Ageing Matters in Ireland

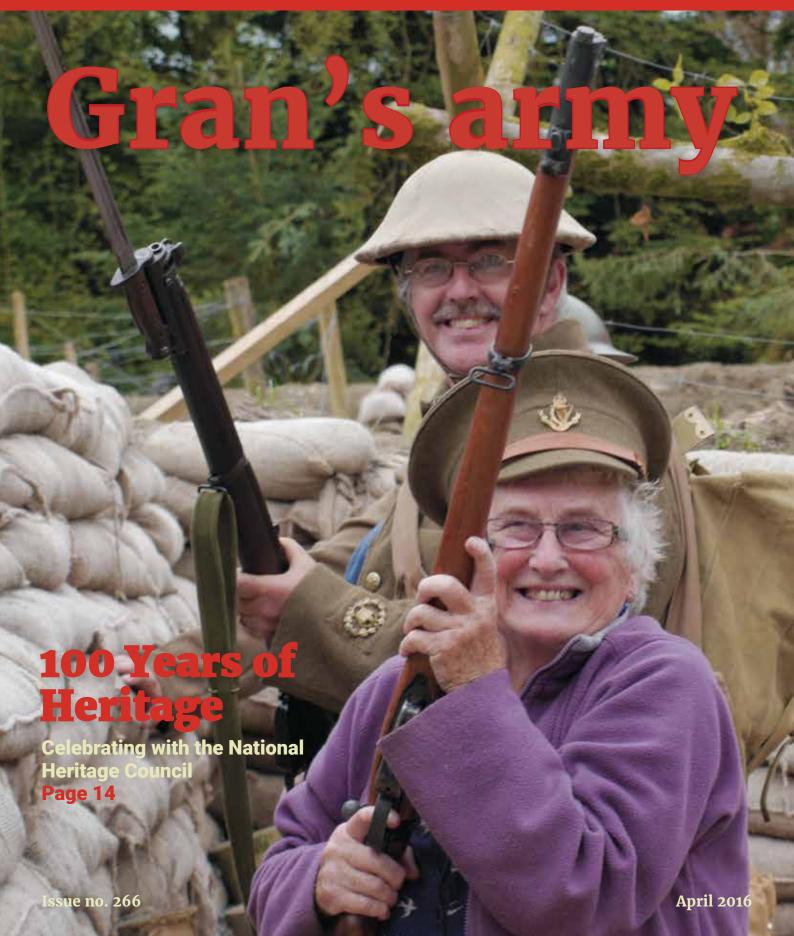




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PUBLISHER

Age Action Ireland

I td

ADDRESS

30-31 Lower Camden St,

Dublin 2

TELEPHONE

(01) 475-6989

FAX

(01) 475-6011

EMAIL

info@ageaction.ie

WEBSITE

www.ageaction.ie

AGE ACTION IRELAND LTD

Company Limited by Guarantee

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CHIEF

Eamon Timmins

EXECUTIVE

PUBLISHING &

Justin Moran & **Gerard Scully** INFORMATION

DESIGN

Catherine Osborn

■ Cover Photo: WW1 Trench Experience at Cavan County Museum during Heritage Week.

Opinion

Getting our message through



Eamon **Timmins**

One of the greatest challenges facing Age Action is making politicians and policy makers understand what's really important to older people.

It was clear during the General Election that many candidates and parties had a very simplistic understanding of what older people needed, and limited plans for what they would do to address the needs of our ageing population.

Our members (together with members of Active Re-

tirement Ireland) did a magnificent job in educating those candidates who attended our five election debates. In total, over 350 older people attended the meetings, along with more than 30 candidates.

Some of the honest, personal, accounts which older people provided from the floor were heart breaking.

A lady in Dun Laoghaire told how her 101-year-old mother had lost her medical card at the age of 96. In Cork, a lady spoke of her fear that the property tax may force her to sell her home in the coming years and in Galway a man highlighted the challenges posed for pensioners trying to collect their pensions by the city's public transport system.

Complex needs

There were many more issues highlighted by older people at these meetings. The consistent message was that health and income issues were important for older people, but that their needs were more complex.

The candidates left a lot wiser. The meetings were another important step along the long road of improving policies and services for older

At the time of writing, efforts are still continuing to form a new government. It is unclear how many of our demands will be acted upon. But it is important to remember that campaigning is a marathon, not a sprint.

One of the key challenges for the new government will be to begin planning for our ageing population, starting with the appointment of a Minister at Cabinet level to implement the National Positive Ageing Strategy.

Anything less would indicate that the new administration does not understand the scale of work which is required if Ireland is to meet the needs of its older people in the years to come.

In the meantime, our campaigning continues as we look to our members to give us their views on our priorities for the budget later this year.

We encourage you to complete the survey accompanying this magazine and to attend one of our pre-Budget members' meetings in the months to come. It is essential that policy makers and politicians hear the voice of older people. With your help, we are committed to ensuring they do.

It's not just a house — it's **a home**

There was huge anger from many older people at a report from the ESRI last month examining the suggestion that older people should be incentivised to move out of their homes.



▲ Our housing should accommodate people of all ages.

The ESRI found that such incentives might free up a limited amount of housing though it did acknowledge this 'economic benefit' needed to be set against its health and social impact.

Age Action was strongly critical of the report, arguing that it ignores the lack of choice facing many older people. In almost a dozen radio interviews spokespersons for the organisation repeatedly highlighted its funda-

mental weaknesses.

"These aren't just houses, they're homes," said Age Action's Justin Moran. "Many older people don't want to move out of homes where they know their neighbours, where they are close to family.

Community supports

"Moving away from those community supports is simply not something many older people are able to do."

Successive Irish governments have failed to plan for our ageing population. The National Positive Ageing Strategy, which highlighted housing as a key priority, has been sitting on a shelf without an implementation plan for almost three years.

With no sheltered housing close by, older people thinking about downsizing face moving to a new town or even a new county where they may know no-one.

"No doubt there are some older people who might benefit from the kind of incentives that the ESRI are suggesting," continued Justin.

"But would this really help to solve the housing crisis? Are we really suggesting that older people living in their own homes is partly to blame for Ireland's housing problem?"

The next government must address the lack of housing choices for older people. It has to think beyond the next five years and understand its responsibility to today's older people and to all of us who hope to grow old in Ireland.

That means more sheltered housing communities, but it also means changing how we design our homes and our communities to support a mix of families and individuals of all ages. That work needs to begin now.

April 2016



Loneliness can have a significant impact on the physical and mental health of older people and is of increasing concern for public health professionals according to a new report from the Institute of Public Health in Ireland (IPH).

The research suggests that approximately 10 per cent of older people are affected, by chronic or persistent loneliness.

It also found that loneliness amongst older people may be linked to depression, increased nursing home admission, decreased quality of life and cognitive decline.

The report was compiled by Brian Harvey and Kathy Walsh for the Ageing Research and Development Division at the IPH. It examines loneliness among older people and the policy and service interventions needed to tackle the problem.

It argues that loneliness may be tackled by health and social policies and must be addressed in a cross-cutting manner to maximise the impact of interventions and services.

Misunderstood

"Loneliness is an issue that is frequently talked about but often misunderstood," said Dr Roger O'Sullivan, Director at the Ageing Research and Development Division of the IPH.

"It is a feeling that can occur to any of us from time to time, at a particular stage in life or associated with specific life events. However, chronic loneliness is where a person feels lonely most or all of the time.

"There is evidence that the negative impacts of loneliness on health and mental wellbeing are particularly significant for older people.

"This research highlights the importance of understanding the type and the causes of loneliness and the groups most at risk as a key first step to designing the most effective interventions."

Groups at particular risk of loneliness identified in the report include older people who have physical or intellectual disability, older people living with dementia or cognitive impairment, those from minority communities and older Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender people.

The report calls for greater targeting of these groups for services and interventions as well as for greater evaluation of their effectiveness and sharing of examples of best practice.

Age Action's Care and Repair service provides a befriending and home visit service. You can contact us on 1890 369 369.

A growing network

New Age Action office opens in Cork



Cork. (L-R) John O'Mahony, Eleanor O'Leary, Julie Oates, Tony Kehoe, Roger Coughlan, Phil Uí Mhurchú, Oonagh O'Regan, Gerry O'Leary and Triona Healy.

■ Members of the Age Action South

Age Action South has opened a new office in Cork City as the organisation continues to grow across the south of the country.

Growing interest in Getting Started, demand for Care & Repair services and the enthusiastic work of local members in the Glór group have been at the heart of the need to expand.

"Since we first opened our Cork office in 2010 we have been located in St Luke's Home in Mahon," explained Age Action's John O'Mahony.

"While we are very grateful to St Luke's Home for providing us with their excellent facilities. there was an increasing need for Age Action to open our own doors to the public.

"For the first time we have our own Getting Started Computer Training Room. We will now be able to hold classes up to twice daily. This will also bring more of our clients to our office where they can feel at home and learn about other areas of our work."

Greater growth

Age Action South is responsible for the Munster region and it is hoped the new office will spur even greater growth in demand for our services.

"A large promotional campaign will be taking place including a public launch of the new office,"

said John. "We want to ensure that older people in the region know about the services we provide and how they can get involved in Age Action's campaigns."

But the move would not have been possible, John stressed, without a great deal of help.

"A huge amount of work from a great many people went into this," he said. "People volunteered their time to help us find the place, to paint and decorate it and to assist with the move.

"All of the furniture in the office was donated and a lot of people were really generous. We really owe special thanks to Eli Lilly, West Cork Development Partnership, the OPW and JCI Cork for particularly generous donations of furniture and IT equipment."

Age Action South's new office is located on the Model Farm Road in Cork. The new phone number is 021-2067399.

Older people's forums advocate for rights in Tanzania

Leading the way for older people



▲ Anna Masonge of the Lugeye older people's forum.

Living a life with dignity and respect are universal desires no matter what part of the world you live in, writes **Lianne Murphy**.

I recently visited Tanzania, in east Africa, to see how older people are being assisted by an Irish Aid funded programme and visited Magu district, a rural area near Lake Victoria in northern Tanzania.

As part of the programme Malperece, which is affiliated to HelpAge International Tanzania, has organised older people in Magu district into forums and monitoring groups.

Together they agree on what is needed for the local older population and then meet with local officials to advocate for their own rights. The issues range from access to age-appropriate health services and medicines to social protection benefits or funding to start small businesses.

In the village of Lugeye I met a group of older women and men who explained how they worked, which in many ways is similar to the approach taken by Age Action. They carry out their own research and monitor the delivery of health services for older people.

A top priority for older people locally is campaigning for a

social pension like the one that has been introduced in Zanzibar, the semi-autonomous region of Tanzania.

They are working constantly with local officials to explain how decisions they make are affecting older people and to look for improvements in access to basic services.

Strength in unity

Anna Masonge, a 68-year-old member of the older persons' forum, received a grant to set up a small business. She now makes and sells soap, disinfectant, bath salts and massage oils, which ensure she has enough money to get by.

She also explains the social benefits of joining the older persons' forum.



▲ Members of the older people's forum in Sukuma village.

"I meet my peers," she explains, "exchange ideas, take part in social activities and I have an identity within the wider group. There is strength in unity."

In nearby Sukuma village I meet another group, predominantly made up of older women as the men are out tending to the cattle. Each woman explained how they are working with the older persons' forum and pointed to examples of how their campaigning had improved local services.

I also met a group of homebased care workers who provide assistance to older people in their own homes. They are coordinated by the district hospital but the workers themselves are volunteers from the local community.

The care workers provide advice on basic healthcare, clean water, malaria control and encourage their clients to use the services available for older people in the local health centres and district hospital.

I am independent again

They also administer massage to assist with joint pain and related mobility issues and provide assistance with cooking and cleaning if the older person is living alone.

Marianna Kang, an 89-year-old, was unable to walk because of joint pain and swollen ankles. Getting home care support has changed her life.

"I am able to do my own things again now," she said. "I have my mobility back and also the dignity and respect from my family members. I am independent again."

On my way home I was struck by the commitment of the older people I had met and also the positive way the local government has responded to them. Together, groups of older people and local officials have found a constructive way of working together which has greatly improved the lives of older people.

I am also struck by how many times the same issues came up that we deal with in Ireland. Access to healthcare, enough money to live on and getting the support you need in your own home are issues in Lugeyue and Sukuma as much as they are in Sligo and Enniscorthy.

Keep up the **pressure**

We need your help to deliver a decent budget



As the new members of the 32nd Dáil begin their work, we are already thinking about how we can influence the first Budget of the new government, writes **Naomi Feely**. But to highlight the issues of most importance to older people we need your help.

Last October's budget was the first in six years to make a real effort to restore the incomes of many older people but it fell well short of repairing the damage inflicted by years of austerity budgets.

On the positive side, there was a small increase in the State Pension, partial restoration of the Fuel Allowance and the Christmas Bonus, as well as additional investment in the Travel Pass Scheme.

But the hard truth is that the incomes of older people still lag

behind where they were in 2009. There was nothing in the budget on prescription charges – the notorious 'Sick Tax' – and nothing for home helps.

Rising costs

Rising fuel and medicine costs as well as new taxes on the family home and on water have put older people under enormous pressure.

We must keep up the pressure and ensure that Budget 2017 restores the incomes of older people and invests in home helps and housing. Monaghan members discussing their budget priorities.

Survey

In this edition of Ageing Matters we are enclosing a survey to help inform our priorities for Budget 2017 and please do fill it out and return it to us.

We are also holding meetings for members to discuss the budget in the coming weeks. Registration for each meeting begins 30 minutes before it begins.

To register, contact Naomi on 01 475 6989 or socialinclusion@ ageaction.ie.

Meeting schedule

Galway: Wednesday 20 April at 11:30 to 1pm – Westwood Hotel, Newcas-

Castlebar: Thursday 21 April 2016 10:30 to 12 noon – The Harlequin Hotel.

Dublin: Monday 25 April at 11:00am to 12:30pm—Carmelite Centre, Aungier Street.

Cork: Thursday 28 April at 11:00am to 12:30pm – Imperial Hotel, South Mall.

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Big changes underway in Ageing Matters

It's your magazine

Big changes are underway to your favourite magazine after a survey of readers carried out earlier this year.

Almost 200 members took part and it was fantastic to see how much the magazine means to so many of you and to read such positive feedback. Two-thirds of you told us the magazine was either very important or important to you as a member.

But there was also a fair share of constructive criticism from readers who pointed to areas where they wanted to see improvements.

The most obvious changes are that we have completely redesigned the magazine and increased its size to 20 pages. We will also be reducing the number of issues each year from ten to six. More than 80 per cent of readers wanted six issues a year or fewer.

One of the advantages of this is that it means our team will be



▲ Age Action members have been urged to take ownership of their magazine.

able to coordinate the delivery of the magazine better so we would expect it to arrive in the post on the first week of the month and by email the week after.

This will hopefully address one of the criticisms highlighted in the survey, of magazines arriving after events advertised in it are over.

More positive

One of the most common criticisms was that the magazine can be too negative, too focused on what's wrong and the challenges facing older people.

Over the last few issues we've made a conscious effort to promote more positive stories such as articles in this issue on

Heritage Week and some good news about the travel pass.

We're also doing more to profile members such as Rita Coll, from Galway, in this issue and Mary Murphy, from Cork, in the last one. We have a few more of those kinds of stories lined up for the next magazine.

As a magazine focused on campaigning issues we have to keep an eye on what the Government is up to, but there is a sense that we need to be a bit more balanced as well and we're going to strive to do that.

Changes to come

In response to points made by some readers we are changing the design and layout of the magazine in the coming months. Generally, people were very happy, particularly with the large type, but there was also a suggestion that the pictures took up too much space and that there was no system to how the mag-

Members asked for a specific page in the magazine set aside for assistance with information queries and our senior information officer, Gerry Scully, is now contributing a page every issue.

azine was laid out so we're going to try and fix that.

Members asked for a specific page in the magazine set aside for assistance with information queries and our senior information officer, Gerry Scully, is now contributing a page every issue, but there was also a suggestion we should have a page on health problems.

The team is looking into that but it is not without its challenges as we would need to find a medical expert willing to volunteer his or her time for free. We're also trying to see if we can meet another suggestion from members for a crossword or puzzles page. Again, it's some-

thing we'd like to do and we're exploring a couple of ideas.

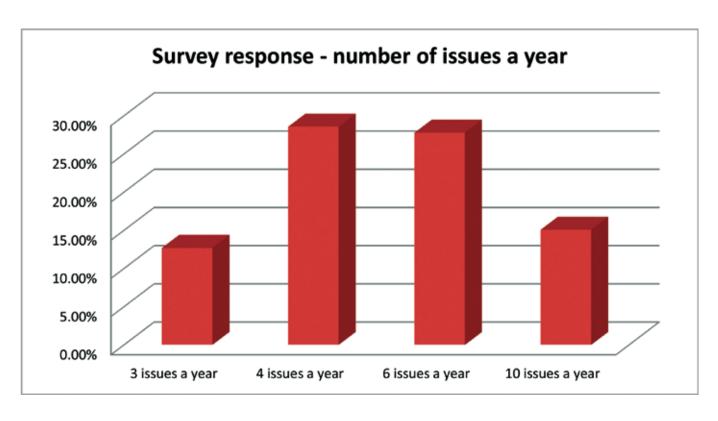
Ownership

The single biggest challenge the team who work on Ageing Matters have is getting content.

"There are so many stories out there," said Justin Moran. "But we need someone to send us in the pictures or a few lines.

"Most of the time, we don't get sent anything for the magazine from our members and we really need that to change, for members to take more ownership of their magazine.

"If we got good material, we'd love to feature more from members."



Bernadette and Phil running one of our information stalls in a local library.

Ageing Matters



Older drivers **frustrated** by licence renewal requirements

The information team has been raising the additional costs facing older drivers with the Department of Transport, writes **Senior Information Officer Gerry Scully**.

Many older drivers feel very aggrieved by the requirement to undergo a medical exam at least every three years. Some have called this discrimination.

Another bone of contention for many older people is the fact that once they reach 66 their car insurance shoots up. These two problems are of course interconnected but not in a clear-cut manner.

Insurance

For many years we have complained bitterly that age should not be the determining factor in setting insurance premiums. One's age does not automatically reflect one's ability or fitness to drive.

Even though it is frustrating

that older drivers undergo regular medical assessments, this should mean that insurance premiums are reduced not increased.

This is an issue that could be addressed by challenging the EU directive that says insurance companies cannot be charged with discrimination as long as they have an actuarial basis for their commercial decisions.

For example, the European Court of Justice ruled in December 2012 that taking gender into account when setting prices for car insurances was illegal discrimination.

Driver's licence

Many drivers also complain that they are discriminated against

because the length of time for which licences are renewed drops after we turn 60.

April 2015

We recently wrote to the Minister for Transport, Paschal Donohoe TD, on this issue but the department pointed to a 2011 Equality Tribunal judgement that dismissed a complaint that this was discrimination, arguing it was justified on health grounds.

The licence is free once you turn 70 but the medical exam is not.

Age Action will shortly be contacting the Minister again looking for the medical exam to be covered by the medical card and reductions in the fees for licence renewals for older drivers.

Please contact our information team on these, or any other issues, at 01 475 6989 or help-line@ageaction.ie. The line is open Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm, and closed for lunch.

Some good news on the travel pass

Two years ago Age Action members the length and breadth of the country campaigned to ensure the travel pass was protected from threats to it from the IMF.

Although successful, a number of question marks remained around the funding and operation of the scheme that Age Action continued to pursue but in recent months there have been some positive developments.

Last October, the Minister for Social Protection allocated an additional €3 million to the scheme. This was the first substantial investment since 2010 and brought the total budget up to €80 million.

One of the most frustrating aspects of the scheme for many older people was that the pass was refused by many private operators.

"It's important to be clear about this," said Justin Moran of Age Action. "Since 2010 the department refused to allow private operators to join the scheme despite the fact that many of them wished to do so.

"The department imposed a funding cap and put a restriction on new companies or new routes joining the scheme."

Private operators

That restriction was recently lifted and the scheme is now open to private operators operating on new routes.

"There is still a gap there," continued Justin. "It



▲ Dublin Age Action members campaigning to protect the travel pass. Credit: Conor Healy Photography.

should really be a requirement of any licensed operator that they join the scheme, rather than leaving it up to the operators themselves, but it is still very welcome that they can now apply to join."

Many Dublin members of Age Action have expressed their concern about the threat to the travel pass on the Dublin Bus and Bus Éireann routes that are to be put out to tender.

"The privatisation of the routes is not a threat to the travel pass," said Justin. "This has been confirmed to us time and again. Whether the operator is public or private, the travel pass is not under threat on existing routes where it is already recognised.

"The challenge we face is trying to ensure the pass will be recognised on new routes, either ones being licensed or ones already licensed where the pass is currently not operating."

Celebrating 100 Years of Heritage

The summer seems very far away right now, but across the country plans are coming together for National Heritage Week, writes **Níamh Donnellan**.

This annual celebration of Ireland's built, natural and cultural heritage will take place from 20 to 28 August. In 2016, the Heritage Council is inviting us to explore 100 Years of Heritage and to take a journey back through one hundred years of Ireland, discovering the lives of those who came before us.

In this centenary year, what better time to celebrate the last one hundred years of Ireland's heritage: historical, archaeological, architectural and environmental.

How did people live, what did they eat, how did they travel, what jobs did they do? What was life like for a soldier, a farmer, a nurse or a schoolchild? What was important to those who lived in Ireland then? Are these things still important to us now? What has been saved and what has disappeared?

National Heritage Week is Ireland's most popular cultural event and this year over 400,000



▲ Digging for history at Swords Castle during Heritage Week.

people are expected to participate in more than 1,800 heritage events. Most of the events are free so our heritage can be accessed and appreciated by all. For nine action packed days, Ireland celebrates not only heritage but community involvement and a deep connection between people and place.

Activities include walks and talks, archaeological digs, historical re-enactments, demonstrations, exhibitions, tours and workshops. Local historians, geologists, academics and enthusiasts want to show you around their towns and villages, buildings and landscapes.

Our tall tales

Hear the history, folklore, legends and tall tales that shaped Ireland. From magnificent buildings to stunning landscapes, some of Ireland's most incredible places will be open to the public during National Heritage



Celebrating Heritage Week at the National Print Museum.

Week. Take the chance to get a new perspective on a well known site or discover a hidden gem.

The Heritage Council has been responsible for coordinating and promoting National Heritage Week since 2005. Their mission is to engage, educate and advocate, developing a wider understanding of the vital contribution that heritage makes to our social, environmental and economic well-being.

The Heritage Council is a public body working in the public interest. Across Ireland the Heritage Council is putting in place infrastructure and networks to enable communities to participate in the development and conservation of their heritage.

National Heritage Week is a part of European Heritage Days, which is celebrated in over 40 countries across Europe. Ireland will kick off the celebrations which will roll out through the rest of Europe in autumn 2016.

Dedicated volunteers

The week also shines a light on the work of dedicated heritage volunteers and their incredible community spirit. It highlights the abundance of great work that is carried out in all communities in Ireland to preserve and promote our natural, built and cultural heritage.

Events are organised across the country by almost 1,000 heritage enthusiasts from organisations to community groups to individuals.

Would you like to get involved in running an event? Why not attend a National Heritage Week

Training Day? Taking place in Dublin and Galway this April, they are a fantastic way to learn how to plan a great heritage event.

Topics will include reaching new audiences, creative events, event management, resources, and networking with other event organisers.

The Dublin training day will take place at the Gresham Hotel on Thursday 14 April from 10am - 4pm while the Galway training day will take place at Druid Theatre, Galway on Wednesday 27 April from 10am- 4pm. The training days are free of charge but places are limited so please book early.

National Heritage Week: 20-28 August 2016. For more information visit www.heritageweek.ie or call 1850 200 878.

The Heritage Council's mission is to engage, educate and advocate, developing a wider understanding of the vital contribution that heritage makes to our social, environmental and economic well-being.

ELECTION 2016

How we made our voi







ELECTION 2016

ces heard

It's time we elders stood up to be counted





Preparing for the inevitable

Think ahead

Advocacy group Age Action has called for a ministry to represent the interests of older people in the next government, a call driven by the changing demographics of Ireland's population. It is estimated that Ireland's population of older decades.

This call speaks to an action of the next three calls speaks to an action of the next three calls speaks to an action of the next three calls speaks to an action of the next three calls speaks to an action of the next three calls speaks to an action of the next three calls speaks to an action of the next three calls speaks to an action of the next three calls speaks to an action of the next three calls speaks to an action of the next three calls speaks to an action of the next three calls speaks to an action of the next three calls are called the next three calls are called the next three called the next three called the next three called the next three called three calle

This call speaks to one of the weakest areas of public administration and in our culture — our reluctance to embrace the idea of long-term planning. This can be seen again in are short- to medium-term.

How much better

How much better it would be if we expected a different approach from politicians, if we expected them to facilitate services, everything from retirement homes or communities to reliable pension options. But then we have only ourselves to blame. Politicians can only respond to the challenges they are set—unless of course they embrace the idea of leadership-beyond the next election. That could be transformative.

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AgeingMatters April 2015



■ Tutors and learners hard at work in Qualcomm's headquarters.

Qualcomm computer classes a **huge** success

The first ever Getting Started class hosted by Qual-comm in Mahon, Cork, was a huge success, writes **Julie Oates**.

The company opened its doors in Cork in 2013 and develops 3G, 4G and next-generation wireless technologies. It employs about 30,000 people globally and around a hundred people in Cork.

Oisín Sheehy is one of the company's IT engineers and championed the Getting Started project, persuading 14 of his colleagues to volunteer time out of their work day to help older learners master new technologies.

Social element

One lady brought a smartphone and learned how to use it through the class. Another gentleman started out with a standard mobile and by the end of the classes was comfortably using a new laptop.

As well as learning new skills there is a huge social element

to classes like this and everyone seemed to get on famously. I think Oisín might even have had a bit of trouble getting his team back to their desks after classes were done!

We're hoping that, once they've had time to catch their breath and catch up on a little work, the Qualcomm volunteers will be interested in "going another round".

Thanks again to all of you from Age Action.

Five star reviews for Qualcomm course

"The computer course at Qualcomm is excellent and even my husband is fired up and getting to grips with it! Our tutor is very patient and I am becoming more familiar with the function of some of the buttons. After just two sessions I am eager to learn more: it is well worthwhile."

Catherine O'Brien

"Tuition is provided in a relaxed, friendly and no-pressure environment. Everyone is made to feel at ease. The great advantage is that it is given on a one-to-one basis so you can learn at your own speed. I would strongly recommend that you sign up and get started — don't get left behind!"

Sheila Barry

Celebrating learners at St Luke's

St. Luke's Home in Cork was also home to Age Action until we moved premises recently. Just before going we were delighted to facilitate a Getting Started class for residents.

It wouldn't have been possible without a massive amount of work by Sarah Ahern, a social worker in St. Luke's.

The Mayor of Cork, Cllr Chris O'Leary, met learners, their relatives and staff when he came to the last class to hand out certificates. He stressed that the success of the class was proof it was never too late to learn something new.

It was Sarah's last day in St. Luke's and we couldn't let that go without being marked.



U3Agroups

Active Virginians U3A

Contact Patricia Rice at (087) 235-0515 or email mspat-price@gmail.com.

An Cosán U3A Tallaght

Contact Imelda Hanratty at (01) 462-8488.

Ballymun U3A

Contact Peter Branigan at (087) 292-4001

Ballyroan U3A

Contact June Murphy at (01) 494-7030.

Blackrock U3A

Contact Eileen Larkin at (087) 4128607 or (01) 455-7653.

Blessington U3A

Contact Peter Polden at (087) 815-1018, (045) 867-248 or email pjpolden@gmail.com.

Bray U3A

Contact Linda Uhleman at (086) 045-1600 or email linda_uhlemann@ yahoo.co.uk.

② Carrick-on-Shannon U3A

Contact Margaret Fawcett at (086) 837-2934 or email mgtfaw@gmail.com.

Output Dublin City U3A

Contact John Roche at (01) 201-7490.

Galway U3A

Contact Livio Rocca at u3a-galway@gmail.com.

Lucan U3A

Contact Maureen Newell at lucanu3a@gmail.com.

Maynooth U3A

Contact Helena Kirkpatrick at (01) 628-5128.

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

Monaghan U3A

Contact Mary Beagan at (047) 75942 or (086) 331-4439.

Newcastle, Dublin 22 U3A, Retired Active Men's Social

Contact Matt Dowling at (01) 458-9007 or (086) 844-3820.

Roscommon U3A

Contact Vivienne Clarke at (087) 126-7639 or email clarkevivienne@gmail.com.

Sutton-Baldoyle U3A

Contact Christine at (01) 832-3697 or email u3asut-bal@gmail.com.

Tramore U3A

Contact Mollie Hunt at molliehunt@eircom.net.

Waterford U3A

Contact Josephine Murphy at (051) 871-037 or email jo1murphy7@gmail.com.

Ageing Matters

Rita declares Evergreen open

When local businesswoman Aideen Hurley was looking for someone to open the new Evergreen Healthfoods outlet in Galway's Eyre Square, she didn't have far to look.

Local Age Action member Rita Coll was at the opening of the very first Evergreen store in Mainguard Street many years ago. A regular customer, she is passionate about nutrition, alternative healthcare and Fairtrade foods.

The Salthill woman was the perfect choice to declare Evergreen's newest store open for business.



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

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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

(01) 475 6011 Fax: