

LEADER helps design and deliver services supporting older people in rural Ireland

A community-led initiative develops a strategic plan to improve the services and support it offers to older people.

EAFRD-funded projects

Location: Truagh, Ireland

Programming period: 2014-2020

Priority: P6. Social inclusion and local development

Focus Area: 6B. Local development

Measures: M19. LEADER CLLD

Funding: Total budget 32 656 (EUR)

EAFRD 18 457 (EUR)

National/Regional 10 933 (EUR)

Private/own 3 266 (EUR)

Timeframe: 20/11/2018 - 22/05/2019

Project promoter: Truagh Development Association CLG T/A Truagh Spirit

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Summary

In 2018, Truagh Spirit, a community-led not-for-profit organisation located in Co. Monaghan, Ireland, identified issues affecting older people in the border areas of Monaghan and Tyrone as a priority for the organisation. In response to this, it sought LEADER funding to develop a study and related strategic plan – in collaboration with the local community – which helped to provide a roadmap for development in the area.

The design and delivery of services and support for older people, rural enterprises and resilient communities post-Brexit were crucial areas for improvement identified in the study and included in the plan. Between 2019 and March 2020, the services and support offered to older people by Truagh Spirit (outlined in the LEADER funded strategic plan) included in-house weekly social activities and the provision of meals. In March 2020, Truagh Spirit pivoted and outreached its services as a consequence of the pandemic, delivering meals on wheels and care packages to older people.

Project results

- The older people in the area became happier, more empowered and more digitally literate.
- Since January 2024, over 600 older people between the ages of 60 and 95 have attended the Wise and Well Social Club. That includes older people with additional needs who attend with their carers.
- Over 60 school students have attended intergenerational cultural activities focusing on gender equality and societal changes in attitudes towards women through intergenerational dialogue.

Key lessons and recommendations

- This project showed that facilitating connections between older people can help them create friendships and that their well-being can be improved by bonding over shared experiences.
- Information sessions with expert speakers, help older people to feel more empowered and confident when dealing with statutory agencies.



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Context

Ireland's Truagh Spirit organisation has an over 30-year track record in project delivery and management for a wide range of community groups. Since 2008, its rural social enterprise has focused on services for older people, lifelong learning, capacity building and cross border cross-community ties.

The organisation felt that developing a strategic plan would be an essential tool for addressing the ongoing consequences of decades of deprivation caused by the political situation in the border areas of Ireland and the UK. The target area of this project (specifically Monaghan and Tyrone) has suffered severe economic disadvantage, rural deprivation and a lack of opportunity. Those now in their 60s and older suffered most as a result of conflicts, and the needs of this demographic have always been a priority for the organisation. In addition, the north Monaghan area has a higher-than-average share of older people compared to other parts of the county.

The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the issues affecting older people in the area, increasing levels of rural isolation and social exclusion. The Wise and Well Social Club, a key output of the strategic plan, addresses the needs of older people who no longer socialise how they used to. Activities organised by the club include digital training, social outings, trips to the theatre, empowerment through information sessions, facilitating ease of access to statutory agencies and cross-border visits.

Objectives

The aims of this project included:

- Providing a framework to improve the lives of older people living in these rural areas.
- Changing how older people are regarded and talked about (i.e. not to pity older people but to treat them as anyone else wants to be treated: with dignity, respect, as individuals, not a homogenous group and with a sense of fun and adventure).
- Increasing the number and variety of activities aimed at older people.
- Increasing the number of older people coming out of their homes to socialise, learn and interact.

Activities

Truagh Spirit received LEADER funding to commission the Errigal Truagh Study and Strategic Plan, 2019-2022. A cornerstone of the plan is the delivery of services and support for older people in the area. The Wise and Well Social Club emerged as a result of activities laid out in the strategic plan.

Between January and July 2024, activities targeted at older people have included organising:

- monthly digital training/coffee mornings;
- monthly information sessions with key organisations such as the Garda Síochána (Police) Crime prevention team, local pharmacists, the Citizens Information Centre and Monaghan Sports Partnership;
- outings to sites of historic interest;
- a day trip to the Dáil (Ireland's national parliament) with people from the cross-border community;
- visits to a new high-tech factory; and
- outings to the theatre with school students.

Main results

- Older people are happier, more empowered, and more 'digital aware'; their families and friends see this. Older people come together in a safe space and are open to new experiences, fostering respect and underlining the importance of safe shared spaces in communities.
- Since January 2024, 12 Wise and Well events have fostered social inclusion, cohesion and resilience in a rural border area.
- Since January 2024, over 600 older people between 60 and 95 have attended the Wise and Well Social Club. That includes older people with additional needs who always attend with their carers, fostering inclusion and positivity.

- Over 60 school students have attended intergenerational cultural activities focusing on gender equality and the societal changes in attitudes towards women through intergenerational dialogue.
- In November 2020, the Truagh Spirit management team won the National Volunteer Manager Award for the pivot the organisation achieved to spread support and services to older people during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- In May 2024, the Wise and Well Social Club won the national Digital Town Award 2024 in the Rising Star category for raising awareness at national level around respect and dignity for older people. Validating the work and innovative nature of the club.
- A daily bus service was launched in the area in 2023. Older people remain unsure about using the service, so the staff team met with older people at the bus stops so they could get on together and disembark at the destination and attend an event supporting the use of new rural transport links to foster independence.

Key lessons and recommendations

The implementation of this initiative has shown that:

- Facilitated connections between older people can develop into friendships.
- Bonding over shared experiences has a positive impact on well-being.
- Through information sessions with expert speakers, older people feel more empowered and confident when dealing with statutory agencies.
- Bringing speakers from statutory agencies together has helped to break down barriers between people.



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Quote

"I never thought I would visit the Dáil in my life. It was brilliant and we were treated so well. It was exciting to see the politicians in the chamber; I only ever seen them on television before. We had great fun chatting over lunch, and it was nice to meet people I had never met before".

Participant in the day trip
to Ireland's national parliament in Dublin

Additional information:

Project website:

www.truaghspirit.ie

Project on Facebook:

Facebook.com/truaghspirit