



ANNUAL REPORT

2020

Pivoting to respond to the emerging needs of older people throughout COVID-19 lockdowns.

MESSAGE FROM THE DIRECTOR



Mary O'Donohue
Executive Director

OUR VISION

A community where no older person is isolated or alone.

OUR MISSION

We work to alleviate loneliness and isolation for adults aged 65 years and over needing support to live independently at home and to stay socially connected.

I clearly remember the weekend of March 28th 2020. As we faced the COVID-19 public health emergency the **Community Response Interagency Forum** was set up at great speed by DLR County Council and twelve local agencies, including Making Connections.

Our aim was to deliver a co-ordinated response for vulnerable people during COVID-19 lockdowns. We worked together to identify the most vulnerable people, respond to gaps in services, and provide solutions to problems raised at our regular meetings. There was a great sense of urgency to ensure that no one was left behind.

As the crisis evolved, Making Connections was also active in the **Health & Wellbeing sub-group** focusing on social isolation and mental health. The 'digital divide' became starkly apparent as older people were unable to access wellbeing resources online.

Time and time again we received requests "to see human beings." We organised artists and musicians to celebrate milestone birthdays of older people outside their house and invited neighbours to join in the fun while social distancing. These events lifted spirits at a time when hope was so achingly needed. To this day, some people still talk about these "surprises" as the most cherished memories of lockdown 2020.

The policy of cocooning presented a devastating challenge for people whose social interactions depended on day centre activities, befriending visits or trips to the shops or local café. Consequently, Making Connections experienced unprecedented demand. Older people phoned us not only for practical supports but also for reassurance, advice, or to share their sense of weariness, confusion or isolation.

We mobilised 100 volunteers who generously put their hands up for whatever we asked them to do: the delivery of over 4,000 meals, grocery shopping, pharmacy pick up, pension collection, phone support, or a garden visit to support someone who "couldn't bear it any longer."

This crisis has shown the effectiveness of local government working with local agencies and the invaluable contribution of the community and voluntary sector. I feel privileged to be part of such a responsive and resilient community of volunteers who prioritised the needs of others and were there for people in 'high and low tide.'

The level of collaboration I have witnessed fills me with hope for continuing our work and supporting people to Live Well as we navigate the transition period ahead.

MAKING CONNECTIONS

COVID-19 RESPONSE

The older people we work with are highly at risk from COVID-19. We have witnessed first-hand the impact of fear and stress, increased isolation, loss of freedom, and further barriers to accessing much needed support. The impact on physical and mental health has been wide reaching.

For many, the day centre or a daily walk to the corner shop may have been the highlight of the week. In the midst of COVID-19 these simple social outlets were taken away almost overnight. Similarly, the ability for people to support their own family, friends or neighbours was severely impacted by the restrictions imposed.

Making Connections started working remotely in March 2020. With Befriending visits temporarily suspended, we pivoted quickly to change to Telephone Befriending and we launched a range of emergency supports to respond to the needs of vulnerable older adults in the County.



I was afraid I'd forget how to walk so I went out. You see I just have to get my courage back because if that goes, I'm finished. I'm afraid the government won't let us oldies out any more 'cause we're the problem. We are the ones who can prolong the virus because we are too slow getting around.

MARIE, 88 YEARS OLD



A COLLABORATIVE RESPONSE

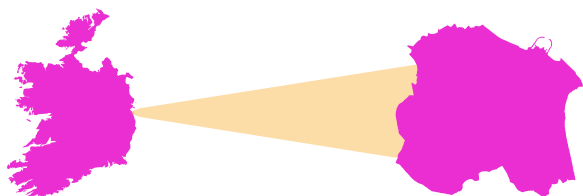
In March 2020, Making Connections was invited to sit on the Dun Laoghaire-Rathdown Community Response Forum as part of National government initiative. The forum comprised over a dozen local agencies and organisations which met regularly to identify and respond to the emerging needs of the most vulnerable groups in our community.

We worked in close partnership with HSE Managers of Services for Older People and a diverse team of frontline clinicians who identified those most in need of our support.

Making Connections was also an active member of the Health & Wellbeing sub-group of the Forum proposing and implementing innovative solutions such as the garden concerts, which lifted the spirits of all who participated. This initiative was picked up by the media, and featured by Sylvia Thompson in the Irish Times in June 2020.

We were regular contributors at the dlr Age Friendly Alliance meetings. In particular we were delighted to share our insights about the emerging needs of older people. These will be important for the new five-year Age Friendly strategy for the county.

As a local volunteer-led organisation, Making Connections mobilised and managed a team of over 100 volunteers.



NATIONAL ALIGNMENT

- › National Covid-19 Response
- › Healthy Ireland
- › #Keep Well
- › Age Friendly Ireland

LOCAL PARTICIPATION

- › dlr Community Response Forum
- › Health & Wellbeing sub-group
- › dlr Age Friendly Alliance
- › dlr Volunteer Centre

LIAISON WITH FRONTLINE AGENCIES

- › HSE Managers of Services for Older People
- › HSE Primary Care Teams
- › Hospitals
- › dlr Community Call (local helpline)

SERVICE DELIVERY

- › Making Connections Volunteers
- › Employee volunteers local businesses
- › Airfield Estate | MAO at Home

OUR IMPACT



215
OLDER PEOPLE
SUPPORTED

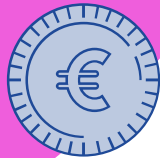


100
VOLUNTEERS
MOBILISED

4,000
MEALS DELIVERED



INFORMATION
PROVISION



PENSION
COLLECTION



PHARMACY
COLLECTION



GROCERY
SHOPPING



TELEPHONE BEFRIENDING

The impact of the sudden lockdown and prolonged restrictions led to increased demand for support. Although befriending visits were suspended, volunteers continued their support by making regular phone calls and outdoor visits where possible and in compliance with COVID-19 guidelines. Making Connections recruited additional volunteers to carry out check-in calls as demand for this support increased.



Tackled loneliness
and isolation
through regular
phone calls



Brought gifts
to brighten up
their day

I feared dying of loneliness
more than the virus. Your
volunteers have been my
lifeline. I will never be able to
thank you enough.

PATRICK, 79 YEARS OLD



**Provided
information
about COVID-19
restrictions**

MAKING CONNECTIONS HELPLINE

Making Connections received an influx of calls from older people seeking information, advice and support as well as calls from families in crisis who found themselves suddenly unable to support their family in the usual way and requiring assistance.

Making Connections responded by operating a phone line 12 hours a day Monday to Friday. This enabled us to provide information, advice, reassurance and the ability to link people to other relevant services, including mental health services.

“Margaret, an 87-year-old lady, called Making Connections asking if someone could call her regularly “just to check that I’m alive”.



**Connected
people with
mental health
services**

PRACTICAL SUPPORTS

Making Connections recruited a team of 100 volunteers to support people with practical needs including pharmacy collection, pension collection and shopping. New protocols were created to ensure all of these activities were compliant with the COVID-19 health and safety requirements.

I just need basic groceries. I'm afraid to go out and don't even know where the nearest shop is. Can you help me?

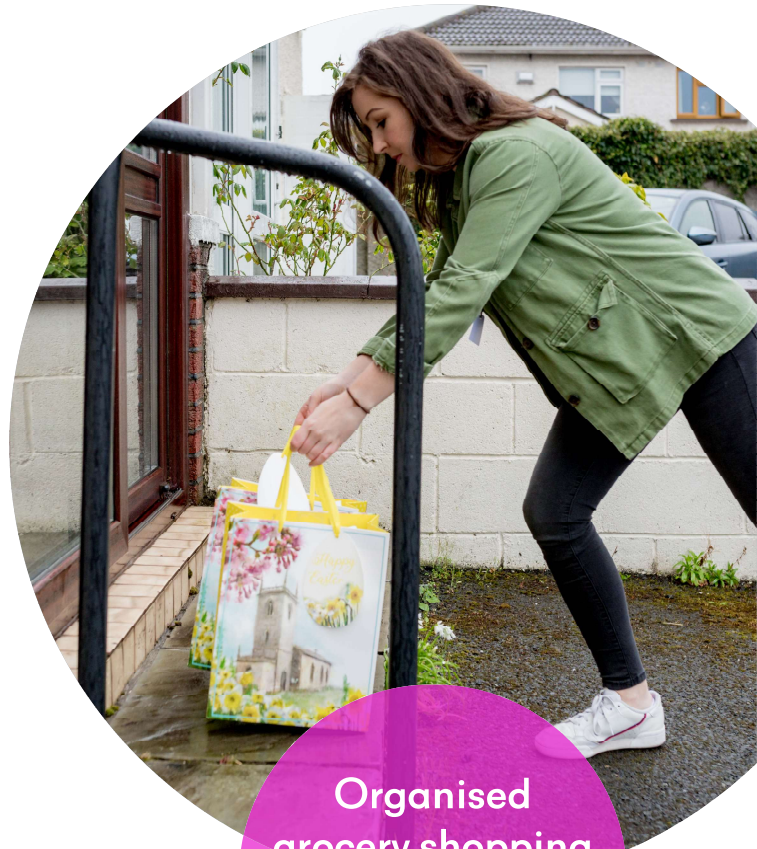
PATRICIA, 84 YEARS OLD, who called after she came to the UK to look after her elderly sister and was stranded

Your volunteer who did my shopping was so careful to pick products with an extended date to last me longer. Only someone very thoughtful could do something like this. Your charity gives me such a lift and I feel secure knowing that ye are there for me and I can call on you.

JAMES, 92 YEARS OLD

It wasn't just about the task they did. It was the helpful attitude of your volunteers: their presence, their company, their smile and sense of humour. I will never forget it.

MAURA, 75 YEARS OLD



Organised grocery shopping and pharmacy collection

MEAL DELIVERY SERVICE

A number of meals on wheels groups were unable to continue to provide the service due to kitchens having to close or drivers who were over 70 years having to cocoon. As a consequence many older people who depended on the meals were left without them.

In response, we took up the challenge to find a solution and thanks to food suppliers Airfield Estate and Mao at Home, Making Connections volunteers delivered over 4,000 nutritious meals to older people between April and July 2020.

The volunteers' friendly presence and positive approach had the added value of bringing invaluable comfort to cocooners, many of whom were frightened and anxious at that time.



Delivered over 4,000 nutritious meals during the crisis



Stopped to chat during deliveries

“Life isn't about perfection. We are getting tenderness and kindness from your organisation, which is far more important than anything else at this awful time.

JOHN, 70s, responding to our apology after a logistics error led to a failed meal delivery

I'm nearly 90 and don't know if I'll survive this strange virus but with the lovely food you are giving me, I might last a bit longer.

BRENDAN





Celebrated
birthdays

INNOVATIVE OUTDOOR & ONLINE EVENTS

Highlights included:

- › A classical guitarist playing and singing for a lady celebrating her 90 birthday.
- › A couple dancing for a man whose passion was ballroom dancing.
- › A storyteller sharing and listening to tales of childhood.



Inspired
hope with
garden
concerts



Made them
laugh

Also, when winter weather prohibited outdoor events, older people were offered an online concert. In partnership with Pavilion Theatre and dlr Arts/HSE office, Making Connections supported a big group of older people to get online and enjoy the world-renowned Irish pianist, Finghin Collins.

I'm a cheerful sort of person
and I was determined not to get
depressed (during lockdown).
I was sad when the volunteer
(home visitor) couldn't come but
it was fantastic to have a live
performer in my garden.

TERESA, 73 YEARS OLD

Listened to
their stories





LETTER CONNECTIONS: SPIRIT OF CHRISTMAS

Older people received over 400 letters, cards and gifts by post throughout Christmas and the New Year from volunteers and supporters of Making Connections. Each older person received a personalised letter about their favourite hobby or something of interest to them. Letters were full of sensitivity, imagination and sense of humour penned by adults and children alike.

I have read the letters over and over again: heartfelt thanks. I am so moved.

PAUL, 85 YEARS OLD

I lit the candle at 3pm on Christmas day knowing that somebody was thinking of me at that moment.

JOAN, 68 YEARS OLD

I can't write back due to an advanced eye condition but I'll never forget your thoughtfulness and kindness. It brightened up Christmas day on my own.

DONAL, 93 YEARS OLD

I am finding the whole lockdown thing so hard, but these letters and cards give me such a lift and brought a smile to my face.

CATHERINE, 79 YEARS OLD

GOOD GOVERNANCE

- › In spite of the challenges of 2020, Making Connections ensured that our work remained fully compliant with the Charities Governance Code.
- › Making Connections' risk register was updated to deal with COVID-19 risk management.
- › Five board meetings were held in 2020 including AGM (4 online).
- › New appointments to the board included Adrienne Gormley, Chair, and Helen Boyd, Company Secretary.

OUR COMMITMENT

As we adapt to the 'new normal' of the COVID-19 crisis, Making Connections will continue to work in alignment with national strategy and in collaboration with our partners and wider network.

Making Connections' COVID-19 response was only possible thanks to the support of our volunteers, partners, donors and supporters.

Special thanks to our donors who supported our work with emergency funding. This enabled us to pivot quickly and provide a range of essential services to get people through the crisis.

As we move into 2021, we are confident that together – we can continue to support people to Live Well as we navigate the new landscape ahead with hope and resilience.



We pledge to
continue our
support



MAKING CONNECTIONS

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Charity Registered Number (CHY): 21301
CRA Number: 20149635
Company Number: 559418

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

- › Adrienne Gormley, Chair
- › Laura Ryan, Vice Chair
- › Helen Boyd, Company Secretary
- › Shane Mooney
- › Joe Coleman
- › Tara Ryan