

Exploring Older People's Issues in County Cavan

A Research Report from the 050 Network

May 2008

Foreword

The inaugural meeting of the Cavan O50 Network took place on June 27th 2005. This meeting identified the principal objectives of the network as:

- To support the development of strong groups at local level by providing a forum for the exchange of ideas and providing mutual support.
- To use lobbying and advocacy to address issues affecting older people.
- To raise awareness and challenge thinking around ageism.
- To access information about supports for older people.
- To devise strategies that would influence policy at local, regional and national level.

This report is the culmination of a period of consultation with older people's groups and individuals throughout the county and will provide the basis for future strategies to be employed by the network. This task was carried out, for the most part, by older people whose enthusiasm for the task was inspirational.

Many individuals and organisations (whom I shall not name for fear of omitting someone) contributed to this report. To all a very heartfelt thank you.

Bob Gilbert
Chairperson
O50 Network

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Executive Summary

This report represents the culmination of a research journey which began with the desire to carry out comprehensive, bottom-up research into issues affecting older people in County Cavan. Members of the Cavan 050 Network have been the initiators, the designers and the researchers on this project. This innovative approach has resulted in a project where both the end result – this report – and the process through which it was produced, are of significant and lasting value. In all, 219 individuals over the age of 60, 7 older persons' groups, and 8 agencies and organisations who provide services to older people took part in this study.

Overall, this study found that there are positive aspects to life for many older people in Cavan. Many participants spoke of the enjoyment of good company, of the pleasures of spending time with family and grandchildren, of the great opportunities to cultivate new interests or to travel or spend time on hobbies, and of an overall contentment with life.

However, the research process also uncovered a range of challenges and issues which impinge on the well-being, security and happiness of many older people in County Cavan. These include the following issues:

- ? Transport – or more accurately, the lack of transport options – emerged as perhaps the single most critical issue for participants in this study.
- ? Although there was a healthy level of both organised and more informal social activity amongst many of the participants, this study also revealed a significant 'participation problem' and feelings of loneliness and isolation amongst a significant minority.
- ? Home support and Home Help – be it formal or informal – emerged as having a key role to play in reducing feelings of loneliness, providing important care and personal attention and keeping people in their own homes and communities for as long as possible.

- ? Concerns about personal health and wider concerns about the deficiencies within the current healthcare system were expressed across all of the data sources.
- ? Security and safety were of significant concern to those who took part in this research and for a small number of participants – and particularly those who had been the victims of crime – security and safety concerns were in fact of paramount importance.
- ? Although only a small minority of participants considered financial issues to be relevant to their personal situation, this was belied somewhat by the frequency with which concerns over cost arose in discussions about other issues at focus groups and individual interviews.
- ? Finally, a significant minority of participants spoke of their problem with a lack of information and with the level of coordination amongst service providers.

A number of recommendations for change or action emerged from the research. These can be grouped under seven headings which reflect the key challenges and issues outlined above:

Transport:

- ➔ Put in place ‘transport proofing’ of both existing and new initiatives and services for older people which addresses the obvious question of whether they will actually be able to get to them or not.
- ➔ Ensure that Rural Transport Initiatives remain flexible and responsive to the (sometimes changing) needs of their customers and extend services across areas of Cavan which are currently underserved by public transport.
- ➔ Request Bus Éireann to show greater flexibility and imagination on the routes they operate, particularly in relation to stops, feeder services, etc.
- ➔ Request Cavan County Council to plan and build more bus stops, suited to the needs of older people, which could be used by public, private and community operators.

- ➔ Subsidise and/or pay the fares for those who need to get taxis or hackneys to go to doctor or hospital appointments.

Social Interaction and Social Activities

- ➔ Provide more activities, classes and outings which meet the social needs of older people and ensure that transport and cost do not act as barriers to participation in activities.
- ➔ Address the 'participation problem' by organising a certain amount of activities geared towards men's interests (e.g. sport, agriculture, gardening, etc.). Ensure that people are asked to take part by existing members and made to feel comfortable and welcome once they join, by organising lifts where necessary, etc.
- ➔ Acknowledge that organised activities and groups are just one aspect of social interaction – by far the greater part of it lies in the ordinary, everyday social bonds and encounters. Thus reducing feelings of isolation and loneliness and building social interaction is something which we can all do as neighbours, family and friends.

Home Help and Home Support

- ➔ Provide easier access to home help for those who need it and longer hours and greater flexibility for those currently accessing home help.
- ➔ Draw up a list of handymen, cleaners etc. in the county willing to do work for pensioners at a fair price.
- ➔ Continue and further promote valuable home support projects such as the Good Morning Project and the Senior Help Line for the significant minority who wish to access them.
- ➔ Recognise that different people have different support needs and desire varying levels of independence – any projects or interventions have to remain respectful of that and flexible to meet people's changing needs.
- ➔ Recognise the central and irreplaceable role of informal support from family, neighbours and friends in meeting the needs of older people.

Health and Well-being

- ➔ Explore the possibility of providing a fracture clinic at Cavan General Hospital.
- ➔ Transport to hospital appointments or admission to be either paid for or provided as part of the health service.
- ➔ Explore the possibility of making greater use of Enniskillen Hospital for those in parts of the county closest to it.
- ➔ More funding for Public Health Nurses to provide a more comprehensive service.

Safety and Security

- ➔ The fee for panic buttons should be subsidised by the State, with general agreement that a fee of €50 to €60 per annum would be fair.
- ➔ A scheme whereby alarm installation could be paid for or subsidised should be explored.
- ➔ There should be a greater and more visible Garda presence in rural areas and on the streets of villages and towns to deter both crime and anti-social behaviour.

Financial Concerns

- ➔ The fuel allowance to be increased but also continued for more of the year than is currently the case.
- ➔ An increase in the old-age pension to take account of rising outgoings.
- ➔ The Living Alone Allowance to be increased.

Information and Coordination

- ➔ Produce a booklet aimed at older people in the county that describes all entitlements, services, etc. in clear, jargon-free language.
- ➔ Available services to be marketed more effectively to older people to encourage them to access them, with, for example, presentations to Active Retirement Groups or Day Care Centres.
- ➔ Establish an inter-agency forum for older people in Cavan.
- ➔ Explore the possibility of appointing a coordinator of services for older people in Cavan.

Section 1: Background to the Research

1.1. The 050 Network

In June 2005, the County Cavan 050 Network was formed to bring together a wide range of older people's groups to collectively address issues affecting older people.¹ The specific aims of the Network are:

- To provide an outlet for older people to exchange ideas and help each other.
- To enable older people to network, lobby and advocate on behalf of older people.
- To raise awareness and to challenge thinking around ageism.
- To gain information and support in the areas of funding and training.
- To devise strategies that would influence policy at local, regional and national level.

Crucial to achieving such aims, and in particular devising a strategy for the future, is the availability of solid and reliable research upon which to base action. Although information and reports on the needs of older people in general were available, there was a genuine need for comprehensive and locally oriented research into issues affecting older people in the county.

It was felt that if a comprehensive research project were to be embarked upon, there would be real and lasting value in Network members carrying out any such research themselves. Members of the 050 Network had already undertaken training in various areas, giving them the necessary confidence and skills to undertake a project of this nature. They were involved 'on the ground' in other community organisations, giving them first hand knowledge and experience of older people's issues which they could bring to the research process. The fact that older people themselves would carry out the project would mean that they would perhaps have greater empathy for and understanding of the groups they would be

¹ Active Age Groups, Retirement Groups, Day Care Centres, etc.

consulting. Finally, it would probably be easier for potential participants to open up to and engage with their peers. Of lasting value would be the confidence and capacity-building that successful participation in this process would bring to Network members. Thus an innovative and enlightening research journey began, which is described in greater detail in Section 2.

1.2 Objectives of the Research

The research process embarked upon by the O50 Network had the following specific objectives:

- ➔ To provide an insight into the lives of older people in Cavan.
- ➔ To identify and explore key issues and challenges facing older people in the county.
- ➔ To present recommendations for future action or change.
- ➔ To provide a solid foundation upon which to devise strategy and take action in the future.

1.3 Outline of the Report

This report presents the results of the research process outlined above, and is divided up as follows:

- ? Section 2 describes the research methods employed in this study.
- ? Section 3 presents the results of the secondary research carried out and thus sets the context for the detailed description of the findings in Sections 4, 5, 6 & 7.
- ? Section 4 presents the main results from the questionnaire completed by older people. These findings serve as a framework for the more detailed discussion of the issues in Sections 5 and 6.
- ? Section 5 provides an insight into the positive aspects of life for older people in County Cavan.

- ? Section 6 describes in detail the issues affecting older people in Cavan today and goes on to offer recommendations for action and change.

- ? Section 7 summarises the research findings and presents the key recommendations arising from the process

Section 2: Methodology

2.1 The Research Plan

As outlined in Section 1, the research undertaken for this study has been largely about arriving at a clearer picture of the lives of older people in Cavan, with a particular emphasis on the issues and challenges they face and on changes needed to improve their quality of life. The fact that members of the O50 network led and carried out the research themselves meant that the process of carrying out this research was in itself a learning experience.

Following training in research methods (research ethics, facilitation skills, running workshops, etc.), network members arrived at the following research plan:

1. Decide on overall research questions to ascertain the current situation of older people in County Cavan.
2. Carry out secondary research (review of literature and of relevant statistics).
3. Design research tools (questionnaires and interview schedules).
4. Target geographic areas to get a dispersed sample.
5. Collect primary data via questionnaires for older people, focus groups, individual interviews and agency questionnaire.
6. Collate and analyse data from all sources.
7. Write up final report.

2.2 Secondary Research

The secondary research for this study consisted of a review of relevant national and local reports, studies, etc. and more specifically, analysis of the 2006 Census figures for County Cavan. In this report, the secondary research serves largely to provide a context for what really lies at the core of the research process – the results of the primary research. The findings of the secondary research are presented in Section 3.

2.3 Primary Research

The primary research involved using a variety of research methods and multiple sources to arrive at as inclusive and complete a picture as possible.

1. At the heart of the primary research lay a detailed questionnaire (see Appendix 1) distributed to older people, via the medium of day care centres and active retirement groups across the county (listed below). The questionnaire was designed to be completed as swiftly and easily as possible, with respondents largely required to tick boxes. In total, 206 people completed the questionnaire and the majority of respondents completed it in full. The questionnaire is discussed in greater detail in Sections 4, 5 & 6.

2. Though of significant value in allowing us to quantify the responses to issues raised, the questionnaire was limited in its capacity to explore issues in greater depth. To allow this to happen, a series of 7 focus groups were held at the following centres around the county: Clifferná; Dr John Sullivan Home, Cavan; Swanlinbar; Bunnoe; Shercock; St John's Retirement Village, Virginia; and Templeport. These focus groups were largely comprised of the same people who had completed the questionnaires but provided a forum through which participants could thoroughly - and collectively - discuss issues relevant to them. The focus groups were well attended and provoked lively debate and rich insights.

3. In-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with a further 13 older people (See Appendix 2 for a copy of the interview guide). These interviews proved a particularly rich source of information and provided perhaps the most vivid depictions of life as an older person in Cavan today. Furthermore, the high proportion of men interviewed (10 men relative to 3 women) helped to offset the bias of the questionnaire, where 73% of respondents were female.

4. A further questionnaire was used to gather information from key stakeholders involved in the provision of services to older people in Cavan. This resulted in the completion of 12 questionnaires within the

following agencies: Cavan Partnership; Cavan County Council (Social Inclusion Unit; Community and Enterprise Section, Housing Section); the Health Service Executive (a social worker, public health nurse and Positive Age worker); County Cavan Vocational Education Committee; the Citizens Information Service; Rural Lift, South West Cavan Rural Transport Initiative; and St Vincent de Paul.

Section 3: Setting the Context

3.1 The National Picture

When compared to other EU countries, Ireland has a low proportion of older people in its population. In 2006, 11% of the population was aged 65 and over, compared to an EU 27 average 16.8%.² However, the population is ageing, with an average age of 35.6 years in 2006 compared to 35.1 years in 2002. The population of older people in the State is also growing. There is a projected upward trend in the 65 & over dependency ratios for both Ireland and the EU from 2006 to 2026. This dependency ratio is expected to increase from 16.4% to 25.1% for Ireland.³

Older people have long been considered to be one of the groups in society at risk of social exclusion and disadvantage, particularly in certain aspects of life such as income, access to services, healthcare and transport. Older people are a named target group of the National Anti-Poverty Strategy, for example, and of many regional and local groups with a remit to tackle disadvantage. The following statistics from the recent CSO report on Ageing in Ireland (2007)⁴ highlight the necessity of such a focus:

- In 2005, only 17.9% of persons aged 65 & over perceived their health status to be “very good” compared to 52.2% of persons aged 16-64. Nearly 9% of persons aged 65 & over perceived their health to be “bad/very bad” compared to 2.7% of persons aged 16-64
- In 2006, 29.5% of persons aged 65 & over indicated they had a disability compared to 9.3% of all persons. The proportion of persons with a disability increased with age, particularly for the older age groups. The disability rate varied from 18.7% for the 65-69 age group to 58.6% for the 85 & over age group

² Central Statistics Office (2007) Ageing in Ireland, CSO : Cork.

³ Central Statistics Office (2007) Ageing in Ireland, CSO : Cork.

⁴ Central Statistics Office (2007) Ageing in Ireland, CSO : Cork.

- In 2005, around 20% of persons aged 65 & over were at risk of poverty. It should be noted that this was substantially lower than the 2004 rate of 27.1% and was due mainly to an increase in the old age pension in 2005
- Primary or no formal education was the highest level of education attained for 48.1% of people aged 65 & over in 2006
- The proportion of women aged 65 & over living alone in Ireland (31.7%) was the eighth lowest of EU countries but the rate for men at 20.6% was the fourth highest

O'Shea (2006)⁵ draws attention to what he describes as the essentially ageist nature of Irish society, claiming that the rights of the older person in Ireland and the value placed on the older person's input into society have been particularly marginalised in the context of an overwhelming focus on economic growth.

Yet, at the same time, and as is highlighted in Section 5 of this report in particular, there are many positive aspects to life as an older person in Ireland in 2008. As we saw earlier, substantial progress has been made on decreasing the risk of poverty for over-65s. For men, life expectancy at age 65 has risen from 13.8 years in 1995-1997 to 15.4 years in 2001-2003 with a corresponding increase for women from 17.4 years to 18.7 years. In 2005, Irish men and women at age 65 had higher life expectancies than the EU 27 averages.⁶ It is probably true to say that there are now greater opportunities for education, for travel, for participation in cultural activities, for social activism and voluntary activity for older people than has ever been the case.

⁵ O'Shea, E. (2006) *Older and Bolder : Towards a National Strategy for Older People in Ireland*, National University of Ireland, Galway: Galway.

⁶ Central Statistics Office (2007) *Ageing in Ireland*, CSO : Cork.

Far from being a demographic burden, older people increasingly represent, as O'Shea explains, a demographic bounty:

- Many of the young older are service givers not service receivers, working locally on meals on wheels, parish committees and in organisations like the St Vincent de Paul
- Older people provide a cohesive glue in a changing society, often providing stability in terms of how we think, feel, pray and act in this quickly changing world
- Older people are contributing in families as parents and grandparents, passing on values, offering love and care and often acting as childminders
- Even in economic terms, older people are becoming ever more important as key consumers
- Many older people continue to contribute to the world of literature, painting, drama and music; in fact, this contribution is likely to refine and deepen with age⁷

An array of organisations are now working at both national and (as we shall see in Section 3.2) at local level to promote the rights of older people, to encourage greater participation by older people in all aspects of life, or to campaign for better services or policy changes.⁸ One significant weakness in efforts to agitate for change for older people to date has been the absence of a National Strategy for Older People in Ireland.⁹ However, the current Programme for Government (from 2007) has a commitment to develop a National Strategy on Positive Ageing. This will include the development of operational plans by all Government Departments setting

⁷ O'Shea, E. (2006) Ibid.

⁸ Amongst the key organisations focused on the needs of people working at national level are:

Age Action Ireland (www.ageaction.ie); Age and Opportunity(www.olderinireland.ie); The Irish Senior Citizens Parliament (www.seniors.ie); The National Council on Ageing and Older People (www.ncaop.ie); the Older Women's Network (www.ownireland.ie)

⁹ Indeed this gap has been the focus of a joint campaign by Age Action Ireland, Age and Opportunity, the Irish Hospice Foundation, the Irish Senior Citizens Parliament and the Senior Help Line.

out objectives relating to older people. At the same time, a new office of the Minister for Older People was formally established in early 2008.

To a large extent, the national picture mirrors the findings of this research – that by some measures, this is a positive and even an exciting time in which to grow older in this country but that old age can also bring significant challenges and issues both for older people themselves and for wider society.

3.2 The Local Picture

Demographic Information

County Cavan has, like most counties in Ireland, experienced significant growth and change in the last decade. Its overall population increased by 13.2% between 2002 and 2006.¹⁰ It has experienced rapid urbanisation and attendant development, a significant influx of migrant workers and a greater ethnic mix and has seen a significant shift in employment from the more traditional areas of agriculture, forestry, etc. to services and construction. Beyond that, County Cavan has some notable demographic and social features, an understanding of which is essential to developing a fuller appreciation of the lives of older people in the county.¹¹

- ? County Cavan has a higher proportion of its population aged 65 and over (12.51%), than the State average (11.03%). In County Cavan in 2006, there were 8,007 people aged 65 and over. This figure of 8007 can be further delineated by age bracket:

	65-69 years	70-74 years	75-79 years	80-84 years	85 years and over
Cavan	2,131	2,018	1,663	1,214	981

¹⁰ Central Statistics Office (2007) 2006 Census of Population, CSO: Cork.

¹¹ Cavan County Council (2007) Census of Population 2006 Baseline Data Report for County Cavan, Volume 1

- ? There are a number of areas in the county with much higher proportions of people aged 65 and over than the average of 12.51%. These include: Dowra (27.13%); Derrylahan (23.34%) Pedara Vohers/Tircahan (21.87%); Tuam (19.77%); Rakenny (18.88%); Springfield (18.86%); Dunmakeever/Derrynananta (18.45%); Canningstown (18.28%); and Skeagh (18.02%). These areas are all classified as rural, and in some cases are geographically quite remote.

- ? Although there have been increased levels of urbanisation in recent years, County Cavan remains a predominately rural county. A very high proportion of Cavan's population (73.6%) live in rural areas, compared to a national average of 39.3%.¹² It might be anticipated that the very rural nature of the county would affect the capacity of older residents to access services, take part in social activities, etc. and this is very much borne out in the research findings.

- ? In 2006, there were 2,393 people aged 65+ living alone in private households, compared to 2,308 people in the year 2002. In 2006, among people aged 65+ living in private households, 32.4 per cent were living alone.

- ? 5.18% of people in County Cavan are widowed compared to 4.49% nationally. In County Cavan, women are four times more likely to be widowed than men. In 2006, there were 2,653 widows in the county and 663 widowers. This is largely reflected in the marital status of the participants in this study.

In summary, some of the demographic features of County Cavan – its rural nature, the higher than average proportion of the population over 65, the very large number of widows and the significant numbers of over 65s living alone – present particular challenges. Services and activities aimed at older people need to take these challenges into account, and

¹² Cavan County Council (2007) Census of Population 2006 Baseline Data Report for County Cavan, Volume 1

where possible, minimise their impact on the freedom, security and well-being of older people in the county.

Existing Services and Initiatives for Older People in Cavan

A variety of agencies and groups in the county provide services to older people, some as their core function, and others as part of their services to the wider public. Of particular note are the activities and services of:

- ? Cavan Partnership
- ? South West Cavan Rural Transport Initiative
- ? Rural Lift
- ? The Social Inclusion Measures Group of the County Development Board
- ? Cavan County Council (housing, library, support for community groups, etc.)
- ? Department of Social and Family Affairs
- ? Citizens Information Service

Beyond the services provided by the agencies and groups listed above are a wide variety of initiatives and activities for older people which are very much driven by older people themselves. These include:

- ? A variety of Active Retirement / Active Age groups across the county
- ? A variety of groups oriented towards social care (e.g. Day Care Centres)
- ? The 050 Network, the architects and authors of this report (see Section 1 for a more detailed description)
- ? Positive Age, a voluntary organisation established in 1988 for the promotion of social gain by older people and which has over 2,000 members across Cavan and Monaghan. This organisation provides training and lifelong learning, organises cross-border and international trips, and organises and participates in a variety of art and drama projects.

Overall, a wide variety of services and activities are available to older people in the county, though as we shall see in our discussion of the findings of this research, some significant gaps remain.

Section 4: Questionnaire Findings

4.1 Introduction

In total, 206 people completed the questionnaire. As stated previously, the questionnaires were largely distributed and completed at day care centres and active retirement groups (listed in Section 2). As the focus groups were also held at these centres and groups, the demographic details for focus group participants are largely the same.

4.2 Demographic and Personal Details

The questionnaire asked respondents to supply demographic information and although this section was optional, it was completed at least in part by all participants.

Table 4.1 Sex of questionnaire respondents

Sex	Total Number	% of total
Male	55	27 %
Female	151	73 %

Comment:

Table 4.1 above demonstrates that there is a very significant bias towards female respondents in this study. Given the means through which the questionnaires were distributed, this is perhaps unsurprising - active retirement groups and day care centres typically attract more females than males. However, it is worth bearing in mind that there are in fact more females over 65 than males over 65 in the county, largely due to lower life expectancy amongst males. CSO statistics from 2006, for example, reveal that in that year there were 3773 males over 65 and 4234 females aged 65 and over.¹³

¹³ Census of Population, 2006.

It should also be noted that of the 13 individual interviews, 10 were conducted with men, at least in part as an attempt to moderate the effects of the bias towards females in the questionnaire completions.

Table 4.2: Age of Questionnaire Respondents

Age	% of total
Under 60	8%
61-65	10%
66-70	13%
71-75	28%
76-80	15%
80+	26%

Table 4.3: Marital Status of Questionnaire Respondents

Marital Status	% of total
Married	32%
Single	21%
Widowed	46%
Divorced or separated	1%

Comment:

The high proportion of those respondents who are widowed (46%) is at least partly linked to the high proportion of women who completed this questionnaire - women in Cavan are four times more likely to be widowed

than men. In 2006, there were 2,653 widows in the county and 663 widowers.¹⁴

Table 4.4 Current Living Status of Questionnaire Respondents

Current Living status	% of total
Living alone	46%
Living with spouse	28%
Living with family in your own house	15%
Living with family in their house	5%
Living in rented accommodation	3%
Residential care	2%
Other	1%

Comment:

The proportion of older people in this study who are living alone (46%) is significantly higher than that for the total population of those aged 65 and over in Cavan. In 2006, among people aged 65+ living in private households, 32.4% were living alone.¹⁵

4.3 Issues and Barriers

In answer to the question; 'Do you have any issues or barriers that you feel are relevant to you as an older person, which may stop you from participating fully in society?' 38% answered 'yes' and 62% answered 'no'. Similarly, only 3 out of 13 interviewees stated that they experienced any issues or barriers.

¹⁴ Cavan County Council (2007) 2006 Census of Population Baseline Data Report for County Cavan, Volume 1.

¹⁵ Cavan County Council (2007) 2006 Census of Population Baseline Data Report for County Cavan, Volume 1.

Table 4.5: Participants were asked which, if any, of a list of obstacles or issues were relevant to their personal situation:

Obstacle/Issue	% who answered 'yes'	% who ticked 'no' or left blank
Living in a rural area	39%	61%
Lack of transport	38%	62%
Lack of information	26%	74%
Security Issues	23%	77%
Health issues	22%	78%
Lack of services	22%	78%
Loneliness	21%	79%
Mobility issues	16%	84%
Isolation	13%	87%
Financial issues	12%	88%
Lack of community support	9%	91%
Elderly abuse	2%	98%

Table 4.6: Questionnaire respondents were asked whether they had accessed or had contact with any of the following service providers:

Organisation	% of total who had accessed/made contact
Active retirement groups	60%
Health: GPs, Occupational Therapists, etc.	45%
Day care centre	39%
Department of Social Welfare	36%
Public Health Nurses	29%
Local community group	24%
Positive Age / 050 Network	19%
Cavan County Council	17%
Carer	16%
Citizens Information Centre	14%
Community Welfare Officer	12%
Camcas/CDP/Home Improvement Scheme	10%
Good Morning Project	9%
Senior Help Line	7%
Respite Care	6%
Meals on Wheels	5%
FÁS / VEC	5%
Cavan Resource Centre	3%
Cavan Partnership	2%
Other	0%

4.4 Support and Progression

Only 64 questionnaire respondents (i.e. 31% of the total) gave any response to the question 'Are there any suggestions or recommendations that could help you in life?'.

Of those who did respond, 41% answered 'no' and 59% answered 'yes'. Their specific suggestions are described in detail throughout Section 6.

Table 4.7 Participants were asked what changes they would like to see happening in the future:

Measure/Action	% of total who ticked 'yes'	% of total who ticked 'no' or left blank
More transport	54%	46%
Safety and security supports	42%	58%
More social / leisure activities	36%	64%
More information	28%	72%
More support	27%	73%
Joining groups	23%	77%
Volunteering options	13%	87%
Advocacy	12%	88%
Training	9%	91%
Other	1%	99%

Table 4.8 Respondents were asked whether they were aware of the following benefits and entitlements:

Benefit/Entitlement	% of total who ticked 'yes'	% of total who ticked 'no' or left blank
Medical card	84%	16%
Free transport	77%	23%
Free electricity / gas units	77%	23%
Free telephone rental	76%	24%
Free TV licence	75%	25%
State pension	74%	26%
Fuel allowance	73%	27%
Living alone allowance	58%	42%
Carer's allowance	27%	73%
National Treatment Purchase Fund	12%	88%

Finally, respondents were asked whether there were days during the week when they did not see any relatives or friends.

- 33% of those who responded said that yes, there were
- 67% said that no, there were not.

Of these 33%, 64% went on to specify how many days. The number of days was very even, with similar numbers having 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, or 7 days of the week in which they would not see a relative or friend.

When asked would they like someone to visit or phone them on a regular basis,

- 28% of those who responded said that they would
- a corresponding 72% stated that they would not.

Section 5: Positive Aspects of Life

Though significant issues and barriers were uncovered in the course of this research, many older people also spoke of their satisfaction with many aspects of their lives.

For many, retirement from work has opened up a new world of freedom and possibility. Typical comments included:

“At the moment, I feel I am living for the first time in years as opposed to working to live”

“Life has been wonderful, going places and doing things”

Participants in focus groups spoke of the pleasure of simple things such as “having no alarm clock in the morning” and having time to try new things. Active Retirement Groups and day care centres and the range of activities they offer can form a vital part of a full life in the post-retirement period. They were also described as being of “crucial importance” in combating isolation and loneliness.

The company of other people remains for many the thing they enjoy most in life. This was particularly evident in the individual interviews, where participants spoke of their happiness at visiting or chatting with their friends, of playing cards or going to the pub or meeting old friends at the mart. Family, and grandchildren in particular, were another common source of happiness. It is apparent that for many, getting older has opened up time and space to enjoy the company of others to a greater degree than might previously have been the case.

From a number of participants came a clear sense that this is “a good time to be an older person”. As one woman explained in a questionnaire “We’re doing all right!”.

Others spoke of their general level of happiness with services and with the range of opportunities available:

“I have at least three days a week where I go to activities”

It is also apparent that for many, age has brought a sense of contentment and an awareness of what makes them happy. As one interviewee in her mid-80s put it:

“I enjoy good health and I love my garden. I grow my own vegetables and flowers, that takes up my time and I enjoy it”

For some, a level of happiness is found in independence and self-sufficiency:

“I’m ninety and I don’t need a thing!”

“I’m living in my own home, happily looking after myself”

Section 6: Issues Affecting Older People

6.1 Introduction

A number of significant challenges and issues which impinge on the well-being, security and happiness of older people emerged from the data sources in this research. These issues have been grouped into seven key themes:

1. Transport
2. Social Activities and Social Interaction
3. Home Help and Support
4. Health and Well-being
5. Safety and Security
6. Financial Concerns
7. Information and Coordination of Services

6.2 Transport

General Situation

Transport – or more accurately, the shortage of transport options for many older people – emerged as perhaps the single most critical issue for the participants in this study. Of those completing the questionnaire, 38% agreed that 'lack of transport' was an issue for them. Similarly, 39% also identified 'living in a rural area' as an issue. It is reasonable to assume that this is at least partly related to the lack of transport options other than private car ownership in most rural areas. When asked, without prompting or suggestion, to identify the barriers which may stop them from participating fully in society, fully half of those who identified issues or barriers cited lack of transport. Finally, when asked to indicate what changes they would like to see happening in the future, 54% of

questionnaire respondents ticked 'more transport'. Indeed this option received by far the highest positive response of any of the options listed.

Specific Issues

As the above statistics demonstrate, what we can broadly describe as transport issues are a significant barrier to the full and equal participation of older people in society and to their overall sense of independence and well-being. Specifically:

- It is apparent that a large proportion of those who took part in this study, do not have their own independent means of transport. Yet living in a rural county such as Cavan, some form of transport is nearly always necessary simply to get to the shops, the pharmacy and the post office, to go to hospital and doctors' appointments, to take part in social and leisure activities, to meet up with friends, and to get to mass.
- Those without their own means of transport are therefore dependent on an inadequate and patchy mixture of public transport, private transport (hackneys and taxis), community/rural bus schemes and lifts from family and neighbours. Even for those currently driving, there is a palpable fear that there will come a time when they can't drive and will therefore experience a significant loss of mobility and freedom.
- The current public transport system in the county is generally thought to be wholly inadequate to meet the needs of older people. In a number of areas, public bus services simply don't exist. In others, such services as exist are limited in a number of ways: they may only stop at some distance from their home, are infrequent, or only run at inconvenient times. A number of participants noted that there is no feeder bus to Cavan from their areas which would enable them to link up to the bus to Dublin. The lack of sheltered bus stops along the main routes was also highlighted.

- The Rural Transport Initiatives which exist in certain areas can provide a positive model for the county as a whole. Of particular note is the service in Cliffernabreena which provides a door-to-door pick-up service. However, some participants in the focus group in Swanlinbar suggested that the service there needs to run more frequently and allow more time in town. The need to give three days notice to access Rural Lift was seen as problematic by some. One user asked:

"...that's fine, but what if there's an emergency and you need the service today?"

- The difficulty and/or expense of getting to both doctor and hospital appointments were highlighted by a large number of participants. A number of people pointed out that although they might be able to get a bus to Cavan town centre, they would have no means of then getting out to the hospital.
- The impact of what is generally agreed to be an inadequate transport system is significant. Many participants in this study spoke of the isolation and loss of independence associated with being unable to get out and about. Lack of access to decent transport services is a significant contributory factor in preventing full engagement with such services (medical, social, etc.) as are available in the county. This is corroborated by one of the respondents to the agency questionnaire who identified the lack of transport as a key barrier to fully engaging with clients.

There is significant expense associated with having to get taxis or hackneys. As one participant recounted:

"I recently spent €80 on taxis in one week alone because I had to go back and forth to the doctor several times"

It is also apparent that family and neighbours cannot perhaps be relied upon for lifts in rural areas to the same extent that might once have been the case. In some cases, family might be working, away or are too busy. One participant in a focus group reflected that:

“...people are too busy nowadays...the neighbours don't really want to know”

Key recommendations:

- ➔ Put in place 'transport proofing' of both existing and new initiatives and services for older people which addresses the obvious question of whether they will actually be able to get to them or not
- ➔ Ensure that Rural Transport Initiatives remain flexible and responsive to the (sometimes changing) needs of their customers
- ➔ Extend the Rural Transport Initiative across areas of Cavan which are currently underserved by public transport
- ➔ Request Bus Éireann to show greater flexibility and imagination on the routes which they do operate, particularly in relation to stops, feeder services, etc.
- ➔ Cavan County Council should plan and build more bus stops, suited to the needs of older people, which could be used by public, private and community operators.
- ➔ Subsidise and/or pay the fares for those who need to get taxis or hackneys to go to doctor or hospital appointments.

6.3: Social Activities and Social Interaction

General Situation

Many – indeed most – of the participants in this study enjoy a level of social activity and are, as many put it, “still out and about”. However, as the participants were largely drawn from those who attend Active Age Groups and Day Care Centres, they are not necessarily reflective of the population of older people in Cavan as a whole. However, the interviewees, who were not drawn from these sources, also enjoyed a range of activities, from dancing to playing cards, to going to the pub, to going to the mart, to calling into friends. The more informal setting of the interviews gave participants the opportunity to reflect on the importance of the support of, but perhaps more importantly, the simple company of neighbours and family. Seven of the thirteen interviewees felt that it was the company of other people that they enjoyed most in life.

Some of the participants in this study also reflected that a certain level of loneliness is almost unavoidable in old age, perhaps almost regardless of any intercession by others. The loss of a partner in life or of old friends and family, decreased mobility and independence, and the loss of work as a social outlet can all contribute to feelings of loneliness and loss.

Over a third (36%) of questionnaire respondents would like more social and leisure activities. These are primarily seen as a means of “getting out of the house” and “breaking up the monotony of the week...sometimes I go to Church just to pass the time”. The need for organised activities is particularly acute in some of the more remote areas. At one of the focus groups in West Cavan which contained a large number of widows, a number of participants said that if they could attend the senior social group every day they would, because some of them live in isolated areas and might see nobody all week except the postman.

Amongst the activities suggested were:

- Free classes (e.g. painting, arts and crafts, computers, etc.)
- Organised activities during the day (e.g. bridge, whist, bingo, etc.) as some old people don't like going out at night
- More outings organised through Active Retirement Groups, Day Care Centres, etc.
- More plays and films suited to the interests and tastes of older people

Specific issues

- Although more activities, classes etc. for older people would be welcome, it is apparent that there are currently many activities and outlets available to older people in the county – what is perhaps more acute is what we could call the 'participation problem'.
- Participants in some of the focus groups suggested that many older people may feel that they are too young to attend active retirement activities, sometimes regardless of their actual age!
- It is also immediately apparent from the gender breakdown of the questionnaire respondents that there is a particular problem with getting men to participate in some of the existing activities, organisations, etc. Suggestions from the focus groups as to why this is the case ranged from "men can be too shy" to "men never really retire, especially farmers" to "men could not be bothered attending social gatherings unless it involves alcohol first" to "bachelors get into a very regimented routine and it can be hard to get them to change". It was also suggested by some that outings and activities are not necessarily geared towards men's interests.

The individual interviews, which were largely conducted with men, in fact revealed a high level of interest in and desire for social interaction and company. However the focus was very much on the kind of

interaction that comes from ordinary, every-day contact and activity – going to the mart, or calling in on a neighbour, or playing a game of cards in the pub or chatting on the road rather than on organised group activities. Opportunities for meeting people in these traditional ways have obviously declined in many rural areas with the decline and closure of rural pubs, mart closures, etc.

- Many participants in the focus groups felt that some people may be too shy or intimidated to come and join a group, especially if they have been living alone. The value of actually asking people to join (and perhaps asking them a number of times), of calling for them or making sure they don't have to walk into the room on their own were all highlighted.
- It is also apparent that many older people are very much involved in other groups or activities that are not necessarily related to older people. For example, 24% of questionnaire respondents are involved with a local community group of some type. In fact, in many communities, older people form the backbone of voluntary and community activity.

Key recommendations

- ➔ For those who are interested in taking part in activities and organisations geared towards meeting the needs of older people, there is an apparent need for more activities, classes and outings (see list of suggested activities above).
- ➔ As emphasised throughout this study, it is important that transport in particular, but also cost should not be a barrier to participation in activities.
- ➔ Those groups and activities which are targeted at older people should attempt to address the aforementioned 'participation problem' by organising a certain amount of activities geared towards men's interests (e.g sport, agriculture, gardening, etc.), by ensuring that people are asked to take part by existing members and made to feel comfortable and welcome once they join, by organising lifts where necessary, etc. It is also worth making the obvious point that any organised group or activity or indeed any group identifying itself as being for older people will inevitably not be for everyone. People have the right not to participate!
- ➔ It is also important to emphasise that organised activities and groups are just one aspect of social interaction – by far the greater part of it lies in the ordinary, everyday social bonds and encounters. Thus reducing feelings of isolation and loneliness and building social interaction is not something that is just done 'out there' by agencies or organisations or clubs. It is done by calling into a neighbour after they come out of hospital, giving someone a lift to the shops, stopping for a chat on the road – in other words, it is something which we can all do as neighbours, family and friends.

6.4: Home Help and Home Support

General Situation

This section is concerned with the work of home helps funded by the Health Service Executive, but also with other projects and activities, both formal¹⁶ and informal¹⁷ which provide supports to older people living at home. It is apparent from the comments of those in focus groups, interviews and questionnaires that where available, home help and home support can have a vital role to play for older people in:

- Lessening feelings of loneliness and isolation
- Providing a level of care and attention that older people may no longer be able to provide for themselves
- Ensuring that people are able to stay in their own homes for as long as possible

Specific Issues

- 34% of questionnaire respondents felt that loneliness or isolation was an issue for them. 27% agreed that they would like more support, while 28% of participants said that they would like someone to visit or phone them on a regular basis. A small number of questionnaire respondents (12 in total) specifically stated that they would like either a home help or meals-on-wheels service. A number of the focus groups concluded that there should be easier access to home help for those who need it - in one of the focus groups, there were 5 people who had waited 5 months for a home help.
- A number of those participants who already have a Home Help felt that the length of time they had them for – 45 minutes in many cases – was simply too short and should be extended.

¹⁶ For example, Meals on Wheels, the Good Morning Project and the Senior Help Line.

¹⁷ For example, family and neighbours calling in and 'keeping an eye'.

- In the course of discussions at one of focus groups, the story was told of one elderly man who came home after two weeks in hospital to a cold and empty house. For participants, this highlighted the need for the Home Help service to remain flexible to meet the changing needs of people, who will sometimes need a great deal of care and sometimes only a little.
- For a smaller number of participants, the additional home supports sought are of a purely practical nature – cleaners, window cleaners, handymen to do odd jobs or mow the lawn, etc. As one participant put it:

“I’d like a list of handymen willing to do work for pensioners at a fair price - I don’t mind paying but would like honest work”

- It is important to recognise that for many older people, the most fundamental and valuable Home Help and support is that which comes from family, neighbours and friends. Fully 67% of questionnaire respondents would not have any day during the week when they would not see a relative or friend. In an interview, one man in his mid-80s with no immediate family spoke of the “great neighbours” that he has, who “bring me to play cards, to the mart and to do my shopping”. He was able to say:

“I’m never lonely because I have neighbours living close to me”

Similar sentiments were expressed by many of the participants in this study in relation to their own spouses or children or extended family or neighbours and it is notable that only 9% of questionnaire respondents felt that lack of community support was an issue relevant to their personal situation. Some participants did not necessarily seek any kind of formal Home Help but would like “more company” or “more contact with the neighbours” or “someone to call in for a chat more often”.

- 33% of questionnaire respondents agreed that they would have days during the week on which they would not see any relatives or friends.

The number of those days varied from 1 day per week up to 7 days per week in a significant minority of cases. Unprompted, participants offered comments such as: “the nights are very long”; “I dread Christmas” and “the weekends are very lonely”.

Yet interestingly, although 28% of the total number of respondents said they would like someone to visit or phone them on a regular basis, they were not necessarily the same people who said there were days when they don't see relatives or friends. In fact, there was no statistically significant relationship between the positive responses to both questions – those who don't go a day without seeing friends or relations were just as likely to want someone to phone or visit them regularly as the other group.

Some explanation for this the correspondingly high number of respondents (72%) who did not want someone to visit or phone them on a regular basis may be found in some of the (unprompted) comments of questionnaire respondents:

“Everyone has a different personality....people shouldn't intrude”

“I'm still active and out and about, thank God”

“I have my own friends and family”

Key Recommendations

- ➔ Provide easier access to Home Help for those who need it and longer hours and greater flexibility for those currently accessing Home Help
- ➔ Draw up a list drawn up of handymen, cleaners etc. in the county willing to do work for pensioners at a fair price
- ➔ Continue and further promote valuable home support projects such as the Good Morning Project and the Senior Help Line for the significant minority who wish to access them
- ➔ Recognise that different people have different support needs and desire varying levels of independence – any projects or interventions have to remain respectful of that and flexible to meet people's changing needs
- ➔ Recognise the central and irreplaceable role of informal support from family, neighbours and friends in meeting the needs of older people

6.5: Health and well-being

General Situation

22% of questionnaire respondents agreed that health issues were relevant to their personal situation. A further 16% felt that mobility issues affected them and 6 of the 13 interviewees described their health as 'poor'. Twenty-nine per cent of questionnaire respondents had accessed the Public Health Nurse and 45% had accessed their GP or other health professional.

Most of the specific health complaints mentioned in the course of the research were those which become more common with age, such as arthritis, stroke, hip problems, hearing difficulties, joint pain, walking

difficulties and high blood pressure, although some, such as Multiple Sclerosis [MS] and depression were not necessarily age-related.

Specific Issues

- At one of the focus groups, participants were positive about their experience of the health service:

“We have no complaints about the health service, they do their best and we aren’t neglected”

- However, in most of the other focus groups, the health service was criticised with comments such as:

“The HSE needs a huge revamp – it’s a disgrace that people are afraid to get sick”

“The old are especially vulnerable in the health service”

One respondent to the agency questionnaire suggested that the HSE recruitment embargo is “having an effect on services available to the elderly” in Cavan.

- The lack of a fracture clinic at Cavan General Hospital – necessitating travel to Drogheda Hospital with such injuries – was raised at four of the seven focus groups.
- The problems of lack of transport to hospital appointments and a poor ambulance service were mentioned numerous times across all of the data sources in this study. This situation is particularly acute when people have to travel to Drogheda or Dublin. It was suggested that transport to hospital should be either paid for or provided as part of the health service.

- A number of people in those parts of the county close to Enniskillen suggested that it would be more convenient if it was arranged that they could attend Enniskillen Hospital.
- The service provided by the Public Health Nurses is generally considered valuable and necessary but in one of the focus groups, it was agreed that they are currently over-stretched and that more are needed:

“The public health nurse does her best but can’t get around to see all as there are too many for her to cope with”

In another focus group, it was suggested that the Public Health Nurse or a doctor should call to those over 80 once a week as a matter of course.

- In one of the focus groups, participants spoke of having to wait 24 hours after phoning in for prescriptions for what is often vitally important medication.
- In another focus group, a majority stated that the group “felt hard done by having to wait until 70 to get a medical card”

Key Recommendations

- ➔ Explore the possibility of providing a fracture clinic at Cavan General Hospital
- ➔ Transport to hospital appointments or admission to be either paid for or provided as part of the health service
- ➔ Explore the possibility of making greater use of Enniskillen Hospital for those in parts of the county closest to it.

- More funding for Public Health Nurses to provide a more comprehensive service

6.6: Safety & Security

General Situation

In general, security and safety were of significant concern to those who took part in this research. Forty-six per cent of respondents to the questionnaire live alone and 46% are widowed - and have therefore had to adjust to living alone - so this level of concern is not unexpected. Twenty-three per cent of questionnaire respondents stated that security concerns were relevant to their personal situation and 42% would like more safety and security supports. For a small number of participants – and particularly those who had been the victims of crime – security and safety concerns were in fact of paramount importance. As one participant said:

“My house was broken into and now I don’t feel secure at all in own home”

Specific issues

- In focus groups in particular, participants spoke of a great fear of being broken into and robbed. This fear and vulnerability was particularly notable in West Cavan, where at the time of writing, there was a recent spate of robberies.
- While a number of participants have installed alarms – often with financial assistance from their families – a number spoke of not being able to afford to do so. State subsidy of alarm installation was proposed at two of the focus groups and in a number of completed questionnaires.

- Participants in the focus groups and a number of questionnaire and interview respondents spoke of the vital role of panic buttons in alleviating fear and anxiety. However, it was agreed at all of the focus groups that the cost of panic buttons (€90) can be prohibitive for pensioners on a fixed income:

“The panic button does work and it is good to know we have it but €50 or €60 is enough money to pay for it on a pension - there should be a government subsidy”

- A small number of participants spoke of problems of anti-social behaviour in their areas – ringing of church bells, excessive noise late at night, lack of respect for private property, etc. It was felt that a stronger Garda presence on the streets and around rural areas would help to prevent both crime and anti-social behaviour.

Key recommendations:

- ➔ As a service which provides a high degree of comfort and security to older people, the fee for panic buttons should be subsidised by the State, with general agreement that a fee of €50 to €60 per annum would be fair.
- ➔ A scheme whereby alarm installation could be paid for or subsidised should be explored
- ➔ There should be a greater and more visible Garda presence in rural areas and on the streets of villages and towns to deter both crime and anti-social behaviour.

6.7: Financial Concerns

General Situation

Only 12% of respondents to the questionnaire considered financial issues to be relevant to their personal situation – a finding that was echoed in the individual interviews. However, this comparatively low figure was belied somewhat by the frequency with which concerns over cost arose in discussions about other issues at focus groups and individual interviews. This inconsistency may reflect an unwillingness to baldly admit to general financial problems.

Specific Issues

- A significant number of participants drew attention to the difficulty of surviving on the fixed income of a pension in the context of ever-increasing living costs. Amongst the outgoings considered particularly problematic were health insurance and other insurance costs, taxis, household bills, bin charges and GP and medicine costs for the under 70s. A number of participants simply said they would like more money in the pension so that “we could enjoy life a little more.”
- Participants at one of the focus groups drew attention to the fact that when one person in the household dies, there is a pension loss, yet all other charges remain the same. This can leave those widowed at increased risk of income poverty. For a number of participants, the current Living Alone Allowance is considered inadequate to the task of alleviating this situation.
- The limitations of the current fuel allowance were discussed at most of the focus groups. In the first instance, many feel that it needs to be increased in line with rising energy costs. Most of the focus groups concluded that it needs to be available for more of the year than is currently the case – suggestions ranged from extending it to May to extending it to the full year.

- Of serious concern to a small number of participants across all the data sources in this research was a level of anxiety about their ability to pay for good nursing home care in the future should they need it:

“...nursing home charges are a big worry for people as they get older”

Key recommendations

- ➔ The fuel allowance to be increased but also continued for more of the year than is currently the case
- ➔ An increase in the old-age pension to take account of rising outgoings
- ➔ The Living Alone Allowance to be increased

6.8: Information & Coordination

General Situation

A significant minority of questionnaire respondents (26%) felt that lack of information was an issue which was relevant to their personal situation and 28% stated that they would like 'more information'. 14% of respondents had accessed the Citizens Information Service.

Specific Issues

- In focus groups, participants spoke of a lack of information about services and entitlements, of a reliance on word-of-mouth for information, of difficulty filling in forms and of intimidating and confusing language on forms, information leaflets, etc.

Key recommendations:

- ➔ Produce a booklet aimed at older people in the county which would describe all entitlements, services, etc. in clear, jargon-free language. This booklet could be supplemented by a service which helped with grant application forms, etc.

- ➔ One of the respondents to the agency questionnaire suggested that available services need to be marketed more effectively to older people to encourage them to access them, with, for example, presentations to Active Retirement Groups or Day Care Centres.

- ➔ Establish an inter-agency forum for older people in Cavan - 9 out of 12 of those completing the agency questionnaire felt that this would be of huge benefit and would help avoid duplication of services.

- ➔ One of the respondents to the agency questionnaire suggested appointing a coordinator of services for older people in Cavan, which was needed to "to link in with all agencies for older people".

Section 7:

Conclusions and Recommendations

7.1 Overall Conclusions

We should begin by saying that it would be unwise to overly generalise or put forward definitive conclusions relating to all older people in County Cavan. This is a diverse group of people, all of whom have their own set of circumstances, their own needs and aspirations and their own ideas on how they would like to live at this stage of life.

We can say that there are positive aspects to life for many older people in Cavan. Many participants spoke of the enjoyment of good company, of the pleasures of spending time with family and grandchildren, of the great opportunities to cultivate new interests or to travel or spend time on hobbies, and of an overall contentment with life.

The research process also uncovered a range of challenges and issues which impinge on the well-being, security and happiness of many older people in Cavan. The principal issues were:

- ? Transport – or more accurately, the lack of transport options – emerged as perhaps the single most critical issue for participants in this study.
- ? Although there was a healthy level of both organised and more informal social activity amongst many of the participants, this study also revealed a significant ‘participation problem’ and feelings of loneliness and isolation amongst a significant minority.
- ? Home support and Home Help – be it formal or informal – emerged as having a key role to play in reducing feelings of loneliness, providing important care and personal attention and keeping people in their own homes and communities for as long as possible.
- ? Concerns about personal health and wider concerns about the deficiencies within the current healthcare system were expressed across all of the data sources.

- ? Security and safety were of significant concern to those who took part in this research and for a small number of participants – and particularly those who had been the victims of crime – security and safety concerns were in fact of paramount importance.
- ? Although only a small minority of participants considered financial issues to be relevant to their personal situation, this was belied somewhat by the frequency with which concerns over cost arose in discussions about other issues at focus groups and individual interviews.
- ? Finally, a significant minority of participants spoke of their problem with a lack of information and with the level of coordination amongst service providers.

7.2 Key Recommendations

The recommendations for change or action are grouped under seven headings which reflect the key challenges and issues outlined above:

Transport:

- ➔ Put in place 'transport proofing' of both existing and new initiatives and services for older people which addresses the obvious question of whether they will actually be able to get to them or not
- ➔ Ensure that Rural Transport Initiatives remain flexible and responsive to the (sometimes changing) needs of their customers and extend services across areas of Cavan which are currently underserved by public transport
- ➔ Request Bus Éireann to show greater flexibility and imagination on the routes they operate, particularly in relation to stops, feeder services, etc.
- ➔ Request Cavan County Council to plan and build more bus stops, suited to the needs of older people, which could be used by public, private and community operators.

- Subsidise and/or pay the fares for those who need to get taxis or hackneys to go to doctor or hospital appointments.

Social interaction and Social Activities

- Provide more activities, classes and outings which meet the social needs of older people.
- Ensure that transport and cost do not act as barriers to participation in activities.
- Address the 'participation problem' by organising a certain amount of activities geared towards men's interests (e.g sport, agriculture, gardening, etc.), by ensuring that people are asked to take part by existing members and made to feel comfortable and welcome once they join, by organising lifts where necessary, etc.
- Accept people's right not to participate!
- Acknowledge that organised activities and groups are just one aspect of social interaction – by far the greater part of it lies in the ordinary, everyday social bonds and encounters. Thus reducing feelings of isolation and loneliness and building social interaction is something which we can all do as neighbours, family and friends.

Home Help and Home Support

- Provide easier access to Home Help for those who need it and longer hours and greater flexibility for those currently accessing Home Help
- Draw up list drawn up of handymen, cleaners etc. in the county willing to do work for pensioners at a fair price

- ➔ Continue and further promote valuable home support projects such as the Good Morning Project and the Senior Help Line for the significant minority who wish to access them
- ➔ Recognise that different people have different support needs and desire varying levels of independence – any projects or interventions have to remain respectful of that and flexible to meet people's changing needs
- ➔ Recognise the central and irreplaceable role of informal support from family, neighbours and friends in meeting the needs of older people

Health and Well-being

- ➔ Explore the possibility of providing a fracture clinic at Cavan General Hospital
- ➔ Transport to hospital appointments or admission to be either paid for or provided as part of the health service
- ➔ Explore the possibility of making greater use of Enniskillen Hospital for those in parts of the county closest to it
- ➔ More funding for Public Health Nurses to provide a more comprehensive service

Safety and Security

- ➔ The fee for panic buttons should be subsidised by the State, with general agreement that a fee of €50 to €60 per annum would be fair.
- ➔ A scheme whereby alarm installation could be paid for or subsidised should be explored

- There should be a greater and more visible Garda presence in rural areas and on the streets of villages and towns to deter both crime and anti-social behaviour

Financial Concerns

- The fuel allowance to be increased but also continued for more of the year than is currently the case
- An increase in the old-age pension to take account of rising outgoings
- The Living Alone Allowance to be increased

Information and Coordination

- Produce a booklet aimed at older people in the county which would describe all entitlements, services, etc. in clear, jargon free language.
- Available services to be marketed more effectively to older people to encourage them to access them, with, for example, presentations to Active Retirement Groups or Day Care Centres
- Establish an inter-agency forum for older people in Cavan
- Explore the possibility of appointing a coordinator for services for older people in Cavan

Appendix I

Confidential Information
Questionnaire for Older People – Cavan

Facilitator:

Venue:

SECTION 1: 1.1 Personal Details (Optional)	
Name:	
Address: _____ _____	Telephone No: Mobile Phone No:
Sex: Male <input type="checkbox"/> Female: <input type="checkbox"/>	Nationality:

2. Current Marital Status	
	Please Tick
Married	
Single	
Widowed	
Divorced/Separated	
Other:	

3. Age	
	Please Tick
Under 60	
61-65	
66-70	
71-75	
76-80	
80 +	

4. Current Living Status (please tick)	
	Yes
Living Alone	
Living with Spouse	
Living with Family in your own house	
Living with Family in their house	
Living in rented accommodation	
Residential Care	
Other Please state -	

SECTION 2: Issues and Barriers
<p>5. Do you have any issues or barriers that you feel are relevant to you as an older person, which may stop you from participating fully in society?</p> <p>Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>If yes, could you expand _____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p>

6. Are any of the following issues relevant to your personal situation?

Obstacles	Yes	No
Lack of Transport		
Isolation		
Loneliness		
Health Issues		
Lack of Services		
Living in a Rural Area		
Mobility Issues		
Lack of Information		
Lack of Community Support		
Financial Issues		
Security Issues		
Elderly abuse		
Other		

If yes, could you expand _____

7. Have you accessed and /or had any contact with any of the following Service providers? Please tick the relevant box.

Organisation	Yes	No	What Capacity?
Active Retirement Groups			
Day Care Centre			
Meals on Wheels			
Public Health Nurses			
Citizen Information Centre			
Cavan County Council			
Senior Help Line			
Camcas/CDP/ Home Improvement Scheme			
Positive Age/ 050 Network			
Respite Care			
Good morning project			
FÁS /VEC			
Health: GP's/ Occupational Therapist/Chiropodist etc			
Dept of Social Welfare			
Carer			
Local Community Group			
Cavan Partnership			
Cavan Resource Centres			
Community Welfare Officer			
Other			

SECTION 4. Support & Progression

4.1 Are there any Suggestions/Recommendations which could help you in you life

Yes No

If yes, could you expand

4.2 What changes would you like to see happening in the future?

Measure/Action	Yes	No	Why?
More Transport			
Volunteering Options			
More Social and Leisure Activities			
More Support			
Joining groups			
Safety and Security Supports			
More Information			
Training			
Advocacy			
Other (Please State)			

4.3 Are you aware of the following Benefits and Entitlements?

Benefit Entitlement	Yes	No
State Pension		
Living Alone Allowance		
Fuel Allowance		
Medical Card		
Free Transport		
Free Electricity/Gas Units		
Free Telephone Rental		
Free Television License		
Carers Allowance		
National Treatment Purchase Fund		

4.4 Are there Days during the Week when you do not see any Relatives or Friends?

Yes No

If yes, how many days on average? _____

4.5 Would you like someone to visit you or phone you on a regular basis?

Yes No

Thank You for Your Time

Appendix II

050 Network

Guidelines for Individual Interviews

The interviewer should read the following paragraph to interviewees and obtain informed consent:

The 050 Network is a network of older people's organisations in County Cavan. It aims to provide an outlet for older people to help each other. The 050 Network is carrying out research with older people living in County Cavan to identify key issues that affect them. This research will help us to develop a strategy for meeting the needs of older people. This will involve identifying what needs to happen to improve the situation for older people. We are looking at a number of areas, such as health, transport, caring, community support, financial issues and social opportunities.

In order to hear your ideas, we would like to carry out an interview. The interview should take less than an hour of your time. The information you provide will be confidential. It will be used only for the 050 Network research and strategy and it will not be passed on to any other organisation. You will not be identified in the research but we may refer to points that you raised.

The interviewer should ask the interviewee to sign below to confirm their consent to take part in the project. If they are unwilling or unable to sign, obtain informed consent verbally.

Name: I, _____ agree to take part in an interview for the 050 Network for the purposes of developing a strategy to support older people in County Cavan. I understand that the information will be treated confidentially and that I will not be identified in the document.

Date of Interview: _____

Interview Guide

Gender	_____
Age	_____
Area	_____

Background Information

Can you tell me a little bit about yourself? What's your background? (age, family, where you grew up, the area you are living in now)

How happy are you with your current situation generally?

What do you enjoy most in life?

Are there areas of your life that you are not happy with?

Services and Support

What types of services do you use most often? (rural transport, library, health nurse, community groups, post office, GPs, etc.)

Are you satisfied with the range of services available to you locally?

What's good about them?

What could be improved?

Can you describe the support you have...

From family?

From friends?

From your community?

Are you living in a rural area or an urban area? What are the advantages and disadvantages of the area you live in?

Do you provide care for family or friends on a regular basis (unpaid help)?

Have you experienced a family bereavement?

Issues and Barriers

Are there any issues that prevent you, as an older person, from participating fully in society? (e.g. transport, lack of money, loneliness, lack of information etc.)

Housing

What type of housing are you living in?

Is it satisfactory to you? (in terms of heating, space, modern conveniences, being able to get around it easily)

What are your living arrangements (living alone, with spouse, partner, other family, residential). Does this arrangement suit you?

Financial Issues

What are your sources of income (pension, other welfare payments, working)

Do you have problems making ends meet on a regular basis?

Do you find it difficult to afford specific items? (for example, bills, repairs, a new coat in winter) What types of things present difficulty for you?

Health and Well Being

How would you describe your health at the moment? (excellent, good, okay, poor)

Have you any conditions or disabilities that affect your daily life? How do you cope with these? (mental or physical)

Can you describe what opportunities you have for socialising with friends and family? Is there anything that prevents you going to social events?

Are you ever affected by loneliness? If yes, how could this be addressed?

Do you have any suggestions for things that would help to improve your life?

What changes would you like to see happening in the future in your local area for older people? What change would you like to see in the county?

Are there any other issues you would like to raise? (bullying, elder abuse)

At the end of the interview, the interviewer should thank the interviewee for their time and information and tell them that they will be sent a copy of the final strategy. Make sure they have contact details for the 050 network if they would like to get in touch.