Age Friendly Ireland

Making Ireland a great county to grow old in

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# Introduction

Thank you very much. I am delighted to be here this morning to address you.

I am part and parcel of a process of local government reform which has been ongoing for a while. In recent years, however, we have been given what I believe to be a clear mandate in the context of economics, society and community. This mandate has given local authorites responsibility and it has also given them opportunity. So this morning, I will be discussing how some of that opportunity can be used to make real changes.

# Age Friendly Societies

I am involved in the Age Friendly Societies programme and it has been an informative and rewarding experience. Age does not distinguish between ability or disability. It's a fact of life. We are all growing older

The objective of the Age Friendly Societies’ programmes are to create an inclusive society that we all wish to be a part of.

We all face challenges on a daily basis, for example, the person pushing the buggy across the road and the person with the wheelchair crossing the road. Both of them need to get across the road but each person will do it at a different speed and in their own way. It’s important that the needs of each person are identified, understood and responded to.

# The Need to Respond

The statistics show we need to respond to people with disabilities and older people

* 80 percent of people acquire a disability from the ages of 18 to 64.
* The over 65s population will increase by 250% by the year 2036.
* One in three newborns will live to 100.
* The over 80 population will increase by 400% by the year 2041.

An interesting fact is that 95% of the aging population are exceptionally active. The objectives of the Age Friendly programmes are to look at how we can effectively harness the skills and experience of older people and people with disabilities to create more inclusive societies.

# The Response

In 2008 an international study was carried out on what Age Friendly Cities would look like. Dundalk was part of that study. At the same time we had a national network emerging on age friendly societies, supported by Atlantic Philanthropies. A forum was developed from that network. I was part of that forum and we linked in with the international study in Dundalk. The objective of the forum was to ask what could we do to create Age Friendly Cities.

Initially everyone was looking for a new solution but a few of us in the forum started suggesting that we should build on and use existing structures, for example, the local government structure.

Initially the concept of creating age friendly societies was a challenge for the local authority sector but we took it on board.

A national framework which is based on the World Health Organisation was established. The methodology was not rocket science, it was about listening, learning, designing and responding and we are still listening, learning, designing and responding and we will to do that until the day we get it right and that day will come.

# What’s Different? New Thinking, New Approaches

Creating age friendly, inclusive societies was a new initiative that required a fresh new approach and a new way of thinking about these issues. The following elements were crucial to the design and implementation of the age friendly programmes:

* Participation
* Efficiency
* Collaboration
* Implementation
* Partnership
* Innovation

## Participation

It was really important to have older people involved in the design and implementation of these programmes. Older people find solutions to issues. They have a wealth of experience that needs to be tapped into and listened to. Older people have helped us enormously in determining priorities. One of the key lessons that I have learned is that this part of the design and implementation wasn't demanding, it was very pragmatic.

## Efficiency

In 2008 and 2009 when we were designing and implementing these programmes the local authority sector had no money and we had less staff so we had to be efficient in our approach. It was a very basic start. So when the groups were brought together, the simple issue was, this is what we need to do? Can we do it together or how do we do it together?

## Collaboration

Collaboration was the next step in this process. Collaboration is something which we talk about, but it's not something we are particularly good at doing. However we know it needs to be done. Sometimes you need the challenge to force you into that position. When a theme is common to all parties, it's easier for them to respond to what that particular challenge is. The theme of age enabled people to come to the table because it was affecting so many different aspects of public service, it was one that needed to be resolved. The theme itself was not confrontational and it enabled us to bring the various parties together to create that cross‑sector collaboration.

## Implementation

Planning and implementing these programmes is a key element of this process. Some very good publications have been produced in the last number of months, that demonstrate what has been achieved and what is being achieved. Targets in every individual county were set by the Older People's Council and the Older People's Forum. Its easy to measure if a local authority is doing something or it’s not.

At the start of this process, I remember one of the staff up in Louth County Council asked when would people know if the Age Friendly programmes were making a difference.

The answer was very simple. When we ask someone on the road do they know what we are doing and if they answer yes, we are starting to make an impact. It will not be up in lights, it will not be in government policy, it will not be in the media. You know when a programme is making an impact based on the response on the ground.

## Partnership

The local authority sector has always worked in partnership with colleagues in the public services. We were used to working with different organisations to design and implement these Age Friendly programmes. What did emerge however was that we had never had the capacity before to share resources such as budgets etc. So we had to find a mechanism whereby the different local authorities could share these type of resources. We had to start thinking of innovative ways to do this

## Innovation

Innovation is part and parcel of the new approach local authorities are using to implement Age Friendly programmes. Its important that local authorities share budgets and staff so that we can work together to create inclusive societies.

# A Common Approach

We are working together across the country on these programme. This common shared approach enables us to do a couple of things. First of all, we are on a common platform and secondly, we can measure what our respective priorities and what our actions are across the country.

Every programme in every county has the same common themes taken from the World Health Organisation. These themes are as follows:

* Outdoor spaces and buildings
* Transportation, housing, social participation
* Respect and social inclusion
* Community support and health services
* Civic participation and employment
* Communication and information

All of those themes are relevant no matter what organisation you are in, no matter what part you play in society itself. They all affect you. And therefore we felt these themes provide us with a very simple basis upon which to measure interactivity between local authorities.

# What is an Inclusive Age-Friendly City or County

## Step1 – Local Collaboration

So in terms of the approach to establish an age friendly city or county, local collaboration remains at the top. We brought together at the very outset all of the specific agencies, the leaders within the public service, including the The Gardaí, the HSE, the businesses, the NGOs, the transportation providers etc. We established an alliance with a common theme in order to respond to what we mean by age friendly and it means something different to everybody.

## Step 2 – Local Consultation

The second step in establishing an age friendly city/county was getting the local consultation piece right. It was important to talk not just to older people who were involved in local groups, but also to people who were isolated, who didn’t belong to any group. We didn't go through the normal format, we gathered people together in various locations. We went out to the community to talk to people and we listened. As a result of the local consultation, an older people's council formed. We now have 1,500 people associated directly with the forum. They have elected their own executive of 40 people. We have provided the supports to enable us to go through the plan which has been agreed by them.

This Council has set the priorities for our authority in terms implementing real change for older people in the following areas:

* Older people are supported to stay in their own homes.
* There is a focus on creating better public spaces and parks. There are exceptionally good examples of this across the country, for example, Ardee Town Council are ensuring that their public spaces are accessible to everyone.

This morning Minister Frances Fitzgerald launched the report was **How Walkable is your Town.** It’s important that a local level we ensure that everyone can get around our towns and counties.

Other areas that change is being implemented are:

* Transport
* Safer places
* More opportunities to participate
* Better health services
* New opportunities to volunteer to make neighbourhoods better places for all

# Age Friendly Cities and Counties Programmes

I am going to quickly go through some examples of Age Friendly programmes that demonstrate the core programme related activities which are:

* A shared response in terms of the programme itself
* Involve collaboration/multi agency response
* Borne out of citizen engagement
* identified the voice of older people

# The Challenges to the Programmes

These programmes also shared the same challenges which were to:

* Reconfigure resources to be more effective and potentially more equitable in terms of service provision
* Supporting/Empowering older people towards greater self management,
* Supporting/ Empowering older people to participate in programmes and in the community themselves. They were not the passive recipient of intervention but often a co‑designer.
* An emphasis of delivering these programmes at a low cost and focusing on achieving the high return

# Age friendly programmes

I’d like to give you a very brief overview of these very effective Age Friendly programmes.

## The Cultaca programme

This programme provided a wide range of social care supports to enable older people to live longer in their own homes. We know that is what older people want. The way the programme works is that 2 full‑time staff and 50 volunteers provide a front of house service for individuals. They liaise with the social care service provider on behalf of the individual and they ensure that there is clarity on the types of service the individual is getting , what is needed etc. There are about 650 clients receiving visits in relation to that and that's with two full‑time people operating.

## The Health Route programme

The health route is an interesting one, particularly in north Dublin, because the challenge is clear, 47% of people were missing hospital appointments. It targeted 600 older people. 88 euro per patient for contracted services. 48 euro per patient for the patient transportation services cost to the system.

## Age Friendly Business Plan

In terms of the business environment, everybody needs to visit the shop in some form of another and there is the social interaction part of that where someone is part of a community. So we worked with the business sector to devise a recognition scheme. If a business did certain things they were recognised as being age friendly and we would promote that accordingly. 140 businesses were targeted, two national franchises, two shopping centres and six chambers of commerce came on board relative to it.

## The Crime Prevention Ambassadors Project

The challenges in this project were very real, particularly in rural areas. It became clear in every piece of consultation across the country that safety was an issue. The Gardai worked very closely with us in responding to this issue. In fact they were the first to produce a national strategy regarding older people and crime.

Volunteer Gardai were vetted and trained by the Gardai. A group of national community police officers was established. The volunteer Gardai visited 230 older people in the home. This measure were simple but extraordinarily effective in the communities that people have had to live in .

# Outcomes

These programmes had very positive and significant outcomes

## The Cultaca Programme

The programme supported 650 older people to stay living in their homes, instead of having to go into residential care. This programme resulted in significant savings of €1.2 million a year.

## The Health Route Programme

This programme helped reduce the number of older people who were missing their medical appointments. Savings to the system.

## Age Friendly Business Plan

Business have recognised the economic importance of providing age friendly services and discounts.

## Crime Prevention Ambassadors Project

The visits from the volunteer Gardai have made older people feel safer in their homes and made many of them feel less isolated. The training and advice the gardai provided people increased their knowledge about security issues and risks and also enhanced their coping and response skills.

# Social and Economic Outcomes

The outcomes from these four programmes show that an efficient reconfiguring of key services can produce positive change,

* Efficient reconfiguring of key services on part of key service providers
* Bottom line cost savings/revenue generation opportunities for services
* Recognise older people, as consumers, that play a vital role in supporting local businesses and services, thus keeping communities vibrant.
* Holistic Age Friendly framework is put in place. Each area can put their own blueprint on model
* Flexibility to respond in creative / tailored ways to issues of local importance
* Parallel potential to ‘scale-up’ and share with national network when evidence is gathered

# Adaptive Housing

The last area that I want to deal with quickly is the issue of adaptive housing. I have included the following comments to give you a sense of how important it is to design houses that meet people’s needs:

“I want to stay living in my home as long as possible”.

“ The stairs are terrible. Physically I find it hard to climb them. “

“ Even when I am on my own, I lock myself in and make sure all the doors and windows are closed.”

Local authorities have to have a different approach to housing. We have to start planning to provide adaptive/universally designed houses that meet people’s needs. We have to put the houses in the right location and we have to integrate user friendly technology into houses to ensure that people can easily contact the Gardai and/or the health services in an emergency situation.

The Great Northern Haven is a good example of adaptive housing. 16 units were designed to adapt to each person as they grew older. 3 people were taken out of long‑term care and put into independent living because of this type of housing. The HSE saved nearly 50% on care packages, as a result of this type of housing.

Design can be enormously beneficial. Local authorities need to start at the beginning, not at the end. We need guidance from a local government perspective and social housing perspective to design for the future. There may be costs upfront but the long term savings are very significant. That's an area where we need to change our business.

# Conclusion

In conclusion, becoming an age friendly city and county is a process. I have outlined this process in this presentation. 31 local authorities across the country have adopted this process and can respond in their areas to very specific needs as they are emerging.

In Limerick there is a small place called Cappaghmore. They have designed an action plan which the councillors have adopted and the councillors are providing the resources directly. This action plan contains steps to look at the local paths and ensure that they are accessible. The plan also includes actions to look at the location of the bus stops and ensure that they are in areas where they are most needed.

We need to think about how we develop social policy in this country. We need to start at the bottom and influence from the bottom up. The Age Friendly Programmes started in Louth and have now spread across the country. The main reasons for the success of these programmes is because local authorities collaborated with each other and with older people. We also focused on building on existing structures and sharing resources not reinventing the wheel.

Thank you very much.