



making
connections



ANNUAL REPORT

2021

Building on the strength of
our Covid-19 Response

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MESSAGE FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



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.

2021 was the year of new COVID-19 variants and a very demanding one for charities like Making Connections, working with vulnerable cohorts of people.

The stark reality for older people during the pandemic was evidenced in a piece of research called 'Telling it Like it Is' which underlined the negative effect of the lockdowns on those who felt isolated, alone, afraid and 'cancelled.'

We witnessed volunteers and families grapple with grief and illness of loved ones. We listened to stories of the effect of long COVID and the struggle of coping with uncertainty and change. We reached out to those experiencing loneliness or isolation by providing practical supports, companionship, reassurance and above all, hope.

In 2021, we were delighted to launch a new service, Good Food Delivered, in partnership with HSE and Airfield Estate, Dundrum.

Our charity was one of only a handful of charities in Ireland invited to participate in the EU Family Volunteering pilot project.

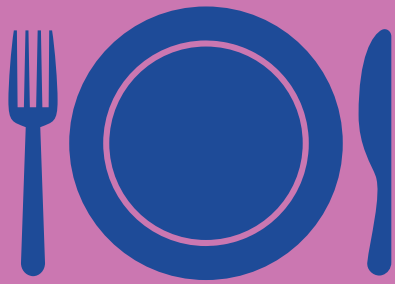
Making Connections continued our role on the local government Community Response Forum and were an active contributor to the Age Friendly County Strategy 2022 – 2026.

We are so grateful to our donors for supporting not only the immediate requirements of service delivery but also the ever changing needs arising in 2021.

I want to acknowledge the tremendous commitment of volunteers. Inspired by their generosity and sensitivity we hope that soon we can celebrate with them and show our appreciation.

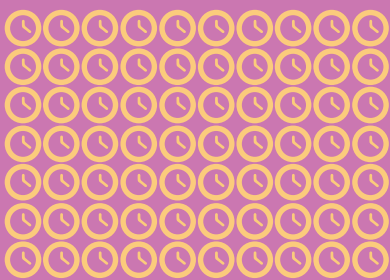
A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mary O'Donohue". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Mary" and the last name "Donohue" clearly legible.

OUR IMPACT



11,500

NUTRITIOUS MEALS
DELIVERED

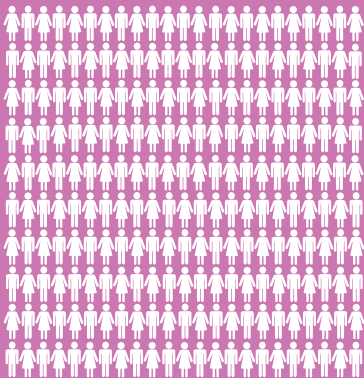


3,500

VOLUNTEER
HOURS



LAUNCH OF
GOOD FOOD
DELIVERED



230

OLDER PEOPLE
SUPPORTED



EU FAMILY VOLUNTEERING
PILOT PROJECT

ADDITIONAL
COVID-19



SUPPORTS



CREATING STRENGTH THROUGH ADVERSITY

2021 began against the backdrop of extended lockdown and restrictions. Older people continued to be disproportionately affected by Covid-19. Yet again, being isolated from community and cut off from activities and supports was the final blow for many. Research, evidence and frontline clinicians reported a further increase of physical and mental health challenges caused, or exacerbated by the crisis.

Making Connections continued to meet the challenges and to adapt services to the needs arising. We used the lessons learned during the first year of the pandemic to listen to what older people were saying, to identify the needs and to come up with solutions that made people feel valued and supported.

None of this would have been possible without our dedicated team of community volunteers, funders and donors. We successfully increased capacity; provided essential Covid-19 supports; adapted our Befriending program to prevail during lockdowns; launched a new core program; contributed towards local Strategy and participated in an EU wide initiative.

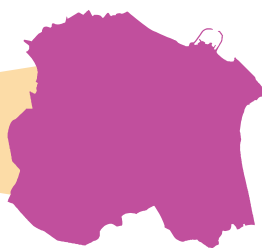


Launched
Community
Meals

I was afraid of loneliness more than any health issue. Your volunteer has been a lifeline. I will never be able to thank you enough.

ALBERT, 93

COLLABORATION: STRONGER TOGETHER



FRONTLINE COLLABORATION

- › HSE Managers of Services of Older People
- › HSE Primary Care Teams
- › Hospitals
- › Community Policing Team

NATIONAL ALIGNMENT

- › Age Friendly Ireland
- › National Positive Aging Strategy
- › Healthy Ireland
- › HSE 'Sharing the Vision'
- › Volunteer Ireland

LOCAL COLLABORATION

- › Dlr Community Response Forum
- › Airfield Estate, Dundrum
- › Business Community
- › Local Agencies

COMMUNITY VOLUNTEERS

- › Befriending Visits
- › Walking Companions
- › Phone Support Volunteers
- › Community Meal Drivers
- › Specialist Skills Volunteers

Collaboration is one of Making Connections' core values. The global pandemic has highlighted the imperative of working together, being flexible, responsive and ready to support shared goals especially for the most vulnerable.

Our long term partnership with HSE Managers of Services for Older People, Primary Health Care Teams, and other frontline clinicians allowed us to remain on the pulse of the needs of older people.

HSE referrals connected us with those in greatest need of our support and in turn, we delivered essential downstream supports as part of a cross-cutting tiered approach to Health and Wellbeing.

In 2021, Making Connections continued its active participation in the Community Response Forum led by dlr County Council. This collaboration helped to identify our strengths, work effectively through shared goals and avoid duplication of efforts.

Looking to the future, as a member of the dlr Age Friendly Alliance, our insights regarding volunteer-led community supports for older people formed part of the upcoming 5 Year Strategy.



Delivered
Over 11,500
nutritious
meals

LAUNCH OF GOOD FOOD DELIVERED

'Good Food Delivered' was launched in partnership with Making Connections, the HSE, and Airfield Estate, Dundrum. After a successful pilot project in 2020, this initiative was developed as a sustainable long term project.

The service delivers nutritious meals to people identified by HSE clinicians as being at risk of malnutrition. The programme is supported by a dedicated team of Making Connections Volunteers who also provide social interaction to the people they deliver to.

In 2021 we supported individuals and couples experiencing a range of challenges; unable to shop due to Covid-19 restrictions; loss of mobility; struggling from physical, mental or other medical challenges; families unable support their loved ones due to travel restrictions or fear of spreading the virus; recent discharge from acute care facilities; respite for family carers in crisis; and more.



Thousands
of volunteer
hours



When I returned home from hospital after a bad break – it would have been impossible for me to manage without the meals.

PATRICK, 85

Chatting with the volunteers every week makes me more secure in my own home. Knowing that there's people who care looking out for me.

ELLA, 69



In January 2021 we started with x4 routes and finished the year with x9 routes. We look forward to expanding the service in coming years.

Areas covered included; Ballyogan, Blackrock, Cabinteely, Churchtown, Clonskeagh, Cornelscourt, Deansgrange, Dundrum, Dún Laoghaire, Galloping Green, Kilmacud, Kilternan, Leopardstown, Monkstown, Mount Merrion, Ranelagh, Rathmines, Sandymount, Sandyford, Stillorgan, and Tipperstown.



Delivering
a smile and
a chat

There would be nothing else that could have replaced this support. Even if there was a person to come and live with me it wouldn't have been the same – thank you for giving me my independence back!

GEORGE, 91

I'm nearly 90... it's difficult managing alone in the house, but with the lovely food your volunteers bring, I feel I'll last a bit longer!

VERA, 89





Resumed
In-Person
Befriending

BEFRIENDING & WELLBEING SUPPORTS

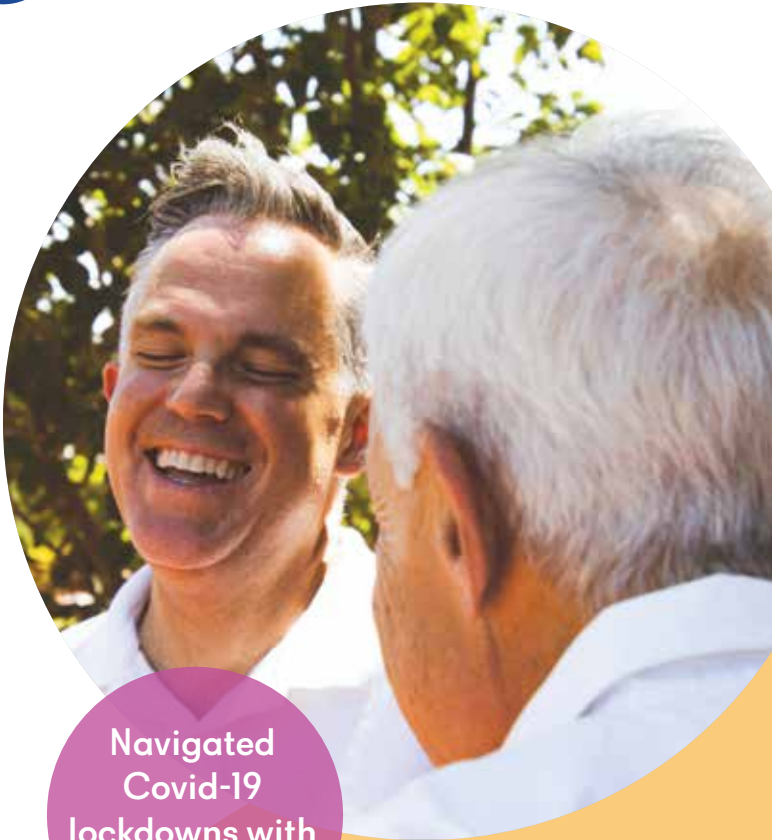
Faced with public health and safety restrictions Making Connections was required to suspend in-person Befriending at a time when older people needed human connection the most.

We facilitated initiatives including phone befriending, socially distanced garden visits when appropriate, as well as adding a social element to our newly launched meal delivery program.



I was afraid to go out alone after being stuck in the house for so long. Cormac has helped me get back to 'normal'. We go for walks around block. I felt like I was done with this life, but now, I think I'm getting my spark back!

JIM, 76



Navigated
Covid-19
lockdowns with
safe solutions

We continued our 'Covid-19 Emergency Response' initiatives responding to practical needs such as pharmacy/ pension collection, shopping and access to information. Making Connections staff were also available for older people in need of advice information and reassurance.

In June 2021, Making Connections guided a phased return to in-person befriending on a case by case basis. After extended lockdowns, the presence of another compassionate human being was an invaluable lifeline for so many.



Additional
Covid-19
Supports



Listened to
their stories

“Before I met Kate the doorbell never rang. Now her visits are the highlight of the week – it makes such a difference having something to look forward to.

JOAN, 79



EU FAMILY VOLUNTEERING PILOT PROJECT

Making Connections was one of 3 organisations invited to participate in an EU wide Family Volunteering pilot project in partnership with Volunteer Ireland. We engaged families including parents and their teenage children.

Volunteers visited the homes of older people as a family. Activities included garden clearance, light housework, dog and animal lover conversations, games of scrabble, knitting exchange and social meet-ups for coffee.

I can't remember the last time that I got to make tea for visitors. We had a great chat and as a bonus, Pat even got my telly working for me. I love the visits, and I never feel out of place with the 'youngsters'

BREDA, 77



Quality family time through positive action



Sharing chats
and smiles

“The girls brought me to tears. In such a short time, they seemed to know me and crafted a personal gift that summed up my life. I feel energised from hearing their stories too – it helps me to keep looking forward.”

MARJORIE, 86

“After a hard time in hospital having people to talk to lifted my spirits and we got to chatting about painting, an old hobby of mine. We’re going to paint together next time.”

BRENDAN, 82

Sharing Activities





Sharing the warmth of human connection

SPIRIT OF CHRISTMAS

Although restrictions eased towards the end of the year, two years of adversity and isolation had taken its toll. The Winter months, usually a challenge for many, brought a new level of dread for those who had lost their sense of social connection.

As part of our Winter Support Plan, we coordinated the Spirit of Christmas campaign bringing joy, laughter and hope to older people during the dark days. Rosemont Secondary School students created delightful packs bursting with letters full of imagination and thoughtfulness as well as hand-made gifts.

“ I found the letters so emotional. And I lit the candle and it stayed lighting for so long.
PATRICIA, 83

I can't remember the last time I was asked about my dreams and life goals! The youthful letters brought me such joy.
MARTIN, 92

Reading stories about their pets, hobbies, and families was so entertaining. I re-read the letters many times to bring that smile back to my face.
EILEEN, 87

As they'd learned a little bit about me the letters were so personal – it felt like I was reading a letter from an old friend.
SEAN, 79

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GOOD GOVERNANCE

- › The Board of Making Connections ensured that our work remained fully compliant with the Charities Governance Code in 2021.
- › Making Connections' risk register was updated to deal with COVID-19 risk management. Five board meetings were held in 2021 in addition to an Annual General Meeting.

OUR COMMITMENT

As we enter into the recovery phase of COVID-19, Making Connections will continue to work in alignment with national strategy and in collaboration with our partners and wider network.

Special thanks to our donors who supported our work with emergency funding enabling us to pivot in the face of emerging needs; and to those providing sustainable multi-annual funding affording us the secure foundations on which to develop and grow.

With two years behind us helping the most vulnerable get through the worst of the pandemic, Making Connections is well positioned at the end of 2021 to continue its mission of supporting older people through the recovery phase of COVID-19.



Onwards
from strength
to strength



MAKING CONNECTIONS

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

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