

Foresight Future of an Ageing Population - International Case Studies

Case Study 5: Promoting age friendly businesses in Ireland

Foresight Theme: Promoting inclusive environments

The ‘Age friendly business’ initiative in Ireland is part of the Age friendly cities and counties programme. Businesses are an important part of neighbourhoods and communities and the Age friendly business initiative aims to encourage businesses to adopt an age friendly approach. This case study will look the methods and effectiveness, of this single sector approach, in promoting an age friendly environment.

Context and History

In 2015, Ireland had a population of 4.6 million, 0.6 million of whom (13%) were aged 65 and over.¹ Approximately 38% of the total population of Ireland live in rural areas with a higher proportion (42%) of those aged 65 and over doing so.²

In 2007 the World Health Organisation (WHO) published a guide to help cities identify features that would make them ‘age-friendly’. This led to the establishment, in 2010, of the WHO Global Network of Age-Friendly Cities and Communities.³

At an EU Summit held in Dublin in 2013, under the Irish Presidency of the European Union, the leaders of European local government made a unanimous declaration, known as the ‘Dublin Declaration 2013’ building on an earlier ‘Dublin Declaration 2011’ by WHO Global Network representatives. The 2013 declaration acknowledged the value and contribution of the WHO work to help cities and communities become more supportive of older people, by addressing their needs across eight dimensions: Outdoor Spaces and Public Buildings; Transportation; Housing; Social Participation; Respect and Social Inclusion; Civic Participation and Employment; Communication and Information; and Community Support and Health Services. The representatives agreed to adopt the WHO guidelines adapted to fit the European context.

The first supporting pledge, within the declaration, was to “*Promote among the general public awareness of older people, their rights, needs, and potentials, and highlight the positive social, economic and cultural contribution they make*”.

A key part of that general public in Ireland, interacting with older people every day, both as employers and service providers, is the Irish business community.

In the period before 2013, the *Ageing Well Network* led the establishment of the Age-Friendly Cities and Counties programme in 16 of Ireland’s 26 counties. Since then, *Age Friendly Ireland*, a not-for-profit organisation, established in January 2014, manages the Irish Age Friendly Cities and Counties

¹ Central Statistics Office, Ireland

² Connolly, Finn and O’Shea (2012) *Rural Ageing in Ireland: Key Trends and Issues*, Irish Centre for Social Gerontology, National University of Ireland, Galway

³ Fitzgerald and Caro (2014), *An overview of age-friendly cities and communities around the world*, Journal of Ageing and Social Policy, 26(1-2)

programme. Age Friendly Ireland is hosted by Dublin City Council and funded by Atlantic Philanthropies.

Implementation

An important element of the Age Friendly Cities and Counties programme is the Age Friendly Business initiative. Age Friendly Ireland produces informational material nationally but works with individual local Chambers of Commerce to establish a local Age friendly business forum, drawn from Chamber of Commerce (CoCo) members, that consults with local interested organisations and groups and engages with local businesses.

Informational material from Age Friendly Ireland highlights, for businesses, the effect of demographic changes and the business opportunities of being age-friendly. They point out that older people (aged 65+) in Ireland have an annual income of over €10 billion, are loyal customers and outspend younger shoppers. Older people spend locally, have time to shop and half of all toys are bought by grandparents.

Suggestions of low-cost and no cost ways to make a business 'Age Friendly' and attract older customers include : Offer products and/or services that are appropriate for older adults, e.g. single portions; Make discounts or special offers available for older adults when possible; Offer assistance with shopping, and or drop off/delivery services; Provide respectful human contact, in person and on the phone; Place products on shelves which are reachable or readily offer assistance to reach items; Use large, clear fonts for signage, printed materials, and websites; Moderate excessively loud music and noise; and Speak clearly in low tones and repeat yourself if necessary.

One of the first counties in Ireland to establish a local Age-Friendly Business programme was County Louth. An age-friendly business forum was established in 2011 and an age-friendly business action plan was produced.



In 2012 and 2013 a successful Age-Friendly Business consumer fair was held in the local Darver Castle and, in 2012 the local town of Ardee was chosen as Ireland's first Age-Friendly Business town.



The Ardee initiative was a pilot stage in developing a national Age Friendly Business Recognition programme.

Age Friendly Business Recognition

The aims of the Age Friendly Business Recognition programme are to recognise the efforts and improvements made by local business to provide more Age Friendly services and products; facilitate local businesses to further tap into an existing and growing market segment; and share and collate online 'best practice' learned for wider dissemination.

To become an Age-Friendly business, an organisation has to identify a member of staff to act as a champion for age friendliness and older customers. The champion participates in an Age Friendly Business Workshop, starts to develop ideas and asks older customers what they like and what could be improved then implements any necessary changes so they can become recognised as an 'Age Friendly Business'.



Once recognised as an Age-Friendly Business, the company receives a decal to display on the window or website, a charter that they can display on the premises, and is entered in the directory of Age Friendly Businesses.



An important aspect of the Age-Friendly Business Recognition programme is the granting of awards to businesses that have been recognised as age-friendly.

Age Friendly Businesses also can, and do, use this recognition in their advertising.

Local companies in County Cavan claim to have seen the benefit of the scheme with a local hotel, who used their award in their advertising, having seen increased bookings and a local phone shop reaching older people who had previously not been approached.⁴

The Irish Age Friendly Cities and Counties programme operates south of the border but Belfast was the first city in Northern Ireland to join the World Health Organisation's Global Network of Age-friendly Cities. In March 2015 Belfast launched an age-friendly charter⁵ that includes a checklist to ensure businesses and similar organisations are age-friendly.

Customer care / staff training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Older people are treated respectfully by staff. Staff are courteous, helpful and speak clearly. Staff give extra time or there is a quiet space for older people who have dementia or are anxious. Staff are trained to listen and respond to the varying needs of older people-for example disability or dementia awareness training. Discounts or special offers for older people are promoted when possible.
Communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Older people can easily find information about your organisation and services. Printed information is clear and straightforward. Older people are visible in advertising and are depicted positively and without stereotyping. Telephone answering services give instructions clearly and tell callers how to repeat message at any time. You moderate excessively loud music and consider use of music in your premises.
Accessibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Entrances are kept free of dirt, leaves, snow or other obstacles. People in wheelchairs or with walking aids can easily navigate spaces in your premises or services. Products are placed on shelves that are reachable or help is offered to reach items. There is a place where clients or customers can sit and rest. You provide, or sign post to toilet facilities. You provide adequate lighting at entrance and throughout your premises. You avoid heavy doors or offer electronic doors.

⁴ <http://www.cavanchamber.ie/events/cavan-chamber-launches-age-friendly-business-recognition-scheme>

⁵ <http://www.makinglifebettertogether.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/7044-Age-friendly-charter-A4-web.pdf>

Signage	Large clear font is used on signage, with good contrast between text and background. There is good contrast between signs and the surface they are mounted on. Signs for toilets and exits are clear. Glass doors are marked. Signs are at eye level and are well lit.
Valuing an ageing workforce	Older staff have opportunities for up-skilling and in-work training. There are opportunities and support for intergenerational mentoring. Policies and procedures are in place for supporting staff members with caring responsibilities. Your organisation is committed to working flexibly; support is available for all ages joining, employed and leaving employment.

A further aspect of the Irish Age Friendly Cities and Counties programme is to help older entrepreneurs. For example, in Kilkenny, the Age Friendly County office, County Enterprise Board and Business of Ageing Forum are developing an information pack and training programme for retirees who wish to start up their own business.

Impact

Ireland's Age Friendly Cities and Counties Programme (AFCC), programme which started in 2009 in County Louth and was boosted by the Dublin Declaration signed in 2014, has gone from strength to strength and, by the end 2015, all 31 Local Authorities had established an AFCC programme.

The programme has been supported at national level and the Irish Prime Minister, the Taoiseach, Enda Kenny, at the signing of the Dublin Declaration in 2014 recognised the “particular and special role ... in the lives of our older men and women. - Mayors and Cathaoirligh, - local authority Chief Executives, - Chairs of Age-Friendly Alliances - Chairs of the Older People Councils, - Older People Council Coordinators, and- representatives from the health services, An Garda Síochána, the NGO, education and business sectors”.

Adoption of the of the Age Friendly Business Recognition scheme has been strong with for example, in Cavan Town alone, thirty businesses signing up to join the programme.