Age Friendly Towns: Making our towns a great place to grow old

Nationwide, Ireland

Aisling Costello

Project Stage:
Growth

Budget:
$100,000 - $250,000
The rapid ageing of Ireland’s population has major implications across most spheres of life, with local government, transport, health, and employers, for example, being forced to adapt. There is an increase in healthy well-educated older adults with accumulated skills and experience seeking a balanced life, involving work, education, family, leisure and volunteering. Further, the current economic climate that demands doing more with less has fostered a culture of innovation. Older people must be recognised as important members of communities: they shop at local businesses, are invested in neighbourhoods, and have the time and inclination to make real change. This initiative supports these communities in tapping into this valuable resources.

Solution: What is the proposed solution? Please be specific!

In order to realise our Age Friendly Outcomes, the participating towns follow a clear four step process that has been developed and proven by the Age Friendly Cities & Counties Programme (Set Up, Audit and Consult, Plan, Implement and Review). The innovative process is led by older adults, who have a role to play in bringing stakeholders together to prioritise the changes and in implementing the changes as agreed. Multi-stakeholder collaboration informs the process from the initial stages as each town benefits from the established oversight provided by the local Age Friendly Alliance. After a year-long investment from Age Friendly Ireland, participating partners in each town take ownership of the initiative to secure its future.

Impact: How does it Work

Example: Walk us through a specific example(s) of how this solution makes a difference; include its primary activities.

The Age Friendly Towns initiative champions the Age Friendly Business Recognition Scheme, supported by the Chambers of Commerce in each town, allowing customers to identify businesses as age friendly and publicising local businesses to older customers, via window stickers, a charter to display in their business, and promotion on our website. Businesses consult with their customers and respond to their feedback by implementing Age Friendly practices, such as reducing background noise, improving signage, and removing trip hazards. Becoming Age Friendly improves the experience for all customers, so both customers and businesses profit. In Skerries, 20 businesses have become Age Friendly and are delighted with the improvements in their business.

Spread Strategies: Moving forward, what are the main strategies for scaling impact?

The goal of the Age Friendly Cities & Counties Programme is for every Local Authority in Ireland to have adopted the programme by the end of 2015, thus spreading age-friendliness throughout the country and “making Ireland a great place to grow old”. To date, 16 counties are engaged in the programme and 9 counties committed to adopt. The strategy is focussed on the replication of the Age Friendly four-step process, and it is this process and the facilitation of multi-agency relationships that makes the programme so successful. Comprehensive documentation of the Age Friendly Towns initiative is underway and once a toolkit has been produced, any town in a county that has an Age Friendly Alliance will be able to replicate the process and become an Age Friendly Town. Frequent awards and recognition helps to sustain the momentum and continued expansion of the programme.

Sustainability

Marketplace: Who else is addressing the problem outlined here? How does the proposed project differ from these approaches?

In Ireland, there are multiple NGOs in the ageing sector, each representing their members, particular interests or specific issues. To our knowledge, the Age Friendly Cities & Counties Programme is the only organisation that works to facilitate inter-agency collaboration around the issues of ageing, and certainly on such a large national scale. In contrast to other NGOs, this programme focuses on developing dialogue and deepening the relationships between pre-existing organisations and services to leverage maximum value from the resources invested by all partners. The Age Friendly Towns initiative centres around collaborative planning, with older people and the community at the heart of the consultations. To our knowledge, no ageing organisation in Ireland performs such extensive consultation or implements plans so closely related to the needs that older people have voiced.

Team

The organisation is governed by a Board and a National Implementation & Integration Group consisting of senior representatives of participating agencies (see Governance). In each county, county-level representatives of the relevant partners form an Age Friendly Alliance, which draws up an Age Friendly County Strategy based on consultations. The Alliance members are responsible for coordinating the contributions from their organisations. The Programme recognises the importance of having older people represented at the decision-making table, and Older Peoples’ Council are formed to represent older people at the Age Friendly Alliances. At a town level, representatives of the relevant stakeholders meet on a Steering Committee, where members negotiate to enact timely change on the ground. This whole-system approach promotes dialogue and unleashes powerful forces for community enhancement.
**Organization:**
Local Authorities, Chambers of Commerce, etc. as represented by NIIG (Age Friendly Ireland)

**LEAD SOCIAL-MISSION ORGANIZATION**

- **Organization Name**
  Age Friendly Ireland

- **Type of organization (e.g. NGO, association, not-for-profit, foundation, social enterprise)**
  not-for-profit

- **Total Number of Full-Time Employees**
  7

- **Lead Contact First Name**
  Aisling

- **Lead Contact Last Name**
  Costello

- **Title**
  Head of Projects

- **Country**
  Ireland

- **Twitter URL**
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- **Facebook URL**
  https://www.facebook.com/IrelandAFCCProgramme

- **Website**
  -

**LEAD CORPORATE PARTNER**

- **Organization Name**
  Local Authorities, Chambers of Commerce, etc. as represented by NIIG (Age Friendly Ireland)

- **Total Number of Full-Time Employees**
  7

- **Lead Contact First Name**
  Hugh

- **Lead Contact Last Name**
  O'Connor

- **Title**
  CEO

- **Country**
  Ireland

- **Twitter URL**
  -

- **Facebook URL**
  https://www.facebook.com/IrelandAFCCProgramme

- **Organization Website**
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**Basic Info**

**Project Starting Year**

2013
Primary European Country where this Project is creating social impact
, XX, Nationwide

Additional European countries where this Project is creating social impact
-

Select the category that best fits the type of your project:

**New products & services**: Entries in this category develop and offer essentials product and services that address needs currently unmet.

**Last mile distribution**: Entries in this category focus on solutions that enable the physical delivery of life-changing services to people with restricted mobility or restricted access (senior people, people with disability, remote or difficult areas, etc.).

What awards or honors has the project received?
Grant from the Pfizer Foundation

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Project Summary

Co-Creation Model: Tell us about your main strategic partners and how the partnership truly create value. For each Partner please include its type (business/social/public), its name, a short description, its key motivation to participate in the co-creation project, and the key contributions it is making in the co-creation project. Please follow the format displayed below:

- **Older People’s groups (e.g. Active Retirement Ireland) (social)**
  Social groups comprised of voluntary members of the community
  To improve their quality of life as older people and promotes the interests of their members (if applicable)
  They have contributed to the project by participating in the multi-stakeholder groups and negotiations, which seek to achieve the Age Friendly Outcomes.

- **Chambers of Commerce/local business groups (business)**
  Ireland’s largest business organisation, which promotes local development and works towards creating a better environment for business.
  To improve the delivery of services to older people and promote local development on behalf of their members.
  They have contributed to the project by participating in the multi-stakeholder groups and negotiations, which seek to achieve the Age Friendly Outcomes.

- **Local Authorities (public)**
  Administrative governmental bodies that play a crucial part in the Age Friendly Cities & Counties Programme.
  To improve the delivery of services to older people
  They have contributed to the project by participating in the multi-stakeholder groups and negotiations, which seek to achieve the Age Friendly Outcomes.

- **HSE Representatives (public)**
  Representatives from the Health Service Executive
  To improve the delivery of services to older people
  They have contributed to the project by participating in the multi-stakeholder groups and negotiations, which seek to achieve the Age Friendly Outcomes.

- **Gards Representatives (public)**
  Representatives from An Garda Síochána
  To improve the delivery of services to older people
  They have contributed to the project by participating in the multi-stakeholder groups and negotiations, which seek to achieve the Age Friendly Outcomes.

- **Representatives from Rural Transport Programme**
  The Rural Transport Programme provides a quality nationwide community based public transport system in rural Ireland which responds to local needs
  To improve the delivery of services to older people
  They have contributed to the project by participating in the multi-stakeholder groups and negotiations, which seek to achieve the Age Friendly Outcomes.

- **Representative from education (public)**
  Representatives from third-level educational institutions
  To improve the delivery of services to older people
  They have contributed to the project by participating in the multi-stakeholder groups and negotiations, which seek to achieve the Age Friendly Outcomes.

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Impact

**Impact: What is the impact of the work to date? Also describe the projected future impact. Please specify using qualitative and quantitative data (e.g. # of indirect and direct beneficiaries); help us understand how this solution truly makes a difference.**

Age Friendly Towns is in its second year, after a successful pilot in 2013, in which 16 towns completed our rigorous structured process. Extensive consultation with over 1000 older people ensured that the changes implemented in each town tackled the most important issues to the older people living there. Over 130 long- and short-term action plans were identified, including over 50 short-term actions that are already completed. Redeployment of existing resources has resulted in community gardens, men’s sheds, intergenerational skills exchanges, walking groups, Age Friendly Business networks, Age Friendly Libraries, befriending services, care-and-repair services, and changes to the outdoor environment (seating, pedestrian crossings, pavements, parks). All of these improvements were made with minimal cost to governmental agencies, demonstrating the strength of this collaborative model.

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Sustainability

**Funding: How is your project financial supported? [select all that apply]**

Foundations. Regional government.
Sustainability Plan: Has your project already reached financial sustainability? If not, what is this solution’s plan to ensure financial sustainability? Do the main partners have enough stake to sustain the solution? If this project requires limited budget, how will other resources be secured to maintain or grow this work?

Dublin City Council has committed to maintaining an office for the Age Friendly Cities & Counties Programme when Atlantic Philanthropies withdraw at the end of their term. Other expenses for the running of the programmes have been met by successfully attracting grant funding to date. However, the strategy for the organisation involves embedding the age friendly model and approach into local organisations and it is hoped that building this structure will enable them to do it within their own resources. The programme operates by initiating new partnerships using our four step process and then withdrawing from the area once such intensive support is no longer needed, allowing the partners involved to continue to implement change. For example, Skerries Liaison Committee has taken responsibility for the Age Friendly Towns initiative run in 2013, enabling continued change at a local level.

Founding Story: Share a story about the “Aha!” moment that led the Partners to get started and/or to see the potential for this to succeed.

In the summer of 2011, Ardee in County Louth took on a graduate town planner to extend and enhance the County level Age Friendly programme in a more localised area. The planner followed the four-step process and engaged the community and local businesses to collaborate. While a submission was made to the Local Area Plan, the real successes of the project were in small changes that made a big difference to the community. For example, already planned benches were installed at suitable locations based on the input of older people to provide rest spots walking to and from the town centre. The learnings gained from this small-scale experiment demonstrated the concept’s potential, paving the way for a full-scale pilot in 2013. Further, business owners in Ardee agreed to make small changes to improve the experience for older people; the Age Friendly Business Recognition Scheme was born.

About the Co-Creation

Barriers: What main barriers may you have encountered to co-create during the creation and implementation of the project and how did you try to overcome them?

During the pilot in 2013, we transformed barriers into learnings and opportunities. While collaboration between partners is needed to get results, it was often difficult to get multi-partner actions agreed. It took skill, diplomacy and tenacity to secure agreements between partners. The learning that emerged from this is that not all stakeholders need to be on board to make progress; as long as some partners were strong, good results can be achieved.

A defining feature of the Age Friendly Towns programme is its short timescale. Some issues can take a long time to resolve and the actions can be scheduled for completion after the project has finished. However, this is also a strength since the time pressure is conducive to getting short-term actions implemented more quickly, and the longer term actions that remain provide useful leverage for the continuation of the initiative in that town.

Governance: What is the type of the relationship between the partners? (e.g. joint venture, contractual relationship, joint project...)

The Age Friendly Towns initiative is run by Age Friendly Ireland. A National Implementation and Integration Group (NIIG) has responsibility for the governance and strategic direction of the AFCC Programme. The group is chaired by the Assistant Dublin City Manager and includes Assistant Secretaries from Department of An Taoiseach and Department of Environment, a Director of the Health Service Executive, An Garda Síochána Assistant Commissioner, the President of Dublin City University and three County Managers. The Age Friendly Towns programme provides bi-monthly progress reports to the NIIG.

Interaction model: How is the project a transformative partnership? How is the interaction transforming the partnering organizations and their employees/leadership in terms of creating a new vision, new management practices, new skills and new organizational structures? Please provide for concrete examples

This social partnership model endorsed by the Age Friendly Cities & Counties Programme comes at a time when delivery of plans and services on a fragmented, silo basis has proven inefficient and public budgets are increasingly tight. The multi-stakeholder approach has developed an evolving blueprint for how relevant state agencies, businesses and voluntary organisations can engage more effectively together ensuring that their combined resources are used optimally. The management structure of the programme consists of multi-stakeholder groups (NIIG, Alliances, Steering Committees) with decision-making powers. Successful inter-agency interaction has been demonstrated by Skerries Liaison Committee, who have taken responsibility for the Age Friendly Towns initiative run in 2013, enabling continued change at a local level.

How did you find out about this competition?

We received an invitation to apply from Fiona Koch, from Ashoka.