



**Age &
Opportunity**

Annual Report 2024



At **Age & Opportunity**,
our mission is to achieve the best
possible quality of life for us all as
we age. Our vision is an Ireland
where all older people can be more
active, more visible, more creative,
more connected, more confident,
more often.

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Chairperson's Statement



Age & Opportunity's Annual Report for 2024 highlights another year of progress aligned with our Strategic Plan 2021–2024.

Since our establishment in 1988, we have remained steadfast in our mission to challenge negative attitudes to ageing and champion the rights, value, and experiences of older people. In a rapidly evolving society, the need for an age-inclusive approach is more important than ever.

Our work is guided by national strategies including the National Positive Ageing Strategy, Healthy Ireland, the National Physical Activity Plan, and the Arts Council's policy frameworks. These provide critical direction as we continue to ask questions about ageing, redefining what it means and how we can all age well.

Through our programmes and workshops, we aim to empower older people to be the agents of their own lives. In our policy submissions and public discourse, we challenge ageism and promote more inclusive language and imagery. Alongside our partners in the Alliance of Age Sector NGOs, we have continued to advocate for meaningful government action, including the establishment of an Independent Commissioner for Ageing and Older People.

The Board remains fully committed to good governance, ensuring that our organisation is both effective and accountable.

2024 was a challenging year for Age & Opportunity from a financial point of view. However, necessary remedial action was taken, and we continue to uphold high standards of governance and compliance as reflected in positive outcomes from our key funders and regulators, to whom the Board is very grateful.

I would like to thank my colleagues on the Board, our Committees and Advisory Groups for their voluntary dedication and expertise.

To our CEO, our dedicated staff team, volunteers, and all who support our work—thank you. Together, we are contributing to creating a society where ageing is seen not as a challenge, but as a time of growth, creativity and contribution.

Josephine Feehily
Chairperson, Age & Opportunity

CEO's Statement



I am pleased to share an overview of Age & Opportunity's work in 2024—another impactful year of connection, inclusion and growth across our programmes and communities.

Older people in Ireland are a richly diverse population. There is no single path to ageing well, and this understanding continues to shape our approach. Across our Active, Arts, and Engage Programmes, we've developed tailored opportunities to empower older people to stay connected, curious and active—on their own terms.

Our initiatives have truly captured imaginations and fostered meaningful participation. Walking Football has proven to be a dynamic way to promote fitness, camaraderie and fun, particularly among older men. Changing Gears, our personal development initiative, continues to support people navigating transitions in later life, encouraging reflection and building resilience. And our flagship Bealtaine Festival, celebrating creativity as we age, once again brought together thousands of older artists and audiences across the country, showcasing the energy, talent and imagination that continues to thrive in later life.

We've also seen the continued value of our Person and Public Involvement (PPI) group, formed in 2021. These older individuals contribute vital lived experience that

strengthens our research and evaluation and helps us co-design initiatives that are relevant and inclusive.

Our work wouldn't be possible without the energy and commitment of our remarkable staff and volunteers. Thank you for your passion, creativity and resilience. To our funders—including the HSE, Sport Ireland and the Arts Council—your support enables us to reach those who need it most.

I also wish to thank the Board of Trustees, our Committees and Advisory Groups for their strategic leadership and steadfast guidance.

Finally, to all the older people across Ireland who engage with us: you inspire us to push boundaries, shift the narrative around ageing and build a society that values everyone, at every stage of life.

Karen Horgan
CEO, Age & Opportunity

Strategic Plan

2021 – 2024

Our Vision

An Ireland where all older people can be more active, more visible, more creative, more connected, more confident, more often

Our Mission

Our mission is to enable the best possible quality of life for us all as we age

Our Values

Our values are centred around ensuring that the views, opinions and experiences of Older People inform all that we do. We seek to promote Equality and Inclusivity. We aim to be Brave, Pioneering and Inspiring and we strive for Excellence in everything we do.

What We Do

Age & Opportunity is the national organisation that provides a range of opportunities for older people who want to get more involved in arts and culture, sport and physical activity, civic engagement and personal development.

One of our key priorities is to truly understand what ageing in Ireland means for people today by increasing the dialogue we have with them – conducting regular research through focus groups and workshops and by generating more opportunities for their feedback across all of our programmes.

We work with local communities and organisations across the country to run a range of programmes and activities in three key areas:

Our **Active Programme** is designed to get us more active and participating in recreational sport and physical activity.

Our **Arts Programme** provides opportunities for us to engage more in arts and cultural events and initiatives.

Our **Engage Programme** offers a range of workshops and learning initiatives for our own personal development as well as opportunities for us to play an active role in our community..

Our Strategic Themes

Our Strategic Plan 2021-2024 enhances our strong research orientation to ensure that when designing, developing, and delivering our programmes, we are meeting the needs of participants. The rich data that we have garnered informs programme design while also providing confidence to our funders. The pandemic required a shift to new methods of programme delivery and much has been learned through this process. Throughout 2023, a continued mix of online, telephone and in-person engagement allowed an extension of our reach to new communities and help ensure that fewer older people are left behind.

Throughout the lifetime of our Strategic Plan 2021-2024, the focus is on achieving ambitious goals in four areas to help society make the most of the social and economic opportunities presented by people living longer. We continue to measure and track progress on these aims to be sure that our programmes, and the funding which supports them, are making a real difference. In keeping with ambitions set out in the United Nations Decade of Healthy Ageing (2021-2030), by 2030 the aim is for more people in later life to be in good health, physically active, to have social connections and to continue to feel that our lives are meaningful and purposeful.

One

Enhancing the ageing experience

Strategic objectives

- Develop and deliver programmes which promote community development and enhance the ageing experience.
- Challenge ageism and negative stereotypes of ageing.
- Conduct and collaborate on research with programme participants and older people and apply findings gathered through consultation and programme delivery.

Two

Influencing public policy

Strategic objectives

- Strengthen engagement and communication with politicians and national level policymakers.
- Shape informed, compelling and targeted goals for relevant policy and decision makers.
- Create opportunities for older people to have their voices heard by relevant policy and decision makers.

Three

Working with partners

Strategic objectives

- Engage strategically with partners, programme participants and older people to advance our stated vision and mission in a sustainable and effective way.
- Ensure stronger collaboration across our three programme areas.

Four

Delivering value for our funders and programme participants

Strategic objectives

- Promote an innovative and learning working environment that motivates, challenges and develops the organisation.
- Facilitate the continued development of staff and optimise the effective deployment of available resources.

Our Year in Numbers

Programme	Number of initiatives	Number of events / sessions across initiatives	Number of engagements*
Active	15	161	58,395
Arts	264	1,144	28,987
Engage	32	110	476
Total	311	1,415	87,858

*Engagement refers to peoples’ encounters with or experiences of Age & Opportunity initiatives. There is a range of ways this can happen - for example, participating in a course or workshop over a number of weeks, attending an arts event, being funded by our Active National Grant Scheme or receiving resources from us. It does not include the significant reach of our digital media platforms.





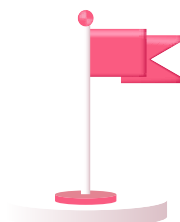
**Age &
Opportunity**

Impact in 2024



Our Vision

An Ireland where all older people can be more active, more visible, more creative, more connected, more confident, more often.



Our Mission

Our mission is to enable the best possible quality of life for us all as we age.



311 Initiatives

The number of initiatives we had throughout 2024

- 15 Active initiatives
- 264 Arts initiatives
- 32 Engage initiatives

87,858 Engagements

The number of engagements we had in 2024

*Engagement refers to peoples' encounters with or experiences of Age & Opportunity initiatives.



How Our Work Impacted People in 2024

97% of men who took part in Walking Football felt more connected to others.



93% of artists in Bealtaine Festival 2024 felt more positive about ageing.



85% of participants surveyed after our Changing Gears workshops felt confident about challenges and times of change.

We support several UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)



Age & Opportunity **active**

**What we want
to see for older
people**

**An Ireland where all older people are more active;
more visible; more creative; more connected; more
confident; more often.**

Age & Opportunity's Active Programme is the national sport and physical activity programme for older people funded by Sport Ireland and the HSE. The programme is designed to get us more active, providing opportunities for us to take part in recreational sport and physical activity.

Why We Run Our Active Programme

Physical inactivity is recognised as one of the leading risk factors for overweight, obesity, non-communicable diseases and chronic conditions. The national guidelines tell us that older people should be active for 150 minutes a week of moderate intensity activity with a focus on aerobic activity, muscle strengthening and balance. Science has proven that staying active keeps our body younger and our mind happier, no matter what it says on our birth cert.

Since 2001, our Active Programme has been getting more older people more active more often. We are funded by Sport Ireland as part of its commitment to increase participation in physical activity and recreational sport among older people. The objectives of our Active Programme are closely aligned with Sport Ireland's strategy, as well as the National Sports Policy 2018-2027, Healthy Ireland Strategic Action Plan 2021-2025, the National Physical Activity Plan and Healthy Ireland.

Physical Activity Leaders (PALs)

Physical Activity Leaders (PALs) is an education and peer leadership initiative that trains older people as physical activity leaders to lead recreational sport and physical activity initiatives with older people in their local groups and communities. In 2024, we delivered 37 PALs workshops across the country in counties Dublin, Louth, Cavan, Tipperary, Wexford and Cork and finished our Kerry PALs series. In total we gained 106 new PALs in 2024, bringing our total number of PALs to 548. Each PAL leads physical activity sessions their groups, reaching ten older people each on average on a weekly basis.

CarePALs

CarePALs are Physical Activity Leaders (PALs) who have been trained to lead physical activities specifically in day and residential care settings. Our CarePALs initiative, like the National Physical Activity Plan for Ireland and the National Positive Ageing Strategy, is focused on keeping older people as healthy as possible for as long as possible. CarePALs is a two-day course, adapted from the PALs workshops, which empowers staff in day and residential care settings to lead suitable physical activities with older people who live in or visit their settings. It is based on our original PALs leadership model and means that physical activity sessions can be delivered by staff and included as part of the daily or weekly routine, without cost to the care setting.

In 2024 we delivered 18 CarePALs workshops, thanks to continued support by HSE, training a total of 241 care staff. Since we began delivering CarePALs in 2016, we have trained 1,801 CarePALs around the country.

People with intellectual disability Physical Activity Leaders (PPALs)

People with intellectual disability Physical Activity Leaders (PPALs) enables people with intellectual disability to become physical activity leaders. This initiative was developed in conjunction with TCD in 2018. In 2024, a series of PPALs took place in Roscommon in October/November, working with the Brothers of Charity. 11 support workers along with 11 participants took part in the series of 7 workshops. By the end of 2024 we had 11 new PPALs trained and there have been 48 PPALs trained to date.

Active National Grant Scheme

Since 2001, our Active National Grant Scheme has been providing funding to groups and organisations to help them engage older participants and peers in more physical activities and sport, by purchasing equipment and/or encouraging further participation through programmes and activities. Local Sports Partnerships, HSE Coordinators and other local agencies work closely with the groups when they are applying for funding, giving assistance and advice to applicants.

In 2024, we rolled out our Active National Grant Scheme in February and had 1,413 applicants, of which 1,169 were successful. We had a marked rise in applications from various sports clubs who worked on many new initiatives and innovative ideas to attract their older club members, and those in the community, back to their sports. We issued €301,469 in total under the Scheme in 2024 and we estimate the reach of our Grant Scheme to be 38,000 older people across Ireland.

Go for Life Games

In 2024, the National Go for Life Games returned to DCU on the 8th of June. We had 216 participants supported by 14 individual LSPs resulting in 18 different teams. Additionally, we organised 7 introductory Go for Life Games workshops which reached 132 participants in Dublin, Kildare, Laois and Monaghan.

Walking Football Initiative

Our Walking Football initiative has grown from strength to strength since the pilot was held back in 2022. This has proven very successful in reaching older men in particular, to encourage them to become more active and involved in group activity and sport. We partnered again with the Football Social Responsibility Officers within the FAI and completed an agreed delivery of 6 Walking Football initiatives to League of Ireland clubs around the country. We also hosted 142 participants over 3 Blitz days in Cork and Kildare and a referee training day with 14 people attending. We were asked to deliver the initiative to men in Arbor Hill Prison which resulted in 15 men taking part. In total we introduced Walking Football to 92 new participants in 2024.

A Steering Committee was set up in 2024 with members from FAI, Age & Opportunity, Healthy Ireland and Men's Sheds with a goal of providing a one stop shop for Walking Football in Ireland. As part of this process a national survey and consultation process was carried out. 217 surveys were completed by those who had taken part in the initiative over the past 2 years as well as 4 focus group sessions. 7 organisations were consulted and provided valuable feedback and information about the sport in Ireland. The Committee also looked at governance structures for walking football in other jurisdictions like the UK, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

FitLine

FitLine is a nationwide telephone mentoring support initiative that encourages people who sign up, to increase and maintain more physical activity in their daily lives. Our participant age range is aged 50 and above, with no upper age-limit.

We raise awareness amongst our participants of the National Physical activity and sedentary guidelines (2024), and in the case of participants who are living with significant or multiple health conditions, to explore ways of being as physically active as much as their capabilities and health conditions allow. We deliver support through fortnightly telephone calls from a dedicated mentor and post out paper resources e.g. exercises that help to promote strength and balance suitable for older people. Many of our participants express loneliness and we also research local physical activity courses and groups, if of interest, and post this information out so that participants have opportunities to join in and feel more connected to their local community.

2024 was a busy year for FitLine. The age demographic of participants ranged from 50 (being the youngest person to sign up) up to 94 years of age. This year 27% of participants are male, which shows an increase in male participation from previous years (22%), and this aligns with our aim to increase engagement with social groups that are traditionally underrepresented. We continued to promote an awareness of FitLine through press releases, 9 live interviews on local radio stations, a library leaflet drop and also through liaising with professionals who have contact with older people through their work. Physiotherapists continue to be the biggest source of referrals to FitLine.

In 2024 we had 154 participants and 35 volunteer mentors who all carried out their role remotely. The number of phone calls made by FitLine Mentors to participants in 2024 was 1,602.

Online Activities

Our Active Programme online physical activity videos continue through our YouTube and social media channels.

Offline Resources

Our Active Programme continued to provide various resources directly for older people including our 'Active DVD' and our fact sheets teaching balance, strength and posture, and encouraging people to remain active. Our 'Steady Sevens' booklet is still popular and offers practical and simple movements which help with mobility and preventing falls.

All of these resources are sent to older people when requested through our own communication channels, and through our partners and local community support groups.

Working in partnership

In the National Sports Policy 2018-2027, the Government recognises that policy cannot be implemented in isolation and urges all agencies to work together to increase participation in sport and recreational sport to enhance the physical wellbeing for all.

Much of our work runs in partnership with the Local Sports Partnerships that are a central point within each county for sport and physical activity. All the initiatives within our Active Programme are enhanced and reach a wider audience because of the close relationships we have developed over the years with these organisations.

We continue to engage with other organisations in developing new ideas to help support older people to stay active and engaged. In 2024 we continued to work with FAI League of Ireland clubs and the Men's Sheds groups to expand our Walking Football initiative, and we also collaborated with Brothers of Charity in relation to our PPALs initiative.

We worked with Dun Laoghaire Sports Partnership and Fingal Sports Partnership on a 'Sofa to Saddle' initiative to encourage more older adults to return to or start cycling in their area with 16 participants taking part.

European Week of Sport (EWOS)

This event takes place each September and encourages everyone across Europe to become more active and involved in sport. Each year we place a strong emphasis on engaging with the National Governing Bodies for Sport and with local activity providers as part of the week's #BEACTIVE campaign.

Our contribution to EWOS 2024, which took place from the 23rd to the 30th of September, was 9 individual events which reached a total of 218 participants. We partnered with 7 different organisations including The Irish Men's Sheds Association, Fingal Active Travel, the FAI, Age Friendly Ireland, Olympic Handball Federation of Ireland and Cork Local Sports Partnership along with engaging with many other groups.

Additionally, we received Sport Ireland European Week of Sport funding to organise a Walking Football mini blitz event in Cork which hosted 35 participants.

Active Programme Our Year in Numbers 2024

Active Programme Statistics	Number of initiatives	Number of workshops in each initiative	Number of engagements as at 31/12/2024
Initiatives			
Active National Grant Scheme			
Total number of grant applications			1,413
Total number of successful applications			1,169
Estimated reach of grant scheme			38,380
Total	1	0	40,962
Resources			
Number of Active DVDs/USBs posted out		0	159
Number of Steady Sevens Sheets posted out		0	215
Number of fact sheets posted out		0	109
FitLine Flyers/posters			1,808
FitLine Flyers/posters library mail outs		0	5,926
Let's Dance Resource			61
Total Resources	1	0	8,278
FitLine			
FitLine Mentors trained in 2024			18
Previously trained mentors Active in 2024			17
Total number of Active FitLine Mentors year end	1		35
FitLine Participants			154
FitLine Engagements (phone calls)			1602
Total FitLine Engagements	1		1,756
European Week of Sport Activities	1	9	218
Walking Football		40	92
Walking Football Blitz		3	142
Walking Football Referee Training		1	14
Walking Football Evaluation			N/A
Number of Participant surveys			217
Number of Organisations Consulted		7	10
Focus Groups		4	30
Walking Football Stakeholder Group		2	7
Total Walking Football	1	57	512
PALs Workshops		36	106
PALs reconnect Workshops		1	26

Total PALs workshops	2	37	132
Total number of PALs			548
PALs reach (estimate each PAL reaching 10 members of their group)	1		5,480
Total Sofa to Saddle	1	16	142
CarePALs delivery			
CarePALs Workshops	1	18	241
PPALs workshops	1	7	11
Go For Life Games			
Games refresher/workshops		7	132
National Games Day			216
Total Go for Life Games	1	7	348
Counties represented on Games Day			12*
Staff and Volunteers			14*
<i>*Not included in total figures</i>			
Training of trainers and volunteers			
Active trainer training		1	9
FitLine mentor training		1	18
Total Training of trainers and volunteers	1	2	27
Total Talks and presentations	1	8	253
Total Active Programme	15	161	58,395



Showcasing PPALs

PPALs (People with Intellectual Disability Physical Activity Leaders) is an initiative that enables people with an intellectual disability to lead activities with their peers and become physical activity leaders.

The workshops offer so many different benefits to people with an intellectual disability such as the ability to lead activities with their peers along with them learning about the social and psychological benefits of them doing the physical activity. They gain confidence through doing the workshops and relying on themselves to do things. Support workers come along to the workshops to help guide the service users, but they are only there as a support - it is up to the service user to take the initiative and do the physical activity themselves so they can go back to the care setting and lead out the activity.

This initiative was developed in conjunction with TCD in 2018. We ran our first in person workshops since before Covid in Roscommon in conjunction with the Brothers of Charity in 2024 and we gained another 11 PPALs bringing our total to date to 48 PPALs.

Participant feedback:

"I feel full of energy and the games were fun I feel happy after doing the exercise."

"I feel confident, and I have the books to look at if I forget something."

"I really enjoyed PPALs, and I feel healthier and fit and its great."

"I liked taking part in the group activities and setting up the games and leading the training was great."



Showcasing

Walking Football

Walking Football is played on small pitches, using small goals, and typically features teams of five to seven players. Tackling is non-contact, the ball must remain below head height, and the pace is — as the name suggests — always a walk. It can be played outdoors or indoors, making it accessible year-round. Designed to be safe, inclusive, and most importantly fun, Walking Football offers major physical and mental health benefits, while helping participants reconnect with their love of sport and community.

The five-week initiative provides the perfect introduction for those new to the game. Since its pilot launch in 2022, the initiative has gone from strength to strength. Specifically designed to engage older men, this fun, non-contact sport has proven incredibly effective in promoting physical activity, social connection, and a renewed involvement in team sport.

In 2024, we proudly expanded the initiative in collaboration with the Football Association of Ireland's Football Social Responsibility Officers, delivering Walking Football sessions to six League of Ireland clubs across the country. We also hosted three Blitz days in Cork and Kildare, with a fantastic 142 participants taking part, as well as a referee training day which saw 14 attendees learning the rules and spirit of the game.

The initiative was embraced by Men's Sheds groups from Kildare and Cork, and even reached Arbor Hill Prison, where 15 men took part in a unique and rewarding delivery of the initiative. In total, 92 new participants were introduced to Walking Football through our efforts in 2024 alone.

To help guide the growth of the sport nationally, a Steering Committee was formed in 2024. This Committee includes members from the FAI, Age & Opportunity, Healthy Ireland, and Men's Sheds, all working towards creating a central hub for Walking Football in Ireland. A wide-reaching consultation process was carried out, with 217 surveys completed, four focus groups held, and seven organisations providing insights. The group also examined governance models from the UK, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland to shape the future direction of the sport here at home and better understand how to continue growing the sport in the years ahead.

Participant feedback:

"It was great for getting fit and for my general mental wellbeing. I really recommend it to anyone."

"The walking football made me feel more confident."

"It's the craic – the banter out there and disagreeing with the ref, you know, the usual! We love it."

"Keep it going. Good for relationships with other sheds. Keep it competitive but friendly [Following blitz]."



Age & Opportunity **arts**

**What we want
to see for older
people:**



**An Ireland where all older people are more active; more visible;
more creative; more connected; more confident, more often.**

Through our Arts Programme, we support the meaningful participation and representation of all older people in the arts in Ireland through celebrating the arts and creativity as we age. We also aim to underline the importance of the arts to positive ageing, showcasing the diversity of ageing and to influence policy and practice in the area.

The Programme comprises a range of developmental initiatives and events, the biggest of which is the annual, month-long Bealtaine Festival, which takes place in May throughout local communities all around Ireland. We also deliver a comprehensive resource and development programme designed to support the arts and ageing/creative ageing sector in Ireland.

As such, we work through resourcing artists, arts participants (and audiences) and arts organisations to engage with us and raise the standard, knowledge-base, and visibility of the arts and ageing sector in Ireland.

Bealtaine Festival

Established in 1995, Bealtaine Festival is the world's first national celebration of creativity in older age and alongside St. Patrick's Festival, is Ireland's largest co-operative festival. The festival takes place each May for the entire month. Through Bealtaine, we bring together older people and artists from all over Ireland and across generations to participate in arts and creative activities.

The festival has also been an inspiration for international festivals including Luminate in Scotland, Gwanwyn in Wales, The Age of Creativity in England and ARMAS in Finland.

In 2024, most of our initiatives were devised and run via a hybrid of in-person and online formats, with the majority of Bealtaine events delivered in person.

The festival comprised of 605 events (78 of which were in house and 527 were organised by partners as part of the national festival) arising from 239 initiatives and 16,565 total engagements. There were 157 registered Bealtaine organisers and another 21 unregistered events of which we are aware.

Why We Run Our Arts Programme

Ireland is committed to upholding the cultural rights of every citizen to access and express their own culture as enshrined in the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. As such, our Arts Programme primarily aims to provide more opportunities for older people to engage with the arts and to resource the arts sector to support that engagement.

We also wish to make sure older people are represented in the arts in Ireland and to demonstrate and celebrate how our creative potential can improve with age.

In addition, creativity is a key factor in how we adapt to ageing and there is a significant body of research demonstrating the health and wellbeing benefits for older people who engage with the arts and creative activities. The evidence suggests that the arts and creativity specifically strengthen self-confidence and morale in later life, contributes to physical and cognitive health and enriches relationships through greater social connectivity.

Bealtaine Festival aims:

- Nurturing the greater participation and representation of older people in the arts.
- Celebrating older artists and highlighting the creativity and potential of older people.
- Platforming the diversity of older age.
- Nurturing solidarity between generations.

Bealtaine Festival objectives:

- Creating an inclusive and welcoming Festival in a wide variety of settings and locations with a wide variety of events.
- Challenging expectations of a festival celebrating older age.
- Platforming and reflecting on key issues impacting on age through projects and discussions.
- Nurturing the participation of organisations and communities around Ireland.
- Supporting organisations to deliver their own events.

Bealtaine Festival

The festival programme in 2024 reflected the theme of Lust For Life, referencing Iggy Pop's classic song and showcased events across Literature and Ideas, Music, Theatre, Dance, Visual Arts, Circus, Comedy and Film. The festival also featured a mixture of popular events (the Dawn and Dusk Choruses, Standing on the Shoulder of Giants, National Arts in Nursing Homes Day, Bealtaine Tour) as well as new events (Prom Night, 4 O'Clock Rock, What A Drag, Teenage Kicks, Silver Screen Critics). There was a balance of direct participation (workshops and discussions) and audience experiences (Bealtaine Tour).

We reached audiences in almost every county in Ireland, and our bespoke online events also meant we were able to reach those who could not attend in person.

Development work

Our Arts programme has been supporting the development of older arts audiences and participants since Cultural Companions was established in 2011.

In the last five years, with the development of supports and training for artists, as well as supports for arts organisations working with older people, our Arts Programme has vastly expanded its work by developing new ways to support creative ageing and the arts and ageing sector in Ireland. Specifically, we have developed initiatives that resource older arts participants, audiences and artists, as well as arts organisations who work with older people.

We ran a total of 25 development initiatives in 2024, reaching 28,987 people.

There are three strands to this work:

- artist development activities.
- audience development activities.
- arts practice/organisational development activities.

Artist Development Activities

This strand aims to support the careers of older professional artists and offer them more opportunities to develop and show work.

Arts in Care: Introduction to Arts Health and Older People (AHOP)

This is an initiative that was originally developed in 2021 and 2022 between Age & Opportunity, Realta (formerly Waterford Healing Arts Trust) and Uileann, West Cork Arts Centre. AHOP, which is now a partnership between Age & Opportunity and Realta, aims to provide a broad introduction outlining the essential components for emerging arts practitioners who wish to work with older people and/or in a health context. In 2024 the event consisted of a one day in person programme of presentations, case studies, workshops and networking, with 17 artists and was held in Limerick City Gallery of Art.

Arts in Care: Artists Care Information Exchange (ACE)

The Artists Care Exchange is professional development initiative which was created because of artists requests for support in this area as well as recommendations contained in an evaluation report on our Artists in Residence in a Care Home initiative. In 2024 ACE provided the opportunity for 8 professional artists from a variety of disciplines who work in care settings and/or with older people to exchange information, advice, and experiences in a group setting while learning from and being mentored by a variety of professionals in the social, medical and arts fields.

Residencies

As part of our work to support older artists and artists working with older people, we partner with KCAT (Kilkenny Collective for Arts talent), Fingal County Council, Meath County Council, Louth County Council, and the Tyrone Guthrie Centre to deliver artist residencies, with resulting work often being presented at the annual Bealtaine Festival.

Visual Arts Professional Development KCAT Residency

The KCAT (Kilkenny Collective for Arts Talent) partnership offers us the chance to directly engage with a dedicated and open-access life-long learning initiative and a programme, Engagement at KCAT, which forges partnerships between artists with learning disabilities and professional artists of different backgrounds and skills. Engaging in arts initiatives that involve disadvantaged older people is a key objective for our Arts programme. The award recipient in 2024 was Anna Spearman.

Artists Professional Development Age & Opportunity, Fingal and Tyrone Guthrie Centre Residency

Developed in 2022, this residency offers two Fingal-based visual artists aged 50+ the opportunity to spend a month in the Tyrone Guthrie Centre exploring their work and practice. In 2024 the residency was awarded to writer Desmond Traynor and visual artist Susan Buttner.

Artists Professional Development Age & Opportunity, Local Authority (Meath and Louth) and Tyrone Guthrie Centre Residency

This residency was developed by Age & Opportunity in partnership with local authorities in 2022 to offer artists of any artform from Louth and Meath who are aged 50+ the opportunity to spend a week at the Tyrone Guthrie Centre exploring their work and practice. In 2024 it was awarded to screen writer Dara Higgins and opera singer Ronan Leahy.

Artists Awards

Emerging Artist award

This award aims to encourage and support older artists who are newly emerging and may benefit from mentoring or other opportunities to further develop their practice. The award recipient in 2024 was theatre maker Fiona Breen, writer Theresa Ryder and visual artist Annette Smyth.

Professional Development award

This award aims to offer support for an artist to undertake professional development opportunities. The award recipient in 2024 was theatre maker Declan Gorman and visual artist Sharon Murphy.

Creative Ageing Writing bursary

The bursary aims to afford time and space for an artist, arts worker writer to reflect on their practice as it relates to creative ageing – the learnings, insights but also challenges they have faced as they have got older or as they have worked with older people. In the coming years, we hope to contribute to this growing body of knowledge of creative ageing in Ireland as we continue to offer this award. The award recipient in 2024 was writer Sylvia Cullen.

Audience Development Activities

Cultural Companions

Cultural Companions brings people together who wish to go to arts events but have no one to go with. The Cultural Companions Regional network aims to bring organisers together to network, share experiences and plan collaboratively. There are currently six branches of Cultural Companions nationally, with a reach of 1,110 older people in 2024.

National Arts in Nursing Homes Day (NANHD)

NANHD was developed in partnership with Nursing Homes Ireland in 2021 to promote the active participation of care homes in a 'National Day of Arts' on the third Friday of the month of May (during our Bealtaine Festival). The event aims to create arts experiences for residents and visitors of day and care home settings, and to stimulate and encourage the homes to value and engage more with the arts. The National Arts in Nursing Homes Day 2024, delivered in partnership with Nursing Homes Ireland, attracted 20 nursing and care homes who devised events specifically for Bealtaine and approximately 1,000 residents and family members.

National Arts in Nursing Homes Day Information Webinar

Every year, in partnership with Nursing Homes Ireland, we run an information webinar on National Arts in Nursing Homes Day and the NANHD awards for the staff of nursing homes and care setting. In 2024 39 people attended.

Matchmaking for Artmaking

Age & Opportunity and Nursing Homes Ireland offer nursing homes, day services and other residential care settings the opportunity to meet, one on one, with a professional artist from their area. This meeting is intended to foster the beginnings of a possible collaboration, whereby the artist may offer residents a more immersive art making experience, or an unexpected art form to explore. In 2024, 33 artists and organisations attended.

NANHD Awards

We awarded three pots of funding (1 x €1,000 and 2 x €500) via the National Arts in Nursing Homes Day Award to St. Josephs Nursing Home, Shankill, Co. Dublin, Ashbury Nursing Home, Blackrock, Co. Dublin and Innis Ree, Athlone, Co. Westmeath.

Bealtaine Tour

This award aims to support interesting touring productions to become part of the Bealtaine Festival. In 2024 it was awarded to the theatre work 'Vixen', by Helen Casey.

Arts Event Listings

This year-round listings portal was launched in Autumn 2022 on Bealtaine.ie. It offers a searchable database of age friendly arts events that older people and their relatives, carers and social prescribers can see at a glance.

Organisation and Art Practice Development

The Gathering

The Gathering is an annual event which brings together our local and national partners for a day of networking, showcasing good practice, discussion and feedback on the festival. It provides us with an opportunity to hear about the challenges and needs of the organisers, showcases interesting and inspirational events from the previous Festival, and promotes the next Festival.

In 2024, The Gathering took place in Project Arts Centre, Dublin and focused on considerations of solidarity in our work.

Arts & Creative Charter for Older People

Arts Charter launch and Pilot Project

The establishment of the National Arts & Creative Charter for Older People at the end of 2022/beginning of 2023, concluded a three-year process of discussion and consultation with and amongst older people and the arts sector in Ireland. The consultation related to the expectations and needs of older people in relation to the arts.

The main aim of the Charter, which we believe is the first of its kind in the world, is to improve and extend the experiences of older people engaging with arts organisations in Ireland and to underline their value as active arts participants. We also want to support arts organisations so that they can deepen their relationship with older people. This enhanced engagement, we hope, will lead to increased confidence amongst older people when they visit and participate in the work of arts organisations.

Following the initial Charter pilot, an extension of the pilot ran in 2024 with 5 organisations.

Arts, Disability Equality and Older People Training and Tool Kit

The Arts, Disability Equality and Older People Training initiative intends to ensure arts access and supports for older people and people with disabilities and to support the Arts Charter initiative through developing a training framework for arts organisations. This initiative continued through 2024 and aims to develop online and in person training in the arts, disability and older people.

Bealtaine Coordinators in Libraries Network (BCLN)

This network was developed in 2024 to support Bealtaine organisers in libraries to exchange information and develop Bealtaine initiatives.

WISE Artists Network

This artists network was developed in 2024 to support artists working with older people to find a professional community, exchange information and avail of professional opportunities.

Resources

Alongside the newly launched Arts Events listing service, the Bealtaine Festival and Age & Opportunity website contain many resources to support artists, audiences, and organisations. These include the Toolkit for Arts & Creativity in Care Settings (for care setting workers); 'Feel the Fear and Do It Anyway: An Introduction to the Arts' video; commissioned publications such as 'I Love Museums But They Don't Love Me' (a source for arts organisers); and other resources for art making, organising events and working with older people.



Arts Programme Our Year in Numbers 2024

Arts Programme Statistics	Number of initiatives	Number of events / workshops in each initiative	Engagements (views /attendances)
Bealtaine May 2024			
Total Age & Opportunity Bealtaine curated events	57	78	5,397
Total events curated by national partners	182	527	11,168
TOTAL BEALTAINÉ 2024	239	605	16,565
Development initiatives			
NANHD information webinar	1	1	39
VAI Professional Development Event	1	1	30
AHOP	1	1	17
ACE	1	7	8
KCAT	1	1	10
Fingal Tyrone Guthrie Residency	1	1	2
Kilkenny Tyrone Guthrie Residency	1	1	1
Meath/Louth TG Residency	1	1	2
Emerging Artist Award	1	1	3
Professional Development Award	1	1	2
Creative AgeingWriting Bursary	1	1	1
The Gathering	1	1	47
Charter Pilot Organisations	1	4	5
Matchmaking 20th Nov	1	1	13
Matchmaking 21st Nov	1	1	20
BCLN	1	1	14
WISE Network Pilot	1	1	5
Cultural Companions	1	6	1,100
RESOURCES			
Toolkit	1		149
Creative AgeingWriting Bursary: Creative Journeys alongside the Red Brick			525
Arts Events Listings	1	502	10,293
Matchmaking Flyer	1	1	110

Arts Programme Statistics	Number of initiatives	Number of events / workshops in each initiative	Engagements (views /attendances)
Total development initiatives	21	535	12,396
Total including family and staff attendances			12,396
Focus Groups			
Bealtaine 2024 Focus Group	1	1	9
Mens Focus Group	1	1	7
Library Focus Group	1	1	5
Artists Focus Group	1	1	5
Total Focus Groups	3	3	26
Total Development Initiatives (Incl Focus Groups)	23	532	12,422
OVERALL TOTAL	264	1,144	28,987

Showcasing Teenage Kicks

Teenage Kicks was an exhibition and panel discussion centred on Garry O'Neill's archive, 'Where were you?'. The archive consists of thousands of images of Irish street style and subcultures sourced from the general public, photojournalists, amateur photographers, archives, and print, covering the 1960s to the 1990s. The images showed images of various (and mostly younger) people in diverse styles and poses, hanging out in Dublin during those periods.

Our aim behind showcasing Teenage Kicks was to make a connection between people who are now in their 50's to 70's and who might identify with or even feature in the images. The exhibition was held outdoors in the outdoor projection space of the National Photo Museum Ireland in Meeting House Square and preceded by a very engaged discussion on the style and music from the images with Garry himself, music and style legend Gavin Friday, head of the IFI film archive Kassandra O'Connell and music historian Michael Mary Murphy.



Testimonials

"The commission has been incredibly helpful in enabling me to continue my work and interest in this field, which will culminate with the release of two further books on the topic next year."

Garry O'Neill, Artist



Showcasing Bealtaine Festival Prom Night

Hosted in partnership with Street 66 and Outhouse at Street 66, Prom Night is inspired by US 'Senior Citizen Proms' and was a unique intergenerational event, offering an inclusive opportunity for older LGBTQIA+ individuals and those who missed out on prom experiences (as well as some younger people), to dress up and relive the magic of Prom.

The event was celebratory in tone and comprised a highly stylised venue (we dressed up Street 66 in balloons, with corsages of lavender, cupcakes and other props) with various performances, some entertaining prize-giving for best dressed, and a photography booth to capture individuals' style

on the night. Iconic drag artist Alan Amsby (AKA Mr Pussy), photographer Enda Burke, and DJ Ruth Kavanagh featured throughout. Couples also were invited to dress up in Outhouse as a fun prelude to the event.

Our aim behind the event was to provide an opportunity for older LGBTQIA+ people who had been denied this simple rite of passage in their younger lives (also showing the diversity of ageing) and could celebrate and fully express themselves at this event.



Testimonials

"I never thought I would ever see myself at (prom). It's a time to be outrageous and not give a damn, so I wore the skimpiest dress I could find, and I don't care... So many of us missed out on it, and of course, me for a different reason, I wouldn't go to it even if I was offered it because it would have been the wrong one for me, you know, so my journey brought me here today. That's amazing. That is amazing the way my journey... finally, all these years later, I'm at a prom with my community that I love."

Lynda Sheridan, Attendee

"This is my first time ever, at any debs, and it's just absolutely amazing. When I heard about it, I just wanted to go so badly. It hadn't even been properly announced yet. I just thought, 'Oh my God, is this actually going to happen?' And then, as soon as it came up, I bought the tickets."

Stephanie Aherne, Attendee

"Well, basically, tonight is a night out, right? I mean, it's been a bit of fun and a chance to see some friends. But really, I mean, if I think about it, prom and that tradition is a rite of passage. It's about learning how to date and learning how to have relationships, and as LGBTQ+ folk, we miss that. We miss out on that. It's not part of our tradition and no one schools us in how to have relationships. And our relationships are not celebrated or not acknowledged at that age which is a big loss. And so I think it's wonderfully affirming to have this and to experience it."

Maurice Cassidy, Attendee



Age & Opportunity engage

**What we want
to see for older
people**

**An Ireland where all older people can be more active;
more visible; more creative; more connected;
more confident; more often.**

We understand that education and learning are not just for the young and that opportunities for learning; self-discovery; connection with, and contribution to our communities, are key to our wellbeing throughout our lives which a wide body of research supports. Our Engage Programme is a response to this and offers a range of learning initiatives, comprising courses and workshops focused on personal development and civic engagement for older people.

Why we run our Engage Programme:

None of us are born with all the skills required to carry us through our lives successfully; we are all a work in progress throughout life and we all age within an environment and a culture which will help or hinder our lives as older people, at different points. We will determine if and how, we grow to embrace those opportunities or face those challenges, but we cannot do that within a vacuum. We run our Engage Programme because we believe we have something important to offer in terms of responding to that need and shaping our attitudes to, and how we, 'age'.

What supports we need and how we do that will differ for us all. It may involve:

- Becoming more 'age aware' – recognising ageism within ourselves and others and identifying ways to counter it. Realising older age can be a time of real growth and transformation, that we become more diverse, not less diverse as we age and that there are choices to be made in how we age.

- Learning how to cope with major life changes, building resilience and reframing transitions so that we can manage them better.
- Deciding we'd like support to age more confidently and learning we can do that by looking holistically at our spiritual, physical, psychological, social and emotional selves.
- Recognising that we've more time to become connected with and involved in our community and that we want to develop skills to help us do that and further our personal and collective agency.

The objectives of our Engage Programme are also directly aligned with the first goal of National Positive Ageing Strategy (2013). The range of courses and workshops also directly support objectives outlined in the Department of Rural and Community Development's Statement of Strategy (2023-2025). Our work in the areas of tackling ageism and promoting social inclusion also helps to meet commitments aimed at tackling loneliness and isolation in Ireland's Roadmap for Social Inclusion (2020), Healthy Ireland's Strategic Action Plan (2021-2025) and the Slaintecare Strategy and Action Plan (2021-2023).

In-person / online

In 2024, our Engage Programme initiatives were provided in-person, with the exception of an online delivery for the Oireachtas, 'Planning for a Healthy and Active Retirement', a Changing Gears course for FitLine Mentors and 3 sessions of Age Awareness Training for Arts organisations enrolled in the Arts Charter.

Changing Gears

HSE Funded Changing Gears

Changing Gears continues to be our most popular and successful initiative. It is typically delivered over 5 sessions and focuses on building resilience and managing significant life-change or transitions in mid to later life. This could involve a transition arising from a change in career, retirement, bereavement, dealing with ill health, or for some, simply having more time to focus on themselves and their own interests which presents a new opportunity. We also tailor the course to suit those with physical and/or intellectual disabilities and in those cases, usually keep the participant numbers smaller.

The HSE funds the provision of 11 Changing Gears nationwide annually and we offer access to these in two ways. Some courses are open to individuals to enrol in and typically take place at libraries/hotels, and some are delivered for groups upon request and often take place at community centres.

In 2024 we ran 7 courses, open to the public to enrol in and 4 courses for groups/ organisations.

Our 7 public courses were held at: Ashdown Park Hotel, Gorey in February; Ashling Hotel, Dublin in February/March; Hayes Hotel, Thurles in April/May; Tullamore Court Hotel, Tullamore in April/May; Great Southern Hotel, Killarney in May; Ballymun Civic Centre, Dublin in June/July and Carlow County Library, Carlow town in July/August.

We ran 4 courses in response to requests by different organisations/community groups. These were run for: Ballygall Women's Group, Finglas, Dublin in January/February; Strokestown Mental Health Day Centre, Strokestown, Roscommon in March/April, the Franciscan Missionaries of the Divine Motherhood Convent, Ballinasloe in May/June and Dublin Northwest Partnership at St Helena's Family Resource Centre, Finglas, Dublin in July/August.

For Strokestown Mental Health Day Centre we modified the course to suit participants with intellectual disability and those managing literacy challenges. In the Franciscan Convent (and care home), Ballinasloe, the course was delivered in person to retired sisters from the Franciscan community in the convent chapel, however some members with reduced mobility/ill health, attended remotely through an in-house webcam system (see our Showcase Item 2).

Courses were free to participants thanks to our HSE funding, and those offered directly to the public were promoted in a variety of ways. Some of these involved our website, social media, direct contact with local older persons groups and linking with the local Age Friendly Programme Manager and Active Retirement Groups. A total of 207 participants attended our 11 HSE funded courses nationwide.

Commissioned Changing Gears

A Changing Gears course was commissioned by Gheel Autism Services, who provide a range of services for autistic people in the greater Dublin and North Kildare region. The request came as Gheel are in the process of putting in place supports and education around ageing for their service users. The course was delivered for staff and some service users at their training centre in Ballymun, Dublin in September/October.

Dublin Northwest Partnership, who respond to social exclusion issues, by promoting self-development, wellbeing, training and education opportunities for individuals and community groups, also commissioned a Changing Gears course having received one through HSE funding earlier in the year. This took place at Axis, Ballymun, in November/December.

Creative Exchanges

Creative Exchanges is a training course designed to provide Activities Coordinators and those with an arts background, with the skills, ideas, competence and confidence needed to run meaningful creative activities, within care settings, as required by the HIQA Standards for Residential Care Settings for Older People. It was initially known as 'Arts in Care' and with support from the Community Foundation for Ireland, had originally been developed as a Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) accredited course (Level 6).

Over 2025 we delivered 5 new 2-day versions of Creative Exchanges. The first, which was a pilot of the 2-day format was held at IMMA (Irish Museum of Modern Art), Dublin in January and due to demand, we created a waiting list for a second Dublin course. We ran the second course in September at IMMA and a third in November. We had approximately 18-20 participants on each course.

We also received 2 commissions of Creative Exchanges in 2024. The first took place in Ballyshannon, Donegal in June and was commissioned for HSE staff, working within care settings in the Northwest.

The second commission came from the Creative Ireland, Cavan programme and involved delivery of the course for a group of artists and arts practitioners, involved in the 'The Art of Life' project in Cavan. The project focused on supporting conversations around planning for end of life, death and dying, using creative approaches. The course was held at Cavan library in September.

Azure

The aim of the Azure initiative is to improve access for people with dementia-related conditions to Ireland's galleries and museums and to enhance their experience of these cultural institutions.

Inspired by the 'Meet Me at MoMa' programme at MoMa (Museum of Modern Art), New York, Azure originated through collaboration between Age & Opportunity, The Alzheimer Society of Ireland, the Butler Gallery (Kilkenny) and IMMA (Irish Museum of Modern Art). Collectively, we partner to train museum and gallery staff with the skills needed to deliver Azure tours.

The tours give people living with dementia and their families/friends/carers the opportunity to visit museums and galleries together and to share an art- looking experience facilitated by trained and supportive, museum and gallery staff.

The Azure network (those organisations offering Azure tours) has now expanded to numerous arts venues nationwide.

During June/July Age & Opportunity managed the delivery of Azure foundation training for staff from a group of galleries/museums. This was held at IMMA and was attended by 15 participants from 9 organisations.

The benefit of this course was that it provided training for organisations who would not have enough staff available to warrant commissioning a training course for their organisation solely (in some cases due to their size). It allowed a range of organisations to have one or two staff members trained and to benefit from the interaction with participants from other arts organisations working toward the same goal.

Get Engaged

Get Engaged is a course aimed at developing the skills and knowledge, of people in mid to later life, who wish to play an active part in their communities, and challenging ageism, by highlighting the contributions older people make to society.

It invites participants to work together on collective activities or creative initiatives, which address specific needs and strengthen participation in their local community. It is designed for a group and is particularly suitable for those who have a community issue or project they would like to address. For those groups that do not, the course helps to identify one they may wish to pursue.

In February/March we delivered a Get Engaged course for Cope Galway, Senior Support Service to 13 participants at Discovery Church, Galway. This was a diverse group of participants with plenty of experience in community engagement issues.

Spirituality

Our Spirituality initiative, delivered over 4 to 6 sessions, invites participants to explore the meaning of spirituality from the perspective of their life experience. Using art, music, poetry, literature and story, it examines spirituality as the search for meaning; a way of living; a source of wonder; a sense of connection with something bigger than the self; and "something, for the sake of which, it is worthwhile to live on earth," (Nietzsche). It was first piloted in 2019 for Waterford Institute of Technology, now South East Technological University (SETU).

In 2024 we facilitated an in-person course for participants on the MA in Applied Spirituality, run by South East Technological University (SETU) and held at the Milltown Institute of Theology and Philosophy, Dublin. This took place over one week in September, for 15 participants.

Projects

Ageing: Debunking the Myths

In May we were awarded a grant from the HSE National Lottery Grants fund through CHO 6 (Wicklow and Dublin Southeast,) to pilot a course for older persons, examining ageism and challenging negative myths around it.

The course comprised 3 workshops which explored attitudes to ageing (positive and negative aspects), definitions of 'ageism' and experiences of it, negative 'myths' on ageing; positive ageing and making choices about

how we want to age and how age can be considered a gift, presenting opportunity. The project was a chance for Engage to pilot a course focusing on ageism and positive ageing in a more in-depth way than we've done to date. Prior to the project we've done this through our AgeWise workshops, designed for older persons groups and staff within organisations and also through elements of our Changing Gears, Ageing with Confidence and Get Engaged courses.

Collaboration with our Active Programme

Ageing With Confidence

Ageing With Confidence is about maintaining and building self-confidence, physical health and wellbeing in mid to later life and typically comprises 5 sessions of 2.5 hours. Research has shown that preparing for changes in later life can greatly improve our experience of ageing. The course works towards this, by offering participants the time and space to reflect on how they want to prepare for this stage of life.

During September/October we collaborated with our Active Programme to run 3 Ageing with Confidence sessions for PPALS participants and their Support Workers. This PPALS course was run for the Brothers of Charity and held at the Kilbride Community Centre, Roscommon.

Changing Gears

In September/October we also collaborated with our Active Programme to deliver a Changing Gears course online to a group of FitLine Mentors, as part of the nationwide expansion of the FitLine initiative, funded by Sport Ireland.

Collaboration with our Arts Programme

AgeWise

AgeWise is typically a 1.5/2 hour workshop which examines the drivers of ageism in society and their detrimental effect on attitudes to our own ageing and older people. It promotes a life-course model of ageing, exploring strategies to counter negative images and stereotypes in society, and discrimination on the grounds of age.

It is suitable for older persons' groups and community, parish or library groups who are interested in promoting and learning about positive ageing. It's also suitable for organisations interested in challenging ageism and/or those whose staff may come into contact with older people regularly. For organisations it can be delivered in person or online.

In August, we delivered an AgeWise contribution, at Marino Institute of Education, to the Artists Creative Exchange initiative. This initiative run by the Arts Programme, offers training opportunities for professional artists with an interest and background in the arts and older people, in a care context.

In December, we made an AgeWise contribution to Experience: An Introduction to Arts, Health and the Older Person, held at Limerick City Gallery of Art. This initiative aims to outline the essential elements involved in working with older people in an arts and health context and is a one-day seminar, run annually by our Arts Programme.

Age Awareness Training for the Arts Charter

We continued to work with our Arts Programme to facilitate Age Awareness training as part of the Arts and Creative Charter for Older Persons. Age Awareness training evolved from our AgeWise workshops and is adapted to suit arts organisations meeting the needs of older artists, arts participants and audiences in Ireland.

It involved provision of 3 online training sessions for 5 arts organisations. These were the Watergate Theatre, Kilkenny; the Civic Theatre, Dublin and RHA who participated in training together; Siamsa Tire Theatre and Arts Centre, Kerry and the Linenhall Arts Centre, Mayo who also participated in training together.

Collaboration with our Policy, Research and Evaluation Manager

In May we collaborated with our Policy, Research and Evaluation Manager to facilitate an AgeWise session for the Age & Opportunity PPI (Personal Public Involvement) group.



Engage Programme

Our Year in Numbers 2024

Initiatives	Number of initiatives	Number of workshops in each initiative	Number of engagements
Initiatives			
Ageing with Confidence	1	3	22
Ageing: Debunking the Myths	1	3	12
AgeWise	3	3	45
Age Awareness	3	3	22
Creative Exchanges	5	10	87
Changing Gears	14	68	207
Spirituality	1	4	15
Get Engaged	1	5	13
Azure	1	5	15
Talk 'How to Achieve a Healthy and Active Retirement'	1	1	15
PPI Group meetings	1	5	23
TOTAL Engage Programme	32	110	476



Showcasing **Creative Exchanges**

Creative Exchanges two-day Workshop,
Johnston Central Library, Cavan, September 2024

The Events Space of this multi-award-winning library was the setting for our Creative Exchanges workshop in September 2024. Its sustainable design, which maximises natural ventilation and sunlight, offered a lovely environment to work in.

The course was commissioned by the Creative Communities Engagement Officer in Cavan County Council, who brought together an experienced and very talented group of practitioners. Alongside artists and health care workers, it included a drama therapist, speech and language therapist, Reiki master, flamenco dancer, storyteller and therapeutic drummer.

Through Creative Exchanges, everyday objects can act as a catalyst for the imagination. Let the symbol speak, one might say, and the stories flow.

Philippa Donnellan's movement workshop was the focus in the afternoon on day one, weaving different exercises around a variety of songs and musical pieces - from 'Tom's Diner', 'The Sound of Silence' and 'My Baby Just Cares for Me' to Chopin ('Nocturne in B Flat'), The Carnival of the Animals and Swan Lake.



On day two, Valerie Whitworth led the Music and Singing Workshop. Adapting different melodies, she underlined the vital importance of reclaiming one's voice for creative expression and the value of singing in building confidence and cohesion within a group. Tom Meskeil followed with two Visual Arts workshops which invited participants to explore a range of different materials for art-making activities. His encouraging approach brought the best out of the group while broadening the horizon of creative possibilities.

Everyone came away with a sense that all who participated in this Creative Exchanges initiative felt at home, encouraged and absorbed.

Showcasing Changing Gears

Changing Gears, Franciscan Convent and Care Home, Ballinasloe, May/June 2024

This modern, purpose-built Convent and Care Home in Ballinasloe was the setting for Changing Gears in May and June 2024.

The five course sessions took place in the chapel (a first for Changing Gears), with a smart TV on the altar in front of the San Damiano Cross. This bright, curvilinear space, with carpet and comfortable seats, was lovely to work in. It was linked via webcam with rooms throughout the care home, so that participants who were restricted in terms of mobility could also take part. Around twenty-five attended each week in person.

It quickly became apparent that, for the sisters, the countries where they had lived and worked were 'places made holy by the heart's affections' (Patrick Kavanagh). This global connection continues to sustain and enrich the community. One sister, from Dawestown in Louth, spoke about looking forward to re-visiting Zimbabwe in Easter 2025.

Changing Gears with its focus on resilience in the face of life's transitions tapped into their experience and connection. It struck a chord with the sisters who encountered all kinds of challenges throughout the world, not least as a congregation who, in the words of one writer, 'confronted the condescending patriarchal control of the medical profession and hierarchy in mid-twentieth-century Ireland.' What was most valuable in the programme for them, as outlined in the evaluation, was the opportunity it offered to remember their shared sense of mission or purpose:

"Remembering our past as it is valued. Finding out and remembering who we were and who we are now. Remembering that no matter what we still have dreams and goals."



Corporate and Public Affairs

Policy, Research and Evaluation

What we want to measure, inform and influence for older people:

An Ireland where all older people can be more active, more visible, more creative, more connected, more confident, more often.

Our Policy, Research and Evaluation work underpins and supports our Arts, Active and Engage Programmes through:

- Configuring the development of robust evaluation models which allow us to measure and report on the impact of our programmes and the social return on investment that we are providing.
- Configuring the work of Age & Opportunity in research frameworks to highlight our effectiveness and our capacity to support public policy development.
- Increasing our sustainability and impact by making best use of the organisational experience, insight and evidence to influence how policy is created from international to local levels and how it is implemented in practice in older people's lives.

During 2024, we continued to gather and share evidence and expertise from our programmes with key external stakeholders,

including elected representatives, Government Departments, statutory bodies, Research Performing Organisations, funders, and other NGOs. This was done across a range of communication channels to further policy development and progression across our stated policy objectives. We also conducted robust evaluations of our programmes to continuously improve delivery and demonstrate outcomes and impact. With the support of our Policy, Research and Evaluation Advisory Group, the drafting of twelve Policy Position Papers was completed, significantly increasing our capacity to influence and support public policy development. A new section was established and populated on our website making all recent Age & Opportunity policy, research and evaluation publications accessible online.

During this year we used evidence from our research and Programme evaluation to advocate for increased awareness and government support for age friendly public spaces, digital equality, continued support for community groups, lifelong learning initiatives, meaningful activities in care and equal access to the arts. These topics were highlighted in our pre-budget submission and our significant contribution to the development of the Alliance publication Taking Stock as well as our engagements with other stakeholders. These included written submission to and formal participation in the Commission on Care reference group along with various presentations and communications related to our research and evaluations and informal networking at events.

Following the launch of our research project exploring older people's perceptions of ourselves as rights holders in 2023, we continued to be part of the consultative group contributing to the development of the For Equality in Ageing national awareness campaign. The campaign was led by the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission and released across various media channels in January 2024.

In February, along with our colleagues in the Alliance of Age Sector NGOs, we completed and launched the first edition of 'Taking Stock' in Dail Eireann. This snapshot report tracks and spotlights the progress (or lack of) made by Ireland in respect of its key pledges and policy commitments relevant to older people in Ireland. This work formed the basis of our pre-election asks which were communicated to political parties and candidates through several channels over the course of the 2024 campaign leading to the November general election.

We also led on the development of a Guide to Language and Imagery by the Alliance of Age Sector NGOs as an initial set of standards to be used, in the first instance, by Alliance members while designing and implementing our public communications strategy. It should also be useful for media and other opinion making actors using imagery, language and messages to represent ageing and older people.

We continued to gather robust evidence relating to our initiatives throughout the year. Formative evaluations of proposed initiatives continue to help develop new ideas across all of our programmes and ongoing process evaluations ensure that our delivery remains relevant, efficient and effective. During 2024 we updated the evaluation of our Active Programme's Walking Football Initiative and conducted a comprehensive stakeholder consultation. This informed the work of the Steering Committee established to examine

arrangements for the development of Walking Football in Ireland. We finalised and applied a framework to evaluate the impact of Artists' participation in the Bealtaine Festival. We also began an evaluation of the 3-session pilot course, Ageing: Debunking the Myths, delivered in Arklow by the Engage team.

We were awarded a grant by Sport Ireland in 2024 to evaluate our PALs initiative using the Social Return on Investment (SROI) model to measure its impact and establish a monitoring system for PALs. This work will continue into 2025, and we are partnering with Section 3 Solutions to deliver this report.

During 2024 we continued to raise organisational capacity in relation to ongoing evaluations and continued to benefit from the addition of a Post-Doctoral Researcher to our team (seconded to the HSE) with expertise in data analytics for the HSE, improving our approach and competency in this area as a result.

Our Personal and Public Involvement (PPI) Group continued to be involved in our research and evaluation activities and collaborative research projects with other organisations. During 2024 the group focused on development of PPI involvement in the UCC led Falls Management (FaME) research project. The group also contributed to the development of the upcoming Strategic Plan.

Throughout the year, we continued to demonstrate leadership and extend our influence, taking every opportunity to share our evidence and expertise through consultation and engagement with a wide range of stakeholders including government departments, academic institutions, NGOs, statutory bodies and older persons. The learnings from our Programmes, the invaluable expertise of our Policy, Research and Evaluation Advisory Group, and our sustained investment in staff development continue to enhance our capacity in the areas of policy, research and evaluation.

Communications

Communications activity is core to the operation and continued existence of our organisation. We refreshed our Strategic Plan in 2021 and set our strategic objectives to the end of 2024, when we will develop our new Strategic Plan.

Our organisational communication underpins all four key strategic themes in our Strategic Plan (2021-2024) by:

- Building understanding and awareness of our work, to engage and grow support for our initiatives.
- Creating opportunities for older people to have their voices heard by relevant policy and decision makers.
- Engaging strategically with partners, programme participants and older people to advance our stated vision and mission in a sustainable and effective way.
- Shaping informed, compelling and targeted goals for relevant policy and decision makers.
- Developing and delivering programmes which promote community development and enhance the ageing experience.
- Celebrating and profiling diverse stories of ageing.

All these activities are critical to our engagement with and reporting to funders, partners and all of our stakeholders, which in turn increases the sustainability and continued existence of the organisation.

Throughout 2024 we continued to build on our profile across print, broadcast and online media as the voice of positive ageing in

Ireland. We had 695 media pieces throughout 2024, which is 70% more than 2023, with an audience reach measured as Opportunity To See (OTS) of 97,334,100, which represents an 18% increase on 2023 figures.

There was huge interest in Bealtaine before the festival started and throughout the month of May. Throughout the year there was consistent local press coverage of Age & Opportunity Programmes.

We grew the followers on Age & Opportunity social channels (Facebook, Instagram and LinkedIn) by between 11% and 38%, and we grew the Bealtaine Festival social channels (Facebook and Instagram) by between 11% and 28%. The homepage continued to be the most popular page each month of 2024. In January, February, March, November and December, the Age & Opportunity Active National Grant Scheme was the second most popular on the website. Different initiatives took the second most popular page on the website throughout the year.

Improving our understanding of the needs and views of older people

The focus of our Strategic Plan 2021-2024 is on continuing to improve our understanding of the needs and views of older people and building our communication and feedback processes with them. Covid-19 was an unexpected occurrence that changed the lives of people worldwide, and which heavily influenced our work. We continue to use our learnings from the pandemic to make sure we consider and implement different methods to reach our wide and diverse audience.

Digital Communications

In 2024 we continued to develop our digital communications, raising issues concerning contemporary ageing and ensuring older people are visible and their voices heard in today's crowded media environment.

We communicate with our stakeholders across many channels, and our Age & Opportunity website is a growing area for those who want to find out more about us and access a programme that may benefit them or someone they know. As this technology changes, we continually review our site, the content, visited pages and seek to improve and build on the information provided and the most user friendly and accessible way to present it.

We continue to monitor and view analytics on the Age & Opportunity website in order to see what is working and what content is most popular with our users. Our statistics for the website from January to December 2024 are:

- Total number of users – 45,366 (27% more than 2023)
- Total number of page views – 122,015 (8% more than 2023)

The Bealtaine Festival website statistics:

- Total number of users – 34,870 (16% more than 2023)
- Total number of page views – 126,434 (9% more than 2023)

For our Arts programme we send a monthly e-zine to some 6,000 Mailchimp subscribers. It has a consistently high open rate, averaging 48% per e-zine.

A quarterly Age & Opportunity electronic newsletter was sent to a Mailchimp audience of 7,000 general subscribers. It yielded a 45.6% open rate.

The Alliance of Age Sector NGOs

Age & Opportunity is a member of the Alliance of Age Sector NGOs, which represents the collective thinking of seven significant NGOs working in the age sector in Ireland.

Separately, each of the Alliance member organisations provide vital programmes and services for older people; support older people to contribute to and participate in community life; and advocate for better policies, services and supports for older people at national and local level. Together, Alliance members collaborate to combat ageism and to seek action on the specific issues that make older people's lives more difficult than they need to be.

In 2024, the Alliance undertook several significant initiatives:

February 2024: 'Taking Stock' Report

The Alliance released "Taking Stock: Is Government Keeping Its Commitments to Older People?", a comprehensive review analysing 15 policy commitments related to ageing. The report highlighted that many commitments remained unfulfilled and called for the establishment of an Independent Commissioner for Ageing and Older People to oversee and advocate for the interests of Ireland's ageing population.

September 2024: Pre-Election Briefing

Ahead of the general election, the Alliance hosted a briefing in Dublin, urging political parties to include the establishment of an Independent Commissioner for Ageing and Older People in their manifestos. This initiative aimed to ensure that ageing-related policies receive dedicated attention and effective implementation.

December 2024: Updated “Taking Stock” Statement

The Alliance published an update titled “Taking Stock: Is Government Keeping Its Commitments to Older People? December 2024.” This document revisited the earlier analysis, noting limited progress on vital policy commitments and emphasizing the need for renewed governmental focus on ageing issues.

Throughout the year, Age & Opportunity led on the development of a Guide to Language and Imagery which will be published in 2025.

The Alliance members are Age & Opportunity, Active Retirement Ireland, ALONE, The Alzheimer Society of Ireland, Irish Hospice Foundation, The Irish Senior Citizens’ Parliament and Third Age.

Governance and Structure

Governance

Age & Opportunity is governed by a Constitution.

Our Board and CEO are committed to maintaining the highest standards of corporate governance. Our Trustees, all of whom are non-executive and independent, are drawn from diverse backgrounds and bring a broad range of experience and skills to the Board’s deliberations.

There are clear distinctions between the roles of the Board and the executive management team. The Board is responsible for providing leadership, setting overall strategy and monitoring budgets and outcomes of the organisation. The Board is also responsible for identifying the risks affecting the organisation and ensuring procedures are in place to reduce and manage the major risks identified.

The Board is committed to working effectively, behaving with integrity and being transparent and accountable. The Trustees bring to the Board their significant policy, strategy, financial, governance, business and decision-making skills gained in their respective fields together with a broad range of experience and views. In 2024 one new Trustee joined the Board, bringing the total number of Trustees to ten.

The day-to-day management is delegated to the CEO. The CEO leads the Senior Management Team in implementing our vision, mission and strategic plan, and prepares and presents policies, business plans and annual financial budgets and management accounts for consideration and approval to the Board. There is a Schedule of Matters Reserved for the Board for decision.

We held seven Board Meetings in 2024. We also held six meetings of our Finance, Governance, HR, Quality, Safety and Nominations Committee and four meetings of our Audit and Risk Committee.

We are fully compliant with the Charities Regulatory Authority’s Governance Code and the Governance Code for Sport as a Type C organisation, and our various funders’ governance and compliance requirements.

This was evidenced during 2024, as we continued with our three-year Internal Audit plan, with two reports being completed during the year.

A range of significant risks facing Age & Opportunity have been identified. These risks are detailed in our formal Risk Register and Risk Management Plan. We continued, at our Audit and Risk Committee meetings, Finance, Governance, HR, Quality, Safety and Nominations Committee meetings and Board meetings throughout 2024 to evaluate these risks and continue to ensure that all actions and initiatives undertaken manage these

challenges proactively, with risk mitigation actions being identified and implemented without delay, so that our mandate to our participants can be pursued and effectively delivered.

Board, Committees and Advisory Groups

Board

Our Trustees throughout 2024 were:

- Josephine Feehily (Chair)
- Aileen Healy
- Mary Kelly
- John Kerrane
- Michael Laffey
- Catherine Marshall
- Tony McCarthy
- Úna Redmond
- Peter Smyth
- Katelynne Pilcic (from December 2024)

Board Committees

Finance, Governance, HR, Quality, Safety and Nominations Committee

The primary responsibility of this Committee is to assist the Board in fulfilling its responsibilities for ensuring proper accounting and corporate governance procedures in the organisation. The Committee carries out its

responsibilities mainly through regular contact with the CEO, the Financial Controller and with other members of the Senior Management Team. The Committee may investigate any matter falling within its terms of reference, calling on whatever resources (including outside professional advice) and information necessary to do so.

Its members are:

- Mary Kelly (Chair)
- Aileen Healy
- Josephine Feehily

Audit and Risk Committee

The primary responsibility of this Committee is to assist the Board in fulfilling its responsibilities for ensuring proper accounting, financial reporting, proper internal controls and procedures in the organisation. The Committee carries out its responsibilities mainly through regular contact with the CEO and Financial Controller and the external auditors.

The Committee is responsible for recommending the appointment of auditors for approval by the Board.

Its members are:

- Katelynne Pilcic (Chair)
- Tony McCarthy
- Michael Laffey
- Conor Hctor (Independent member from September 2024)

Board meetings

Trustee:	11/1/2024	26/2/2024	22/4/2024	14/5/2024	10/6/2024	7/10/2024	2/12/2024	Attendance
Josephine Feehily	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	7/7
Aileen Healy	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	7/7
Mary Kelly	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	7/7
John Kerrane	✓	✓	✓	x	✓	✓	✓	6/7
Michael Laffey	✓	✓	✓	x	✓	✓	x	5/7
Catherine Marshall	x	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	6/7
Tony McCarthy	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	7/7
Peter Smyth	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	x	✓	6/7
Úna Redmond	x	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	6/7
Katelynne Pilcic (Board member from Dec 2024)	Attended as Chair of Audit & Risk Com- mittee	n/a	n/a	n/a	Attended as Chair of Audit & Risk Com- mittee	n/a	✓	3/3

Finance, Governance, HR, Quality, Safety and Nominations
Committee Meetings

Trustee:	12/2/2024	08/4/2024	20/5/2024	19/8/2024	23/9/2024	18/11/2024	Attendance
Mary Kelly (Chair)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	6/6
Josephine Feehily	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	6/6
Aileen Healy	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	6/6

Audit and Risk Committee Meetings

Members	12/2/2024	26/4/2024	16/9/2024	18/11/2024	Attendance
Katelynne Pilcic	✓	✓	✓	✓	4/4
Michael Laffey	✓	✓	✓	✓	4/4
Tony McCarthy	✓	✓	✓	✓	4/4
Conor Hctor	n/a	n/a	✓	✓	2/2

Organisational Advisory
Groups

We have four organisational Advisory Groups. They are comprised of a wide range of stakeholders with an interest in encouraging the active participation of older people in sport and physical activity, arts, civic engagement, and policy, research and evaluation. Their role is to provide expert advice on our strategic themes and objectives, guidance on innovative approaches to encouraging participation of older people in our programme areas. They also provide guidance on innovative approaches to encouraging participation of marginalised older people in our programme areas. In addition, they provide guidance and support in the further development of partnerships, guidance and advice regarding European funded projects, funding and sustainability generally and guidance on action-based research opportunities and health and wellbeing.

Active Programme Advisory Group

- Robert Grier (Chair to September 2024)
- John Kerrane, (Chair from October 2024) - Age & Opportunity Trustee, Former Lecturer in the School of Health and Human Performance, DCU
- Tony McCarthy, Age & Opportunity Trustee, PAL Representative
- Oisín Foley, Partnerships Manager, Sport Ireland
- Marian Mooney, Active Programme Physical Activity Leader (PAL), Bunbrosna/Multyfarnham/Ballinafid ARA

Arts Programme Advisory Group

- Catherine Marshall, (Chair) Age & Opportunity Trustee, Curator and Art Historian
- Damien McGlynn, Director, Create
- Helen O'Donoghue, Retired Senior Curator and Head of Education & Community Engagement & Learning Programmes, Irish Museum of Modern Art
- Brendan Teeling, Deputy City Librarian, Dublin City Council
- Mary Cloake, Director, Bluecoat Arts Centre, Liverpool
- Nigel Flegg, Acting Head of Performance & Learning, National Concert Hall
- Medb Lambert, Co-Artistic Director, Asylum Productions
- Liz Burns, Arts Officer, Wexford County Council
- Niall McMonagle, Writer/Teacher/Editor
- Francesca La Morgia, Director, Mother Tongues Festival

Engage Programme Advisory Group

- Úna Redmond, Chair, and Trustee of Age & Opportunity
- Colm Kilgannon, Board Member DDLETB.
- Janet Gaynor, Trainer and Facilitator, retired from the HSE & Chair of Donegal OPC

**Policy, Research and Evaluation
Advisory Group**

- Fionnuala Hanrahan, (Chair) and Retired County Librarian
- Dr Austin Warters, Manager of Older Persons Services, HSE CHO 9
- Dr Jane O’Kelly, Chair BSc in Education and Training, Assistant Professor School of Policy and Practice Institute of Education, DCU St. Patrick’s Campus
- Peter Smyth, Age & Opportunity Trustee and former Director of Research, Sport Ireland
- Professor Kieran Walsh, Professor of Ageing and Public Policy and Director of the Irish Centre for Social Gerontology, NUIG

Staff Members:

- Karen Horgan, CEO

Operations and Programme Support:

- Bryony May, Operations and Governance Manager (Deputy CEO) (to October 2024)
- Melissa Byrne, Communications Manager
- Anne Carroll, Communications Assistant
- Mary Harkin, Policy, Research and Evaluation Manager
- Lasarine O’Carroll, Financial Controller
- Dariusz Hanusewicz, Salesforce Coordinator
- Audrey Farrell, HR Executive (from August 2024)
- Ann Kehelly, HR Manager (to May 2024)

- Aurelia Ciblis, Postdoctoral Researcher, seconded to the HSE

Arts Programme team

- Dr Tara Byrne, Arts Programme Manager
- Bridget Deevy, Arts Programme Assistant Manager
- Jessica Burton Restrict, Arts Programme Administrator

Active Programme team

- Sue Guildea, Active Programme Manager
- Nicole Evans, Active Programme Assistant Manager
- Philip Duffy, Active Programme Administrator
- Meg Hegarty, Active Programme FitLine Coordinator
- Cathy Ginty, Active Programme FitLine Administrator
- Máire Murphy, Active Programme, PALs Coordinator

Engage Programme Team

- Orla Byrne, Engage Programme Manager
- Ciarán McKinney, Engage Programme Senior Facilitator and Funding Lead
- Brian Dooney, Engage Programme Training and Development Facilitator
- Fiona Holohan, Engage Programme Coordinator



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