



The Older Women's Network (OWN) Ireland *Bantracht na Sinsear*

Report of the October Meetings, Galway, 2010

What does OWN offer its members?

- Connects you with other older women
- Provides you with information
- Organises events to provide opportunities to express your views, to promote lifelong learning and to influence policy
- Invites you to workshops and seminars to discuss issues of interest
- Helps to make your voice heard by the decision makers

An OWN Meeting was held at Maam Cross on the 4th October 2010 and also at Ballybrit on the 5th of October 2010.

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Overview of the OWN October Meetings

Why hold OWN meetings in Galway?

Following the OWN Introductory Meetings that took place in Galway in May, it was decided that a second round of meetings would take place in the autumn.

This decision was based on the resounding request from those who had attended the introductory meetings to meet existing OWN members. Taking this request on board, OWN invited three of its members to travel to Galway to meet, and share their experiences with both prospective OWN members as well as those who have joined OWN.

There was interest from those representing local organisations to find out more about what plans OWN had for its future in Galway. Responding to this, the OWN Development Officer attended the October meetings to explain future plans.

How did the meetings go?

The variety of opinions and voices captured at the meetings strengthen OWN's mandate to speak on the behalf of older women in Galway City & County bringing their words and voices to the eyes and ears of decision makers.

There was diverse representation from a number of local women's groups based in both the City and Connemara.

The greatest success was in this diversity of older women who attended the meetings. The meetings included:

Women who are deaf; women from both urban and rural areas; women who are retired and women who are not retired; women who are members of a local group as well as women who are not; women who feel socially isolated; women who are separated; women who are widowed and women who are carers; women who are public service providers as well as women who access public services; women who work in the community as well as women who are volunteers.



Pat O' Flynn, OWN Chairperson speaking at the OWN meeting in Ballybrit.

Summary of Opening Speech by Pat O' Flynn

"Some women would have never stood up and said a word but now they can be a leader and get a group motivated."

Ten years ago, Pat saw an advertisement in the newspaper for an OWN conference in Maynooth. When she rang to book her place, it was booked out but that didn't stop Pat from joining OWN. Ten years on, Pat is finishing up her last year as chairperson of OWN.

Pat finds health information days 'specific to you' particularly useful as the speakers are all experts in the related field.

Pat recently completed a report on OWN as part of her studies at the UCD Equality Studies Centre. Through this study, Pat has found that OWN can support its members to build personal capacity. OWN has supported Pat in her work as chair of her local ladies club.

"OWN is concerned with older women's issues. OWN is an organisation for older women run by older women. "

Pat finished by highlighting OWN's involvement with lobbying.

"You might not see immediate effects but a connection into the powers that be can help. Any views you state as an OWN member, is acted upon and carried through to decision makers through these connections."

Report of the OWN October Meetings

Galway 2010

**“There’s something in
OWN for everyone.
You’re never alone
when you join OWN.”**



OWN Members (l-r) Ruth Stenson
Monica Murphy and
Theresa Byrne

**“OWN can help
with the steps and
provide the support
to dissolve
self consciousness”**

**“Able to voice my
opinion in the
group and most
importantly heard”**

Experiences of being an OWN Member

Three OWN members, Theresa Byrne, Monica Murphy and Ruth Stenson were invited to Galway to share their experiences of why they joined OWN and what being an OWN member has brought to their lives. The following are selected excerpts from their speeches.

Theresa Byrne, OWN Member

“[OWN] informs us, it’s educational, it provides opportunities; it brings out passion and provides insight into a range of topics. It gives us a voice; and, the organisation has great connections! OWN provides intellectual stimulation and it is free!”

“We are followers of something or another, and I am a follower of the OWN organisation. The impressions that OWN brings is priceless.”

Monica Murphy, OWN Member

When Monica joined she wasn’t able to do courses or avail of training but always enjoyed meetings and talking to other women. Monica has met people with different problems. She looked after her mother on a full time caring basis at the time of joining OWN and through OWN members, she found out what she, as a full time carer, and her mother were entitled to.

Ruth Stenson, OWN Member

Ruth joined OWN five years ago. Since then, she has met many like minded people that she wouldn’t have met if she didn’t join OWN.

Through the OWN Equality for Women Course, Ruth wrote a cookery book, ‘Cooking for One’ and also learnt about digital photography.

Ruth due to her experience from OWN could stand up and speak at a lifelong learning event in Trinity College.

Summary of the Working Groups discussions

Working Groups were set up to hear the opinions of those attended the meetings.

There were four topics for discussion:

- What is really meant by ‘Healthy Ageing’?
- How we would like to be treated as we age?
- Adapting to changing roles within the Family
- Transport: Getting out & about?

The working group discussions were energetic, insightful and thought provoking.

Some of the discussion groups decided to concentrate on one particular topic while other discussion groups decided to discuss all four topics.

The topic of ‘how would we like to be treated as we age’ was the topic of most discussion overall. An unsuitable transport structure and the subsequent implications of this was highlighted the most by those attending the Maam meeting.



Members of Ballybane
Active Retirement (BARA)
and Maam Women’s Group
discussing ‘How would we
like to be treated as we
age?’



The involvement of younger women in local club activity came up quite strongly at the Maam meeting with many of the women trying to understand why younger women are not as involved with local community.

“There is a modern myth about working women. However, some older women also had to give up their jobs when they got married at the time of the marriage ban so joining a club was a way to get out and get active. I suppose watching TV has become the younger woman’s club”

What is really meant by 'Healthy Ageing?'

Living in your own home was essential to healthy ageing for many of the women.

Healthy Ageing is doing for ourselves

"Healthy Ageing is the ability to be able to care for ourselves, to do our own shopping, to get out and about."

Healthy Ageing is about 'prevention rather than cure'

"Need access to information especially the HSE services for older people. Push button telephone services are not ideal."

Healthy Ageing is about exercise and a healthy diet

The value of physical activity and eating healthily was put forward strongly by the Deaf Women's Group.

Healthy Ageing is about exploring interests and keeping in touch

"We also have to have our own interests; things that we didn't have time for when we were younger. But, do we have to wait until we're older to follow our interest?"

Healthy Ageing is "Galway as a 'Healthy City'"

'Galway was designated as a 'healthy city' by the World Health Organisation (WHO) in 2008.'



Members of Galway Deaf Women's Group at the Ballybrit Meeting

These are summaries of the working group discussions.

"Holistic approach is so important; communication and social contact. Keeping up to date and in touch with everything; for example, through the computer."

How would we like to be treated as we age?

"We would like to be treated with respect. We would like to be noticed. We would like to be loved."

Much of the responses to 'how would we like to be treated as we age?' had **respectful and positive attitudes** at their hearts. Positive attitudes are central to being treated with due respect by services, by ourselves, and by others.

There was a mixed attitude towards disclosing age. Some women felt that you should not be obliged to provide your age or date of birth for records. Others had no issue with disclosing their age. **Being treated with respect by family, by younger people, by the public, and by the government** came up several times over the two meetings.

Comfort in knowing that facilities are and will be available that accommodates adapting to temporary or long term changes was specified by many of the women. 'Facilities' had a range of meanings. 'Facilities' mean healthcare facilities such as care centres; information centres or 'one stop shops'; packaging that can be managed; and extra consideration in supermarket layout. **To have protection against discrimination and crime.**

To be treated with respect for your independence. Independence is vital. It is firmly believed that independence is kept safe through an adequate income, through transport and through a positive attitude!

"I would like to be treated with respect and acknowledged for the experience I have in life. Sometimes, your children will say 'You don't know what you're talking about'."

Adapting to changing family roles

Insights exchanged between the older women on this topic brought **both positive experiences of increased involvement as well as grim experiences** of changing roles within the family. Pressure to support family members financially was also felt.

Where there is no understanding and severe disrespect prevails, the situation is of a more abusive nature and of concern.

"Over a long time, the severity of changes can bring on lots of disagreements over many things but sometimes it's o.k.! Some families can be understanding."

Some of the women have enjoyed or are looking forward to a change in their role within their family due to increased involvement with grandchildren and increased free time.



"Some older women live with their families semi-independently in a 'granny flat' – this is ideal!"

Transport: Getting Out & About?

Transport was a major issue at both meetings; specifically, an **urgent and desperate need for an affordable and suitable bus service** that meets the requirements of rural communities, especially in Connemara.

Without this service, the risk of isolation is increased, excessive costs are incurred and there is restricted access to meet necessary appointments.

Transport is seen as being more than the means to move – it is seen as an access point towards keeping up a healthy, active, socially involved life.

“It is socially important to meet people. If you have no transport you become isolated.”

A **public transport service that consults with, listens to, understands and delivers to the needs of the community** is a major wish for rural communities so that they can access essential services stress free.

“Bus timetables are not suited to people’s needs”

The **lack of a local emergency service** is of great worry to the communities in Connemara.



Members of Clúid St. Josephs, Clifden and Anne Coyne, Clifden with Monica Murphy

“You can’t plan ahead or rely on local transport. When trying to book a bed for treatment in the hospital, you have to ring up in the morning to check, you can’t call the week or night before. You could be calling for a week. You have to try and organise your family around you all the time. We feel overlooked. I have to fight my own way all the time.”



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Plans for the Future: OWN in Galway

For the closing speech, **Christine O’Kelly, OWN Development Officer** explored future plans for the Older Women’s Network in Galway at both of the meetings.

“Part of OWN’s mission is to encourage older women and to follow the demand from their members. OWN works closely with other organisations by linking in together. OWN tries to publicise other events.”

Consultation with the membership is an integral part of OWN’s work. OWN actively seek the opinions and recommendations of its members to inform policy making. Christine also assured OWN’s Galway members that their voices will be heard

“One of the aims of this meeting is to coordinate all these things [topics being raised at the working groups] into policy documents so as to bring the issues of the OWN membership to the decision makers”.

One of the core OWN objectives is to **equip its members with the confidence** and know how to follow their interests through networking.

OWN can provide or point to available resources so that members can build their lobbying capacity.

Christine encouraged those attending the meetings who were prospective members of OWN to become members. Without membership, OWN do not have the mandate to put forth and represent the voices of older women in Ireland.

“OWN acts as a jumping off point for its members to courses, organisations, and opportunities through the provision of information.”



How to become a member of OWN?

To become a member of the Older Women’s Network, please contact OWN for an application form. Contact details for OWN are:
Tel: 01 884 4536 or e-mail: ownireland@eircom.net

To join OWN as an individual, the fee per annum is €15
To join OWN as an organisation, the fee per annum is €30



A detailed report of the OWN October meetings is available from OWN. Please contact them if you are interested to read more.

Report Compiled by:

Funded By:



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