

Towards a more age-friendly Galway City

A report on the views of older
people on Galway as an age-friendly city

Summary October 2009



Galway Healthy Cities Project
Gaillimh Tionscnamh na gCathracha Sláintiúla



Feidhmeannacht na Seirbhíse Sláinte
Health Service Executive

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Introduction

This report presents a summary of the findings from research undertaken in 2008 examining Galway as an age-friendly city. It represents the voice of ninety-five older people on how age friendly Galway City is and presents recommendations arising from the research. The full report is available on www.galwayhealthycities.ie

The Galway Healthy Cities project which is part of the World Health Organization (WHO) Healthy Cities programme undertook this research. The Healthy Cities project has been working on the theme of Healthy Ageing. As part of its involvement with the WHO it became aware of an Age-Friendly checklist developed by the WHO to help cities to become more age friendly.

The checklist focuses on eight key areas, which include:

1. Outdoor spaces and buildings
2. Transportation
3. Housing
4. Social participation
5. Respect and social inclusion
6. Civic participation and employment
7. Communication and information
8. Community support and health services

The aim of the research was to;

- a) Identify the strengths and weaknesses of Galway City in relation to an age friendly checklist developed by the WHO.
- b) Identify where and how Galway city can become more age-friendly.

Methodology

The Checklist

The checklist used for this study was developed by the WHO outlining the essential features of an age friendly city. Respondents were asked to tick one answer regarding each of the checklist statements. An opportunity was also given to include relevant examples. See excerpt from checklist below.

<u>A. Outdoor spaces and buildings</u> <i>Please tick one box for each question</i>				
A1. Public areas are clean and pleasant.				
Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither agree/disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Please give examples if possible based on your selection				
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The sample population

Older people and groups/organisations representing older people were invited to give their views on the strengths and weaknesses of Galway City in relation to this age friendly checklist. Communication on this was given out through relevant groups and the local media.

Findings

A summary of the findings is presented for each of the eight “age friendly” categories. At the beginning of each section, we provide a few direct quotes from participants who completed the checklist. The overall strengths and weaknesses for each section are also presented. Recommendations reflect in part the suggestions of participants and the author’s interpretation.

Next steps

The information in this report is being given to all key groups and agencies in the city. In addition agencies and groups will be asked to take on board the findings and to progress with the recommendations. The Healthy Cities Forum will work with the City Development Board to progress work on making Galway City more age friendly.

A. Outdoor Spaces and Buildings

Some quotes from respondents

“Improvements have been made especially in Eyre Square and the Millennium Playground. Litter and graffiti still a problem”

“It seems that the seats provided are very few and far between. Also, the seats are for designer’s satisfaction rather than comfort for users”

“Bags of rubbish and bins are blocking pavements, cyclists use them, paving is loose, motorists parked on pavements”

“Some streets have no accessible footpaths- poles, bollards, too narrow with no dropped areas to gain access either side of offending obstacles”

“There are not enough public toilets in town. I have to queue and pay in the Eyre Square Centre if caught short”

Strengths

Participants commented positively on the following:

- Eyre Square, Salthill prom, Canal Walk, Barna New Park
- General feeling that green spaces well maintained
- In general drivers give way to pedestrians

Weaknesses

Participants highlighted a number of issues in relation to Outdoor spaces and buildings:

- A recurring theme was pavements – broken, uneven pavements, slippery, not wide enough and not enough white lines
- Bicycles and cars parked on pavements
- Not enough public seating
- State of green areas in some areas
- Too few public toilet facilities
- Motorists not giving pedestrians enough time to cross
- Safety concerns due to lack of Garda patrols and insufficient street lighting
- Not enough litter bins
- Some buildings are inaccessible

Recommendations

1. Implementation of parking regulations
2. Maintenance and improvement to paths, pavements and kerbs
3. Enforcement of planning for signs to ensure no obstruction
4. Buildings should be accessible and older people consulted when constructing or renovating buildings and facilities
5. Increase and maintain public seating
6. Improve cycle parking and ensure bikes are not causing obstruction
7. Improve access to toilet facilities
8. A campaign to promote driver courtesy and awareness of people at pedestrian crossing
9. Link with Transportation Office in relation to pedestrian crossings e.g. availability and time to cross
10. Increase Garda presence
11. Improved access and maintenance of green spaces and facilities
12. Improved lighting in the city
13. Promotion of existing facilities

B. Transport

Some quotes from respondents

“Bus service too infrequent on weekends and holidays”

“I have often been stranded by bus service in City” “Unreliable” “No displays at stops”

“Buses overcrowded and not always clean” “Not suitable for wheelchairs”

“Buses all big, should have some minibuses”

“Does not pull in fully to path so difficulty in getting in and out”

“Lack of simple bench to enable the elderly to be seated whilst waiting for a bus makes public transport inaccessible to some elderly people”

“Most frustrating to see designated blue painted areas and not accessible because it’s too small or it’s encroached by another driver”

Strengths

Participants commented positively on the following

- The Red buses
- On some routes people were satisfied as it got them into town

Weaknesses

Participants highlighted a number of issues in relation to Transport:

- Priority seating not respected
- Lack of disability parking spaces and drop off points, where they exist not respected
- Not enough disability friendly transport
- Bus drivers not parking close to kerb, not dropping step and not waiting for passengers to get on and off the bus
- Unreliable and insufficient service especially evenings, weekends, holidays
- Need to extend routes e.g. post office on Tuam road
- Overcrowding and litter on bus
- Safety concerns at bus station
- Traffic congestion, road work and parking causing obstructions
- Lack of seating and shelter at bus stops
- Insufficient information at bus stops e.g. timetable, route and print too small
- Cost of taxis expensive

Recommendations

1. Liaise with Galway Transportation Unit to work on the specific issues highlighted in this report
2. Enforce parking regulations
3. Improve public transport options and ensure that routes consider the needs of older people
4. Consider providing minibuses
5. Work on access issues
6. Increasing number of parking spaces for people with disabilities following consultation with users
7. Improving service provided for passengers by giving adequate time to get on and off the bus, get seated and drop step when required
8. Provide age friendly bus stops by improving seating and shelter at bus stops, lighting, timetable and route legible
9. Improve cycling facilities
10. Work with transport providers to make information more accessible and legible
11. Improve traffic flow e.g. student Garda or Garda reserve could perhaps assist with this

C. Housing

Some quotes from respondents

“Housing grants are at a stand still and there is a huge waiting time”

“Private house owners have to rely on services provided by workmen often at exorbitant prices” “There are a lot of conmen” “We need a lot more housing like Sue Ryders and Cluid Housing development in Clifden”

“There is still insufficient social housing with long waiting lists”

“There should be more affordable homes available for low income”

“Most suppliers know very little about disability friendly housing and do not understand the needs of older people” “Doors frequently too narrow for wheelchairs”

“Insufficient home helps available” “Not enough insulation for noise”

Strengths

Participants commented positively on the following:

- Age Actions Care and Repair programme
- Sue Ryders housing development and Cluid housing development in Clifden were given as good examples of sheltered housing for older people that should be followed

Weaknesses

Participants highlighted a number of issues in relation to Housing;

- Lack of sheltered housing with caretaker, restaurants, laundry in proximity to services
- Waiting list for social housing
- High cost of repairs and modifications to their existing home
- Concerns about finding suitable tradesmen and not a “conman”
- Lack of regulations on maintenance charges
- Poor standards in private rented accommodation
- Houses not disability friendly

Recommendations

1. Promotion of maintenance programmes such as Age Action Care and Repair Programme
2. Develop housing plan for older people in Galway City which considers options such as sheltered housing and social housing as well as options for smaller houses
3. Greater enforcement of planning regulation in terms of disability legislation for housing
4. New housing development and adaptations should make provision for lifetime adaptability, greater energy efficiency and take account of the needs of older people e.g. wider doorways
5. Develop a campaign regarding promoting safety for old people in the home which includes issues such as employment of tradesmen
6. Older people awareness training for relevant organisations
7. Disability awareness training for relevant organisations

D. Social Participation

Some quotes from respondents

“Not everyone wants painting; many are adventurous, want to shoot the wind or rapids”

“Difficult to find space for senior meetings/events”. “due to steps and expense”

“Private transport buses don’t always suit...taxis are too expensive”

“It is not safe to travel alone especially for older people” “Not safe to walk out alone, no community garda”

“Most activities on at night too late for us” “All the time bingos are at night”

“Most events are very expensive”

“Lack of specific information ... causes isolation for older people” “Perhaps information could be available at post offices?”

“Create a friendlier atmosphere welcoming to new people...break from existing cliques and include new people”

Strengths

Participants commented positively on the following:

- Active Retirement groups, Sonas Mervue, Bohermore Community Hall, Galway Contact, Day Care Centres, Age Action, Libraries, Bingo Hall
- Older people expressed a desire for involvement in the community

Weaknesses

Participants highlighted a number of issues in relation to Social Participation including:

- Accessibility is seen as a barrier, some community centres still have steps
- Lack of public transport
- Lack of benches at bus stops
- Venues poorly lit
- Cost – most events very expensive
- Concerns regarding safety
- Lack of variety of activities
- Timing – activities on at night not suitable for a lot of older people
- Some activities and events poorly promoted
- Some people feeling that very little on offer for older people

Recommendations

1. Greater promotion of existing events and activities for older people e.g. Positive Ageing week, Bealtaine Festival
2. Groups and events to be more welcoming of new people and being more inclusive
3. Improved information about all community activities and events
4. Increased opportunities for older people to socialise
5. Greater consideration to location and timing of events so that they are more suitable for older people in terms of time and transport
6. Initiative to promote safety for older people including increased community Garda presence
7. Recognise businesses for efforts to support age friendly environments
8. Increase and promote volunteer options that promote social contact with older people

E: Respect and Social Inclusion

Some quotes from respondents

“No one asks for an older persons view” “Everything nowadays you feel you need to beg for”

“With increased population older people are forgotten and isolated” “Some older people who live alone never get people calling”

“Older people are stereotyped and ageism is rampant”

“Community events on whole don’t consider requirements of older people ...e.g. Macnas parade, Arts festival or Cuirt” “Organised events lacking in seating for frail /disabled/older”

“Not many activities that include all ages in the community”

“Few schools involve older people but improving”

“Access to transport difficult for older people who are less well off, voluntary transport would help”

Strengths

Participants commented positively on the following:

- Active retired groups
- HSE staff are generally helpful
- Desire for older people to be included and involved in community events

Weaknesses

Participants highlighted a number of issues in relation to Social Inclusion including:

- Lack of consultation
- Few schools involve older people
- Older people are forgotten, isolated and undervalued
- Access to housing and transport very difficult
- Needs of older people not considered e.g. seating
- Many rude staff in shops and café’s
- Letters sent to local authority are rarely acknowledged
- Parades in Galway don’t accommodate older people
- More services needed to assist older people to stay in their homes
- Ongoing Ageism

Recommendations

1. Promote and celebrate the contribution that older people make to society e.g. Mayor Awards Positive Ageing Category
2. Increase communication regarding events, facilities and services such as Get to Know your Neighbour Weekend, Neighbourhood watch, Active Retirement
3. Develop structures to represent the views of older people in decision making in Galway City
4. Greater consultation with older people where they are not just listened to but that their views are taken on board
5. Community events to take account of the needs of older people
6. Increase opportunities for intergenerational connections through school and community programmes and activities
7. Provide ageism training that promotes awareness of services and best methods to assist older people in accessing services
8. Maximise the use of the media to promote positive ageing and age awareness in Galway City

F: Civic Participation and Employment

Some quotes from respondents

“Give an old geyser a chance! Many older people have a lifetime of experience, wealth (not €) and contribution to make” “Public bodies should seek the older persons experience”

“Retirement seems to include a silence option with no opinions required”

“Information re training could be more widely circulated” “No new training opportunities for older people”

“I did back to work courses in 1993 then told too old as over 55”

“No incentives to work for older people e.g. in relation to non contributory pension”

“On surface discrimination is forbidden but not always observed”

“Most workplaces are not disability friendly”

Strengths

Participants commented positively on the following:

- Age Action training courses
- Improvement has happened in relation to workplaces becoming disability friendly
- Older people expressed a desire for opportunities for meaningful involvement in their community

Weaknesses

Participants highlighted a number of issues in relation to Civic Participation and Employment including:

- No incentives for older people to work
- Lack of knowledge about support in employment
- Lack of training and information regarding training opportunities for older people
- Not enough parking for disabled employees

Recommendations

1. Promote and celebrate the contribution that older people make to society and to the workforce
2. Increased volunteer options for older people to contribute
3. Greater consultation with older people where they are not just listened to but that their views are taken on board
4. Provide information and promote activities and education courses for older people
5. Raise awareness of ageism in employment through training and in the media
6. Enforcement of disability legislation

G. Communication & Information

Some quotes from respondents

“Good quality info on Galway Bay FM and parish newsletter and local paper”

“Galway Bay should have a designated programme for older people, as these are the people that listen to the radio during the day”

“Basic training in computer literacy would greatly assist”

“Bus timetables, medicine bottles, cinema times and TV captions should have larger print”

“Those at risk of social isolation do not always come to the attention of services, not enough outreach, advertising or directory of services”

“Very difficult to read and understand official documents”

“Some answering services speak too quickly and indistinctly for those with hearing loss”

“Personal contact system of imparting information is vital”

“Need more large buttons and big lettering on equipment”

Strengths

Participants commented positively on the following:

- Good quality information on Galway Bay FM and parish newsletter and local paper
- Friends and Neighbours informing them of relevant information

Weaknesses

Participants highlighted a number of issues in relation to Communication and Information including:

- Answering machines too quick, indistinct and too many instructions
- Printed information and equipment with large lettering is lacking e.g. bus, cinema and theatre timetables, and even in social welfare offices
- Difficulty in reading and understanding official documents
- Sunday Mass should be on Galway Bay FM
- Lack of dedicated programme for older people in the media

Recommendations

1. Greater use of existing channels to communicate with older people e.g. local radio, print media, waiting areas, churches.
2. Literacy proof printed material for the public, consideration to larger print and audio format
3. Ensure structures in place to represent views of older people in decision making in Galway City – consider developing Older People Network
4. Promote technology training for older people e.g. Age Action mobile phone training
5. Improve internet access for older people e.g. access to computer at public locations;
6. More training for staff of public service providers on communication skills
7. Promote Care for your Neighbour Policy
8. Promotion of services that provide information to older people on entitlement and supports e.g. Senior Help Line, Citizen Information Centre
9. Open House Days at public services to engage with older people and improve awareness of services
10. Work with existing groups working with older people to make information more accessible

H: Health and Community

Some quotes from respondents

“Waiting lists are too long” “Too many cut back services insufficient for older peoples needs” “near impossible to get home help” “Home helps, community nurses and allied health care professionals needed to help us stay at home”

“Lifts in UCH numbers worn no idea which floor” “Try to park at UCH half dozen disabled spaces insufficient” “Some health services conveniently located but many not on bus routes”

“Dissemination of info (re Health services) is minimal and removal of services not publicised”

“(Health services information is) difficult sometimes to understand – when on radio programme it’s easier to understand” “Form filling and box ticking! - takes so long”

“Those who can afford to pay better are served”

Strengths

Participants commented positively on the following:

- Just under two-thirds of respondents agreed that health and social services are conveniently located and accessible
- Public health nurse very good despite scarce resources
- HSE employees helpful and efficient

Weaknesses

Participants highlighted a number of issues in relation to Health and Community including:

- Inadequate home care services
- Waiting lists too long especially for public patients
- Information on prescription tablets very small
- Insufficient designated housing
- Dissemination of information is minimal and removal of services not publicised
- Health and Community services not on bus routes/ inadequate bus service
- Difficulty of form filling for services
- Parking in UHG very difficult

Recommendations

1. Improve communication to older people regarding services and entitlements
2. Increase opportunities for older people to promote their own health and wellbeing including promoting a sense of self responsibility
3. Ensure that Health Service providers and older people have opportunity to share information on regular basis e.g. older representative consumer panel
4. Raise awareness of ageism through staff training
5. Work in partnership with other sectors in highlighting and addressing the wider issues affecting the health and wellbeing of older people e.g. transport, housing,
6. Examine ways to make information more legible and easier understood for older people including verbal and written and the use of technology
7. Health Services to work with older people group to identify how services can be more age friendly