

Submission to the Joint Committee on the development of local and community arts, January 2023

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Age & Opportunity

We are Age & Opportunity, the national organisation that provides a range of opportunities for older people who want to get more involved in arts and culture, sport and physical activity, civic engagement and personal development.

Our vision is an Ireland where all older people can be more active, more visible, more creative, more connected, more confident, more often.

One of our key priorities is to truly understand what ageing in Ireland means for people today by increasing the dialogue we have with them – conducting regular research through focus groups and workshops and by generating more opportunities for their feedback across all of our programmes.

www.ageandopportunity.ie

Contents

Introduction	4
Who we are	4
Age & Opportunity Arts	4
1. Access to the arts in social & health care settings for older people	5
What needs to be done?	5
Access to the arts, training and networks	5
Cultural rights.....	6
Care settings.....	6
Network to support care setting activity coordinators	7
Artists	7
Age & Opportunity Training and resources	8
2. Equal access to the arts	9
National Arts & Creative Charter	9
Training	9
Public Transport	9
Personal Assistance Services.....	10
Value Added Tax	10
References	11

Introduction

This short paper intends to outline issues surrounding and opportunities for the development of community and local arts in the State vis a vis the arts and older people.

Who we are

Age & Opportunity is the leading national development organisation working to enable the best possible quality of life for us all as we age. We do this by:

- championing the creativity and value of older people;
- combating stereotypes and negative views of ageing;
- developing inclusive and engaging experiences which respond to the interests and needs of the diverse older adult population;
- developing, testing and measuring the impact of pioneering programmes and approaches;
- making evidence available to policy-makers and service providers;
- working with partners and stakeholders to ensure that Ireland's policies, strategies and programmes are directly informed by the needs and experiences of older people.

Age & Opportunity Arts

Age & Opportunity's Arts Programme focuses on older people's artistic creativity and creative potential, and supports the meaningful participation and representation/inclusion of older people in cultural and creative life. The programme is anchored in the annual Bealtaine Festival and a series of year-round resource and development initiatives which support artists, arts participants and arts organisations. We recently launched the Arts & Creative Charter for Older People which is based on a series of 8 commitments aiming to create greater confidence amongst older people in accessing the arts and supporting arts organisations to enhance this access.

We have identified two key issues impacting on access to the arts for older people which rest on:

1. Access to the arts in social & health care settings for older people
2. Equal access to the arts for older people

1. Access to the arts in social & health care settings for older people

Ireland will be a society for all ages that celebrates and prepares properly for individual and population ageing. It will enable and support all ages and older people to enjoy physical and mental health and wellbeing to their full potential. It will promote and respect older people's engagement in economic, social, cultural, community and family life, and foster better solidarity between generations. It will be a society in which the equality, independence, participation, care, self-fulfilment and dignity of older people are pursued at all times.

Minister for Mental Health and Older People Mary Butler, June 2022 (1)

What needs to be done?

In June 2020 Age & Opportunity was invited to make a submission to the Special Oireachtas Committee on Covid-19 Response in Care Settings. In this submission we outlined the importance of quality of life domains for those visiting day care centres and living in care settings and argued for the right of all visitors and residents in those settings to participate in meaningful & creative activities. In 2018, we were invited to make a submission to the Oireachtas on ageing and the arts in Ireland. In this submission, we talked about the importance of the arts for older people as self-reported in recent (UK) research, but also of the secondary value of the arts to their social, physical and psychological well-being.

Though our recommendations and this paper rests on access and equity issues in relation to the arts and older people, there is a significant body of international research showing the social and health benefits of engaging with the arts which further underlines the importance of this recommendation.

Since many of us may engage with day care services and/or residential care as we get older, the issue of access to the arts for older people in these 'difficult to reach' settings, is critical. Our key recommendation, therefore, rests on access to the arts for older people in day-care and residential settings.

Access to the arts, training and networks

Accessing the arts within social (day care centres and nursing homes) and health (hospitals etc.) settings which cater for older people depends on three critical things.

- 1) The first requirement is that there is a **state policy and legal framework** which provides for and ensures that arts activities are embedded within and available throughout those settings;
- 2) The second requirement is the creation of a **national organisation** modelled on the UK based NAPA (National Association for Providers of Activities for Older People) to support care staff in developing arts programmes;
- 3) The third requirement is that there are **sufficient numbers of artists** and creative workers who are professionally trained in relation to working with older people in those settings. Local authorities are also key to creating access to the arts for older people in care settings.

The three requirements outlined above rest on the education of wider society and government in relation to the potential and value of the arts throughout our lives, and the provision of resources to respond to that.

Although we would recommend funding be allocated directly to care and social settings to support the everyday provision of the arts within those settings, we also recommend the setting up of an arts grant scheme. To this end, we direct your attention to the administration of a similar initiative by Age & Opportunity in relation to the National Grant Scheme for Sport and Physical Activity for Older People funded by Sport Ireland. This scheme distributes approximately 1,000 grants to groups of older people each year for the purpose of promoting physical activity. Each group can take part in an activity of their choice and, because this grant has been available for twenty years, physical activity has become part of the annual schedule of activities for these groups. We believe that a similar grant could be used to introduce older people, many of whom have had limited exposure through their lives, to a wide range of arts and culture pursuits thus building cultural literacy and demand.

Cultural rights

Participation in the cultural life of the community and enjoyment of the arts is a human right (2) and should be available to those in care settings as a matter of course rather than exception. While we appreciate that resources may not allow residencies in every nursing home every year, the Irish government should recognise that *everyday* access to the arts and creativity are important for the fulfilment of universal human rights for many older people. The Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission (3) describe the key principle of 'progressive realisation' which charges the State to take appropriate steps – deliberate, concrete, and clearly targeted – to realise rights as quickly and effectively as possible. 'Appropriate' includes legislative, administrative, financial, educational, & social measures.

Care settings

Meaningful activities in home, day and residential care settings facilitate relationships and help confer a sense of achievement and maintain a sense of self. Some activities are more valued than others, generally characterised as 'meaningful'. Key to this is

- taking account of individual interests;

- small group activities most appreciated;
- integration into everyday life. (4)

This means that staff need to take time establishing what is considered valuable by individuals and need training and resources to facilitate meaningful activities and ensure that these activities are prioritised as an essential component of quality of life in care. Furthermore it means that appropriate training within a framework of Continued Professional Development is essential for all artists who wish to work with older people and staff in care settings.

As such, within care settings, there needs to be understanding of the value and potential of the arts within those settings and the appropriate infrastructure (planning, resources, people, budget) to offer arts engagements/experiences.

We recommend that a legal framework underpins provision of meaningful activity in care and budgets are allocated to all day care centres and residential care homes to support daily arts programmes for those who wish to participate.

This proposal supports the aspiration outlined in the National Quality Standards for Residential Care Settings for Older People to bring about a transformation from institutional to more person centred models of care. On a practical level it helps to meet Standard 18 by facilitating greater opportunities for participation in leisure activities that suit their needs, preferences and capacities. (5)

Network to support care setting activity coordinators

There is a need for a network based organisation such as the UK based NAPA (National Association for Providers of Activities for Older People) which is tasked with:

- Developing a mixed membership of care settings, housing with care and day care settings, activity staff, service users and their families;
- Developing strategic partnerships with other relevant organisations;
- Becoming an effective training, assessment and qualification awarding body;
- Setting the standard in training and leadership for activity provision;
- Leading on the development of a career path for activity provider.

We recommend that a similar organisation be established and resourced in Ireland. We believe this should be led by Department of Justice as it reinforces the recognition that participation in meaningful activities is a right for all citizens.

Artists

In addition to diverse creative approaches, professional artists need to understand the context of working in care settings and the possible and diverse scenarios they will encounter there.

We recommend that greater resources and supports are dedicated to supporting artists to reach more older people.

Age & Opportunity Training and resources

Age & Opportunity has a strong track-record of developing arts and arts training initiatives specifically tailored for both care settings and professional artists, we could do more with more funding:

- Creative Exchanges: QQI Level 6 Training Course which trains participants to plan and facilitate arts activities for older people in care settings (these can be activity coordinators in care settings or professional artists). [Creative Exchanges - Age & Opportunity \(ageandopportunity.ie\)](#)
- ACE (Artists Care Exchange)- this is a training module which targets professional artists who wish to develop their skills and knowledge around working with older people. [Invitation to Apply for the Artists Care Exchange \(ACE\) - Age & Opportunity \(ageandopportunity.ie\)](#)
- Azure: Explores how people with dementia-related conditions such as Alzheimer's, and the people who care for them, can have a deeper involvement in cultural institutions and can participate in cultural activities.
<https://www.bing.com/search?q=azure+age+%26+opportunity&q=ds&form=QBRE>
- Multimedia resources such as the Arts & Creative Toolkit for Care Settings and advocacy videos such as 'An Introduction to the Arts' (aimed at care settings) support care settings. [Arts & Creative Toolkit for Care Settings age & opportunity - Search \(bing.com\)](#)
- Awards: The National Arts in Nursing Homes Bealtaine Event (in partnership with Nursing Homes Ireland) and award promotes arts activities in nursing homes. [National Arts in Nursing Homes Day - Age & Opportunity \(ageandopportunity.ie\)](#)
- Artist(s) in Residence in a Care Setting: This opportunity creates access to the arts for older people in care settings, trains artists and supports the work of care settings. [2019 Artist Residency in a Care Setting - Age & Opportunity \(ageandopportunity.ie\)](#)
- AgeWise Workshops: Professionally facilitated workshops for employers and staff who are providing services to older people. These workshops are designed to create awareness of attitudes to ageing and older people. [AgeWise - Age & Opportunity \(ageandopportunity.ie\)](#)

2. Equal access to the arts

Age & Opportunity's Arts Programme focuses on older people's artistic and creative potential, and supports the meaningful participation and inclusion of older people in cultural and creative life. The programme is anchored in the annual Bealtaine Festival and a series of year-round resource and development initiatives which support artists, arts participants and arts organisations.

As an organisation promoting participation of older people in the arts for over 30 years we have seen firsthand many times how transformative such participation can be.

National Arts & Creative Charter

As part of our commitment to best practice, and in consultation with stakeholders and the public, we have developed an Arts & Creative Charter for Older people designed to outline key commitments and principles in relation to working with older people.

The Aims of the National Arts & Creative Charter are:

- To improve the experience of older audiences, arts participants and artists in their engagement with arts organisations in Ireland by recognising older people as distinct communities with particular sets of needs;
- To increase the confidence of older people in their engagement with arts organisations;
- To increase the confidence of arts organisation in working with and for older people;
- To advocate for and influence policy (also to be used in training) and best practice in relation to the arts and older people in Ireland.

Over the course of two years, we have worked with older people, as well as key representative arts organisations around Ireland to develop a National Arts & Creative Charter. The Charter centres around 6 principles based on Equity, Diversity, Support, Intergenerational solidarity and Human Rights and 8 commitments (access, employment, participation, language, policy and programming amongst others). The Charter is currently being piloted by a small group of arts organisations, before its official launch in 2023/2024.

Training

Part of the proposed implementation of the Charter relies on supporting the staff training of arts organisations interested in establishing best practice principles in working with older people. It would be expected that this training would become part of the sign up or registration process for the Charter.

Public Transport

Additionally, there are significant transport and day to day care-related issues that are barriers to the participation of older people in the arts. Making public transport more

accessible, convenient and safe, especially in rural Ireland, is critical to decision-making around going to arts events. Welcoming and accessible buildings, as well as great programming are also key to creating wider access and are also included in the Charter.

Personal Assistance Services

However, the 35% of people over 65 who are disabled may not even get to the building. The UN Principles of fundamental human rights for older people includes the charge, under the heading of fulfilment, that older persons should:

- be able to pursue opportunities for the full development of their potential.
- have access to the educational, cultural, spiritual and recreational resources of society. (2)

This charge relates to all older people including those who need additional supports for such opportunities and access. For many disabled persons this support is provided by personal assistance services, however persons with disabilities over the age of 65 are not eligible. (6)

We recommend that provision of personal assistance services be extended to those aged 65 and over who have aged with, or into, disability.

Value Added Tax

Another issue is the high rate of VAT on engaging with arts consultants/contractors, which is set at the highest rate of 23%. We would regularly work with such contractors to deliver our work nationally and this VAT rate is a barrier to engaging with them. The recommendation here is that the arts services VAT rate is brought in line with the hospitality and tourism, as well as hairdressing industries. Since art is considered a public good as is reflected in state support, it would make sense to bring the rate in line with those other services.

We recommend that the Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media to allocate funding to the Arts Council in Budget 2024 and following budgets to increase the supports for older people in how they access the arts in Ireland, including the establishment of specific age friendly training for those working in arts settings. We also ask the Department to consider the wider equity issues in relation to arts access for older people as outlined above.

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