Series of adult education workshops to engage older people in creativity and provide an opportunity for them to engage socially to boost their mental health and wellbeing. It was also a great way to meet new friends and to continue to stay socially engaged during these challenging times.

Dementia Inclusive Gallery Tours

Explore and discuss a selection of artworks from the County Collection. Specially created online discussions that can be easily enjoy at home using a mobile phone, a tablet or a computer.

Fingal

Theme | Physical Activity

Fingal Digifit

Fingal Sports Office are delivering updates on a daily basis on the Digifit Programme on the Healthy Fingal Learning Portal. Fingal Digifit is a home workout video series encouraging citizens of all abilities to keep moving and get fit during the Covid-19 crisis. Fingal also hosts a children's fitness quiz on the Fingal Learning Portal and is digitising online sporting resources onto Facebook.

Theme | Staying Connected

Fancy a Chat

A free service providing a phone call 5 days a week, Mon – Fri, at a day and time of the service users choosing. One of Empower's Friendly Caller's call and chat to our service users about their day, check on how the service user is feeling and explore the idea of linking the service user in with a support agency if required. The service provides friendship and security making our service users feel safer at home and provides much needed company in most cases.

Care and Repair

A service that helps to keep people living in their own homes in increased safety and comfort. The service uses trustworthy teams to carry out small DIY jobs free of charge for older people. Jobs that our teams undertake include fixing shelves, changing locks, painting/ decorating, moving furniture, gardening, etc.

Theme | Switching Off & Being Creative

Scrapbooks

Age Friendly Fingal delivered 1000 copies of *'From the roaring 20's to the Covid 20s'* and *'My life Through a Lens's'*. It was a scrapbook, to encourage people to stay active and creative as they fill in their book with their photographs and reminisce as they write their introductions to each photo.



Galway City

Theme | Eating Well

Meals4Health

Production and home delivery of fresh ready meals, designed to meet the specific nutritional requirements of older people and others needing specialised nutritional support such as those living with chronic illness. Social restrictions had adversely affected the nutritional and social status of older people in our community. Meals4health combines nutritional and social care. Social connection and eating well is beneficial to the physical, mental and emotional health and well-being to support older people to live well and age well at home.

Theme | Positive Mental and Emotional Health

Interactive Maps

Galway City Council developed a publicly accessible interactive maps of the COVID-19 related responses, activities and services available to people in their areas. The maps include information on supports for the collection of shopping, medications and fuel, and social isolation supports. Through the Galway City libraries, adult readers were provided with a Lockdown Reading Diary where staff provide suggested reading material. Galway City Council created curated pages on their websites with 'Stay at Home' resources, including mental health supports, healthy recipes, workouts, meditation and mindfulness.



Theme | Staying Connected

GAA Chat

Re-run a Phase 2 'GAA Chat'. Phone calls to the vulnerable from legends of Galway GAA which ran through the cocoon period phase1. Organised through Galway GAA/ Irish Rural Link, Community Forum, Age Friendly Alliance, Older Persons Council. Targeted at the general public, older people and vulnerable persons.

Theme | Switching Off & Being Creative

Brining it all Back Home

Based on the model of 'Brining it all back Home', this project reached out to Transition Year students to engage with their grandparents and for grandparents to pass on their stories, poetry or skills which will then be documented and published. Organised by Town Hall Theatre, GCCN, Community Forum, Healthy Galway City, Age Friendly Alliance and Older Persons Council. Targeted at older people/ teenagers/ general public and marginalised communities.

Galway County

Theme | Physical Activity

21 Day Walking Challenge

Designed to help older adults to get out walking and to take note of the amount of minutes / steps they walked per day. It was designed to motivate people to get out walking but to also educate people on the number of steps or minute they are exercising per day to help encourage people to do the minimum daily exercise or more.

Theme | Staying Connected

Chat Benches / Buddy Benches

Initiatives such as Chat Benches and Buddy Benches are being put in place. Signage will be put in place on various benches, to encourage

people to sit and have a chat. Buddy Benches are being allocated to local housing estates to encourage people of all ages to sit and have a chat.

Theme | Switching Off & Being Creative

Here Am I

A collaborative arts and online communication programme, which has supported older people impacted by isolation in Galway City to make their own self-expressive film and sound projects during Covid-19 restrictions. The programme also provided a light-hearted and supportive social outlet for people to learn basic online communication skills (Zoom, Email and WhatsApp) while engaging in creative practices.

Kerry

Theme | Positive Mental and Emotional Health

In the Bag

A wellbeing pack and information envelope. 200+ information envelopes and 200+ wellbeing bags branded and distributed under the Keep Well Campaign to those isolated in the community and identified by Gardaí, Red Cross and public nurses.

Theme | Staying Connected

The Rural Men's Outreach Project

Provides outreach support to rural men across South Kerry who are feeling isolated, lonely and at the risk of or experiencing mental health issues. The role of the Rural Men's Outreach Officer is to contact men living in rural parts of Kerry, i.e. Kenmare, South Kerry, Mid Kerry, Annascaul and Killarney, to discuss with them the best way forward to address their mental health issues and to tackle the isolation and social exclusion they experience.

Radio Kerry

For the months of March up until December, Radio Kerry ran a regular radio slot that featured around supports for older people. It ran every Thursday morning and various groups took part with different slots.

Theme | Switching Off & Being Creative

Armchair Travels

Online experience of objects from the Museum's collection. Promoted under Keep Well Campaign / Switching Off and Being Creative.

Kildare

Theme | Physical Activity

The Reindeer Run

Launched as part of the 'Keep Well' Campaign to encourage people to take some specific time each day for 4 weeks to either walk / jog or run. We had over 200 participants taking part, all of whom picked one of the targets we set as a goal for themselves, 30, 60, 90, 120 or 150km in 30 days. This equates to 1, 2, 3, 4 or 5km's per day making this challenge open to anyone who can walk 1km a day.

STEPtember

During the month of September, they organised the STEPtember Walking Month, which replaces the traditional walking festival in July. In line with current guidelines they decided not to organise a group face to face event but allow participants to take part in their own time by using the Tow-Path Trails of both the Royal and Grand Canals, engaging with the participants remotely and have sign posted the routes for guidance and information purposes. As of today, 875 adults and 466 children have registered with 304 in the 55+.

Theme | Switching Off & Being Creative

Kildare COVID19 Notebook Project

Kildare County Council launched the 'Kildare COVID19 Notebook Project', an initiative of the Kildare Library and Arts Service. The local authority invited anyone living in County Kildare to record their thoughts and ideas at this time in an A5 moleskin notebook, provided by KLAS, free of charge and delivered to homes. When the notebook was completed, participants were asked to share the content of their notebook, or some of it, for Kildare's digital archive, to capture everyday lives in the county during the COVID-19 pandemic. While the project was open to all residents of the county, applicants were particularly welcome from individuals who were cocooning. RTE picked up on this project and a documentary is being made about it and it is being included in Culture Night on the 18th September next.

Older Voices Kildare

OVK is a Social Inclusion Initiative building the confidence and capacity of older people in Kildare and working to ensure older people are included and empowered within a vibrant

community. OVK was contacted by artist Claire Murphy who volunteered to create a series of portraits of people cocooning. Participants emailed in favourite photographs of themselves and Claire sketched their portraits in pencil. The

resulting artwork has brought joy to many and has highlighted those united by the experience of undergoing cocooning in Co. Kildare.

Kilkenny

Theme | Positive Mental and Emotional Health

Resource Packs

Kilkenny County Council in association with HSE and Kilkenny Civil Defence provided Community Resilience Resource Packs for vulnerable persons affected by Covid-19. These include care boxes and overnight bags provided essential items for those who are vulnerable and cocooning / self-isolating. The packs included essential public health messages including minding mental wellbeing and staying well to reduce avoidable escalation of chronic condition symptoms. Packs included a range of items including hygiene products, thermometer, throw, dietitian recommended food, library resources, colouring/mindfulness resources as well as a range of information resources on health and wellbeing.

Theme | Staying Connected

The Tonic

Kilkenny's Well Being Campaign have launched a new programme which began on KCLR radio, after the 6 o'clock news. It's called 'The Tonic' and is a mixture of songs and interviews chosen to appeal to the older generation. It's a part of the wide-ranging 'Keep Well' government campaign which aims to support people and communities to mind their physical and mental health over the coming months and is made in collaboration with the Kilkenny Older Person's Council. Presented by John Masterson, the hour-long programme will feature interviews ranging in subject matter from arts, to sport, storytelling, health & wellbeing and personality interviews. It will include features that recall memories and will draw on contributors from all ages and backgrounds with the overall aim that the content serves as a welcome distraction to the often difficult and serious news that dominates the headlines these days.



Theme | Switching Off & Being Creative

My Home Place

In collaboration with Kilkenny County Council, KCLR and Ossory Youth as part of the Keep Well campaign. The Initiative was a series of 10 programmes featuring memories of times gone by and includes accounts of cultural events and nostalgic anecdotes that captures the local heritage's importance. 'My Home Place' connected older and younger generations through art, imagery, narratives and local heritage. It elevated the importance of local heritage (beautiful buildings, areas where contributors were reared), and to give older people an opportunity to have their story

heard to a wider audience. Every Monday after the 11am news, A Kilkenny Local featured a story of memories on KCLR with Producer Monica Hayes. Each interview was podcasted and sent to Ossory Youth. The recordings were transcribed into art in response to the imagery they heard by students attending an art class at Ossory Youth, Kilkenny. This project was linked to a youth arts programme where children drew illustrations linked with the podcast/stories that were told.

Laois

Theme | Staying Connected

Chatters and Matters

Laois Age Friendly Older Peoples Council - 'Chatters and Matters' - a weekly Age Friendly radio program on Midlands 103. A partnership project between Laois Age Friendly Alliance and Offaly and Westmeath Age Friendly Alliances.



Theme | Switching Off & Being Creative

Always Human

A multidisciplinary art project devised by Cabrini Cahill. Older people were invited to share their memories (those currently staying safe at home, living independently and those living in care homes or hospital settings). Recognizing that while some stories are individual, many are universal, rooted in sense of place, an artist was asked to respond to these stories to create interactive installations or artworks. Dunamaisé engaged an artist to present the resulting artwork and performance (live and online) back to the participating older audience members and our wider community, in Dunamaisé and out around the county.

Musical Memories

A Music Generation Laois (MGL) intergenerational Song-Singing project for care-home residents and children & young people. This intergenerational project brings together children and young people and care-home residents and is piloted with residents of Abbeyleix Community Nursing Unit, St Vincent's Community Nursing Unit and St Brigid's Hospital, Shaen and with pupils of Paddock NS, Mountrath, with Lead Musician, Nuala Kelly, MGL Singing and Early Years Music Specialist, and singer in residential care settings/nursing homes. A series of sing-along songs have been selected and pre-recorded for the nursing homes to use as often as they need to engage residents in this singing project. Live Zoom sessions with children & young people and nursing home residents are taking place to rehearse the songs.

The Bandwagon

The residents and staff of St. Vincent's Community Hospital, Mountmellick, were treated to a visit from the mobile performing unit, The Bandwagon, as part of the Musical Memories Inter-Generational Singing Project. Initiated by Music Generation Laois and funded by Creative Ireland Laois, Musical Memories has been running since September under the leadership of Music Generation Laois musician Nuala Kelly. The project aims to bring music into community hospitals, in a safe way, during the Covid-19 pandemic. With restrictions in place in all residential care settings, the rehearsal sessions for this project have been taking place virtually via Zoom. The Bandwagon is an initiative of Laois School of Music, partner organisation of Music Generation Laois. Musical Memories is supported by the Positive Ageing and Well-being Fund as part of the Creative Ireland Programme 2017-2022, in collaboration with the Laois Age-Friendly Alliance and Healthy Ireland. This project will continue on in 2021.



Leitrim

Theme | Physical Activity

Trishaws

Purchased three Trishaws and have three different models, Day Care Centre, HSE Nursing Home and Men's Shed, one in each MD. The objective of this project is to communicate a positive message of Health and Activity for All. It will increase accessibility to the Outdoor Amenity Areas particularly for older adults and people with a disability and ultimately have a positive impact on attitudes of the wider community to accessibility, inclusion and health for all.

Theme | Staying Connected

Light Up Keep Well

Distribution of rechargeable torches and information packs to older, vulnerable & isolated people in the community.

Winter and Spring Message of Hope

Christmas Card Message of Hope Campaign with all primary schools completing cards and message and being distributed to all Befriending Services/Meals on Wheels clients and other vulnerable members of community.

Theme | Switching Off & Being Creative

The Loughan House Open Centre

Blacklion based centre, has donated over 200 plants from its horticultural facility to older people and communities across Leitrim. Staff at Loughan House contacted the Leitrim Co. Co. to offer the welcome donation of 32 bedding plants, 72 lupins, 106 violas and 66 cosmos pots. Age Friendly Leitrim and Leitrim Civil Defence worked to identify groups and older people who would benefit from the donation. Local Civil Defence volunteers distributed the plants to older people and communities on Wednesday and Thursday last and they were very well received.



Limerick

Theme | Eating Well

Cook Well, Eat Well

This was the last in the series of 'Shortening the Winter' initiatives. Hoping that this will allow for better engagement with family, friends and neighbours, We sent out Age Friendly shopping bags, recipe books and links to online videos, where you can follow step by step instructions on how to cook a three-course meal for two people. The bag is to go shopping for the ingredients and the recipe book contains some of Limerick's favourite recipes and was published as a fundraiser by Adult Learners across the county.



Theme | Positive Mental and Emotional Health

Mind Your Mind

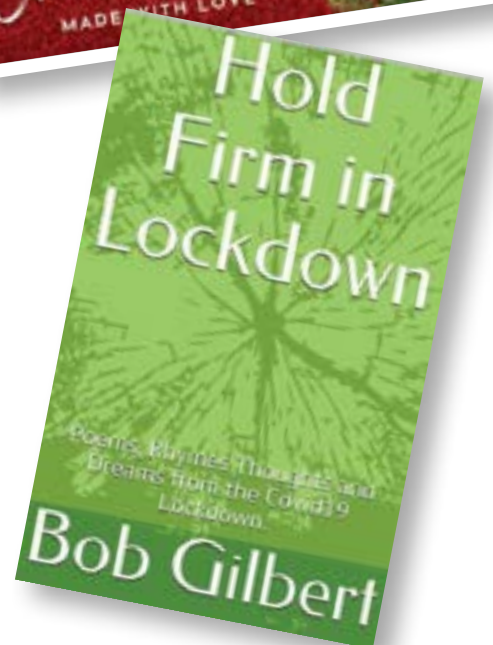
Mind Your Mind gift packs were distributed in February. These packs included a book by Bob Gilbert (Chair of OPC in Cavan), tea bags and positive mental health information.



Theme | Switching Off & Being Creative

Remembering Yesterday, Living Today

Age Friendly Limerick has launched 'Remembering Yesterday, Living Today'. Throughout our lives, from when we were children, right up to today, particular stories, events and memories hold a special place in our hearts. But many of us are not passing those stories on to our children and grandchildren. As a society, we often only see the person in the present and know very little about the person in terms of their life lived. 'Remembering Yesterday, Living Today', encourages the older person to reflect on their life and to tell the story through the completion of the book. This journey of reflection will act as a record for future generations, of that life lived, our parents, siblings, and family history. It will form a permanent record of that life lived and encourages the writer to take time to remember their younger days and the happy memories that it brings.



Theme | Your Body – Your Health

Putting Your House in Order

This was a series of workshops aimed at providing information for those considering retirement and later life planning. It is the topic that most people avoid talking about, End of Life. Traditionally we don't like to talk about planning for what happens in the case of a medical emergency, where a person cannot make decisions for themselves, or a person wishing to make known their preferences for when they die. This planning is essential so

that a person's family can act according to their wishes, not their best guess for what the person would have wanted. In late 2019, following discussions between Limerick Age Friendly Programme and The Irish Hospice Foundation, it was decided to launch an initiative called *'Putting Your House in Order'*. A series of workshops which were held at various locations throughout Limerick City and County during the month of February 2020. The workshops were organised by Age Friendly Limerick and covered the following topics: Care Preferences - Advance Healthcare Directive, Designated Healthcare Representative, Life Sustaining Treatments, CPR etc. Legal - Enduring Power of Attorney, Making a Will etc. Financial - Bank Accounts, Insurance, Life Assurance, Credit Cards, Tax Affairs, Pensions etc. When I Die - Organ/ Body Donation, Post Mortem, Funeral and Burial Arrangements etc. Attendees stated that they found the presentations helpful and informative and that the content was organised and easy to follow.



Longford

Theme | Staying Connected

Basic Digital Skills

Longford County Council in the Corporate Plan and the Local Economic and Community Plan recognizes the great diversity among older people, the importance of keeping them connected, including them in all areas of community life and helping to make our county a better place to grow older in. The Longford Age Friendly Strategy identifies the need to broaden the provision of and access to training in the use of technology for older citizens, and never was this more apparent than during Covid 19 when many of them had to cocoon and were very isolated from their families and

loved ones. Longford Library have on an ongoing basis partnered with Longford ETB and Age and Opportunity Ireland in delivering basic training on internet, email, social media, apps etc. They also delivered a very successful training course for the farming community and currently have waiting lists in three branch libraries for basic digital skills training from our older citizens. Throughout Covid 19 the library kept in weekly contact with Longford Older Persons Council members, library members and members of Active Retirement groups by telephone and text as it became clear that the majority of them living alone were very isolated through lack of any access or knowledge of digital technology. Throughout Covid they have delivered weekly online classes to active age groups. They also provided, where required, a loan of iPad or tablets for the duration of the programme.

Theme | Switching Off & Being Creative

Christmas Arts and Crafts

Handmade Christmas cards by local children targeting nursing homes and direct provision centres.

Love Your Home

Longford Council in collaboration with Longford Leader has launched 'Love Your Home' Photography competition for cocooners and is encouraging people to be creative while cocooning or staying within 2km by sending in a photo of whatever makes them happy. An exhibition will go on display at the library when the crisis is over.

Postcard Project

An intergenerational postcard project was done between local schools and nursing homes, where students would send messages to residents in nursing homes.



Louth

Theme | Physical Activity

Winter Weather Wise Campaign

Over 1500 hats, 1500 snoods and 1000 ponchos were given to participants on all programmes to ensure they can exercise safely in all weather conditions.

Park Bench Exercise Programme

100 benches around the county had signs erected beside them with a series of 9 exercises older adults can do on the bench.

Theme | Staying Connected

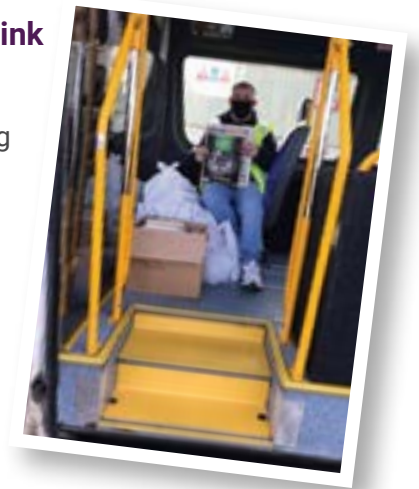
Super Connectors

The aim of the Super Connectors Campaign is to encourage society in general to support older people and vulnerable people to stay virtually connected through young people pestering parents to gift/re-gift a smart device for an older relative/friend and teach that older person to use the device and older people to get over their fears of using technology. The project received national coverage with RTE news covering the

launch and an extensive social media campaign supported by Age Friendly Ireland, ALONE, LGAM and Age Action.

Flexibus, Local Link

Louth, Meath, and Fingal were phoning passengers for a chat and to simply check in. 800 calls were made in one week. Flexibus Local Link and Louth Age



Friendly were also carrying out a house to house visit of older people who have requested a visit and doing a bag drop.

Mayo

Theme | Physical Activity

Home Friendly Yoga Class

Age Friendly Mayo has partnered up with Mayo Sports Partnership to provide an online home friendly yoga class. This class is tailored specifically to suit the active age cocooning or remaining at home. The programme is being provided by Noreen O'Grady 'Noga.

We Age, which was delivered by Age Friendly Mayo in partnership with local radio, HSE, Healthy Ireland and others. It promoted the Keep Well Campaign widely through participating organisations and media channels. Mayo Community Response Forum ensured that local initiatives which support particularly vulnerable groups will be resourced and promoted.

Theme | Positive Mental and Emotional Health

Minding Our Health as We Age

Mayo County actions include an inclusive webinar/broadcast on Minding Our Health as

Theme | Staying Connected

Christmas Connections

Second year students Art project delivered to older people in the area at Christmas. The second-year students of Ballyhaunis Community School created 'lino print' Christmas cards for

those living alone/older people in the area. The Community Garda provided a list of names to the school. The students also wrote a letter for their assigned person. The Garda delivered these cards and letters (with an Age Friendly pack) to the people on list. The visit and card were very warmly welcomed by the recipients. Age Friendly Mayo who coordinated this initiative, would like to extend thanks to Ms. Lennon, the Art teacher and her class in Ballyhaunis Community School and the Community Guard for assisting with this Christmas project.

Theme | Switching Off & Being Creative

Age Friendly Initiatives

Actions include creative initiatives such as a Radio Book Club, Drive-in concerts at Care Homes, Family Photography Projects, Intergenerational Digital Buddy Programmes, Creative online resources for the whole community, Cultural Companions and other programmes for older people to engage with cultural events.



Meath

Theme | Physical Activity

Move Well Project

Meath LSP provided older people with a physical resource (DVD/USB) that they could use in their own homes. Meath LSP designed and produced a physical resource which is constituted of a Move Well DVD & USB. The Move Well programme is delivered by Meath LSP qualified tutors and includes Seated Pilates and Dance classes. Both Pilates and dance classes can be modified to suit a range of abilities.

Theme | Staying Connected

Christmas Dinners

Delivered Christmas dinners to 80 persons/families on Christmas day by volunteers and have a chat. Due to Covid restrictions our local volunteer service worked with our community guards and other

networks to establish vulnerable older adults who may have been left isolated over the Christmas period. The Volunteers went out to these groups and delivered dinners and had conversations with the older adults for up to an hour on Christmas Day whilst following governmental guidelines.

Theme | Switching Off & Being Creative

Athboy Men's Shed

Athboy Men's Shed are keeping in contact via WhatsApp group and direct calls to shed members, particularly those who are living on their own or in rural areas. Men's Sheds in Meath took part in a video conference meeting was facilitated by Meath Partnership. Nationally, the men's sheds are running the 'Call Them for a Cuppa' campaign to address social isolation during Covid-19.

Purls of Wisdom

Launched the Purls of Wisdom initiative with older persons with the Climate action section which uses knitting/crocheting using the climate change colours. A number of the completed blankets will be displayed in the Solstice Arts centre for the next month ahead of the Climate Action seminar in October.



Monaghan

Theme | Positive Mental and Emotional Health

Eircode Fridge Magnets

These fridge magnets are easily read, can be written on with an ordinary pen and will provide peace of mind to older people and their families. They provide a space to include your own Eircode number, your doctors number and who to contact in case of an emergency. These were then distributed to members in Social day care services, community alert groups, meals on wheels groups, befriending services with the support of our interagency partners on the Healthy Monaghan committee. Our library service also delivered them as part of their mobile book service and the community garda was also of great assistance in identifying those most vulnerable.

Theme | Staying Connected

Come Back Cocooners

Monaghan County Council's Age Friendly programme is delighted to launch a new '*Come Back Cocooners*' initiative which is aimed at supporting businesses to increase footfall back to their business and encourage older people who have been cocooning to safely return to shopping in their local towns. Businesses were invited to put in place promotions /events /offers to encourage those who had been cocooning to return to shopping in the town centres. Come Back Cocooners promotional booklet was distributed to older people in the community and publicised in local media outlets. Participating businesses received Come back Cocooners promotional posters for display.

Theme | Switching Off & Being Creative

Record the experience

Monaghan County Museum launched an initiative to '*Record the experience*' of Covid 19 in the county. Members of the public submitted, stories, photographs of their lives during lockdown. In conjunction with Cavan Monaghan Garda division they recorded the birthday visits to older people cocooning in the county who celebrated milestone birthdays during restrictions. All submissions will form part of the Museum archive.

Interview your Grandparents

In a time of Zoom calls and What's App video calls, many grandparents were enjoying calls with their families. Monaghan Age Friendly Programme launched '*Interview your Grandparents*' programme which provided families with a list of fun questions to ask older people about when they were younger. This was a great success with many grandchildren finding out lots of new things about granny and grandad.

Offaly

Theme | Physical Activity

Offaly Sports Partnership/ Healthy Offaly

Sports Pack containing high vis vest, gloves, torch, scarf and hat has been ordered for delivery to participants of OSP suspended programmes. Packs to be delivered by first week of December

Theme | Positive Mental and Emotional Health

Connecting the Faithful

A Newsletter incorporating fun, interesting items including exercise suggestions, Seasonal recipe's, Puzzle's, word Searches, and Library articles. An Age Friendly Alliance Initiative with contributions from Alliance members and Offaly County Council Sections and the Local Development Company.



Theme | Switching Off & Being Creative

Social Prescribing

Social prescribing is a holistic and collaborative approach to health and wellbeing. In Offaly the Social Prescribing Coordinator supports individuals through one-to-one contact to access interventions such as exercise classes, social groups, creative activities, volunteering opportunities, employment services and educational courses. Throughout the COVID period 'Offaly Well Connected' has delivered one-to-one services to those in need, care packs to clients and online supports to the crochet group on a weekly basis.

Chatters and Matters

At the October 2020 meeting of Offaly Age Friendly Alliance the need for a positive communication to older people was highlighted. Offaly Older Person's Network had proposed a regular radio programme/slot before COVID-19 but the need had increased a lot since then. An Offaly working group was formed to further the development of a regular radio slot and is comprised of: Offaly Older Person's Network; Offaly Age Friendly Alliance and Offaly Public Participation Network; Offaly County Council and Midlands Age Friendly Alliance Network and Offaly Local Development Company. The meetings with Midlands 103 received a positive response with the programme, Chatters & Matters, has been broadcast from 8.00 – 9.00am on Sunday mornings, since November 1st. Some of the programme topics will be information sharing about health, fitness, gardening, cooking, a talent contest, story-telling, interviews with interesting people, music, weekly notice board.

Roscommon

Theme | Staying Connected

Virtual Concert

Support will be offered to the recording of a virtual concert for HSE Day Centre users. The annual Christmas concert where day centre attendees all participate in the performance was cancelled this year due to Covid 19. Instead the staff of the centres will record individual performances with attendees and their performances will be compiled into a CD. The distribution of the CD will allow the day centre users to feel connected to their peers who they do not get to spend as much time with due to Covid restrictions and enjoy the musical performances.

The Rossie Way

Roscommon Lions club came up with the idea of having a daily radio show, The Rossie Way! that does not mention Covid-19 or any virus-related news at all and so developed a Community Radio Programme that only has GOOD news for everyone, in order to promote good mental health especially for those who are currently cocooning. The Lions club teamed up with TESCO and SUPERVALU to offer a free transistor radio to any person who does not have one in their home already and sponsored give away daily prizes for shopping vouchers in a quiz. Roscommon Older People's Council have facilitated in getting the word out to everybody over 70 and to those who are most vulnerable and cocooning at home – to help lift the mood for all.



Theme | Switching Off & Being Creative

Forget-me-not Choir

Forget-me-not Choir is a series of virtual online singalongs for people who are in nursing homes, care centres, or are simply at home and would like to sing.

Older Age Virtual Portrait Sitting

Roscommon County Council are engaging with four people for a Creative Ireland Creativity in Older Age Virtual Portrait Sitting. A call went out for people in County Roscommon, over age 70 in a care home or cocooning at home, missing their cultural activities and interested in making new



connections at this time. During these sessions, artist Andy Parsons is painting their portrait via zoom, while talking and getting to know each person and how they have responded to the last few months of Covid. In return for their time, the art will be delivered to the sitters who will hang it in their home and invite a small number of close family, friends and staff to view the portrait, depending on Covid restrictions at the time. Portraits will also be exhibited in digital form on Roscommon County Council and Age & Opportunity's Bealtaine Festival websites and Facebook pages. A partnership project by Roscommon, Sligo, Leitrim and Donegal Local Authorities and Age & Opportunity as part of the Creative Ireland Creativity in Older Age.

Sligo

Theme | Eating Well

Age Friendly Cook Along

Virtual Cook Along Programme to encourage older people to engage with each other by fun means during the COVID Restrictions – Jan - March 2021. The Virtual Cook Along provided the opportunity for Older People in County Sligo to remain connected during the restrictions applied due to COVID 19 in the winter of 2021. Advance Assistance in getting access to the virtual Programme was provided by the tutor to all participants. Shopping lists of required ingredients and utensils were all provided to participants in advance. The tutor made the interaction enjoyable and interactive and over a 2-hour tutorial, participants made started, main course and dessert. All meals were freezable and cooking for one, with tasty and nutritional

food was always to the fore. However, more importantly, friendships were made over the course of the sessions and plenty of laughs were had.

Theme | Physical Activity

Sligo Exercise from Home

'Sligo Exercise from Home' leaflet developed in conjunction with Sligo County Council/Age Friendly and HSE West/Physiotherapy Services. 4week exercise programme targeting older adults delivered on Ocean FM throughout May; 2000 leaflets circulated throughout County Sligo to homes with support from Sligo County Council community response.



Theme | Staying Connected

Muintir na Tire Lend a Hand

Developing Digital Connections. This project involved 1 to 1 training for older people on technological devices to improve their connectivity to the environment especially in the context of COVID 19 and reinforces messages on community safety. It has over the past 6 weeks engaged people through weekly segments on Ocean FM and NW Radio emphasizing the importance of being connected. The next phase in the new year will involve the recruitment of a project worker to provide the 1-1 support.

Theme | Switching Off & Being Creative

Virtual Christmas Concert Tubbercurry

Tubbercurry FRC children performed and recorded Christmas greetings and songs that were distributed via USB to 12 Nursing Homes. This activity was in lieu of their normal Christmas concert performed in Baileys Nursing Home Tubbercurry.

South Dublin

Theme | Physical Activity

Mindful Chair Yoga

Mindful Chair Yoga with Sally Dunne via Zoom - gentle but thorough yoga, including mindful stretching, breath-work and relaxation. The inclusive class is done seated, using easy, accessible poses. Aim is to increase flexibility in the spine and the joints with careful and safe movements which are adaptable to everyone. Yoga can increase our range of movement, help muscle and joint flexibility and calm the mind.

Theme | Positive Mental and Emotional Health

Heads Up Programme

South Dublin County Council's Heads Up Programme, which offers online/phone supports to circa 40 clients with mild mental health issues, is being extended to include supports to recently bereaved persons, utilising experienced and qualified councillors. South Dublin County Council has also conducted a sample survey of 30 lone parents and are now contacting 180 lone parents across the county – this build on video supports in the '4 the family' initiative comprising four sessions offering simple tips for families around the areas of Play, Parenting, Health & Technology. MindMindR is an app produced by South Dublin County Council that lists contact details and information on all mental health services in the County.



Theme | Staying Connected

A Booklet of Hope

A Booklet of Hope was put together in partnership with Healthy Ireland and South Dublin County Sports Partnership. The aim of the booklet is to provide information to individuals over the age of 55 years living in South County Dublin. It includes information on exercises, maps of local walks, healthy eating, useful services numbers, games, songs and a letter of hope. This was distributed to 7000 people.

Theme | Switching Off & Being Creative

South Dublin Together

South Dublin Together - which aims to give advice and motivation to vulnerable and at-risk people living in the community in relation to COVID-19. The initiative provides information on areas such as making masks and using face coverings while providing activities to keep active at home. Letters of support from children of Divine Mercy Senior School, Lucan to people who have been cocooning are also included. South Dublin County Council will deliver 500 of the South Dublin Together care package to people as part of the South Dublin Community Response Forum to COVID-19.

Tipperary

Theme | Physical Activity

Tipperary Active Bodies

A combination of specific adapted physical activity training programmes was facilitated and delivered by TSP to increase the levels of physical activity among older adults in both community and residential settings across Tipperary. Three training programmes facilitated:

- ▶ The CarePALs programme aimed to empower those working in day and residential settings to lead physical activities with older people who live in or visit their settings, training will consist of 2 days training.
- ▶ The PALs training aimed to empower PALs to deliver physical activity, a PAL is a Physical Activity Leader who is already part of a group or club and is willing to lead activities. PALs lead their local group in things like short exercise routines, fun games, simple dances and sports like pitch and toss.
- ▶ Sport Specific Programme, a new sporting activity was introduced to older adult groups, to provide further opportunities for older adult groups to be more active.

Theme | Switching Off & Being Creative

Tonibox

Libraries are partnering up with nursing home and pre-school schools. The initiative will see older people reading stories to small children, with the use of the Tonibox, to promote

story telling as a means of engagement and developing dialogue between a nursing home and a preschool within its environs. The intention is that Tipperary Age Friendly will supply the Nursing Home and local preschool with its own Tonibox and also provide some interchangeable 'creative tonies'. The resident in the nursing home will read a story, with books provided by Tipperary Library Service, this is recorded on the interchangeable 'creative tonie'. This 'creative tonie' is then provided to the local preschool with the same books and the stories will be available for story time as told by the older adult and resident in the nursing home.

Back in my Day

Reminiscing in Tipperary 'Back in my Day'. Tipperary Age Friendly Older Peoples Council are developing a project to capture stories and tales of the past, listening to the voices of older people across County Tipperary. Within this project we hope to capture some living history from residents in the county and we will collate this information in written, audio and video form. This will be a fantastic opportunity to capture the living history of Older Voices in Tipperary and to share stories and reminisces of our past, growing up in the county with the younger generations and showcase how in some instance's things have evolved but also at its core how family and friends impact positively on our lives. In this we have 5 main areas designed to capture the memories about where you went to school, memories of growing up and family activities, where you worked and the friendships and social or sporting activities that you participated in.

Theme | Your Body – Your Health

Understand Together

Increasing Dementia Awareness across the county and striving to make Tipperary Dementia inclusive. Funded by Healthy Ireland the Dementia Awareness Project, commenced with online Learn Listen Link training in Thurles MD. We have held a workshop and training will also be provided to frontline staff

in the local authority, specific workshop with Tipperary GAA and also offered to Local Link. When restrictions ease a walkability will take place in Roscrea where a universal design and dementia consultant will conduct the audit, and also support staff from TCC so that they can undertake future audits, in total the consultant will complete 2 audits.

Waterford

Theme | Staying Connected

Fridge Magnet

Fridge magnets detailing key phone numbers for use by vulnerable people have been order for distribution in January 2021. These numbers include Community Call, ALONE befriending services, Aware etc.

Call to Chat Service

Waterford City and County Council library staff are taking calls on a local Call to Chat Service with Waterford's Older People's Council. This is an additional local service to the Alone national helpline service.

Theme | Switching Off & Being Creative

This Is Waterford

Waterford City and County Council is about to launch the 'This Is Waterford' website which asked Waterford people and diaspora to add and share stories, photos, musical content etc about

what Waterford means to them. The Council planed a virtual exhibition in late summer and a countywide exhibition when larger scale gatherings are no longer restricted.

Seen and Celebrated

Waterford Older People's Council in collaboration with Waterford Libraries and Healthy Waterford have launched a photography competition to celebrate the contribution of older people in Waterford City and County. 'Seen and Celebrated' is part of the Government of Ireland's National Keep Well Campaign, supporting people to mind their physical and mental health over the coming months. The competition aimed at highlighting the contribution older people make to the City and County of Waterford.

Westmeath

Theme | Physical Activity

Resources for Older Adults

Sport Ireland Older Adults Booklet and Cara Home Exercise Booklets were printed and distributed to Older Adults within the Community to help them engage in physical activity at home. Age and Opportunity DVDS were also given out to individuals and groups that requested a DVD. Resources were printed and distributed. Anyone who contacted and groups we felt would benefit from the resources received the booklets. The booklets were a guide for individuals to follow from the comfort of their own homes.

Theme | Positive Mental and Emotional Health

Christmas care packs

1000 care packs put together and distributed to older people throughout the county of Westmeath. Items for 1000 care packs including hand sanitizers, soap, Christmas ornament, tissues, stationery items, chocolates, Ireland's own Christmas issue and other items were purchased and put together and distributed to as many areas as possible in our county. through the civil defence and contact with the age friendly community groups.

Theme | Staying Connected

Live Longer and Prosper programme

A multi-faceted programme targeting elderly in the community – IT technology training,

provision of tablets, food and health course, fitness programme, staying connected programme. Live Longer and Prosper is a wraparound service aimed at Older People in the community. The programme was initiative in 2018 after a consultation session with Older people regarding what services and activities they would like to engage with the feedback from Older People pointed to a multi activity/ services programme which would not only allow Older People to gain more skills prevalent to their age but also do this in a fun and interactive manner where they could meet other older people and build a social circle or extend their social circle. Hence, Live Longer and Prosper was designed to encompass practical skills and activities and information and social benefits. The programme delivers the following elements to all the participants Healthy Eating course for older people on a budget, physical exercise programmes, dementia awareness course, know your rights, keeping safe Garda talks, introduction to services e.g. befriending and visitation services, grow your own sustainable gardening course and other talks as requested by the participants. Participants are also been encouraged to link into the arts, culture and Library services programmes in between the programme dates to ensure they keep using their new-found IT skills and this is working a treat for all concerned. Befriending Service for older and the vulnerable in our community.

Theme | Switching Off & Being Creative

Community Wellness Blanket

Open call for individuals to create an individual patchwork or crocheted square that will form part of a community wellness blanket that represents the community's ability to bond together during Covid. Blanket to be displayed in the LUAN Gallery.

Wexford

Theme | Positive Mental and Emotional Health

Tale-a-Phone Exchange

Traditional storytelling by phone. Wexford Traditional Storyteller Joe Brennan gives older people in County Wexford a chance to take part in The Tale-a-Phone Exchange, a chance to hear one of his wonderful traditional stories in the comfort of their own home. Each Exchange, lasting 20 minutes, is unique to the person receiving the call. Joe has a chat with the person receiving the call first and from this he decides on what story to tell. *'Each call will be different and even where the same story is told, that telling will be unique to that person', says Joe. 'No two tellings of a story are the same. The listener, and the circumstances of the exchange, shapes the telling of the story'.*

Dog walking for cocooners

Dog walking for cocooners - Wexford County Council and Wexford PPN in partnership with North Wexford Society Prevention of Cruelty to Animals offered dog walking services for members of the public who owned dogs but were unable to walk them as cocooning in the early part of the pandemic. Volunteers from NWSPCA walked dogs for these older and vulnerable people.

Theme | Switching Off & Being Creative

Baked Treats Needed

Meals on Wheels in Gorey, Co. Wexford put out a Community Call - Baked Treats Needed, via their Facebook page. They asked all those kids stuck at home, particularly those who may be anxious and want to help with the community's response to have a *'Home Bake In'*. They were looking for sweet treats, the sort of cakes you might bring to a bake sale and they were distributed to older and isolated people in Gorey and Courtown by Meals on Wheels volunteers.

Wicklow

Theme | Positive Mental and Emotional Health

Supercharge Your Selfcare Project

County Wicklow PPN's Supercharge Your Selfcare Project - Earlier this year Co Wicklow PPN teamed up with Avril Bailey of the Dublin Human Givens Centre to develop Supercharge Your Self Care, a series of 6 workshops to support the wellbeing of their members during the current pandemic. The sessions were well received and the feedback from participants was so good that they have since worked with Avril and Nadia Ramoutar to further develop the workshops into a set of 6 podcasts. The first podcast (13 mins) explains why Co Wicklow PPN undertook this work, how it links in with our Wellbeing Visions, and the work of the Wicklow County Council Community Response Forum as well as the government's Keep Well programme. The second podcast (7 mins) introduces Avril and introduces the podcast content. The third and fourth podcasts (6-7 mins each) raises awareness of what we need for optimum wellbeing. The last two podcasts (8-9 mins each) tells us about the simple things we can do to mind our mental health and wellbeing. The podcasts are small enough that you can watch them either individually (on a tea break perhaps) or all together.

Theme | Staying Connected

Keep Wicklow Talking

Wicklow put out a call to action in the form of Keep Wicklow Talking:

- T** Take the time to chat – together we can get through this
- A** Ask your neighbour how they are doing
- L** Let your neighbour have your contact details
- K** Keep in regular contact by telephone or video call
- I** Initiate conversations with a friendly wave or smile
- N** Never feel alone – Wicklow Community Call Helpline is here to help you
- G** Get talking – Its good for you and your community

Theme | Switching Off & Being Creative

Together Apart

Wicklow Stories 2020 is an initiative to capture the experiences of Wicklow life at the current time. A new initiative from Wicklow County Council was set out to create a 'People's Archive' to capture and share photos, stories and experiences of Wicklow life 2020 and all were invited to participate. Whether you are at home cocooning, remote working, home-schooling children or providing an essential service to keep society functioning.

Project Postcard

Wicklow County Council Library Service, as part of the Wicklow County Council Community Response Programme, launched 'Project Postcard' aimed at primary school children. The idea was to encourage primary school children to write to nursing home residents or to loved ones. Library staff have designed a fun and engaging postcard on which the school children can write their own messages to nursing home residents in Wicklow or to loved ones here or abroad. The postcards, which are being distributed to schools, will be delivered free-of-charge to nursing homes by An Post.



Other National Responses

The response from other statutory, state funded and community & voluntary organisations was admirable. The breadth and array of initiatives rolled out around the country demonstrated the level of care, concern and commitment shown to more vulnerable members of our society. Organisations such as An Post, Sports Ireland, An Garda Síochána, the GAA and the League of Ireland used their networks to support older more vulnerable people to stay active and stay connected in their communities.

Theme | Physical Activity

FitLine

This is a volunteer-led telephone-based motivation line, aimed at people aged 50+, which encourages callers to get more active. FitLine, an Age & Opportunity initiative, is a volunteer telephone line designed to help older people who want to feel a bit healthier, but perhaps don't have the motivation, confidence or information on where or how to take that first step. The service is completely free. Age & Opportunity encourage people to call 1800 303 545 and learn more. After you've made the first call, a FitLine mentor will arrange a time to ring you every two weeks until you're happy with your progress. FitLine mentors are volunteer older people who understand the challenges of getting active. They'll give you information, advice and gentle encouragement to get moving over the phone.

Theme | Positive Mental and Emotional Health

COVID Care Concerts

Covid Care Concerts is a nationwide arts programme, developed in rapid response to the pandemic. The project is devised and delivered by the Mobile Music Machine. The project has brought the best of Irish musical talent to the gardens of care homes and hospitals across Ireland, for live, socially distanced concerts. The Healthy Ireland fund supported 250 concerts in Kerry, Kilkenny, Dublin City, Dublin DLR and Wexford. COVID CARE CONCERTS is a new initiative created by acclaimed Irish cellist Gerald Peregrine. The project was conceived in June 2020 in response to the many social and economic challenges created by Covid-19. The series involves some of Ireland's finest classical, opera, traditional and popular musicians presenting live, outdoor socially distanced concerts in the gardens and grounds of residential care homes and hospital settings across Ireland. The concerts follow all HSE guidelines around social distancing. Where possible, residents sit outside to enjoy the concert, or listen through open windows. Since the project's conception in late June 2020 we have performed over 420 concerts in 14 counties. (April 2021). Age Friendly Ireland have supported 250 of these concerts. We have worked with Creative Ireland to develop a creative interactive element within the project. We email the homes in advance and take requests from the residents when planning our programming. We then email a playlist of our music in advance and encourage the residents to write and journal memories around the music.

Care and Inform

Irish Hospice Foundation's Care and Inform resources can support ourselves and each other in new ways during this difficult period. You may be caring for a loved one at home, no longer have the same support network, or someone close to you has died. In response to COVID-19, we have developed our Care & Inform Information and Advice hub to keep people updated on matters related to death, dying, and bereavement. Included are resources on: Caring for someone who is frail or perhaps close to the end of life at home. Practical information: Caring for someone at the end of life at home Palliative Care: What is it and Who is it for? When someone you love is dying in a nursing home: What to expect. What can I do when I can't visit a loved one who is dying? When someone you love is dying in hospital: What to expect. Grieving in exceptional times. Acknowledging and coping with grief from a COVID-19 death. Planning a funeral in exceptional times. Planning a funeral when your relative has died from COVID-19.

Bereavement Support Line

Many people have experienced and will experience the death of someone close during the COVID-19 pandemic. It may have been a COVID-related death or a death from other causes. People may also be finding a previous bereavement more difficult at this time. In the face of such loss, the Bereavement Support Line, in partnership with the HSE, is there to provide connection, comfort and support in these exceptional times. Bereavement Support Line is a national freephone service 1800 80 70 77, available from 10 am to 1 pm, Monday to Friday. We aim to provide a confidential space for people to speak about their experience

or to ask questions relating to the death of someone during the COVID-19 pandemic or a previous bereavement that feels more difficult at this time. We will listen to what a person says about what has happened. We will do our best to provide comfort and emotional support. We will provide any information that might help the caller, including information on practical supports. We will provide support for employers or professionals who want to inform the care their organisation can offer to bereaved colleagues. The service is confidential.

Theme | Staying Connected

CONNECT Project

Older people with acquired severe or profound hearing loss who are unable to make voice calls were identified as a cohort who were additionally vulnerable during covid restrictions. 100 people were supplied with an assistive listening device, including an extension microphone to facilitate social distancing where required, to support them in communicating with family, friends and neighbours. The majority of people with hearing loss do not use hearing aids, and those with more severe hearing loss are unable to make phone calls. Within this group, those who live alone are at most risk of isolation and are less able to access assistance at a time of need. The aim of this project is to use an assistive listening device to engage and support up to 100 older people with significant hearing loss who typically live alone, are at high risk of social isolation, and are greatly disadvantaged in reaching out and seeking assistance at a time of need. This was identified as a significant increased need during Covid-19 restrictions within the Service Users/ Family Carer Experience via Representative

Bodies HSE Covid Work Stream. The project is supported by the HSE through the funding of equipment and will be implemented jointly by Chime and ALONE.

Reaching Out

Active Retirement Ireland has put in place a multifaceted communication plan to ensure older people who are members remain connected to their local ARA, their region and national organisation. This is done through social media, email, telephone calls and postage of cards and letters. Information flows from national level out and feedback on how people are doing flows back. We have passed on all Covid 19 updates: information on initiatives from our fellow organisations in the sector such as Seniorline Fitline Community call, Getting Started and Living and dying with dignity just to mention a few. The ARI communications tree is to provide a vital line of communication to and from ARI members at a time of lockdown and restrictions on physical meetings.

SeniorLine

SeniorLine is Ireland's national listening service for older people, the service delivered by 180 trained older volunteers. SeniorLine is open every day of the year, Freefone number 1800 80 45 91. 18,000+ calls received in 2020. Older people phone SeniorLine because they may be lonely and solitary, anxious, unwell, experiencing family conflict, bereavement, elder abuse, other. SeniorLine volunteers are trained to listen to respond with empathy and support, to discuss caller options and to direct to other services also as appropriate.

An Post

For some people who live alone or in very rural settings, the postman/woman may be the only person they come in contact with on a regular basis. During the pandemic, An Post supported many vulnerable people to deal with Covid-19 through their campaigns.

- ▶ Helping connect our community
- ▶ Helping people stay in touch
- ▶ Helping say hello
- ▶ Helping people keep up with the news

Postmen and women not only delivered the post, but rang the bell to check in on older and vulnerable people. They took messages and connected to local shops and pharmacists and to a wider network of support organisations. Through the '*Come Together by Staying Apart*' campaign, 5 million free postcards were delivered to homes around Ireland.

An Garda Síochána

An Garda Síochána, much like other public agencies, reacted quickly to the emergence of the pandemic. While their primary task was to provide re-assurance to the public and ensure compliance with the public health guidelines they adopted a graduated response to compliance, using the four Es approach, which saw them engage, educate, encourage and, as a last resort, enforce.

At local level, particularly during intense periods of lockdown, Community Gardaí were hugely active, supporting those who are vulnerable, high

risk and isolated. Fulfilling everyday, but essential, tasks for people who were medically vulnerable or cocooning, such as getting groceries and collecting prescriptions, reaffirmed their connection with communities across the country.

Sports Ireland and sports-promoting organisations

Sports Ireland, through Local Sports Partnerships continued to support communities to stay active during the pandemic. Funding was provided to support organisations to adapt how they delivered physical activity initiatives. Funding was also provided to support communication campaigns to enable agencies and organisations to reach marginalized communities in very isolated areas.

Online Zoom classes replaced indoor sporting activities. DVDs and CDs with exercise leaflets were developed and rolled out at local level. Some age friendly counties, in particular Donegal and Sligo, were quick to recognize the power of local radio which they used to raise the level of awareness of older people to the benefits of physical activity. Age & Opportunity continued supporting older people to stay active through their PALs and Movement Minutes programmes. In addition, their over-the-phone 'Fitline' programme appealed to older people who were not digitally connected. Siel Bleu too, was quick to adapt to the changes imposed upon them by lock-down restrictions. They created 'Siel Bleu at Home' and brought their exercise programme into the homes of older people through smart technology.

The response from individual sporting heroes from bodies such as the GAA and League of Ireland highlighted the influence/power of individuals in enhancing the lives of ordinary people in extraordinary times.

'It's Good to Talk' Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA) and League of Ireland (LoI)

'It began with a random tweet on Easter weekend from a man called Kevin to David Brady, chancing his arm. Kevin's father, Tom, was an elderly Mayo man in Wicklow, cocooning and struggling with the silence. Could David ring him? Maybe talk football a little bit? Brady rang him. They talked football and cattle and everything in between. Both of them put the phone down feeling good. Better than good'

Irish Times

What began as a casual message for Mayo footballer David Brady became the GAA campaign 'It's Good to Talk'. While the campaign started out small it was later rolled out in counties from Donegal

to Kerry. Another sporting hero, retired League of Ireland footballer, Conan Byrne, took up the baton from Brady and harnessed the support of soccer players, managers, coaches, journalists and broadcasters nationwide to contact and support older fans struggling to get through lockdown.

‘When I saw Captain Tom Moore doing laps of his garden to raise funds for the NHS in England, I thought he was an inspiration. I decided I could do laps of my garden to keep myself active’

Bob Gilbert, National Older Persons Council member 2021

While it is true to say that people were never so disconnected from everyday life, others found solace in this new slower pace of life. Inspirational people such as centenarian Capt. Tom Moore captured the hearts of not only the British public, but the Irish public too. He inspired people to take to walking around their gardens and local areas and amenities to ensure they stayed active while still adhering to Covid-19 restrictions.

Many people used the pandemic to get back to nature. Some undertook DIY projects in the garden and began to look at growing their own fruit and vegetables. Initiatives such as the ‘Get Free Seeds, Do Good Deeds’ - Healthy Ireland’s partnership with GIY and the Public Library Service, is an example of a creative initiative that appealed to people whose movements were restricted by Covid-19.

“Our clients love to read the regional newspapers, but when they were forced to cocoon, they were afraid to go to the shops to get the paper. We decided to encourage them to use the Acorn smart device to access newspapers online”

Rockmount Care Centre, Kilgarvan, Co Kerry

The pandemic accelerated the need for service providers and service users to look to technology to find a solution to support marginalized communities, including older people, to stay connected and stay active during these unprecedented times.

Funding streams, at both national and local level, were made available to support statutory, state-funded and community & voluntary organisations to purchase smart devices to support vulnerable members of the community. Many of the smart devices purchased were given to nursing homes and day care centres throughout the country. These smart devices not only facilitated nursing home residents and day care clients to stay in touch with family and friends, but also enabled service providers to continue to provide their clients with the care they needed.

An inspiring array of digital initiatives were purchased and distributed by Local Authorities, NGO's and local community voluntary groups across the country. Both Tipperary's Age Friendly County and Cork City Council's Age Friendly digital initiatives are examples of well co-ordinated, creative IT initiatives with wrap-around peer-to-peer training and support which is a must for older people who are new to technology and struggle with confidence when it comes to using technical devices.



The Review

The HSE decided to carry out the review of the initiatives through the work of the dedicated Programme Manager assigned through Age Friendly Ireland. The Programme Manager collated detailed information on Covid-19 initiatives that supported older people during the pandemic resulting in this report.

Covid-19 initiatives which were rolled out during the pandemic and considered 'age friendly' in how they supported older people - were examined. Eighteen of these initiatives have been identified as the most successful for mainstreaming and deemed worthy of further investigation and/or evaluation, with a view to scaling them up and rolling them out across the country.





Methodology

This review of Covid-19 initiatives is based on information collated during the period of the pandemic. The study used a mixed-method approach. Methodologies included a desktop study of the literature pertinent to Covid-19 and older people (see Appendix 1) and an assessment of the information on Age Friendly, HSE-led initiatives, as well as those led by other national and local organisations, collated by the National Age Friendly Ireland Office, which are available as a searchable repository on the age friendly website www.agefriendly.ie.

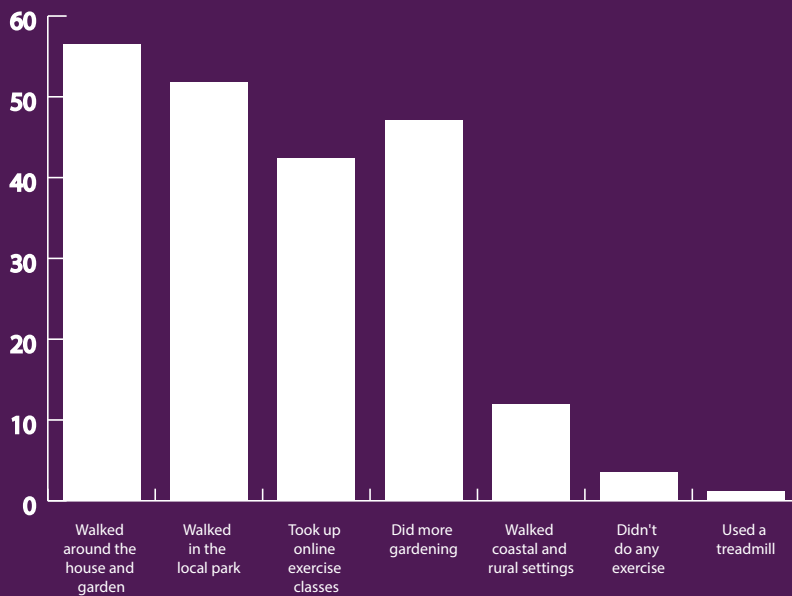
While the reality of Covid-19 restricted the consultation process, every effort was made to engage with as broad a range of older people as possible. A number of tools were used to elicit the experiences and attitudes of older people to Covid-19. These consisted of an online questionnaire, Focus Group workshops and a series of over-the-phone interviews. The online questionnaire and workshops were undertaken with participants drawn from both the National Older Persons Council (NOPC) and representatives from the local Older Persons Councils (OPC) around the country. In addition, a number of over-the-phone interviews were conducted with vulnerable older people outside of the system in order to reflect the needs of the more marginalised. These tools were used in an effort to achieve a meaningful consultation and assessment process to help get a true picture of how older people coped during the pandemic and to establish the initiatives they regard as most beneficial to older people and those they would like to see scaled up and continued beyond the pandemic. The feedback from the workshops was used to support the findings and recommendations in the report.

Questionnaire

An online questionnaire '*The Impact of Covid-19: Challenges and Opportunities*' was created in consultation with members of local Older Persons Councils and rolled out with the support of Age Friendly County Programme Managers and the Age Friendly National Older Persons Council. While limited to older people who have an online presence, it gives a snapshot of the feelings and attitudes of older people to the pandemic. The questionnaire was created using the five Health and Wellbeing themes of the Department of Health's Keep Well campaign - '*Staying Active*', '*Staying Connected*', '*Switching Off and Being Creative*', '*Eating Well*' and '*Minding Your Mood*'. A total of 89 older people from across the country completed the questionnaire. The following are some of the key findings from the questionnaire:

Staying Active

Participants were asked how they managed to stay active during the pandemic. It was interesting to see that only a very small number (3.5%) indicated that they didn't do any exercise at all and are likely to be people with underlying health conditions.



56%

of respondents
walked in or around
their own gardens

51%

of respondents
walked in local parks

42%

took up online
exercise classes

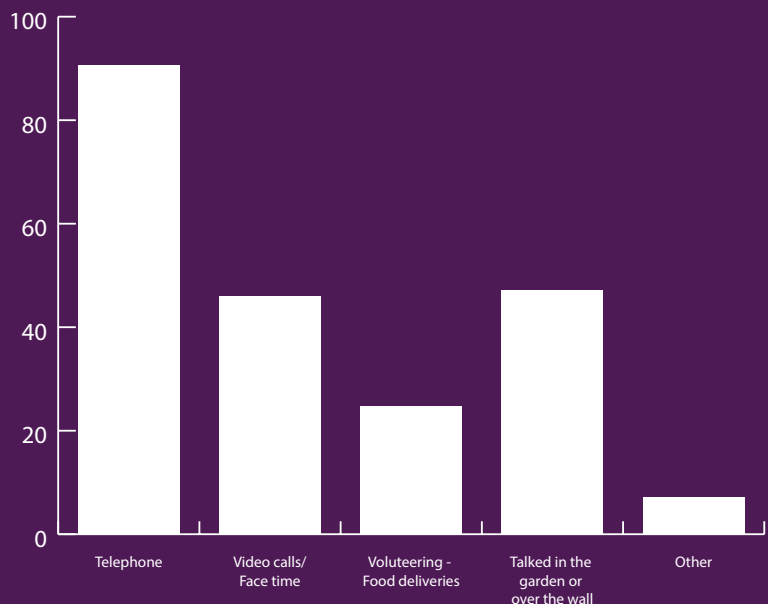
90% of respondents
used telephones to keep in touch

24% of respondents
stayed connected by volunteering to
deliver food and medical supplies to
more vulnerable older people

46% of respondents
used digital devices or smart phones
to facetime family and friends

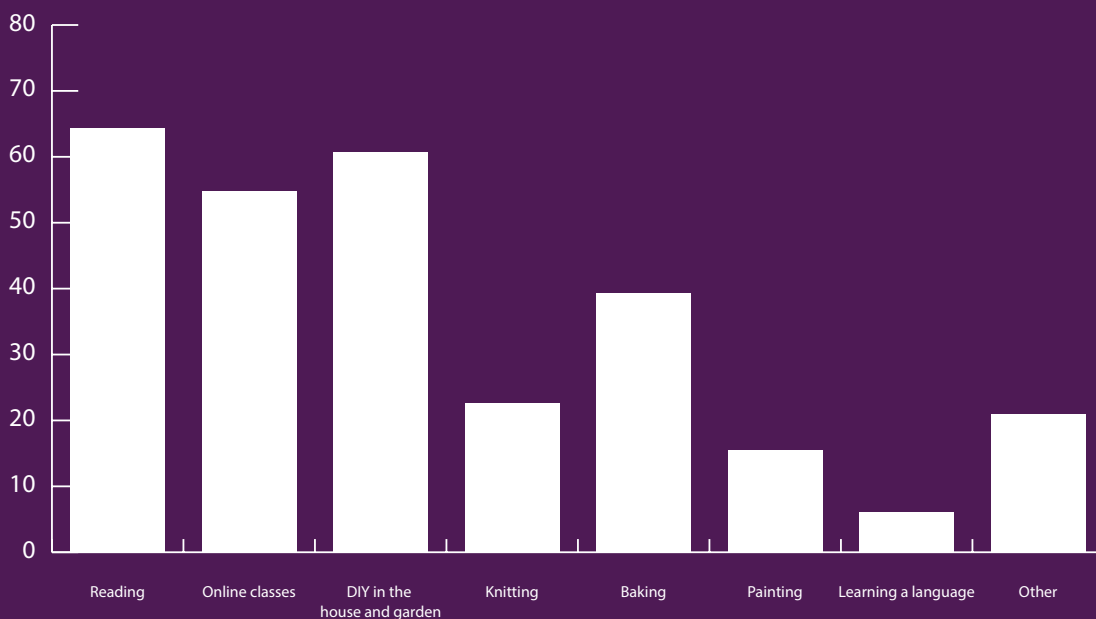
Staying Connected

Participants were asked how they managed to stay connected with their families and wider community.



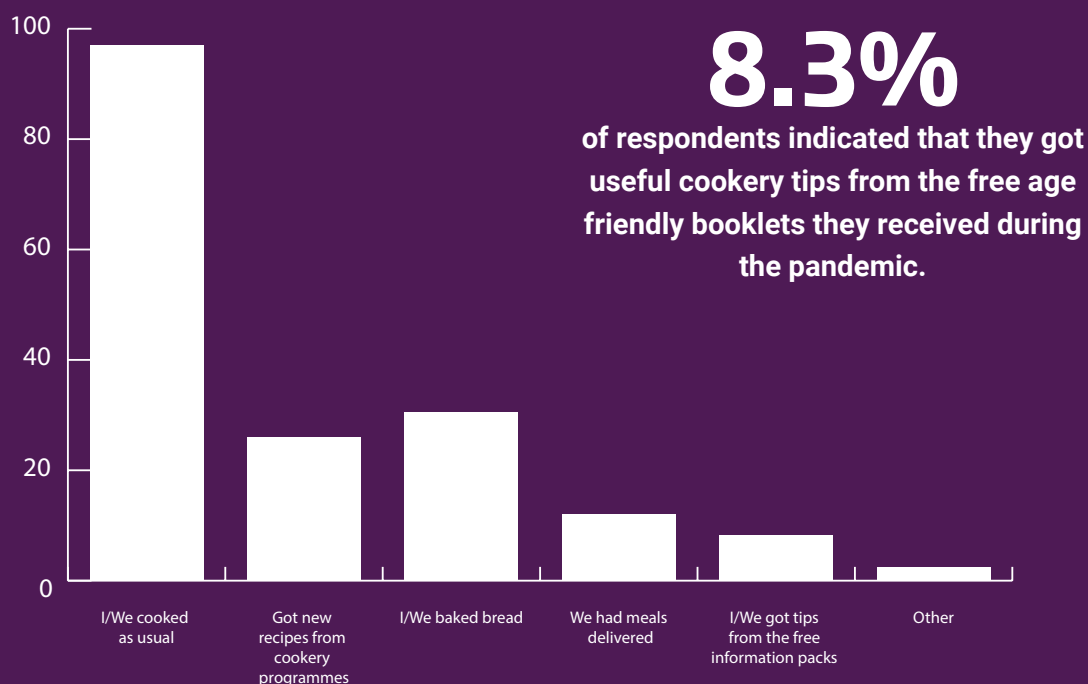
Switching off and being creative

Participants were asked how they managed to switch off and be creative during the pandemic. They took to reading, taking up online classes, getting DIY jobs done in the house and garden. Knitting and baking, painting and learning a new language were also some of the activities undertaken by participants during lockdown.



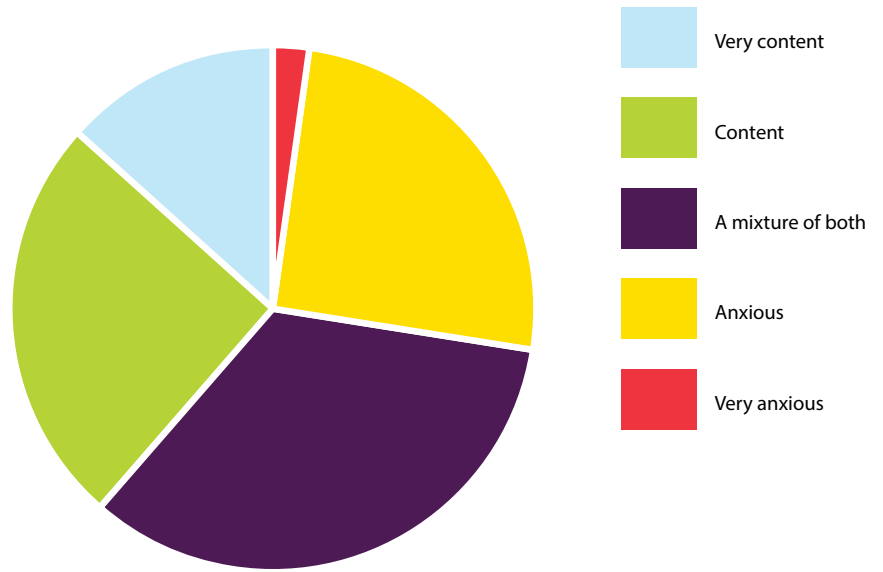
Eating Well

Participants, on the whole, indicated that they continued to eat well during the pandemic.



Minding your mood

Participants were asked two questions regarding their positive and emotional wellbeing. Firstly, they were asked to rate their mood and secondly they were asked to list what they did to keep their mood upbeat.



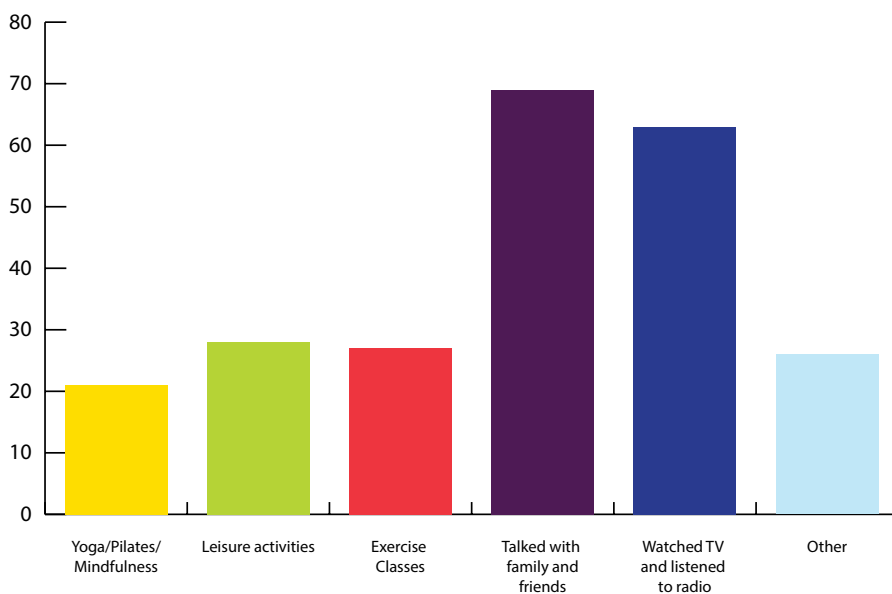
60%
(n=89) of respondents indicated that they felt a certain level of anxiety

2 people felt extremely anxious

21 felt anxious and a further

28 people found that they had mixed emotions during the pandemic

A number of older people found a level of contentment from the slower pace of life. 38% of respondents felt that they were either content or very content during the pandemic. This question was explored in more detail during focus group workshops.



69% of respondents relied on their family and friends to stay positive

63% watched TV and listened to the radio

In general, respondents maintained their levels of positivity through physical exercise, leisure activities, television and talking to family and friends.



Focus Group Assessment Sessions

Five online focus group assessment sessions were hosted during September 2021. Each session was based on the Department of Health's Healthy Ireland 'Keep Well' campaign themes, in keeping with the online questionnaire. The purpose of the sessions was twofold: a) to assess the age friendly initiatives rolled out to support older people during the pandemic and b) to have a conversation with participants to ascertain how Covid-19 impacted on their ability to stay active, stay connected, switch off and be creative, eat well and manage their mood. The workshops were divided into two parts. In Part 1 the group considered the age friendly initiatives and, using an online voting mechanism, they selected those initiatives they felt merited further evaluation or were deemed to be valuable beyond Covid-19. The second part of the workshop was a conversation with participants on how they themselves managed during the pandemic.

Focus Group Sessions

Part 1 - Assessment of Findings

Twenty three OPC representatives from counties Dublin, Kildare, Clare, Roscommon, Wexford, and Waterford took part in the five online workshops. One third of these were men. In advance of each workshop, participants received an information pack, a programme schedule and score sheet. Age Friendly Regional Programme Manager's facilitated the assessment process. There was a discussion on each initiative and participants could seek clarification on any aspect prior to voting. The following diagram illustrates the initiatives that were selected as models of best practice for further evaluation or with a view to the possible scaling up and rolling out across the country.

Staying Active	Staying Connected	Switching off and Being Creative	Eating Well	Managing your Mood
Donegal's 'Physical Activity Awareness Raising' using local radio	Galway City's 'Helping Hands at Home'	Kildare Covid Notebook'	Fingal's 'Cocooning Booklet'	Irish Hospice Foundation 'Getting you House in Order
Age & Opportunity 'Fitline' - over the phone exercise class	DLR 'Age Friendly Winter Magazine'	Monaghan 'Song Ties'	Galway's FEAD Programme	Clare's 'Here Comes the Sun'
Sligo's 'Exercise from Home' radio programme	Clare's 'Digital Smartphone Project'	Mayo's 'Rainbow Project'	Sligo's 'Age Friendly Cook Along'	Irish Hospice Foundation's 'Bereavement Support Line'
Westmeath 'Strong Seniors 55+'	Skerries 'Staying Connected Initiative'	Meath's 'Purls of Wisdom'		Mobile Music Machine 'Covid Care Concerts'
	Tipperary 'Digital Connections'	Wexford's 'Tale a phone exchange'		Cork's 'Blue Bibs' initiative
	Louth Age Friendly 'Digital Ambassadors'			Donegal's 'Ceol le Cheile'

Range of Initiatives & Geographic Spread

24 age friendly initiatives were shortlisted as part of the Assessment Process. The breadth and array of initiatives is indeed inspiring and shows the level of commitment of agencies and organisations to supporting older people to stay active and independent in their communities despite the restrictions of Covid-19. Many of the initiatives were selected because they were creative, interactive, intergenerational, practical and informative.

Part 2 - Focus Group Workshops – Conversations on Covid-19 Findings

The second part of each series of focus group workshops was a conversation based on the 5 Healthy Ireland 'Keep Well' campaign themes. These conversations were facilitated by Age Friendly Regional Programme Managers who helped to ensure that each participant had a voice at the table. The numbers in attendance were small, most sessions had 5/6 people. This did not detract from the quality of the output from the conversations as it allowed us to create an atmosphere of confidence, which lent itself to an open and honest discussion, which can be harder to achieve at a large public consultation session.

Staying Active

I had time to get to know my own area and the local amenities

-MARION

Most of the group members said they had taken to walking in parks and beaches in their local towns and communities. Those who didn't take up walking got outdoors into the garden, growing their own fruit and vegetables. The group unanimously agreed that more was needed to be done to raise the level of awareness of older people regarding the benefits of physical exercise as we grow older. They indicated that '*Radio is their generation's thing*' and, as such, should be used as a means to engage with vulnerable older people, particularly those who have no interest in using smart devices. They also felt it was important that older people be included in the planning stages of the development of physical activity programmes.

Staying Connected

My laptop was a lifeline to my community

-KEVIN

The group was hugely appreciative of the IT training and support they had received from their Age Friendly County Programme Managers during Covid-19, which enabled them to stay actively connected as a group. Some felt they couldn't imagine life without Zoom or WhatsApp while others were 'all Zoomed out' and looked forward to resuming face-to-face meetings. All agreed that a lot of time had been saved having meetings online, particularly for those coming from as far away as Donegal and Kerry. One of two indicated that they were anxious about coming out of Covid-19 too quickly and felt there was scope for developing a hybrid of OPC meetings in the future.

Switching off and Being Creative

I had to get creative or go under. . .
delivering meals helped open up life again for me

- MARTIN

Throughout the periods of lockdown and cocooning, it was felt that it was very important that older people had opportunities to switch off and be creative. Many agencies and organisations delivered creative initiatives under this 'Keep Well' theme which were, in themselves, very creative and managed to reach vulnerable older people living in isolated areas, to address challenges associated with loneliness and isolation.

Focus group participants indicated that they had felt at sea when the restrictions were introduced. However, instead of dwelling on it, they used the pandemic to discover their creative sides. Some availed of opportunities to attend online creative writing classes and webinars. Others watched Netflix or stayed abreast of sporting activities such as soccer, GAA and cricket. Some members of the focus group not only got in touch with their creative side but also used their creativity to support others more vulnerable than themselves. These examples of altruism were inspirational.

Eating Well

Ordering online meant I bought less sweet stuff and I saved money

-ITA

All of the participants in the focus group indicated that they still cook for themselves and enjoy cooking. In the early days of the pandemic, they continued shopping for themselves until the restrictions were introduced and then either had food delivered, bought food online or relied on family and friends to do shopping for them. They were hugely appreciative of all emergency services in their local areas and of local retailers and postal workers who stepped up to deliver food stuff and medical supplies during the pandemic. The group were keen to highlight positive initiatives e.g. Local Authority Community Response Teams, An Post initiatives and 'Get Free Seeds, Do Good Deeds', to name but a few. On the other hand, participants also wanted to raise awareness of the rising costs of living which impact on everyone, but are particularly hard when you live alone. They felt there was little understanding at national level of the cost of living alone.

Minding your mood

'I felt coming out of Covid-19 restrictions was a bigger challenge, I don't feel I want to go anywhere'

- KEVIN

Most of the participants were active community volunteers pre-Covid-19 and continued volunteering, where possible, in an online or over-the-phone capacity throughout. Some participants indicated that they enjoyed the less frenetic pace of life. One participant enjoyed the silence brought by the lack of planes in the sky. Another participant found that cocooning had helped bring about a peace between herself and her son and felt this was a good outcome from Covid. On the other hand two participants found themselves overwhelmed and struggling to come out of it. The group were unanimous that, as a cohort of people, they would like some positive mental and emotional wellbeing initiatives to help support them to get back to a new normal.



Over-the-phone Interviews – Findings

Six people from Dublin, Kildare, Laois and Limerick were invited to take part in over-the-phone interviews to discuss how they coped during the pandemic. The people selected for interview represent the views of older people living in the community. Participants ranged in age from 62 to 89 and were asked the same questions as those who had attended the focus group sessions. Two men and four women interviewed as part of the process.

All participants, bar one, indicated that they stayed active by walking close to home, some finding local amenities they hadn't used for years. One participant found staying active difficult as his physio services were cancelled during the pandemic and this has impacted hugely on him. Two of the six participants had smart devices but used them for limited purposes. Four participants did not have access to a smart device and didn't want it. All said they used their phones to stay in touch with family and friends and also for calls to the GP. In keeping with participants in the focus group sessions, all relied on the radio and TV for light entertainment, religious services and updates on Covid-19. All cooked for themselves but had family and friends shop for them during the level 5 restrictions. All of the participants indicated that they had felt some level of anxiety during the last 18 months but they tried not to think too deeply about things they couldn't control.

All of the people interviewed were appreciative of family and friends who kept them going throughout. Some were keen to get back out there; two had availed of a short staycation as soon as the country opened up. All showed a level of resilience that is to be admired.

Overall Observations and Into the Future

A review of existing resources entitled '*Combined Inventory of Health and Wellbeing Supports for Older People during the Covid-19 pandemic*' carried out at the initial stage of this project provided a robust baseline to build on for this phase of the project.

The findings of this phase are also based on the consultation process undertaken in October 2021 with the support of representatives of Age Friendly Older People's Councils by means of an online questionnaire, online focus group workshops and over-the-phone interviews with older people who were more harder to reach. It should be pointed out that this consultation process which normally would take the form of large roundtable face-to-face facilitated conversations was impacted by Covid-19 restrictions and confined to older people who use smart technology. Interviews, however, were carried out with people who do not use technology, to reflect the views of those who are affected by the digital divide in our society.

- ▶ Digital transformation
- ▶ Pandemic preparedness
- ▶ Stronger Inter agency and interdepartmental collaboration
- ▶ Resilience of older people
- ▶ Adaptability of service users
- ▶ Resurgence of Community
- ▶ Dedicated park times
- ▶ Food poverty

Key positives emerging from the pandemic

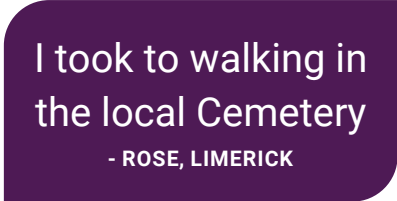
At the top of the list is that of resilience. Both the community as a whole and older, more vulnerable, people in particular, demonstrated their resilience in the face of the unknown. Older people found ways during level 5 restrictions to stay active and stay connected to family and friends. Older people liked what they felt was the return of the *'community atmosphere'*, they liked the care and attention shown to those more vulnerable in our towns and communities. The dedicated park times and community response initiatives by Local Authorities, An Post and An Garda Síochána made older people feel safer while they were out and about and made them feel that they mattered.

While many older people tried to keep themselves motivated during these strange times, some found ways to harness their creativity for the good of the community at large. The breadth and array of creative initiatives being undertaken across the country shows that there is still a hunger among older people for creative activities (See appendix 1 for County by County list). Moreover, older people indicated they would welcome the opportunity to be involved in the planning stages of both physical activity and creative activity programmes.

Flexibility and adaptability of service providers and service users have also emerged as key positives. Services which were halted due to Covid-19 were soon up and running in a different format. Community Day Care Services, Nursing Homes Service Providers and residents looked to smart technology to stay connected with family members and clients. Zoom meetings, WhatsApp, Skype and Facetime became familiar ways to meet people. While nothing can replace face-to-face gatherings of people, many learned that online meetings save time and money and a hybrid model of both may be the new model in the future.

Staying Active

Many of the participants, both online and those interviewed over the phone, indicated that they had rediscovered their local parks and amenities during the pandemic. Some were lucky to live in rural or coastal areas and took to walking on the beaches or rural loops. Others took to walking around their gardens or laneways to ensure they got some exercises. It was clear from the feedback that many liked the designated park times as it made them feel safer.



Recommendations

- ▶ That Sports Ireland, Sports Partnerships, Third Level Sports Institutions in collaboration with Agencies and Organisations that support older people and representatives of older people themselves should work together to develop physical programmes that support and encourage older people to remain active as they get older
- ▶ Consider developing more physical activities programmes in public parks initiatives like the Local Authorities designated park times and Cork's *'Blue Bibs'* which encouraged older people to come out in numbers as they felt safer
- ▶ Consider a review of national and regional physical activity programmes to reduce functional decline due to cocooning during Covid-19
- ▶ Consideration should be given to including older people in the planning phase of the development of physical activity programmes
- ▶ Consideration should be given to developing a Physical Activity Awareness programme for radio in order to reach all vulnerable older people
- ▶ Consider ways to develop structures linking Age Friendly Ireland, local government etc. with key HSE projects e.g. *'Get Up Get Dressed'*, *'Get Moving'*, *'Social Prescribers'*, *'Enhanced Community Care'* in order to enable a partnership approach at regional and national level to address key issues in community settings which would allow older people to age in place
- ▶ Consider continued collaboration between the HSE and Age Friendly Ireland and representatives from Older Persons Councils to ensure that HSE promotional material pertaining to older people is age friendly-proofed
- ▶ Consider research and analysis to help identify where the most vulnerable people are, their levels of need and work with them to develop programmes that address their physical and mental health
- ▶ Consider developing a physical activity module, to be included as part of Retirement Planning programmes e.g. Age & Opportunity's *'Ageing with Confidence'* and *'Changing Gears'* and the Retirement Planning Council's Retirement Programme

Staying Connected

Over the course of the pandemic, a lot of government-funded money was made available for the purchase of smart devices in order to support older people to continue to live active independent lives and to stay connected to family and friends. These devices were distributed to nursing home clients, day care clients and vulnerable older people living alone in the community.

**'I can't imagine life
without zoom'**
- RICHARD, WATERFORD

Challenges were highlighted regarding equality of access to digital supports, including devices and internet connection. As most initiatives moved online because of Covid-19 restrictions, a lot of older people struggled, and are still struggling, to get connected and stay connected.

Participants in focus group sessions have been active online but had opposing views on technology.

**'Zoom was great but
I'm glad it's over'**

- MARGARET, ROSCOMMON

Some felt devices had provided them with a lifeline to the community and others felt *'all Zoomed out'* and couldn't wait to get back to face-to-face meetings. Older people interviewed were also at odds in this regard. Four of the six interviewed did not have access to technology and didn't want it, preferring instead to using their landlines and/or smartphones to stay connected with family and friends.

Recommendations

Projects such as Tipperary County Council's Age Friendly Digital initiative and Cork City Age Friendly digital initiatives identified key digital champions who received training through the Education and Training Board (ETB) to mentor participants in the use of their smart devices and to report back on the progress of clients. Further to this, Agencies and Organisations that support older people in collaboration with ETBs, Third level Institutions and Local Development companies etc. should give consideration to:

- ▶ Promoting greater awareness of IT supports and training already available to older people, using local radio to drive the campaign
- ▶ Consider other alternatives to online to reach vulnerable older people. Provision of hardcopies and use of CDs and DVDs should be encouraged where possible
- ▶ Developing further peer-to-peer and inter-generational IT support initiatives to encourage older people to stay connected and improve their IT skills e.g. Digital Ambassador Schemes, Super Connector and Generation Tech schemes

Switching off and being creative

Many older people found themselves unable to maintain their busy voluntary active lives during the pandemic. While some felt a little lost in the beginning, most felt it gave them an opportunity to reflect and either rediscover their local amenities or re-channel their creative energies for the good of other more vulnerable people. Reading, watching TV for light entertainment and gardening were activities of choice for most. As was baking, knitting and family quizzes over Zoom or WhatsApp. It

**'I felt cocooned and
marooned'**

- BOB, CAVAN

was inspiring to hear how one man used his creativity to write a book of poetry which he self-published and went on to sell 1.500 copies, with a percentage of sales being donated to the Alzheimer's Society of Ireland. Another gentleman felt he had to get creative or go under, so volunteered to deliver food and medical supplies to other more vulnerable families in

his community. Those interviewed over the phone also showed a resilience that is inspiring. Many used their phones to make contact with people they previously hadn't had time to speak to because of busy lives. Others took the opportunity to make calls to people they knew living alone and who might be in need of company.

Recommendations

There was a lot of initiatives delivered under the theme of Switching Off and Being Creative, which managed to reach vulnerable older people living in isolated areas. Some, like Kildare's 'Covid Notebook', were not just creative but will provide a social history record that will be held in the archives of Kildare County Library.

There is clearly an enthusiasm amongst older participants for interactive, inter-generational creative projects. Consideration should therefore be given to:

- ▶ Developing and adapting interactive creative projects e.g. Kildare's 'Covid Notebook', Monaghan's 'Song Ties', Mayo's 'Rainbow project' and rolling them out country-wide
- ▶ Providing greater support to agencies and organisations who support the ageing agenda in order to continue with relevant creative bodies both at national and local level to deliver on creative initiatives for older people
- ▶ Consultation with vulnerable older people is vital to the development of creative programmes that are relevant to their needs. Older People should be invited to participate in the development/planning phase of creative projects



Eating Well – Nutrition

It was clear from the feedback that huge efforts were made by statutory, state-funded and voluntary community organisations to ensure that vulnerable older people were not left without support when it came to shopping for food or medical supplies. Local Authority Community Response Teams highlighted the importance of collaboration between organisations and community volunteers.

Food poverty became evident and initiatives to reach vulnerable older people had to be maintained, supported, and further developed to

meet growing need. Models of good practice emerged for 'Meals on wheels' such as, 'St. Munchin's', Limerick & 'Cope' Galway Social Enterprise with Community partners 'Meals 4 Health', was very effective in reaching older vulnerable adults. Food banks & food hubs were established in Belturbet Co. Cavan providing vital assistance on a weekly basis supported by the Covid 19 response team, the GAA, local volunteers, Gardai and the Civil Defence. Food parcels were delivered through many of the Age Friendly County & City Programmes across the country. The 'Dining Room' in Newbridge provided hot meals for Homeless families and vulnerable older people outdoors in a marquee. Some of these social enterprises while providing key social supports, also contribute to job creation.

Participants in the consultation process commended the work of emergency services and indicated

'My son did the shopping for us, it makes you realise how important family is'

- EVELYN & JOHN, KILDARE

that they were keen to see the Community Response Team structures retained in the future. Participants also observed the detrimental impact Covid-19 had on the Meals on Wheels service, as many of the volunteers delivering the service are older people and were cocooning for a period during the pandemic.

Recommendations

Consideration should be given to:

- ▶ The HSE, in collaboration with other agencies and organisations, exploring opportunities to develop 'Meals on Wheels' as a local development social enterprise model in conjunction with volunteers. Look at models e.g. Galway's Meals4Health or Cavan Local Development Company Meals on Wheels
- ▶ Retaining the structures of the Local Authority Community Response Teams
- ▶ Repeating the 'Healthy Foods made easy' programme
- ▶ Developing a 'Healthy Food Tips' programme for radio
- ▶ Exploring opportunities to develop community café(s) or social hubs with key stakeholders: places where older people (who do not have mobility issues) can come to eat lunch and socially interact with neighbours and friends, such as Rockmount Care Centre in Kilgarvan, Co Kerry, is a great example of a care facility reaching out to support the vulnerable in the community

'We go to the shops everyday but we had to stop when the restrictions were introduced'

-ANNE AND ETHNA, DUBLIN

Managing your Mood

Older people have faced major challenges during Covid-19, which created challenges for their positive mental and emotional health. Feelings of isolation and loneliness were reported to support services and have been captured in new reports on the impact of cocooning.

2 years out of an older person's life is a lot'

-KEVIN, WEXFORD

'I love how quiet things were, you could hear the birds and bees'

-BRENDAN, FINGAL

Many of the older people who took part in the consultation process showed their resilience during the pandemic; not thinking too deeply about things and just getting on with it. Some felt they had been through other crises in their lives and had experiences that they could share, if presented with the opportunity. Some felt disappointed that this historical context/experience was undervalued. While some felt the pandemic afforded them an opportunity to '*smell the roses*', others found they had taken on too much as volunteers in the community and felt overwhelmed by Covid-19, and are still struggling to recover from it.

Recommendations

There is a clear need to address the impact that Covid-19 has had on the mental and emotional wellbeing of older people.

- ▶ Consideration should be given to:
- ▶ Supporting an advertising campaign to promote awareness of the Irish Hospice Foundation's Bereavement Helpline
- ▶ Developing a '*Minding Your Wellbeing*' programme for broadcast on radio or podcast
- ▶ Providing support services/counselling for the volunteers who supported others to get through Covid-19.
- ▶ Collating all leaflets, booklets and information covering all Health and Wellbeing thematic areas and form into one Health and Wellbeing pack. Consult representatives from Age Friendly Older Persons Councils and key professionals on design and content
- ▶ Exploring other ways of reaching vulnerable older people other than smart devices. Consider using radio as a means to deliver positive wellbeing programmes
- ▶ Continuing to maintain the structures of the local authority Community Response Teams to identify those most vulnerable in our communities, establish their needs and means of how to work together to address them



Conclusions

The greatest impact of the pandemic was disproportionate to people aged 65 or over, according to the Central Statistics Office. This age group accounted for almost 92% of confirmed Covid-related deaths between March 11th and May 15th, 2020.

We know that the pandemic has impacted on mental health, relationships, work and education. Recent research carried out by TILDA - *'Altered lives in a time of Crisis: The Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the lives of older people in Ireland' 2021*, the HSE's *'Interim Report on Impact of "Cocooning" Measures on older people adopted March 2020 in response to COVID-19 pandemic'* and the latest report from the NGO Alliance, *'Telling it as it is'*, provides us with hard evidence of this impact and will serve to guide our policy makers as they endeavour to develop a road map for recovery, rebuild our economy and to create a new normal for the future.

TILDA researchers will determine the full scale of the impact of COVID-19 on a wide number of outcomes. The information is critical to inform future policy in relation to further outbreaks, or the long-term consequences of this outbreak and to better understand the actions of the infection in adults over 50 and thereby inform future vaccination and treatment solutions.

"Learning from COVID-19 – we will assess how we care for older people and examine alternatives to meet the diverse needs of our older citizens"

'Programme for Government: Our Shared Future' Dept. of An Taoiseach, amended June 2020

The Government has confirmed its commitment to the Health and Wellbeing initiative in the Review of the Programme for Government – 'Our Shared Future', stating that it will be using wellbeing indicators along with economic indicators to get the country back up and running.

This report has tried to demonstrate what can be achieved when statutory, state-funded and community and voluntary organisations can achieve when they come together in a collaborative and coordinated fashion for the good of the community. It showcases an array of initiatives that were rolled out across the country to support vulnerable older people to stay active, stay connected, switch off and be creative, eat well and manage their mood.

Our older people have life experiences from which we can all learn. They have a resilience that should be captured and shared with younger people. They have indicated that they are ready and willing to share their experiences. If we are to grow, it will be important that we listen to and learn from them.

Acknowledgements

The production of this resource is an outcome of the working of a good working relationship between the Health Service Executive [HSE] and the national shared service Age Friendly Ireland [AFI] for the development of Health & Wellbeing supports during COVID-19. This resource demonstrates the exemplar work from this partnership.

The HSE and AFI wish to acknowledge the HSE Health & Wellbeing Oversight Group for their oversight and direction. This project required the input and collaborative working from many different persons and teams across the HSE, Local Authorities especially the Age Friendly Programme Managers and Regional Managers and members of the public.

Special thanks to all who contributed to the collection and verification of the information

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The HSE and Age Friendly Ireland acknowledge in a special way the commitment and expertise of both Eithne Mallin and Alice Corbett (contracted Programme Managers by the HSE through AFI) who provided excellent project management and expertise for the overall project. Thanks also to Louise Edmonds, Regional Age Friendly Programme Manager for facilitation supports, and to Ciara Mc Manus in the Age Friendly shared service office who provided the clerical support.

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Appendix

Literature Review

'A Coordinated Global Research Roadmap: 2019 Novel Coronavirus' **World Health Organization, March 2020**

'Altered lives in a time of crisis: The Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the lives of older adults in Ireland', **Tilda TCD, 2021**

'An Overview of Local Authority Covid-19 Innovations' **LGMA May 2020**

'Community-based healthcare, including outreach campaigns, in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic' **WHO interim guidance May 2020**

'Digital Solutions Supporting Marginalised Communities' **Interim Report May 2021 ACORN-Cliffrun Media Ltd.,**

'Elder care Providers & COVID-19: Cross Cultural Perspectives' **The Global Ageing Network Emi Kiyota**

'Interim Report on Impact of "Cocooning" Measures on older people adopted March 2020 in response to COVID-19 pandemic' **HSE, 2020**

'Telling it like it is: what older people told us about their experience of COVID-19 and what Ireland should do about it' **The Alliance of Age Sector NGO's 2021**

Health and Wellbeing Inventory 2021 HSE & Age Friendly Ireland

Healthy Ireland Strategic Action Plan 2021=2025 Dept. of Health

National Programme for Government; *'Our Shared Future'* Dept. of An Taoiseach amended June 2021

Sláintecare Implementation Strategy & Action Plan 221 – 2023 Department of Health

Notes

Notes

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