

# ageing matters

# Celebrating with song and dance

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■ **Cover:** Eileen Leddy gets Dickie Rock's signature on one of his albums before the Age Action afternoon tea party last month, sponsored by Hidden Hearing. See photos and report: pages 8 and 9.

## In praise of the workers

**Villeneuve** is a beautiful village in south-west France. Established in the 17th century as a centre for making clothing for the king and his armies, it still has an archway with the inscription "Honneur au Travail" or "Honour in Work".

This is not a common sentiment at present but one that we could do well to rekindle in Ireland, not for the leaders in well paid jobs but for the millions of ordinary workers, many on low wages, who keep this country going. With all the talk about austerity, the value of these workers and the mounting pressures they live under seem to have been forgotten. As for honour, forget it.

I use the term workers, to include public and private sector workers who provide essential services, but also the people who are unemployed because of lack of jobs, disability, ill health and inadequate training. Our experience in Age Action is that there are many people desperate for a worthwhile job with a decent wage, and they show this by their enthusiasm and commitment as volunteers and interns. I should also include the many older people who go on supporting their families and communities even though they were excluded from paid work on grounds of age and gender. As I have said so many times before, anyone who dismisses older people as a burden on society has never seen an ordinary grandmother supporting three or four generations.

There seems to be an unhelpful tendency to try to pit public sector workers against private sector workers in wages and pensions benefits. A more useful approach would be to examine and then reduce the inequalities between the top and lowest earners in both sectors, bearing in mind that 20% of people in employment are living in or at risk of poverty.

We need to protect people both in and out of work from poverty, but it is not clear who is responsible for poverty-proofing the Government's policies and proposals. We have had the fuel supports cut, disability services cut (even for those who cannot walk), the imminent extension of the carbon tax, the property tax without any regard to inability to pay and most recently the harsh guidelines on personal insolvency.

Who are the people in charge of poverty-proofing Government policies, and would they have a clue about how to survive on €188 or even €230 per week?

My conclusion is that if there is to be honour in work, we have to honour and support the workers starting at the bottom. All of us could start this process by thanking the workers who often go beyond their duty to help us.

— Robin Webster



■ **Cold comfort: the new fuel supports no longer cover standing charges, the public service obligation or tariffs for night meter rates on energy bills.**

## U-turn urged on fuel support cuts

Age Action is urging the Government to reverse changes made in last December's Budget to the gas and electricity payments under the Household Benefits Package, given the hardship they caused in the first three months of this year.

"Changes to the fuel support payments announced in December have had a major impact on older people," Age Action spokesman Eamon Timmins said. "The Government did not reveal the extent of the changes in December, and the full impact has only become clear when the first bills began arriving in the post to people's homes."

Despite Government assurances that the equivalent €70 payment under the Household Benefits

Package for each two-month payment period was broadly in line with the value of the units previously provided, the Government failed to reveal that the new allowance no longer included standing charges, the public service obligation or tariffs for night meter rates.

An analysis by Age Action's information service of a bill which contained such charges shows that these charges (excluding VAT) account for €31.12 of the €70 allowance.

Age Action is also concerned that utility firms are currently writing to older people to inform them that any unused units cannot be carried forward beyond the end of September. "This measure unfairly penalises people who try to save up units over the summer period, to use in the autumn and winter," Mr Timmins said.

Age Action welcomed the recent decision of Minister

for Social Protection Joan Burton to extend the payment period for the means-tested Fuel Allowance payment by one week in April in response to the prolonged period of cold weather. But the organisation is concerned that this could be paid for by a week's delay in the recommencement of the scheme next October, given the Minister's warning that no additional funds are available for the scheme.

The difficulties low income households are facing is compounded by the Government's decision in Budget 2012 to reduce the payment period from 32 to 26 weeks.

"Age Action was contacted by a number of older people who had received energy bills of €400 to €500 for January and February," Mr Timmins said. "The combination of cuts introduced by the Government are adding to the hardship and worry faced by these people."





■ Noel Nutley (left) and PJ Gallagher at the Dublin meeting.

## Members urge Budget fairness

One of the aims of the recently held members' meetings in Dublin, Cork, Monaghan and Galway was to gather views for our pre-budget submission. Emer Begley gives an overview of some of the issues raised.

After a number of austerity budgets, members spoke of the importance of social welfare payments and increasing difficulties in making ends meet. Costs and cuts were accumulating. The loss of the bin waiver was noted in Cork, and the significant impact of changes to the household benefits package was mentioned at all four meetings.

Add to these cuts the household charge introduced in 2012 and the 2013

property tax and people spoke about making stark choices to keep costs down.

"It's not much to ask to have a bit of company in an animal, but she costs me €10 a week and I might not be able to afford her. But if it's a choice between property tax and my cat, the cat must go, and it breaks my heart ... I would consider what I have as quite basic. My adjustments are not like taking a child out of a private school or selling a family's second car."

Members spoke of needing to turn to charities like the Vincent de Paul or depending more on savings, while others were curtailing their social activity or not buying presents for grandchildren to save money. One person who works directly with older people spoke of a woman living alone who felt she had no choice but to cancel her

panic alarm as she could no longer afford it.

### Staying warm

There are serious health consequences from not staying warm or living in a damp and draughty home. Worryingly, to avoid high fuel bills some were not turning on their heat during the day, staying in bed longer or going to bed earlier in the evenings. Some said they headed to shopping centres and libraries to stay warm. One member reflected that "if elderly people are just hiding out and going to bed early in the day, it shows there's something deeply wrong in the community".

### Living alone

People living alone had real problems, with the cost of living disproportionately higher for them than those who live in two-person

(plus) households. They felt doubly affected by the property tax, for instance. It must be paid from one income, while others have multiple incomes to cover its cost. A property tax waiver for single-person households was proposed.

**Free travel scheme**

“They are saying they want older people to stay at home, but reducing benefits that enable people to do so.”

A key support for people in local communities is public transport. The free travel scheme plays a pivotal role in supporting people’s mobility and access to services. One member suggested that rather than cutting or curtailing this scheme, the Department should crack down on fraud to make savings.

Loss or lack of transport services was noted in some areas. In 2011, Glasnevin (Dublin) lost 2/3rds of its bus services. One member said the effect of this included rising depression

and isolation, a negative impact on local businesses and difficulty accessing health services: “Everyone’s up in arms as they can’t get transport to hospital.”

In areas where there was no rural transport, people are dependent on cars and the growing expense of this was noted in Monaghan with rising car tax and fuel prices.

**Healthcare**

Healthcare was a common theme mentioned in the meetings. People noted the rising cost of necessary healthcare services, including the tripling of the prescription charge, the high cost of medication, with significant cross-border price differences as well as differences locally in prices between pharmacies. In addition, cuts to home help hours were noted and unmet political promises to extend community-based services.

**A Fairer Ireland**

Members called on policy-

makers to develop a fairer system. They felt policy makers and politicians were disconnected from the reality of being dependent on a State pension.

One person suggested that budgetary changes should be transparent so people can adapt their household income to facilitate cuts. A fairer progressive tax system was suggested in which those who can afford to pay more should do so. Another member said, as cuts were being made incrementally, it was causing apathy among the public.

These are just a few of the comments from members’ meetings. In general people were feeling the harsh consequence of austerity. They felt they have contributed to the economy during their lives and were now not being taken seriously: “We’re not here to take the crumbs. We have contributed, we continue to contribute and we deserve to live with dignity.”



■ Kathleen Behan and Rita Coll who contributed to the members’ meeting in Galway.

■ **Volunteers who ran for Age Action in 2010**



## Raising funds at the Mini Marathon

Have you registered to walk or run the Flora Women's Mini Marathon in June? If not, you could still do so and have a chance to win a €2,000 holiday voucher in a draw open to participants who raise €200 for Age Action.

"Bluebird Care has generously given us this wonderful prize, and anyone who raises €200 or more for us

will be entered into the draw for the voucher," Age Action fundraiser Mark Duggan said.

"Registration for the Mini Marathon closed on April 24, and we know every year there are people who have not thought about running it for a charity, and often regret it when they see how many charities are represented on the day," he said.

Age Action is urging mem-

bers and supporters to sign up and raise urgently needed funds, and to encourage their friends and neighbours to do likewise. All funds raised will go towards the cost of running our Care & Repair programme.

"The draw is limited to the first 100 people who sign up, so the odds of winning the holiday are good," Mr Duggan said.

## First Flag Day planned for September

Age Action is looking for volunteers to help with its first annual Flag Day on Friday, September 27.

We desperately need to ensure that our Care & Repair programme, a service that carried out more than 20,000 small DIY jobs for older people in 2012, has enough funds to continue and grow.

If you can spare a few hours on the day to help this important cause, please contact our fundraising team before May 30, by emailing [fundraising@ageaction.ie](mailto:fundraising@ageaction.ie) or phoning (01) 475-6989.







■ Age Action's John O Mahony, Cork County Deputy Mayor John Collins, Pauline Glavin, HSE and Finbarr Motherway, Muintir na Tire at the Elder Abuse awareness workshop in Ballyphehane, Cork.

## Lively meeting on elder abuse

Age Action South and Muintir na Tire teamed up to hold a very successful elder abuse awareness workshop last month in the Ballyphehane Community Centre, Cork.

Pauline Glavin, HSE Case Worker for Elder Abuse, gave a thought-provoking presentation on the evening. Guests who braved stormy weather to attend were not shy in expressing their views as real life case studies from Pauline's work were the topics for break-out discussion groups. Elder Abuse is, of course, a very serious issue and guests' contributions made for an interesting and worthwhile night.

A lively members' meet-

ing took place in the Imperial Hotel, Cork on Holy Thursday. Again, the weather was not kind to us as members braved cold and windy weather to attend and make their voices heard.

The meeting began with a discussion on Age Action's three-year strategy. Members were glad to see a strong focus on developing Cork as a region and were also keen to highlight that they would like to increase their own involvement in our work.

The second part of the meeting saw guests break into groups to discuss Age Action's pre-budget submission. There was real energy in the room as people took the opportunity to let us know exactly how the austerity budgets of recent years have affected their daily lives and what their concerns are in advance of

the next budget.

Some common themes were the serious consequences of cuts to payments for electricity and telephone units, the importance of free travel, the charge on prescriptions for medical card holders and the elimination of the waiver for refuse collection charges by Cork City Council.

● Meanwhile, time is running out for members who wish to join the Cork Glor Group. This will be a group of members who will meet monthly in Cork to discuss issues that affect older people and decide on follow up actions. It will follow the same format of the very successful Dublin Glor group, which has been running for four years now. If you are interested in joining this group, please contact John O'Mahony at (021) 453-6554.



■ Dickie Rock serenades a member of the audience at the Dublin tea dance.

## Packed audiences for tea dances

More than 900 people danced the afternoon away last month, as part of the latest series of Age Action fundraising tea dances.

Over 550 people packed Moran's Red Cow Hotel on March 11 for a marvelous afternoon of dancing and craic, courtesy of the legendary Dickie Rock.

"There were amazing scenes as Dickie entertained his fans," dance organiser Mark Duggan said.

Two days later, it was Cork's turn when over 200 people were entertained by show band great Declan Ryan and *You're A Star* winner David O'Connor at the Rochestown Park Hotel.

Both events were sponsored by Hidden Hearing, without whose support the tea dances would not have been possible.







■ (Left) Noreen O'Sullivan receives her raffle prize from Age Action's Julie Oates at the Cork tea dance.  
■ (Above) Attendees at the Cork tea dance.



■ (Right) David O'Connor entertained the dancers in Cork.  
■ (Left) dancers enjoying themselves at the Cork tea dance



■ (Right and below) Dickie Rock had the crowd on their feet.





■ A presentation on heraldry to members of the Sutton-Balydoyle, Dublin North East U3A group.

## U3A: education, creativity, social life

University of the Third Age (U3A) is about education, creativity and being social.

A U3A group is a group of people who come together with their thinking caps on.

It is accepted within U3A groups that members have a lifetime of experience and, collectively, a vast amount of knowledge and opinions. The group has such potential; they know it and use it!

In one meeting, a retired bus conductor might share his experience and stories about racing up and down stairs on a double decker bus. In another meeting, a retired teacher might talk about the local history of the area. Groups have given each other advice on household safety, have discussed their favourite poems and hosted debates.

Some groups go walking, some groups sing and all have a good time. This is what U3A is all about.

U3A is an international movement that began in a university in Toulouse, France in the 1970s, and there it is closely linked to universities. It spread worldwide to Britain, America, continental Europe and China, and in each country there are variations of U3A. There is even a virtual U3A: [www.vu3a.org](http://www.vu3a.org).

The British and Irish model is not linked to universities. The groups themselves are, most importantly, autonomous. Each group manages its own affairs. Some meet once a month, some once a week in town halls, libraries or even homes. Participants benefit by discovering new horizons, by connecting with people and by rediscovering their own capabilities.

Age Action wants to grow the U3A programme so people have an opportunity to join a U3A locally in every county in Ireland.

Margaret Fitzpatrick helps new groups to start with advice, information and visits in their early days. She also helps people to find a U3A group to join.

Age Action also helps to coordinate the programme nationally. We publish an e-bulletin with information for groups. We also organize activities, events and conferences and try to help U3A groups network with each other and link with U3A groups internationally. U3A groups are part of EU projects such as Forage ([www.foragenetwork.eu](http://www.foragenetwork.eu)).

***If you would like more information, please contact Margaret Fitzpatrick, Education Officer U3A, at (01) 475-6989 or by email at [u3a@ageaction.ie](mailto:u3a@ageaction.ie)***



# There's always something new to learn



■ Sutton-Baldoyle, Dublin North East U3A member Sheila Cullen being interviewed by a French television crew at an event at Dublin's City Hall to mark the opening of the EU Year of Citizenship in conjunction with the Irish Presidency of the EU.

At the Sutton-Baldoyle U3A group there is no shortage of enthusiasm, things to do and topics to explore. We are keeping our brains and bodies active and widening our social circle.

We all like meeting others, and with such a wide variety of interests, we're never bored. There is such great camaraderie.

At each meeting we are taken out of our comfort zone. The breadth of activities and the intellectual stimulation is great. There is always something new. We all enjoy the many opportunities and stimulation offered by U3A Sutton-Baldoyle in Dublin.

We have visited the Dunsink Observatory, heritage centres, museums, theatre and seminars. We also have talks from our members reflecting interests in such areas as heraldry, art, literature, gardening, living and working in Africa, and general travels to name a few. Visiting speakers have covered other interest areas of the group such as the "Longevity Dividend" and "Financial and Legal Rights and Entitlements". There's always lots of laughter at our monthly talks, especially at our Laughter Yoga event. We

have our own drama presentations by professional actors and musicians. Our nonagenarians bring a special dimension to our monthly meetings with their experiences from life and breadth of knowledge.

This is a great way for older people new to an area to make new friends. We are increasing our profile in the community as we network with other groups. We have visited other U3A groups around Ireland and some of the 21 U3A groups in Northern Ireland.

Our group has a special link with Dublin City University, the first age-friendly university in Ireland, as well as with the U3A in Australia.

At every meeting a list of activities around Fingal and in Dublin City is provided, so there's always somewhere to go to.

Don't just put the U3A into your life. Put some of your life into U3A. Volunteers are priceless.

— Eileen Sweeney

**To get an idea of our activities and learn more about U3A Sutton Baldoye, visit the website <https://sites.google.com/site/u3asuttonbaldoyledublin/>.**





■ The prescription charge was trebled in the December budget in a move which is causing further hardship for Medical Card holders.

## Higher medical and drug charges enough to make us feel sick

When the then Health Minister Mary Harney was asked in 2008 to make some savings, she moved to abolish the over-70s medical card scheme.

Angry politicians and doctors negotiated a traditional type of compromise, “apartheid”, by excluding the rich (and not so rich) from the scheme. Over-70s had to apply to be excluded.

The process grinds on as expired cards are often

refused after review. In the December Budget, the financial criteria for eligibility for an Over-70s Medical Card were tightened, giving a good excuse to look at everyone! The aim is to remove an additional 20,000 over-70s cards.

Minister Harney, before she left office, devastated dental care for the elderly and inflicted a new levy to demand 50 cents on each individual item on prescription for Medical Card holders.

I had seen the document sent to pharmacists

that defined the new rules. There were a certain number of groups exempted from the levy. At the end of the paper, there was the chilling statement that palliative care patients must be charged the levy. As far as I can remember, the document was not signed. I enquired about who had written this hard ruling, but by then a new government was in sight and I was told that Minister Harney’s successor had been keen to abolish the levy and all would be well.

After the first four months

of the levy, it had been obvious that the target of taxation of €24 million a year was going to be exceeded. Well over €2 million a month had been contributed. Financially, this was a success for the HSE.

A few doctors welcome the levy, noting that “just as a payment for a plastic shopping bag made to respect the item, so it would be for pills.”

We waited for the new minister to withdraw the levy, and waited in vain. People were saying that 50 cents only invited a full euro sometime soon. They were wrong! The Minister has now increased it to €1.50 per item.

My pharmacist pointed out other important changes:

- The “cap” amount for a family to pay was increased from €10, and almost doubled to €19.50;
- The Drugs Payment Scheme “threshold”

increased from €132 to €144 per month.

It is interesting to see that most UK territories now have free prescriptions for all, although England itself has gone from trivial charges for those not exempt to reach £7-£8 per item. To safeguard the vulnerable, Irish pharmacists would like new exemptions to include:

- palliative care patients;
- patients in nursing homes;
- psychiatric patients;
- patients with intellectual disabilities;
- people who are homeless.

The next big change for the public and the pharmacist is a Government bill which is due to become law shortly. Medicines are invented by very large companies, who secure patents to protect the large investment costs involved in developing these medicines. Doctors prescribe these

patented drugs.

In time, patents run out. Any other company can then make a copy. Often these copies are made in Asia or elsewhere, and the pill or its packaging will look different. The good news should be that it will cost less to the state or to a private prescription to use these. The government bill will allow substituting the formerly patented drug with a copy, something a pharmacist has not been allowed to do up to now.

A prescription-type drug will still need a doctor’s prescription, as usual.

Regulations are different in different countries, and it is possible, for instance, to buy antibiotics “over the counter” in Spain, which is not allowed in Ireland or other countries, for very good reasons. We await details on some good news.

— Dr John Connolly

*Dr John Connolly is a retired public health doctor. He is an Age Action member.*

## Silver Surfer Larry Wilmott dies

Larry Wilmott, one of Age Action’s most enthusiastic new technology ambassadors, has died.

Larry (92), a resident at Our Lady’s Manor nursing home in Dalkey, Co. Dublin, was a former Google Silver Surfer category winner. A lover of technology, he was a strong advocate of the need for older people to learn IT skills. “He recently arranged for Age Action to run a computer class for fellow residents at Our Lady’s Manor in Dalkey – our first classes in a nursing home,” Age Action’s Getting Started programme manager Pauline Power said.

We are fortunate that, through the Google Silver Surfer Awards, we came to know Larry. He leaves a great legacy and will be missed.



# aLearn to promote active ageing

Age Action is one of five organisations from across Europe, taking part in aLearn, an exciting new Active Ageing project.

Organisations from Bulgaria, Italy, Spain, Germany and Ireland have come joined together to develop an on-line learning community to promote active ageing. The aim is to develop online resources to help both older (60+) and younger (16-35 year olds) learn more about the positive steps that can

be taken to support active ageing, including the use of social networks to help sustain an active social life as we get older.

The first stage of the project will be to hold focus group discussions with a mixed group of younger and older volunteers on each of five key areas; health promotion and disease prevention; healthy nutrition throughout life; physical and cognitive activity, ICT ( Information Communication Technologies) for Social networking; and Intergenerational

Volunteering.

The focus group discussions were held Thursday, April 18 in Age Action's offices in Abbey Street in Dublin.

Learning modules will be developed in each of the key areas and will be available on the aLearn website [www.a-learn.eu](http://www.a-learn.eu) in the coming months.

***For further information on aLearn Active Ageing visit [www.a-learn.eu](http://www.a-learn.eu) or contact: Patricia Higgins, Development Officer, aLearn Project, [alearn@ageaction.ie](mailto:alearn@ageaction.ie) or phone: (01) 475-6989.***



■ A group of students who recently completed their Getting Started training at Castlebar Library, Co. Mayo, with their tutors, librarian Austin Vaughan, Mayo Co. Council Cathaoirleach Cyril Burke and Age Action's Niamh Hennelly.



## Churchgate fundraising volunteers needed

Age Action is seeking volunteers to help us with churchgate collections across Dublin in the coming months.

We are looking for people to do the collections and for volunteers to act as volunteer coordinators in an area. The latest schedule of collections is as follows:

- May 18-19, Our Lady of the Rosary, Harold's Cross and Holy Cross Parish, Dundrum; June 8-9, St Laurence O'Toole Church, Baldoyle; July 20-21, Church of

the Assumption, Dalkey; September 7-8, St Bernadette's Parish, Clogher Road, Crumlin; September 28-29, Our Lady of the Assumption, Ballyfermot

We are currently seeking permission from parish priests for other collections. Perhaps you could ask your parish priest for us. If you would like to volunteer, please contact our fundraising team on (01) 475-6989 or email [fundraising@ageaction.ie](mailto:fundraising@ageaction.ie)

## U3A MEETINGS



### ☉ Dublin City U3A

Meeting Last Tuesday of the month 11am (Jan to April 2013) in Ilac Library Henry Street. Contact John Roche: (01) 201-7490

### ☉ Blackrock U3A

Contact Eileen Larkin: (087) 4128607, (01) 455-7653

### ☉ Ballyroan U3A

Meet every 2nd Monday at 11am in Ballyroan Library. Contact Al Connor: (01) 490-3212

### ☉ Ballymun U3A

Meetings every 2nd Monday, 2pm in Ballymun Library. Contact: Vera Butler (01) 842-2256

### ☉ Lucan U3A

Meetings 2nd Monday of the month, Ballyowen Castle. Contact Ann Hargaden (email: [annhargaden@eircom.net](mailto:annhargaden@eircom.net))

### ☉ Blessington U3A

Meetings 3rd Tuesday of each month. Contact Anne Cowie: (045) 865-159

### ☉ Sutton/Baldoyle-Dublin

North-East. Meets 10.45-12.45, Baldoyle Library. Second Wednesday every month (excl Jun-Aug). Contact: [u3asutbal@gmail.com](mailto:u3asutbal@gmail.com). Phone: 01-832 3697 Website: [u3asuttonbaldoyle-dublin/](http://u3asuttonbaldoyle-dublin/)

### ☉ Active Virginians U3A

Meet every week. Contact Ann Brodie at (049) 854-8232

### ☉ Maynooth U3A.

Community Space, beside Manor Mills Shopping centre Meet every Friday 11am. Contact Helena Kirkpatrick: (01) 628-5128

### ☉ An Cosan U3A Tallaght.

Meet every 2nd Thursday.

Contact Imelda Hanratty: (01) 462-8488

### ☉ Waterford U3A

Contact Margaret Wheeler: [mwheeler2010@live.ie](mailto:mwheeler2010@live.ie)

### ☉ Monaghan U3A

Contact Mary Beagan: (047) 75942, (086) 3314439

### ☉ Tramore U3A

Meetings 1st Thursday each month, 11am, Coastguard Station, Love Lane, Tramore. Contact Mollie Hunt, [molliehunt@eircom.net](mailto:molliehunt@eircom.net)

### ☉ Roscommon U3A

Meet every 2nd Tuesday. Contact Avril McTeigue: [amcteigue@rosdisabilities.ie](mailto:amcteigue@rosdisabilities.ie)

Email Age Action Education Officer Margaret Fitzpatrick at [u3a@ageaction.ie](mailto:u3a@ageaction.ie) or (01) 475-6989 for information.

# Big thanks for the Big Knit effort



■ Innocent's Helen McNamara presents a cheque for €20,000 to Age Action's Robin Webster after this year's hugely successful innocent Big Knit. Over 84,000 little hats were produced by our army of supporters across Ireland, with 20 cent going to Age Action from each hat-topped bottle sold. Also pictured are Innocent's Ali Gibbons (second from right) and some of the members of the knitting group who meet each Wednesday and Saturday morning in Age Action's Camden Street shop.

## Annual membership application

I wish to join Age Action and enclose  
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 bership please write your membership number  
 here .....

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 (Block capitals please)  
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Date: .....

- FEES**
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