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ageing matters
in Ireland



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For all older people

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■ Cover photo: Margaret Mullett, overall winner of the Silver Surfer Awards 2015, celebrating in style
Photo: Marc O'Sullivan

Give older workers a chance

It's hugely encouraging that a private member's bill which aims to abolish mandatory retirement ages is being taken seriously by the Government.

The bill, introduced by Deputy Anne Ferris, has been referred to the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Justice, Defence and Equality. Age Action will be making a submission to the committee and there will be a fuller report in the next edition.

Mandatory retirement ages are deeply ageist. That they have been allowed for so long is a reflection of the widespread public acceptability of age discrimination in Ireland. Set retirement ages have caused untold damage to many older workers who have been forced out of the workplace.

While some people long (and plan) for the day when they can retire, there are others who want to keep working. Some people just love their job while others realise that with retirement comes a major drop in income and the longer they can work the more they can save.

If Deputy Ferris's bill becomes law, older people who are willing and able to keep working would be able to do so.

Wider ageist agenda

But new laws, even those which abolish ageist barriers, won't make life much easier for older workers. They will not change the negative attitude of some employers towards hiring older workers or the wider ageist agenda which is alive and well in Irish society.

Older people frequently tell us they feel they are "invisible". They feel undervalued. They see the media refer to them as "bed blockers" or as a burden on society. Against this backdrop, you would need to be very determined to go job hunting as an older worker.

Research carried out by Age Action in 2007 found that among the barriers facing older people was that many of their prospective managers felt uneasy managing somebody the same age as their parents. Older workers also undersell their skills and experience.

With all of us living longer, it is time that we had an honest, mature, public discussion about older workers. In fact, with people retiring today expected to live, on average, 20 years or more in retirement we need to have an honest debate about the role of older people.

Maybe if we can recognise the amazing jobs older people are currently doing, we can leave our ageist baggage behind and build a truly age-friendly Ireland.

— Eamon Timmins



■ Age Action’s Delo McArdle and Beth Nunan launching a previous Big Knit campaign with Senator David Norris

Get your knitting needles out

Over the past six years, the Irish public has knitted an astonishing 390,000 little hats for the innocent Big Knit. This has raised more than €120,000 to help older people stay warm and well during winter’s harsh weather.

Each little hat knitted by volunteers is put on innocent smoothie bottles in shops and cafés across the country, and for each one sold, 30c is donated to Age Action.

“We are really proud of the Big Knit and what it does to help older people stay warm and well in winter,” said Bláthnaid McKenna, Brand and Digital Manager for innocent Ireland.

“The generosity of each Irish knitter around the country is truly overwhelming and fills us with a great sense of pride.”

Grateful

“We’re really grateful to innocent and to the hundreds of people, young and old, across Ireland who make this event such a success every year,” said Age Action’s Justin Moran.

“Every cent goes to fund our Care & Repair programme. This provides a DIY service for older people and it’s particularly important at winter when older people need the kind of minor repairs that ensure they can keep safe and warm.”

For more information and knitting patterns log on to www.thebigknit.ie. Please send in your hats by 11 December!

Meet the knitters

Winnie

“I love knitting with the Age Action group. We really understand each other and exchange good tips, not only on knitting. You wouldn’t want to hear some of the stuff we talk about...”



Bella

“When you knit these little hats you become a part of a big community – it’s so friendly and welcoming.”





■ Older people will need to fully show their strength in next year's election.

Budget 2016 – a lot more to do

After six years of austerity budgets last month saw the first serious step towards restoring the incomes of older people, but every political party needs to be aware that a lot more needs to be done, writes **Justin Moran**.

Since 2009 an older person on the State Pension and Household Benefits Package has seen their weekly income cut by more than €13 a week. Almost a hundred thousand

older people are living in deprivation.

All of that cannot be fixed at once but Budget 2016 seemed to be an effort to move in the right direction

The first State Pension increase in seven years, along with welcome increases in the Christmas Bonus and the Fuel Allowance, will make a real difference to older people across the country.

2009 levels

But all of this falls well short of getting the incomes of older people back even to 2009 levels, let alone lifting every older person out of poverty.

The property tax, water charges, double-digit increases in the price of energy and spiralling medical costs have hit the fixed incomes of older people extremely hard. More needs to be done. Older people are still facing real hardship.

It's also very frustrating that there was nothing from the Government on restoring the Telephone Allowance. We know from contacts with the political parties that the Government was getting mixed messages on this issue, with some TDs telling ministers it was still a major issue and others claiming the anger had died down.

But while there may have been some limited progress on restoring the incomes of older people in the budget, Minister Varadkar seems to have ignored them completely.

The budget does contain more money to ensure waiting lists for the Fair Deal scheme are kept to four weeks, which is welcome, but there is no sign of a change in the Government's fixed focus on nursing homes.

Home supports

There was nothing on home helps, nothing on home care and nothing on prescription charges.

The Government is refusing point blank to put money into the services that enable older people to stay at home while doing everything they can to get them into nursing homes. It is bad health policy and it

is bad economics.

Given the choice, older people prefer to stay at home with their families rather than go into a nursing home. The home supports that would enable thousands of them to do so are not there and the Government must prioritise this area.

The failure to do anything about prescription charges is also frustrating. These have risen by 500 per cent since they were introduced and are now simply a tax on sick people.

Overall, it was the first budget in years that moved in the right direction but it is still far short of where we need to go in supporting and caring for an ageing population.

With the budget done, our focus must now shift to the coming general election. Age Action has already contacted most

political parties setting out the issues we want to see prioritised.

No party fully appreciates the need to plan for our ageing population and the demographic changes that are coming. That needs to change.

According to CSO research, 88 per cent of people aged over 65 voted in the 2011 general election, compared to an overall figure of 70 per cent.

We need to show this strength in next year's election to make clear that older people are one of the country's biggest, and most active, voting blocs.

This is not, as the cynics might suggest, about "buying the grey vote", but about ensuring the next government prepares Ireland for the the growing numbers of older people.

It's up to us in Age Action to make that happen.

FreeTalk

"Say Hello to Brain Health"



Prof. Sabina Brennan, TCD



Clontarf Castle

Thurs Nov 26th 7:30pm

Email Rachel.mcmahon@tcd.ie to reserve a ticket or call 01 896 8414.



Trinity College Dublin

The University of Dublin

Positive Ageing Week 2015 —



DUNDALK

■ ABOVE: An estimated 3,000 people attended the fourth annual Louth Age Friendly Business Fair.

■ RIGHT: Tea break during the Getting Started class at Mallow Patrician Academy

■ BELOW: Alex Fegan, director of the film *Older than Ireland*, talks about its making to an audience of Age Action members.



MALLOW



DUBLIN

■ BELOW: St Asicus Active Age group receive a warm welcome at Galilee House of Prayer in Boyle.



BOYLE

13 years of celebrating ageing

■ RIGHT: COPE Galway celebrates. The group supports older people, survivors of domestic violence and people affected by homelessness.



■ BELOW: The Mayor of Waterford City and County, Cllr John Cummins, congratulates local Getting Started graduates and learners.



■ LEFT: Ard Mhéara of Dublin Críona Ní Dhálaigh at the Mansion House for a Positive Ageing Week talk on Dublin placenames with historian Cathy Scuffil

■ BELOW: Outside The Pantry in Kinsale enjoying delicious teas and cakes





■ Archana Bai Sharada, a clinical nurse manager in Raheny Community Nursing Unit, addresses the audience.

Care homes urged to support all cultures

Age Action launched a new report in Dublin last month on migrant care workers as part of our Intercultural Care Home Project.

It is now estimated that up to 30 per cent of the staff working in the older adult care sector are from another country. As well as bringing multicultural backgrounds and many new skills into the service, this helps the residential care sector prepare for changing needs as our older population becomes ever more diverse.

But there are also challenges. Many migrant workers report a degree of cultural misunderstanding, discrimination and sometimes explicit racism. The project focused on issues related to these changes, working

with staff, managers, residents and their families in a number of care homes in north Dublin.

A summary of the report's findings was presented by the project's coordinator, Ann Moroney. She said the first stage of the project confirmed that multiculturalism among staff teams was mostly working well, but there were still areas in need of attention.

The second stage of the project, the piloting of an intercultural programme for staff and residents, had been well received and the report recommended that all homes provide such training and develop a workable equality policy.

Closed society

Christy Brady, a resident in Raheny Community Nursing Unit, observed movingly that the Ireland in which he grew up was a

narrow and closed society, "in which we were almost trained to be suspicious".

However, since moving into a home at age 80, he had learned more than he had in any previous stage of his life through meeting staff from all over the world.

Archana Bai Sharada, a clinical nurse manager in the same home, spoke eloquently about what it was like to come from her native Kerala, India, to work in a very different society.

She described some creative approaches being tried in Raheny, including setting up a Diversity Committee and holding a multicultural art exhibition, that could be considered in other care homes.

The project report, a handbook on promoting interculturalism in residential care and a poster celebrating interculturalism are available from Age Action.



■ John Holohan of the Asthma Society, business-woman Celia Holman Lee, Susan O’Dwyer from Boots and Justin Moran of Age Action launch the winter flu vaccination campaign.

Get vaccinated against winter flu

Age Action and the Asthma Society of Ireland have teamed up with Boots Ireland to encourage all those at high risk of contracting winter flu to protect themselves against the virus.

The awareness campaign, launched by business-woman and model Celia Holman Lee, who herself turns 65 in November, aims to highlight the risks associated with winter flu.

The flu vaccination is recommended for all those in an at-risk group, particularly people aged 65 and over, and anyone with a long-term medical condition such as asthma or an autoimmune disease.

There were 2,500 reported cases of winter flu in Ireland

during the 2014/2015 winter season and a significant increase in the number of hospitalisations.

“The majority of people who suffer severely with winter flu in Ireland are aged 65 and over so it is vital that they do everything they can to protect themselves,” said Justin Moran of Age Action.

“No matter how healthy you feel, a bad case of the flu is very difficult to recover from so we are urging all our members and everyone in an at-risk group to speak to your local healthcare professional about vaccination.”

Free of charge

The Boots Winter Flu Vaccination Service has been operating since 2010. The vaccination is delivered free of charge by Boots Ireland to those in an “at-risk” group who hold

a medical card, doctor visit card or health amendment act card. The vaccination is €20 for everyone else.

“Since launching our winter flu vaccination service we have seen a steady increase in the number of people booking appointments for this important vaccine due to the expert advice they receive,” said Susan O’Dwyer, a pharmacist at Boots Ireland.

“We are dedicated to reaching at-risk groups to inform them of the crucial need to protect themselves by vaccinating against winter flu.”

This is a highly infectious illness that can spread easily. It can cause high temperatures, fevers, headaches, sore throat and aches and pains.

Visit www.boots.ie/flu-vaccination for further information.



■ Margaret Mullett used the internet to build a nationwide awareness campaign on haemochromatosis.
Photo: Marc O'Sullivan

Margaret is our Silver Surfer 2015

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

She was presented with her award in the Helix Theatre in DCU by Age Action CEO Eamon Timmins and broadcaster George Hook.

Margaret was inspired to get online after she lost her husband, George, to a genetic disorder called haemochromatosis, an overload of iron in the system, just six weeks after

being diagnosed. If identified early enough, haemochromatosis can be easily treated.

Determined to ensure that no other family would suffer a loss like her own, Margaret used the internet and digital media to build a national awareness campaign, highlighting the dangers of haemochromatosis and urging members of the public to get themselves tested.

Inspirational

Since she began in 2005, her campaign has focused new attention on the illness and more than 20,000 people have been diagnosed.

Eamon Timmins, CEO of Age Action, said: "Margaret is a truly inspirational woman, someone who suffered a terrible loss and dedicated herself to helping others avoid similar tragedies.

"She became a campaigner and learned how to use the latest technology to spread awareness about a disorder not widely known or understood, successfully encouraging thousands of people to get themselves tested."

The awards ceremony was kindly hosted by Dublin City University, which became the first age-friendly university in 2012, leading a global initiative.

Congratulations to all our winners

The **New to IT Award** went to **Michael Monaghan** from Nobber, Co Meath. In 2012 Michael, then a mini-bus driver for children with special needs, suffered a serious stroke and had to retrain himself in many things.

He started with an iPhone, learning to use Viber to send messages and photographs. He now reads the papers, pays his car tax and most recently sorted out his water grant online while using Skype to keep in touch with his family.

The **Hobbies on the Net Award** went to 83-years-young **Stanley Jerrard-Dunne**. Stanley is a vintage car enthusiast, researching, sourcing and buying parts online but his real passion is writing.

A self-professed science-fiction anorak, his first book, entitled *The Adam and Eve Chronicles*, is sold on Amazon and tells the story of a group of scientists who come up with an unusual way of overcoming the problem of overpopulation.

Corkman **Philip O'Donovan** was the winner of the **Golden IT Award**. Every morning, at 7.30, more than a hundred people around the world wake to a "thought for the day" email message from Philip.

He has also used his computer to write a book about a local specialist school for children with complex disabilities and still does the taxes for family members and his local church as well as designing his own greeting cards using old family photos.

Pat Power from Waterford was the winner of the **IT Tutor of the Year Award**, which recognises the efforts of the hundreds of people across Ireland who volunteer with Age Action's computer training programme, Getting Started. Pat has coordinated 15 courses in Waterford, recruiting learners and new volunteers along the way.

There was also a **Special Recognition Award** for Getting Started tutor **Nicholas Simms**, who has trained more than 50



■ Michael Monaghan, winner of the New to IT Award, with Age Action's Eamon Timmins and Professor Dáire Keogh of St Patrick's College Drumconra



■ Philip O'Donovan, winner of the Golden IT Award



■ Pat Power, winner of the IT Tutor of the Year Award, with Age Action's Eamon Timmins and Professor Dáire Keogh of St Patrick's College Drumconra

All photos: Marc O'Sullivan

learners and recently learned how to use specialist software to teach an older blind man how to use a computer.



■ Age Action CEO Eamon Timmins (centre) with Galway Glór members Betty Sheridan, Mary-Louise Lacey, Gráinne Clune, Cyril Doyle and Rita Coll

Members expose problems in Galway hospitals

Last month the Galway Glór Group launched their report on older people's experience of outpatient services in the west of Ireland, writes **Naomi Feely**.

The report contains the results of a survey of older people in the region that gathered almost 400 responses, the majority from Co Galway.

The work was driven by members of the Galway Glór group, who identified the issue in the first place.

They then used their own network of contacts to strengthen the research and ensure there is a greater understanding of the challenges facing older people who use hospitals in Galway.

A lot of the feedback received in the survey was positive, with older peo-

ple generally satisfied with how their appointment was arranged and how they were dealt with by hospital staff.

Waiting times

However, a major issue raised in the report is the length of time older people must wait to be seen by a doctor. Out of the 385 survey respondents, 122 indicated that this was their chief concern.

The continuing practice by hospitals of block-booking appointments means that patients can be left waiting for hours. This approach has been frequently criticised, most recently by Minister for Health Leo Varadkar TD, who urged hospital managers to end the practice.

A second problem highlighted by respondents was the cost of parking. More than two-thirds of those who drove to their hospi-

tal appointment said they found the cost excessive.

Many older people depend on the State Pension of €230 a week, or even less for those not entitled to a full pension. Excessive parking costs hit their wallets and add to the stress of what can be a difficult day.

This research marked a new departure for Age Action's policy and advocacy team as the work was led by our members.

The report was launched on the last day of Positive Ageing Week 2015 and shows that older people are actively engaged citizens who will ensure their voices are heard in the forthcoming election.

For more information or a copy of the report, please contact Naomi on (01) 475-6989 or email socialinclusion@ageaction.ie.



■ Farms across Ireland are under threat from the Fair Deal scheme.

IFA criticises Fair Deal scheme

The Irish Farmers Association has accused the Fair Deal scheme of jeopardising rural communities and their livelihoods.

IFA Farm Family and Social Affairs Chairperson Maura Canning has said the Fair Deal scheme is jeopardising the viability of family farms and is causing untold stress to older farmers at a difficult time.

According to Teagasc's National Farm Survey, over 30 per cent of farms are vulnerable, which means the income from farming is not enough to make them economically viable. Any further dilution of such asset would render these farms non-viable.

A person availing of a nursing home bed under

the Fair Deal scheme is liable to pay 7.5 per cent of the value of any assets for every year of care. This can be a crippling charge for a family with land that might be worth a great deal but which is generating very little money.

Protecting family farms

"The Government needs to address the treatment of income-generating assets, such as the family farm, under the Fair Deal scheme," said Mrs Canning.

"The IFA is looking for the introduction of a maximum percentage charge that can be applied to the family farm in all circumstances, regardless of the duration of care."

She said this would allow farm families to make the most appropriate decisions in meeting the cost of care

and secure the viability of the farm business, which may be undermined by the impact of an unknown cost of care on the future value of assets.

"The introduction of a cap on the maximum percentage charge to be applied to a farm asset would have little impact on the revenue collected by the State, given that the average duration of stay in a nursing home is four years," Mrs Canning continued.

"But it would make a huge difference to farm families and the uncertainty in relation to the costs of care."

Although the Government's review of the Fair Deal scheme, published in July, did not increase charges for nursing home residents, it proposed little to alleviate the financial burden the scheme imposes on families.



■ A packed crowd listens to Minister Heather Humphries TD.

New headquarters for Monaghan U3A

At the start of October, Heather Humphreys TD, Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht, officially opened Monaghan U3A's new headquarters in a building on the grounds of the Health Service Executive in Monaghan.

Across Ireland Age Action supports a network of 18 local U3A (University of the Third Age) groups, a lifelong learning movement for older people.

A packed audience heard speeches from Eamonn Callaghan of Monaghan U3A, Monaghan County Council's Bernie Bradley, Lila Jackson from U3A Northern Ireland, Rose Mooney of the HSE and Keelin McCarthy, Manager of the Lifelong Learning

Programme in Age Action.

Minister Humphries gave a warm and positive speech and congratulated Monaghan U3A for their positive contribution to the community.

She opened with a relevant quote from Henry Ford: "Anyone who stops learning is old, whether at 20 or 80. Anyone who keeps learning stays young. The greatest thing in life is to keep your mind young."

Age is not a barrier

She said that U3A sends out a positive message – that age should never be a barrier or an obstacle to anything. We have much to look forward to in our retirement and taking part in activities like U3A is vital for our health and mental well-being.

Minister Humphries finished up by saying that she is going to encourage rel-

evant government departments to work with U3A as they have an important role to play in consultation and input into policy.

Monaghan U3A has been going from strength to strength over the past few years and now has more than 250 members. These new premises offer them a space in which to conduct all of their activities from flower arranging to yoga!

Each U3A group is independent and managed by its own members. Its DIY approach provides all kinds of non-formal learning, creative activities and leisure opportunities.

For more information about the University of the Third Age, with 18 groups across Ireland, contact Sam O'Brien-Olinger at u3a@ageaction.ie.

Bray U3A lobbies on budget

The Little Bray Family Resource Centre was packed when Bray U3A members met with Social Democrat TD Stephen Donnelly to raise local and national concerns.

Members highlighted the need for an increase in the State Pension, recognition for the important role played by grandparents in providing childcare and the need to invest in home help services to enable people to remain at home.

They also emphasised the importance of the U3A group in improving relationships in the community during what the group felt was a useful discussion with their local representative.



■ Deputy Donnelly answers questions from U3A members.

U3A GROUPS



☉ **Active Virginians U3A**
Contact Patricia Rice at (087) 235-0515 or email m spatprice@gmail.com.

☉ **An Cosán U3A Tallaght**
Contact Imelda Hanratty at (01) 462-8488.

☉ **Ballymun U3A**
Contact Brenda Hickey at (01) 857-1673.

☉ **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.

☉ **Carrick-on-Shannon U3A**
Contact Margaret Fawcett at (086) 837-2934 or email mgtfaw@gmail.com.

☉ **Dublin City U3A**
Contact John Roche at (01) 201-7490.

☉ **Galway U3A**
Contact Livio Rocca at u3agalway@gmail.com.

☉ **Lucan U3A**
Contact Maureen Newell at lucanu3a@gmail.com.

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

☉ **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 u3asutbal@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.
For more information, email Sam O'Brien-Olinger, U3A Development Officer, at u3a@ageaction.ie or phone (01) 475-6989.

Tackling rural poverty at home and abroad

To mark the UN Day for the Eradication of Poverty on 17 October, Age Action highlighted rural poverty in Ireland and in developing countries.

As part of this work we held a focus group with members in Castlebar to explore the issues facing older people in rural communities.

We have published a short booklet, which is available on our website, that highlights their experiences, drawing parallels with older people in parts of the developing world.



■ Launch of rural poverty report

For more details on the project, contact Lianne or Naomi at (01) 475-6989.

Annual membership application

I wish to join Age Action and enclose
 €..... membership fee, plus €.....
 voluntary donation payable to Age Action
 Ireland Ltd.

If you are already an existing Age Action
 member and wish to renew your membership
 please write your membership number here ...

Full name:.....
 (Block capitals please)

Address:

Tel:

Email:
 (Block capitals please)

Date:

FEES

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

STANDING ORDER

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 (Name of Bank/Building Society)

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 Permanent TSB, 70 Grafton Street, Dublin 2,
 BIC: IPBSIE2D

IBAN: IE82 IPBS 9906 2587 7790 21
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until further notice. Starting on: 1st Day of
 January 20

Name:
 (Block capitals please)

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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
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