



ANNUAL REPORT 2023

Ageing is inevitable,
loneliness doesn't have to be



Mary O'Donohue,
Executive Director

OUR VISION:

A community where no older person is isolated or alone.

OUR MISSION:

To alleviate loneliness and isolation by providing Befriending and Wellbeing Supports that empower people to stay healthy and socially connected.

DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE

OUR WORK IN 2023 HAS BEEN BASED ON THE PREMISE, 'AGEING IS INEVITABLE, LONELINESS DOESN'T HAVE TO BE.'

The 2022 Census predicts that 1 in 5 people in Ireland will be over the age of 65 by 2030. This is a positive result of increasing life-expectancy. Indeed, growing old is a privilege that I hope we can all enjoy.

Unfortunately, the EU Loneliness Survey, published in 2023 revealed that Ireland has the highest rate of loneliness in Europe. Within this group, many older people are particularly vulnerable to the devastating impact of isolation and loneliness on their physical and mental health.

This trend is set to continue and requires attention in order to meet the health and wellbeing needs of our older population.

Alleviation of loneliness and isolation was very much a priority for many of the older people served by Making Connections in 2023.

I was proud to see **Making Connections Walk & Talk Programme**, run in partnership with the HSE **featured on RTÉ Nationwide** in October 2023. The feature highlighted the positive impact of physical activity and social engagement on the health and overall wellbeing of older people.

The Walk and Talk programme was also commended in the **HSE National Excellence Awards** and a plan to grow the programme to other locations is underway for 2024.

In 2023, we also **expanded our Wellbeing Supports Programme** by offering a broader range of options including social support, practical support, and assistance to be linked in with relevant services in the community.

Making Connections volunteers are integral to all of our work including volunteer Board Directors, service delivery and administration support. I would like to thank each and every one of them for their time, dedication and generosity of heart.

Finally, I would like to thank all of our supporters, corporate partners, and funders for making the work we do possible.

Yours Sincerely,
Mary O'Donohue

HIGHLIGHTS 2023



259

OLDER PEOPLE
SUPPORTED



4,000+

VOLUNTEER HOURS



215+

VOLUNTEERS
ENGAGED



FEATURED ON RTÉ
NATIONWIDE



HSE NATIONAL
EXCELLENCE AWARD:
COMMENDED



SUPPORTING PEOPLE TO AGE WELL AT HOME

Making Connections services are available to people aged 65+ in Dublin South. In 2023, 99% of our referrals were made by clinicians. This included 85% from HSE Primary Care Teams and 14% from hospitals.

Many of the people we support experience physical and mental health difficulties including mobility challenges, frailty, low mood, depression, anxiety, cognitive decline, or other complex health issues. This can have a devastating impact on independence, confidence, and physical and mental wellbeing.

Our work has a strong preventative focus. We support people to increase physical activity and social engagement, empowering them to remain happy and healthy in their own homes for as long as possible.

“People have their own lives... grandchildren, caring for sick husbands etc. I see people passing by and I'd like to talk to them. You're aptly named, because it's hard to make connections. Making Connections helped me get out of the house, get active and connected with my local community. I never thought I'd make new friends at my age. It's been a huge confidence boost. I feel young again!”

PATRICK, AGE 78



Developing
Innovative
Partnerships

OUR COLLABORATIVE APPROACH

At Making Connections, we believe we are stronger together. We align our work with National Policy and Strategic Plans. This includes Sláintecare's vision of integrated community-based care in the "right place at the right time."

Locally, we collaborate with HSE clinicians to stay on the pulse of emerging needs of the people we support. We also engage with other agencies to ensure a joined-up work approach that complements each other and avoids duplication.

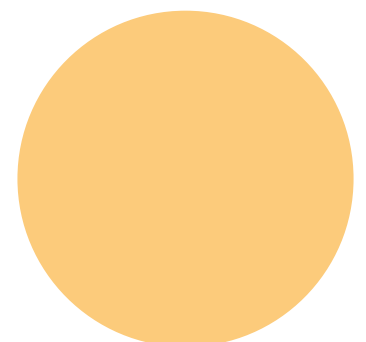
National Alignment:

- Age Friendly Ireland
- National Positive Ageing Strategy
- Sláintecare
- Volunteer Ireland

Local Collaboration:

- Dlr Age Friendly 5 Year Strategy
- HSE Managers & Primary Care Teams
- Social Prescribing Network
- Local Businesses

We are proactive about forging new partnerships. Making Connections Walk & Talk Programme, in partnership with the HSE, is an example of successfully combining the rigour of clinical assessment with the strength of community based, volunteer-led initiatives.



MAKING CONNECTIONS VOLUNTEERS

Our dedicated team of volunteers are the backbone of Making Connections.

Making Connections volunteers support older people in the local community and respond to a range of needs. They also act as 'eyes on the ground' and report relevant changes in circumstances to staff, which is shared with clinicians, enabling early intervention.

“Ivan brings me out to get my shopping. I love talking to him about travel. Since the sudden passing of my wife – he’s made such a difference.”

MARTIN, 85, SUPPORTED BY A MAKING CONNECTIONS VOLUNTEER

Volunteers have also been critical in ensuring the safe and effective delivery of the Walk & Talk Programme.



Volunteers – the heart of Making Connections

“I felt so supported by the volunteers. I especially loved chatting with the young ones – we shared all sorts of stories!”

MAEVE, 79 (WALK & TALK PARTICIPANT)

As an intergenerational initiative, Making Connections Family Volunteers support our goal to tackle ageism and to facilitate mutually beneficial relationships.



FEATURED ON RTÉ NATIONWIDE

Making Connections Walk & Talk Programme, a collaboration with HSE Healthcare East, and HSE Health and Wellbeing, was a resounding success during its inaugural year. This programme aims to increase the physical activity and social engagement of older people. It was designed as a direct response to the increase of falls, and loss of mobility and independence post pandemic.

This new initiative was featured on RTÉ Nationwide during National Positive Ageing Week. It highlighted our success in supporting people's health and wellbeing through exercise and community engagement. This feature prompted a great demand for the expansion of this scalable model across Ireland.



Featured
on RTÉ
Nationwide

The programme was also commended in the HSE National Excellence Awards.

In 2023, we received 83 referrals, and delivered the 7-week programme to 5 groups. The programme consists of hand grip and leg strength assessment on week one and again on week seven, to measure the level of improvement.

HSE National
Excellence
Awards 2023
Commended



Volunteers were an integral part of the programme. The ratio of volunteers to participants ensured a high level of support and safety, facilitating each participant to go at their own pace.



Increasing Physical Activity

Positive Impact Achieved:

- Sit-stand test indicated increased strength
- Grip strength test indicated reduced frailty
- Feedback/wellbeing forms indicated increased physical activity, social engagement, and improved sense of wellbeing

All participants were invited to a year-end celebration event. The benefits of staying active and socially connected was reinforced with an interactive peer-learning session. The group shared lessons learned and plans for sustaining the benefits. Many participants have shared contact details and will continue to meet to walk and socialise independently.

“I’m now able to walk to SuperValu. It’s a little thing, but huge for me - before this I hadn’t been out alone for over a year.”
MARGARET, 76

“I never walk on my own, so it’s the only time I get out walking. And it’s great talking with other people as I live by myself.”
ANNA, 82

“I started with one stick, and now I don’t use any at all. It’s been a big lift for me – especially after losing my wife a year ago.”
JAMES, 69

“You’re finished the walk before you know it because you are chatting away to volunteers and the company makes such a difference.”
PAUL, 76

Enjoying Social Engagement





Sharing
stories &
laughter

RESPONDING TO INDIVIDUAL NEEDS

Through research, collaboration, and programme development we expanded the range of social and wellbeing supports available in 2023.

We supported 219 older people with Individual Support Plans (an increase of 68% compared to 2022). Each one was tailored to the needs of the individual and involved one or more type of support.

Of those supported, 61% required regular in-person support in the home/community. Activities included but were not limited to:

- Visits in the person's home, especially for those who are housebound.
- Support to get out of the house with the aim of regaining confidence and independence (e.g. going to the shops, post office, etc).
- Buddy support to attend activities (e.g. Men's Sheds, Mindful Garden Course).
- Walking companionship to increase physical activity (to maintain mobility, or to support recover after fall/injury/illness).

In addition, 39% required assistance to access other age friendly supports and activities such as Mental Health Support, Dementia Services, Care & Repair, Dublin Bus Transport Assistance, Access to Library Services, etc.



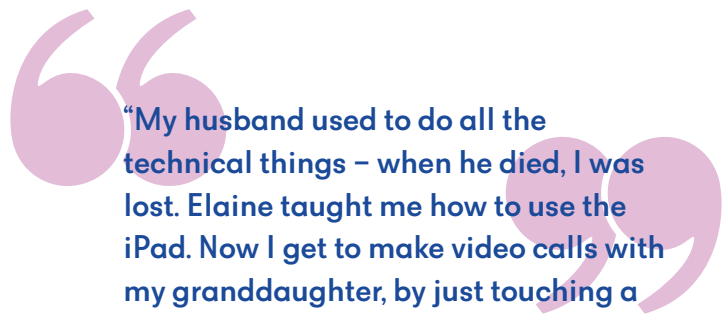
Alleviating
isolation &
supporting
independence



“What matters to you, matters to us”

The benefits of our individual support plans are far reaching, including:

- Improved mobility/increased physical activity
- Improved independence/ ability to remain in their own home
- Improved emotional well-being/mental health
- Increased social participation/community engagement
- Reduced isolation and feelings of loneliness



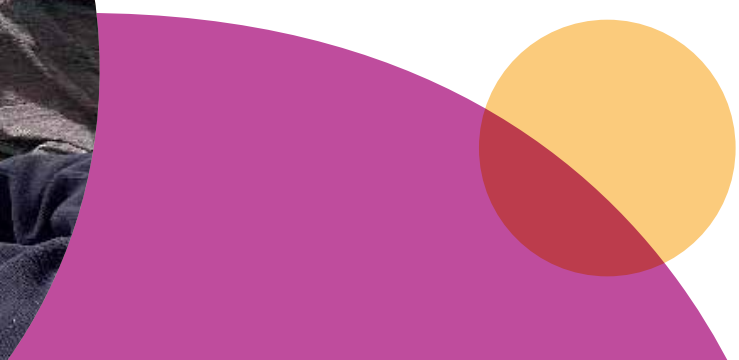
“My husband used to do all the technical things – when he died, I was lost. Elaine taught me how to use the iPad. Now I get to make video calls with my granddaughter, by just touching a button. I love it! She’s also helped me sort out practical things - bills and things. It’s been a lifesaver.”

JANE, 84, SUPPORTED BY MAKING CONNECTIONS VOLUNTEER, ELAINE



“I was stuck inside after the fall. The visits got me through the part of recovery that I feared the most. It was something to look forward to and encouragement to get active. I’ve got my mobility and confidence back – last week I went out alone to meet friends for the first time this year.”

DUNCAN, 73, SUPPORTED BY MAKING CONNECTIONS VOLUNTEER, PAUL





BRINGING PEOPLE TOGETHER

For many older people, loss of mobility, health or confidence can make it difficult to access and enjoy leisure activities, adding to the burden of ageing and sense of isolation within their community.

In 2023, an intergenerational event at the Royal Hibernian Academy art gallery was the highlight of the Making Connections social events programme. This event connected the generations through the shared interest of art. Participants enjoyed a tour with Irish artist, Blaise Smith, followed by lunch and social chats.

Connecting people with community events

Enjoying inter-generational connections



“I’m not great with walking, so I don’t get out much. I really enjoyed the opportunity to do something different. The atmosphere was fantastic, and I particularly enjoyed sharing a cup of tea and a chat with new people.”

VERA, 89





DUNDRUM TOWN CENTRE CHARITY PARTNER



Making Connections was nominated as charity partner by Dundrum Town Centre. The public campaign message was "ageing is inevitable, loneliness doesn't have to be." This message resonated with young and old alike.

As part of the campaign Making Connections was featured in, the Gloss Magazine, radio and print media.

Over 60 Rosemont Secondary School students brought the campaign to life with carol singing. They gave gifts donated by local businesses, to older people in the community, sharing stories, laughter and some Christmas cheer.



"I guess I'll be old too some day and I'd like to be surrounded by a supportive community. It's inspired me to visit my nan more often."

AMY, 24



Raising Awareness

making connections VOLUNTEER

GOOD GOVERNANCE

Making Connections' board of trustees oversees its strategic direction, financial management, and compliance with regulatory requirements. Five board meetings were held in 2023 in addition to an Annual General Meeting. The Board of Making Connections ensured that our work remained fully compliant with the Charities Governance Code in 2023 and all other legal obligations. Making Connections is audited annually by Crowleys DFK and financial statements are published.

OUR COMMITMENT

Making Connections is committed to supporting the independence, wellbeing and inclusion of older people in our community. Through national and local alignment, and our strength in partnerships, we will ensure that we play our part in creating a community that is great to grow old in. We are also dedicated to providing a range of volunteer opportunities, and positive volunteer experiences for people of all ages and backgrounds.

THANK YOU

The impact we achieved in 2023 would not have been possible without our donors and supporters. We are very appreciative of the generosity which allows us to ensure the sustainability of our work, and the capacity to develop and expand our programmes to meet the growing demand.

Making Connections

Trustees (L-R) Colin Shaw, Laura Ryan, Ciara Wallace, Jordan Campbell, Timothy Brick (missing from photo: Aine O'Mahony).





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