Ageing Matters in Ireland

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Ageism that leads to abuse

The Hollywood actress Bette Davis once said: “Old age ain’t for sissies.” Her quote feeds into a view of ageing as a negative phase of our lives, not something any of us should look forward to.

The reality is different. Many older people live richly rewarding and enjoyable lives, fulfilling ambitions and using a lifetime of experiences to contribute to family and community life. But, like all other phases of life, our “third age” is not necessarily a bed of roses and, for many people, with age come challenges.

Perhaps the greatest underlying issue for everyone who hopes to grow older in Ireland is ageism. It permeates society, poisons public values and public policy.

Nowhere is naked ageism more evident than when it comes to elder abuse. The HSE recorded 2,592 elder abuse cases in 2014, the highest number since records began and a five per cent increase on 2013.

Given that the majority of offenders are family members and so older people may be reluctant to report it, the real extent of elder abuse in Ireland is likely to be far greater.

Empower older people

Age Action has campaigned for years to raise awareness of the problem and to inform older people being abused, and those who suspect abuse, that the HSE operates a service which can help. We have also worked to empower older people to protect themselves from abuse and prevent it occurring in the first place.

The latest phase of this work involves collaborating with the Gaiety School of Acting and older people's groups from Italy, Romania and Finland, to develop innovative approaches to prevent abuse.

Under the EU-funded Erasmus+ programme, we are developing drama workshops to educate older people and carers. The workshops will be piloted in Irish care settings in the coming months.

At the core of the project is the concept of “generational intelligence” or putting yourself in the other person’s shoes. Age Action showcased this work at an international conference in Dublin last month.

Professor Simon Biggs from Melbourne University, who delivered the keynote address at the event, spoke of the potential for “generational intelligence” to enable people become conscious of their own age vulnerability, to have a greater understanding of how older people could be abused, and to foster empathy.

If this project can develop the effective tools we need in this continuing battle, we will all benefit from a more age-friendly Ireland in the years to come.

— Eamon Timmins
Age Action hosts major elder abuse conference

Speakers from Australia, Europe, Britain and Ireland gathered in Dublin last month to discuss new ways to identify and prevent elder abuse.

The conference was organised by Age Action and the Gaiety School of Acting who are developing a series of drama workshops to help care workers and older people in residential settings challenge ageism and prevent elder abuse.

Dr Marita O’Brien, coordinator of Age Action’s elder abuse project, said: “The number of elder abuse cases reported to the HSE is rising every year and we know many victims are too frightened to tell anyone.

“This conference brings together experts from Ireland, Europe and Australia to discuss new ways of highlighting the dangers of elder abuse and to identify innovative approaches that can help to prevent older people becoming victims.”

New approaches

One of the new approaches to tackling elder abuse is the use of socio-drama.

“Over recent months we’ve worked with the Gaiety School of Acting and our European partners to develop a series of drama workshops that can be run in nursing homes or other residential settings,” Dr O’Brien continued.

“It’s a creative and interactive way for care staff to learn how their actions can be perceived. It helps older people to understand the kinds of behaviour they should not accept and encourages them to act if they believe they are being abused.”

The most recent figures from the HSE show that in 2014 they recorded 2,592 elder abuse cases, the highest number since records began and a five per cent increase on the previous year.

Earlier this year Age Action launched a campaign to highlight the dangers of financial elder abuse, distributing tens of thousands of information leaflets to community groups, information centres and families across Ireland.

The conference was part of an Erasmus + funded project involving Age Action and partners in Finland, Italy and Romania, along with the Gaiety School of Acting, in tackling elder abuse.

You can contact the HSE elder abuse service at 1850 24 1850.
The older prisoner population has dramatically increased over the past seven years. Today, roughly 10 per cent of prisoners are over 50 years old. While this may seem a young age to begin classifying someone as an ‘older’ person, prisoners experience ‘accelerated ageing’. This means that a prisoner aged fifty may have a standard of health comparable to someone aged sixty in the community. Currently, older prisoners are treated just like all others. Prisons do not have hospital nor hospice facilities, while officers are not specially trained to care for elderly prisoners. The gap in social care is often filled on an ad hoc basis by the Red Cross or informally by fellow inmates.

New report highlights concerns for older prisoners

A new report by the Irish Penal Reform Trust (IPRT) on the experiences of older people in prison highlights the serious practical and ethical challenges in imprisoning older people, writes Aoife Hyde, and illustrates that age-related problems affect everyone.

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Particularly vulnerable

Reflecting society at large, the IPRT report found that older people in prison are particularly vulnerable. They can have serious physical and mental health needs, require specialised care,
Life for older prisoners

“I wouldn’t like to die in prison, that’s kind of a big thing for us...I think it’s a common [fear] among older people, it’s a terrible place to die.” — 61-year-old man

“I’ve seen men bedridden in prison and lads going in and actually changing their incontinence pad and stripping down their bed and changing them...they might see the nurse twice a day and if the lads weren’t going in they would have to sit in that until the nurse came...” — 53-year-old man

“For us getting a job is a million times harder, not only because you’ve got a long criminal record, but also because we’re older. We’re unemployable to a lot of people...” — 52-year-old woman

“In here time stands still, because we don’t realise what’s going on out there really. I went to town one day with the officer...and I clung to her. If I lost her I didn’t know where I was, what was happening.” — 50-year-old woman

face elder abuse and struggle upon release.

Prisons were not built with older people in mind. Half of the prisoners surveyed for the research saw mobility as a significant issue. Those with mobility issues struggle to climb stairs or carry trays of food and have difficulty accessing services such as the library, medical services and recreational areas which may be on upper landings.

Although some participants highlighted positive relations with staff and other prisoners, with some older people relying on fellow prisoners to wash, dress and, in some cases, even change their incontinence pads, elder abuse is as much a problem on the ‘inside’ as it is on the ‘outside’; 38 per cent of older prisoners surveyed reported suffering bullying in 2015.

Worries about release

Many participants also felt anxious about their release, particularly if they had lost their home or had no family contact, while others were troubled by the potential lack of employment opportunities, given the stigmatisation of offenders and ageism of the jobs market.

At the report’s launch, IPRT Executive Director Deirdre Malone said: “Whether it is the difficulty in getting around, fear of elder abuse or simply the loneliness of a long day spent in solitude with little to do and no one to talk to, the needs of older people are remarkably similar either side of the prison wall.

“At the end of life and in cases of severe illness, maintaining the dignity and quality of life of older people in prison requires us all to reflect on the appropriateness of detaining very elderly and seriously ill people in a prison environment, particularly those living with dementia or other terminal illnesses, where the risk of harm to others is minimal.”

▲ The launch was attended by a large crowd of prison workers, human rights activists and lawyers. Photo: Derek Speirs

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Open eir has announced its sponsorship of the Silver Surfer Awards as part of a two-year partnership with Age Action.

Now in its eighth year, the awards celebrate the achievements of older people using technology and the internet as well as the volunteers who teach these skills.

“We are on a mission to not only get Ireland connected but to get Ireland maximising the benefits of high-speed broadband,” said Carolan Lennon, Managing Director for open eir.

“Our rural high-speed rollout programme is giving more Silver Surfers in communities across the country the ability to access high-speed broadband keeping families and friends connected no matter where they live or work.

“We are delighted to work with Age Action by sponsoring the Silver Surfer awards. The internet opens up a whole new world to users and we want to recognise, celebrate and reward all of the great things our Silver Surfers are doing.

“If you are a Silver Surfer or if you have a family member or friend who is using the internet as part of their daily lives then please log onto the Age Action website and fill out the nomination form. By doing so you’re highlighting the benefits of surfing online to older people throughout Ireland.”

Online benefits
“The open eir Silver Surfer Awards is all about driving home the benefit of being online to older people with the aim of getting more people to give it a go,” said Age Action CEO Eamon Timmins

“It is hard to believe but almost one in five adults have never used the internet – that is more than 550,000 people in Ireland! The majority of these are older people with 53 per cent (280,000) of these aged 60 to 74 never having been online. Only 3 per cent of those aged 75 and over have used the internet.

“We’re delighted that open eir has come on board to support the awards. Open eir is working hard to bring broadband to communities across Ireland and every day they extend their network to include more and more rural communities which in turn has a positive impact on our members lives.”
Nominate the Silver Surfer in your life

The five categories for the 2017 open eir Silver Surfer Awards are:

**New to IT Award** — A person over the age of 50 who is new to technology and has overcome challenges to become an IT user.

**Hobbies on the Net Award** — An older person who uses the Internet to pursue their passion or hobby, or who uses IT for communication and social networking.

**Golden IT Award** — An individual over the age of 80 who uses technology to enhance their life.

**Silver Surfer Award** — An older person who embraces the Internet or technology with a sense of fun and adventure.

**IT Tutor(s) of the Year Award** — An individual or group who provides voluntary support to older learners.

The closing date for entry is Friday 17 February 2017 and you can nominate online at www.ageaction.ie.

The awards ceremony takes place in eir’s Head Office, 1HSQ, on Tuesday 28 March 2017.

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Our 2015 Silver Surfer

Margaret Mullett, a retired science and chemistry teacher in her early seventies from Rathgar, Dublin, was last year’s overall winner of the Silver Surfer Awards 2015.

Margaret was inspired to get online after she lost her husband, George, to a genetic disorder called haemochromatosis. If identified early enough, haemochromatosis can be easily treated.

She used the internet and digital media to build a national awareness campaign, highlighting the dangers of haemochromatosis and urging members of the public to get themselves tested.

Since she began in 2005, her campaign has focused new attention on the illness and more than 20,000 people have been diagnosed.
In the five years from 2011 to 2015, over 7,600 individual victims of crime, 37 per cent of whom were victims of burglary, have reached out for help from the Federation for Victim Assistance.

The number of victims coming forward may increase following the launch of a new confidential FREEPHONE number 1800 277 477 which has been established to provide free and easy access to Victim Assistance services for all victims of crime.

Speaking at the launch at Buswells Hotel, Dublin, An Taoiseach Enda Kenny said: “I wish to commend the Federation for Victim Assistance for launching this FREEPHONE number.

“It sends a clear message to victims around the country that there is someone at the other end of the line during what can be a traumatic and painful period for them.”

Becoming a victim of crime can be extremely traumatic and may leave a person unable to function or cope as normal and a trouble-free early access to local support is a key contributory factor in recovering from the trauma of crime.

Victims come first

The Chairman of Victim Assistance, Michael Bennett, said: “The victim will always come first with us and is at the heart of everything that we do. Victims constantly say that talking about the trauma helps them to cope, but the reality is that only a fraction of people who become victims of crime access support services.

“Recent feedback from some of the victims we have dealt with suggests that there is reluctance to incurring the cost of making calls particularly to mobile numbers. The FREEPHONE number is a way of reducing the cost while also meeting the huge demand that exists for our services.”

Anyone who needs to call the new FREEPHONE number 1800 277 477 will be invited to leave their name, telephone number, county they are ringing from and the best time to make contact.

They will receive a call back from one of the Federation’s experienced local coordinators who will listen to the victim’s story and, together, they can decide an appropriate course of action.
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Celebrating ageing in

1. Patsy Keohane, Annette Griffin and Anne Whitehead at the Carechoice, Clonakilty, Positive Ageing Week art exhibition. Photo: Carechoice Ireland

2. Older adults sports day in south Dublin. Photo: Fergal Scally


4. Helen Murray and Tom O’Dowd collecting funds for Age Action.

5. University of Third Age members at Dublin Zoo.

6. Packed crowd in Cork for a talk on DigiHour and proper posture.

7. Dublin Airport Singers performing in Ballymun Civic Centre for Positive Ageing Week. Photo: Chris Shelley

8. Care & Repair Tour of Chester Beatty Library sponsored by Aviva.

9. Great crowd for the cookery demo at Positive Ageing Week in Newry. Photo: Áine Boyle
Celebrating ageing in 2016!
Dear Age Action,

My mother died last year and since then my father is at a loss as to what to do with his time. All he does now is watch the TV. How do I get him involved in a local group for older people?

Bobby, Dublin

We frequently get calls like this from concerned family members looking to help their parents and you’d be surprised how often they haven’t first sat down to find out what their mother or father actually wants to do, writes Gerry Scully.

That has to be the first step, not simply assuming they want to be involved in a local older peoples’ group, but finding out what they’re interested in, what they would like to do.

One alternative to age-specific groups can be those aimed at particular hobbies or interests. Local history groups are increasingly popular, as are bridge clubs, art classes and dancing lessons.

If you have an interest you’ve never had the chance to try out, now’s the time! Your local library can be a great place to find out what groups are active in your community.

Reluctant

Many people can be a bit reluctant to get involved in an older person’s group because they think there is a bit of a stigma around it but there are some great organisations out there.

Active Retirement Ireland (01-873 3836) and Age & Opportunity (01 805 7709) are both national organisations promoting sports, cultural activities and active citizenship to help people make the most of later life.

The Men’s Shed groups (01 891 6150) can be a great choice for older men who like to work with their hands.

Age Action’s own U3A network of lifelong learning groups has grown enormously in the last 18 months and more groups are being set up all the time. You can find a full list on page 19.

And you can always contact Age Action’s information service on 01 475 6989 or email us at helpline@ageaction.ie. We’ll provide contact details for the national groups and we can also try to find groups for you in your local area.

Making the most of later life
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OVER 50’S & GOLDEN ESCAPES

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A recent study conducted on behalf of See Change by Millward Brown showed that 91 per cent of people in Ireland thought it was important to speak openly about mental health compared to 86 per cent the previous year, writes Kate Morgan.

The number of conversations about mental health has been growing steadily with the help of See Change, Ireland’s National Stigma Reduction Partnership.

In May 2016, See Change and its 90 partner organisations rolled out the fourth annual Green Ribbon campaign to get Ireland talking about mental health. Half a million green ribbons were distributed nationwide free of charge.

This movement is led each year by See Change Ambassadors like Kara and Tim. See Change Ambassadors are a group of 60 people with experience of mental health problems who are sharing their stories to help spark a national conversation in Ireland.

Kara’s story
Kara is a volunteer support worker with carers and service users. The Cork native has personal insight into mental health difficulties, having experienced depression about 30 years ago and then again in 2009.
“For myself, it was hard to speak about what was happening to me as I didn’t understand it,” she said about her first experience of depression.

“I was diagnosed with depression in 1995. At that time I didn’t know I had it. I wouldn’t have talked about it in the 90s and I think it’s still a bit difficult for people to speak about it.

“A lot of people don’t even realise they have depression. They just think it’s a bad day they’re having but when something hits you so hard you feel you don’t want to do anything that’s not right.” Educating herself about her diagnosis has been a great help to Kara. She has also supported her son with his diagnosis of schizophrenia. Kara says it can be particularly hard for parents to reach out for support.

“I would always encourage people to try get some support, but people might not be ready for that. The main thing is to make sure not to isolate yourself. When my son was diagnosed I thought it was my job to do everything.”

**Tim’s story**

See Change Ambassador Tim has a diagnosis of bipolar disorder and first experienced mental health difficulties when he was 23 years of age. He worked in the computer industry for many years before moving into working in mental health.

“I am lucky,” he acknowledged. “For the past 20 years my moods have only reached extremes about every seven years. However, between those episodes I live a very normal life.”

The Limerick native says he’s found reducing stress in his everyday life has been a great benefit to his mental health.

“I think back in the day companies used to call it ‘downsizing,’ but it’s an idea that people could take into their own lives. Downsizing on stress is a great way of looking after your mental health.”

Tim says that leaving hospital can be very hard for many people after they have received a diagnosis. For him, getting back involved with some of his hobbies, working with an occupational therapist and keeping a routine were a great help. Speaking about recovery, he says it gets better.

“Getting well is a process which cannot be magically speeded up,” he said. “However there are some things which one can do to help the process along.

“Knowing you have come out of bad times before can give you hope and is in fact, very realistic. Eat well, get adequate sleep, do moderate exercise, look after your appearance.”

If you have personal experience of mental health difficulties and would like to become a See Change ambassador please contact info@seechange.ie.
People of Ireland ‘Have Their Say’ on death and bereavement

The Irish Hospice Foundation (IHF) has concluded a successful campaign to hear what matters most to the people of Ireland at end-of-life.

Throughout autumn people were asked to think, reflect and share their experiences, hopes and fears as part of the ‘Have Your Say’ campaign. Each of us only get one chance to die, so it’s vital to get it right.

More than 3,000 Irish people had their say about dying, death and bereavement; some by attending a Death Café Conversation, others completed the nationwide survey or engaged on social media #haveyoursayirl.

The IHF will use the responses to create the Irish Charter on Dying, Death and Bereavement 2016, to be published next year.

“For all of us there will come a time when we will need care through illness,” said IHF chief executive officer Sharon Foley.

“It’s important we understand how the people of Ireland look at death and dying to ensure correct supports are in place. We are pleased to be leading such an important public discussion nationally.”

Death cafés
Death Café Conversations were held in Cork, Mullingar, Tallaght and Wood Quay Dublin where people outlined what supports are needed for families and feedback was incredibly positive

Campaign supporter Jillian van Turnhout spoke about her personal experience and why it’s important everyone makes their end-of-life wishes known.

“Talk about end-of-life when you are healthy so you really know what your loved ones want,” she said.

“My father Michael wished to remain in Clonskeagh Community Nursing Home instead of going to hospital when he was told he had 24 hours to live. Clonskeagh was his home at that point and it was where our family ensured he remained until he passed away a year after the decision.”

It was clear from the overwhelming response that dying, death and bereavement are important issues and people want their wishes known.

The Irish Hospice Foundation partnered with Limerick Compassionate Communities and worked with the support of Dublin City, Fingal and South County Dublin County Councils.

For more information contact the Irish Hospice Foundation on 01 6793188 or or take the survey at http://svy.mk/2d7UJng.
Pension increase delivered but little on home care in budget

Although the Government met its commitment on the State Pension, the delay in delivery and the failure to invest in home care disappointed many older people, writes Justin Moran.

Prior to the election pensioners were promised an increase in the State Pension of €25 over five years. Our members highlighted a pension increase as their top priority.

Minister Leo Varadkar TD did deliver the increase we were promised, but it’s disappointing to see actual delivery put back to March when many pensioners could have done with that extra money during January and February.

We also welcomed the increase in the Christmas Bonus, now back to 85 per cent of a full payment, but it would have been good to see some movement on the Fuel Allowance, which benefits the least well-off.

Maintaining pressure

It’s clear we need to keep the pressure up next year to ensure pensioners get a decent income in retirement.

Politicians really don’t seem to understand the scale of the problem we face in our community care services. Home help hours and home care packages are simply not available in many parts of the country.

This means more older people forced unnecessarily into nursing homes, families struggling to cope without home helps and more pressure on carers.

The additional €10 million, welcome though it might be, announced by Minister Helen McEntee TD won’t even be enough to cope with the expected new demand next year, let alone to tackle the growing waiting lists.

Finally though, there was some good news on prescription charges. The Sick Tax has increased by 500 per cent since it was introduced. It targets the poor, the sick and the old. Many members complained to us about its impact on them.

Minister Simon Harris TD has said that the prescription charge will drop from €2.50 to €2.00 per prescription for over-70s and will bring the monthly cap down to €20.

It’s a small cut in a tax that eventually must be abolished, and the age restriction is disappointing, but for the first time the Sick Tax is being cut, not increased.
After waiting for what seemed an age, in fact about four minutes, several 46a buses arrived at the same time! Thankfully, we had allowed extra time for the journey and so arrived in good time at RTÉ. We were directed to the canteen where we had time for a quick coffee before our tour started.

Our guide, Killian, arrived and took us to Studio One where Prime Time is filmed. Killian was very informative and answered the many questions our group had. It was fascinating to see the actual studio which looked different to what we see on our screens.

Meeting Miriam
We were then taken back to reception where we met Miriam O’Callaghan who chatted with us for several minutes. After that we toured the radio studios, which are underground. Most of the studios were in use so we could see the activity through glass windows.

We saw Seán O’Rourke, who was in the middle of his programme, and Ronan Collins, waiting for his programme to commence.

Finally, we visited the set of Fair City. It was really interesting to see the actual layout of the various sets and we bumped into a couple of the cast before our tour came to an end when we each got a generous goody bag.

We had a fascinating and enjoyable tour and our thanks go to Killian, Miriam O’Callaghan and to RTÉ for giving us such a memorable day.
Time to get out the knitting needles

This year, we’ve set our sights on making it the biggest Big Knit yet. With your help, we’re aiming to get 100,000 knitted hats on to the tops of our little smoothie bottles.

Since 2008 the innocent Big Knit has been one of Age Action’s biggest fundraisers every year. Our amazing volunteers have knitted a staggering 325,000 little woolly hats to keep the tops of innocent smoothies warm in the shops.

For every hat sent to innocent, they generously donate 30c and together we’ve raised well over €100,000 to support Age Action’s Care & Repair service, working to keep people safe, secure and warm in their homes.

So now, we need YOU. Whether you’re knitting as part of a group of friends or on the couch at home while watching the telly, we want your little woolly hats, because enough little hats can make a big difference.

To find out more, go to www.thebigknit.ie for patterns, ideas and more information.

For more information, email Sam O’Brien-Olinger, U3A Development Officer, at u3a@ageaction.ie or phone (01) 475-6989.

U3A groups

- **Active Virginians U3A**
  Patricia at (087) 235-0515

- **An Cosán U3A Tallaght**
  Imelda at (01) 462-8488

- **Ballymun U3A**
  Peter at (087) 292-4001

- **Ballyroan U3A**
  June at (01) 494-7030

- **Blackrock U3A**
  Eileen at (087) 418-8607

- **Blessington U3A**
  Peter at (087) 815-1018

- **Bray U3A**
  Linda at (086) 045-1600

- **Carrick-on-Shannon U3A**
  Margaret at (086) 837-2934

- **Club 50, Donegal U3A**
  Anne at Annegallagher60@yahoo.ie

- **Dublin City U3A**
  John at (01) 201-7490

- **Dun Laoghaire, Dalkey, Killiney U3A**
  Email dldk@gmail.com

- **Galway U3A**
  Livio Rocca at u3agalway@gmail.com

- **Maynooth U3A**
  Helena at (01) 628-5128.

- **Lucan U3A**
  Mary at lucanu3a@gmail.com

- **Monaghan U3A**
  Eamonn at (087) 918-6567

- **Newcastle, Dublin 22 U3A, Retired Active Men’s Social**
  Matt at (01) 458-9007

- **Roscommon U3A**
  Sam at (01) 475-6989

- **Rusheen Woods, Galway, U3A**
  Angela at rusheenwoodsu3a@gmail.com

- **Sutton-Baldoyle U3A**
  Christine at (01) 832-3697

- **Tramore U3A**
  Mollie at molliehunt@eircom.net

- **Waterford U3A**
  Josephine at (051) 871-037
New shops in Terenure and Ballincollig

Age Action has opened two new stores in a major expansion of our charity shop network.

Our latest locations are at 15 Terenure Place in Dublin and 5 Bharr na Straide in Ballincollig in Co Cork.

“Our new shops have only recently opened but we’re delighted at the response from customers who know a good bargain when they see it,” said Age Action’s Gail Kennedy.

The charity shops are a major source of funds, providing more than 20 per cent of the

Age Action's income in 2015. Donations of clothes, books and furniture are always welcome!

▲ Enjoying a coffee morning in our Ballincollig store.

Annual membership application

I wish to join Age Action and enclose € ........... membership fee, plus €............. voluntary donation payable to Age Action Ireland Ltd.
If you are already an existing Age Action member and wish to renew your membership, please write your membership number here
........................................................................

Full name: .......................................................
(Block capitals please)
Address: ..........................................................
........................................................................
........................................................................
Tel:  ..................................................................
Email:  ..........................................................
(Block capitals please)
Date:  ..................................................................

FEES
€20 Individual – retired/unwaged
€40 Individual – employed
€60 Voluntary Body
€200 Statutory Agency
€500 Commercial

STANDING ORDER
To the Manager
(Name of Bank/Building Society).......................
........................................................................
Bank Address: ..................................................
........................................................................
........................................................................
Please pay annually to Age Action Ireland, Permanent TSB, 70 Grafton Street, Dublin 2, BIC: IPBSIE2D
IBAN: IE82 IPBS 9906 2587 7790 21
the following amount € ......................... .......
until further notice. Starting on: 1st day of January 20 ......
Name: ..........................................................
(Block capitals please)
BIC:  ...............................................................
IBAN: ...............................................................
Signature:.........................................................

Please return to:
Membership Development, Age Action Ireland Ltd,
30/31 Lower Camden Street, Dublin 2.
Email: membership@ageaction.ie
Tel:   (01) 475 6989
Fax:   (01) 475 6011