

Ageing matters

Uncertain times ahead

Some of Ireland's frailest older people face uncertainty over nursing home beds

Page 3



Lianne Murphy visited South Africa and Uganda to see how older people were beginning to make progress

Pages 8-9



A proposed new Bill could expand the choices that can be made by older people suffering from mental incapacity

Pages 10-13



For all older people

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■ Cover photo from iStock. See pages 10-13 for the full story.

Making 2014 better than 2013

If we are to make progress towards our vision of Ireland becoming the best place to grow older, 2014 has to be better than 2013. The Government must ensure that the promised economic recovery brings justice and equality to people who have suffered most from austerity. Those are people living alone, people with little family or community support, people with chronic illness or disability, and the increasing numbers living in or on the edge of poverty. Among them are the sickest and poorest of older people facing cuts in health and care services, such as the loss of medical cards, fewer home helps and higher prescription charges, as well as increasing difficulties accessing residential care.

As senior citizens, we must also be concerned about the damage to our communities and families, including young people facing unemployment or emigration, families crippled by the rising costs of rearing their children and people with disabilities with reduced supports and opportunities tragically highlighted by the rise in suicide among young men.

When the recovery comes, it must benefit everyone rather than be a two-tier process that helps the better off, leaving the people with least resources even further behind. So 2014 must be the year that the Government really delivers on its promise to protect the most vulnerable.

Recent scandals about secret top-ups to senior staff have caused untold damage to the reputation of all charities, not just the charities directly implicated. The fall in donations of up to 50% is bad enough, but the potential loss of public confidence in the value of charities and their work would be catastrophic. The commitment by the Minister for Justice to implement in early 2014 the much-delayed Charities Act 2009 is a welcome first step to provide effective regulation. Another important step would be for the charity sector to establish its own national umbrella body, like the Northern Ireland Council of Voluntary Action, to establish and maintain the highest international standards among Irish charities.

I am glad to report that there has been no drop in public support for Age Action because members and supporters have been as generous as ever. We much appreciate this support and are determined to be worthy of it. So we have tried to apply to our work the words of Bill Cashman, a former National President of the SVP: “There are only two voluntary things about this organisation, joining and leaving it: in between, it must be the finest work that we have ever done.”

I wish all our members, supporters and donors, our volunteers and staff every success in our joint enterprise in 2014.

— Robin Webster

Vulnerable older people may be left to wait under latest HSE service plan



■ There is a serious gap between those who will gain from new initiatives and those waiting for nursing home beds.

Age Action has expressed serious concern over the impact of the HSE's Service Plan for 2014 on the sickest and most vulnerable of older people.

"We welcome the HSE's plans to concentrate on developing community-based services and supports to enable more older people remain living at home, but we are extremely concerned that the switch in some of the funding from nursing home supports to community supports which the HSE is planning will be insufficient to meet the needs of the sickest of older people who will be affected," Age Action spokesman Eamon Timmins said.

The result will be that community-based supports, which are already under pressure, will face even greater pressure as a result of this plan. "Older people,

those whose needs are not met in the community, will be admitted to acute hospitals, while others will be left struggling at home on ever-lengthening waiting lists for a nursing home bed," Mr Timmins warned.

The service plan, published just days before Christmas, acknowledges the reality that waiting times for a nursing home bed under the Fair Deal scheme will increase in 2014. It says 700 fewer beds (22,061 beds) will be funded under the scheme in 2014, compared to the target for 2013.

In reality, the 2014 target is 1,702 beds less than the 23,763 nursing home beds which were funded under the scheme at the end of October. In addition to these 23,763 people, a further 394 were on the waiting list in October for a nursing home bed.

The HSE plans to allocate €23 million from the Fair Deal budget and earmark it for community care and

home-based care initiatives, such as intensive home care packages (which will benefit 250 people), intermediate/transition beds (to benefit 650 people) and beds for more complex cases (benefitting 130 people).

"There is a considerable gap between those who will benefit from these initiatives and those left waiting for a nursing home bed as a result of these changes," Mr Timmins said. "What is not clear from this plan is what is going to happen to the 700 to 1,700 people who will not get a nursing home bed next year and how they will be cared for."

The planned provision of home care packages and home help hours for 2014 has remained the same as in 2013. While the HSE plans to provide 10,870 home care packages in 2014, it provided 11,372 up to the end of September 2013, so it is already under-estimating the level of need.



■ Ali Gibbons (left) from innocent presents the Big Knit cheque to Age Action's Robin Webster, watched by some of the knitting group who met during the year at our charity shop in Camden St, Dublin, to knit hats. They are (from left) Delo McArdle, Noirin Lanigan, Mary Walsh and Bridget Fitzsimons. Also pictured is innocent's Phillippa White.

Big Knit brings in €20,000 for Age Action

Knitters from across Ireland helped Age Action reach its target of producing 60,000 little hats for the 2013 innocent Big Knit.

Groups who helped ranged from schools and arts and crafts groups to retirement clubs and nursing homes. The hats went

on the innocent smoothie bottles with Age Action receiving 30 cent for each one sold.

At the presentation of the €20,000 cheque by innocent to Age Action in December, the charity's chief executive Robin Webster paid tribute to the

knitters for their dedication in helping Age Action hit its target. He also extended thanks to innocent for their continued support since the first Big Knit in Ireland in 2008.

Innocent and Age Action will unveil details of the 2014 Big Knit soon.

Christmas raffle

Age Action extends its thanks to all our members and supporters who generously donated to our Christmas raffle. Their donation will give the gift of dignity to an older person this year by helping us maintain our advocacy, care and repair, and Getting Started programmes and our information service providing practical support to older people around the country.

The winners are: 1st prize – Dora Duffy, Dun Laoghaire; 2nd prize – Michael Lally, Navan Road, Dublin; 3rd prize – Marie Aspill, Beaumont, Dublin; Seller's prize – Bridie Kenny, Galway.

Home box returns



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Lower Abbey St, Dublin 1; St Luke's Home, Castle Road, Mahon, Cork; 2/3 West End Square, Small Crane, Galway; Unit 5 St Helen's Court, Lower Georges St, Dun Laoghaire; or 31 Glaslough St, Monaghan.

Alternatively, you can donate the home box contents online at www.ageaction.ie

Advertorial



Hearing loss is not something we should just tolerate

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To book a free hearing test at any Hidden Hearing clinic nationwide visit www.hiddenhearing.ie or call free-phone 1800 882 884.

Thanks to our volunteers

Age Action paid tribute to its volunteers during a series of volunteer appreciation evenings held at venues across Ireland during December. With over 2,300 active volunteers on its books, Age Action would not be

able to take on the amount of work it does without its volunteers.

Age Action chief executive Robin Webster paid tribute to their dedication and thanked them on behalf of the organisation.



■ (ABOVE) Getting Started volunteer Sarah Treacy (left) with her husband, Bob, and Danny Holmes, who volunteers with the Care and Repair team. at the evening in Dublin.



■ (RIGHT) Sean Oliver, who volunteers with the Glor group, at the Dublin evening.



■ (RIGHT) Sylvie Barrett, Noel Barry and Willie O'Keefe at the Cork appreciation event.

■ (LEFT) Noel Carey and Colin Hayes enjoying the evening in Cork



■ (RIGHT) Catherine O'Brien and Yvonne Fox, who attended the appreciation evening in Cork..



■ (RIGHT) Ginie George and Anne White were at the Dublin volunteers night.



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■ Age Action's Lianne Murphy meets Lalam Rose Oti, who takes part in the intergenerational activities organised in Gulu.

Progress in development for older people in South Africa and Uganda

As the Development Officer of Age Action's Ageing & Development programme, I recently went to South Africa and Uganda.

In Africa I met partners from HelpAge International and saw the Irish Aid funded Afford programme being implemented on the ground.

HelpAge International, along with its partners, is working on the programme in Mozambique, South Africa, Tanzania and Uganda. Age Action's role

is to raise awareness about the programme and the issues older people face in these countries.

For the first part of the trip in Durban, South Africa, I attended a workshop where the project managers from each of the programme countries, as well as representatives from HelpAge's head office in London, convened to discuss their progress so far and plan for the year ahead. It was great to finally meet colleagues I had been emailing and Skyping.

The second part of the trip brought me to Uganda,

where I got to see the implementation of the programme on the ground. I travelled from the capital Kampala to Gulu, a rural area in Northern Uganda where HelpAge is implementing the programme with their partners Caritas.

I saw an intergenerational project in action, where groups of older and younger people come together on each month to discuss issues to help the generations understand each other better.

I also met older volunteers from the older person's monitoring groups

whose job it is to collect data about older people in the district – for example, how many older people there are, their ages and their gender. They also monitor the treatment older people get in local health clinics to ensure it is age friendly. Such basic things as whether older people have seats while they are waiting to be seen are checked, as well as whether the clinics have drugs for common older person's illnesses such as diabetes and heart disease.

The groups also monitor whether HIV/Aids drugs are made available to older people. Given the advances made in drugs for HIV/Aids, people are now living into old age with the disease. However, in Uganda and in other developing countries they often do not receive the drugs and treatment they need, as priority is given to younger people.

The programme in Uganda is also monitoring the donor-funded Social Assistance Grants for Empowerment (SAGE) programme which provides cash transfers to older people. It is currently being piloted in 14 districts (out of more than 100) in Uganda. The local HelpAge office in Uganda are putting pressure on the government to fund the programme into the future and extend it to

the rest of the country, as it has been shown to greatly benefit older people and their families.

As Gulu is not one of the areas where the SAGE programme is being piloted, older people there have no pensions or any income provided by the State. This means they need to continue to work into old age. I was taken to small aubergine plots that HelpAge and Caritas were assisting local older people start, as



Older people are getting income through growing produce.

income-generating activities. The farmers sell the aubergines at the local market.

HelpAge and Caritas have also initiated a savings and loans scheme for older people. Any savings farmers make at the market goes back into the scheme. Then loans are given out to other older people who want to start their own income-generating activities. Older people themselves in the community run the scheme.

On our return to Kampala, I sat in on geriatrics training for nurses and health clinic managers from Gulu and Karamoja, another rural area in Uganda where the programme is operating. This training is done by a professional education organisation but funded through the Afford programme.

As nurses are not generally trained to care for older people, such training is critically important if older people are to receive an age-appropriate health service. In the context of Uganda, having an ageing population, as with other developing countries, such training couldn't have come at a better time.

It was a fascinating experience to see the programme's implementation in Uganda and to see the difference it is making to

older people there, particularly the empowerment of older people. Previously, they might not leave their homes from one day to the next, but with the monitoring group's volunteering activities and intergenerational activities, older people in Gulu have found a strong role for themselves in the community. They see now that they have something to contribute.

— Lianne Murphy



■ The Bill on assisted decision making proposes a task-oriented approach to capacity. While a person might not be able to make a particularly difficult decision, such as buying a car, they would still have the lawful right to make other decisions, such as what they wish to do for the day.

Restoring basic control over everyday choices in life

Where did you spend Christmas this year? What did you get the grandkids? Did you have many relatives over to visit?

These are common conversation starters in January. However, many older people don't have these stories. They did not have the opportunity to choose where, or with whom, to spend Christmas, or what presents to get. These

are the thousands of older people in Ireland living with dementia or a cognitive impairment from a stroke, who have well-meaning relatives who "make their decisions for them". This restrictive, wrapped-in-cotton-wool approach is a huge frustration to older people. The blatant ageism inherent in these attitudes is something Age Action has challenged for quite some time.

Currently, we have an opportunity to constructively channel our work. The Government is reforming

our mental capacity legislation and replacing it with a much more progressive law which says everyone has the right to have supports to make decisions, and the right to make decisions based on their own preferences rather than what others feel is best for them.

This Bill, the Assisted Decision Making (Capacity) Bill 2013, was introduced to the Dail in early December 2013. At the time of writing it was due for a second debate (at second stage) by our TDs.

This Bill offers supporting mechanisms to a person who is struggling at some point in their life with making a decision. It clearly sets the rules and outlines roles for people like informal carers and relatives supporting an older person with making and legally recording decisions such as banking transactions

Old system

An older person may currently confer a power of attorney on a trusted person or persons to make decisions on their behalf if they lack the mental capacity to make decisions on their own. If this power of attorney has not been put in place and an individual becomes incapable of making decisions, he or she may be made a ward of court. In both instances, capacity is considered in its totality — it is presumed if you struggle

to make one decision, you struggle to make all decisions .

UN challenge

This thinking has been challenged by the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with a Disability. The UN says that decision-making abilities can vary. An individual’s decision-making difficulty may vary in degree between different types of decisions, and some individuals may find some difficult but have no difficulties making others. So people can be helped to make the decision rather than having decisions made for them.

The UN convention also sets out the right to legal capacity. Legal capacity is the law’s recognition of the validity of a person’s choice. Without it, a person can end up having no control

over their privacy, how they run their life or whether they’re free to act on their preferences. This is very much the on-the-ground experience we hear from many older people. It is essential that Ireland should change this.

The Bill

The Bill proposes a task-oriented approach to capacity, which considers each decision as unique. This means that, while a person might not be able to make a particularly difficult decision, such as buying a car, they would still have the lawful right to make other decisions, such as what they wish to do for the day, what they might like to eat or who they might like to see.

Capacity is based on a simple test. Take, for example, a decision about the care you need to manage at home.

Do you comprehend the information relevant to the decision?

Can you retain this information for long enough to make the decision?

Can you use and weigh the information to arrive at a choice (which requires an understanding of the consequences of making a decision one way or the other, or of failing to make a decision)?

And can you communicate the decision?

If an individual has dif-

Continued on next page



■ Currently, an older person may confer a Power of Attorney on a person or persons they trust to make decisions on their behalf if they lack the mental capacity to make decisions for themselves.



■ The bill proposes a range of supportive mechanisms to help a person make a decision.

Continued from previous page
 faculty with any of these questions, a number of supportive mechanisms are being promoted. The first one is an informal decision maker, someone who can make low-level

decisions with you. The second is a court appointed co-decision maker, someone who will make decisions with you but will also help you to communicate your preferences. A co-decision maker cannot

make a decision unless you agree with it.

Finally, in some instances a person may not be at all able to make a decision. In this instance the court will appoint a decision-making representative to make this one decision on your behalf. Usually, this person would be someone you already know, such as a family member, and the person must factor in your previously expressed preferences.

The big issue here becomes how these mechanisms are implemented. It is proposed that an Office of Public Guardian should oversee co-decision makers and decision-making representatives to ensure they are fulfilling their roles. This will require significant resources for the office to develop codes of practice for the public, along with sufficient staffing to review individual cases to check everything is ok. The Office of the Public Guardian will also appoint a person to help with decision making if the older person cannot designate a person themselves.

The office also needs to educate health and social care staff, service providers such as banks and informal carers and family members on the law regarding decision-making rights of people with a cognitive impairment. It is absolutely essential that the office



■ Age Action is campaigning for the Bill to guarantee fast access to Free Legal Aid for those who require the various mechanisms of the bill and could potentially face large legal bills.

takes on this role to the fullest possible extent.

What are we doing?

In November 2013, Age Action delivered a detailed submission to the members of the Oireachtas outlining the position of older people in this Bill, our views of the proposed reform, and where we would suggest amendments to the Bill. As well as writing to TDs, Age Action also spoke to a group of TDs and Senators, kindly organised by Senator Katherine Zappone in Leinster House on December 3. Here Dr Frances Matthews, speaking on behalf of Age Action, told Oireachtas members some of our concerns.

Our issues

1: At one time or another we all make decisions others view as unwise. However, unless it's illegal, no one can stop us making the choice. If we want a silly tattoo, we can get a silly tattoo! The Bill needs to strengthen its provisions to allow an older person the indisputable right to make unwise decisions once they indicate they understand the consequences. This can include small decisions like how much money to spend on clothes to more serious and larger decisions such as choosing what care one might want. Age Action asks parliamentarians to strengthen provisions for the right to

make an unwise decision.

2: Older people are particularly vulnerable to elder abuse in their own homes, often at the hands of relatives. The Bill currently allows unsupervised "informal decision makers" to restrain a person where they feel the person might harm themselves. However, while power corrupts, absolute power corrupts absolutely. Allowing absolute power over another's restraint is too dangerous a situation. Where restraints are used, they should be governed by the Office of the Public Guardian. As informal decision makers are not overseen by the office, we ask that these powers need to be removed from this group immediately.

3: If you could imagine, in your worst nightmare, someone exerting absolute control over your movements, how would you feel? This is a terrifying situation, acknowledged in Article 5 of the European Convention of Human Rights as being "unlawfully deprived of ones liberty". Other than mentioning the existence of Article 5, this Bill fails to set out any mechanisms to deal with an unlawful deprivation of an individual's liberty. We are asking the Government to develop mechanisms preventing unlawful deprivation of liberty in the future and to review the case of a small

number of individuals who may be unlawfully deprived of their liberty.

4: Older people are often faced with a capacity test in a stressful time, such as in a hospital bed when being assessed for nursing home care. The capacity assessment can be done extremely fast, and older people tell us they don't understand what is being said. Often, something as simple as taking time to explain it properly can help an older person pass the test. In other situations, the use of pictorial aids or a speech and language therapist is necessary, but not available. We urge parliamentarians to amend the Bill to include a statutory right to the necessary supports to demonstrate capacity.

5: Finally, those who will go through the various, and numerous, mechanisms of this Bill in the courts potentially face high legal costs. We are asking that the Bill should guarantee fast access to Free Legal Aid for this vulnerable group.

If you are interested in contacting your TD on this issue and would like our briefing document to help you, please contact Lorna Roe to get a copy of Age Action's submission. You can email Lorna at — policyinclusion@ageaction.ie or phone her on (01) 475-6989.

Work of U3A praised at conference



■ Delegates attending the conference in Monaghan.

The fact that most people on the island of Ireland are living longer and healthier lives is the best public health news of the last century, Northern Ireland's Commissioner for Older People told a major University of the Third Age (U3A) conference.

Claire Keating hailed U3A groups and their benefits for older people. She also paid tribute to Age Action, saying we added value by involving older people in the development, design and delivery of our services.

Ms Keating was addressing a one-day conference hosted by Monaghan U3A on October 17 entitled Positive Living in the Third Age – Enhancing the Golden Years.

It was an outstanding success. Over 170 people attended and listened to politicians, lecturers and key public office holders celebrate being

older in Ireland.

Other speakers included local Fine Gael Deputy Heather Humphries, who spoke about social planning for an Ageing Population in the Republic. Societies who are willing to plan ahead can afford to grow old, she said. By 2041, people aged over 65 will represent 20% to 25% of the total Irish population, she said.

MEP Marian Harkin spoke about the things that can be important to an older person, such as age-friendly groups that provide a social outlet, financial security, access to affordable healthcare and, crucially, being treated as a person and not an older person.

Sessions were chaired by Dr Roger O'Sullivan, director of the Centre for Ageing Research and Development in Ireland, and Professor Thomas Scharf, director of the Irish Centre for Social Gerontology at NUI Galway.

Other speakers included Margaret Fitzpatrick, development officer for Age Action's U3A programme,

Stuart Pollard from the Third Age Trust, and Catherine McGuigan from the Ageing Well Network.

The event culminated with enjoyable performances from the newly formed Market House Players and the award winning Oriel singers accompanied by members of Monaghan U3A.

Participants came from U3A groups in Lucan, Sutton/Baldoyle, Ballymena, Blessington, Maynooth, Roscommon, Comber, Newry, Armagh, South Tyrone, Erne, Crossmaglen, Belfast, Shimna and Monaghan.

A huge "well done" to Monaghan U3A. This conference was a success thanks to them. (More conference photos can be viewed at: <http://www.picturesofireland.ie/U3A.htm>)

If you are interested in setting up a group or joining one, please contact Margaret Fitzpatrick in Age Action. Phone (01) 475-6989 or email u3a@ageaction.ie

Nursing Homes Ireland presents raffle award to Age Action

■ Nursing Homes Ireland nominated Age Action as the beneficiary of the raffle at their annual Care Awards in November. The raffle raised over €2,300. NHI chief executive Tadhg Daly is pictured presenting the cheque to Age Action's CEO Robin Webster.



U3A MEETINGS



© Dublin City U3A

Meeting last Tuesday of each month at 11am in the Chester Beatty Library. Contact John Roche: (01) 201-7490

© Blackrock U3A

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

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

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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)

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

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North-East. Meets 10.45-12.45, Baldoyle Library. Second Wednesday every month (excl Jun-Aug). Contact: u3asutbal@gmail.com. Phone: 01-832 3697 Website: u3asuttonbaldoyledublin

© 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

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Meet every 2nd Thursday.

Contact Imelda Hanratty: (01) 462-8488

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Contact Margaret Wheeler: mwheeler2010@live.ie

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Contact Mary Beagan: (047) 75942, (086) 331-4439

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Meetings 3rd Thursday of the month, 11am, Coastguard Station, Love Lane, Tramore. Contact Mollie Hunt, molliehunt@eircom.net

© Roscommon U3A

Meet every 2nd Tuesday. Contact Avril McTeigue: amcteigue@rosdisabilities.ie

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

Getting Started in Waterford

■ The first group of learners to complete our Getting Started computer training course for older people at Ferrybank Library, outside Waterford city. They are shown with their tutors and Cllr Fidelis Doherty (seated) who presented the certificates.

Our Getting Started classes will train 3,000 older people this year. The skills they will be learning are life changing, opening a whole new world of opportunities and access for older people. To sign up for Getting Started across Cork and Waterford, contact Julie Oates at gettingstartedcork@ageaction.ie or phone (021) 453-6554.



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