

REPORT ON ACTIVE
RETIREMENT IRELAND
MEMBERSHIP SURVEY
RESULTS
JUNE 2009

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INTRODUCTION

In the summer of 2008 Active Retirement Ireland, the national network of local and community based voluntary groups involving older people in Ireland, began work on a

research study to find out more about the membership and activities of each Active Retirement Association (ARA) in the country. The aims of the research study are:

- To give ARI a clearer picture of each ARA's needs and interests
- To share this information with all ARI members
- To plan for the development and support of the membership in the future
- To use the findings from the study to support ARI's lobbying and campaigning work
- To strengthen ARI's case for increased funding for the organisation

It was agreed that a postal survey would be the best way to collect this information so in September 2008 a survey questionnaire was sent to every ARA committee in Ireland. This report presents the findings from the questionnaires, which the ARI membership completed and returned. The structure of the report is as follows:

- Introduction
- Methodology
- Findings & Analysis
- Recommendations

The *methodology* section, which follows, outlines the methods used during the survey to gather information from ARAs about their membership and the types of activities engaged in.

METHODOLOGY

As mentioned above, ARI decided in the summer of 2008 that a postal survey would offer the best means of gathering information from the membership. The Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of Active Retirement Ireland designed a short, three-page questionnaire, which was circulated to all members by post in September 2008.

The information required from respondents included the numbers and gender breakdown of each ARA. The questionnaire also provided space for respondents to describe the types of activities their ARA engages in. These activities were broadly categorised in the questionnaire as follows:

- *Physical*
- *Cultural*
- *Social*
- *Arts & Crafts*
- *Learning*
- *Other*

Finally, the questionnaire required information on where and how often an ARA meet, whether or not they pay rent for premises and if so, how much they pay.

New members of ARI and ARA's, which had not yet returned their completed questionnaires, were sent a reminder early in February 2009. The closing date for receipt of completed questionnaires was 16th February 2009. A research consultant collated and analysed the information gathered from the questionnaires. In June 2009 an additional 28 questionnaires, which were returned after the deadline had passed, were included in the analysis. This was done in order to create, as much as possible, a complete and comprehensive picture of the membership. The findings from the analysis of all the questionnaires returned to ARI as part of the survey are presented in this report.

The following section details the findings from the membership survey and illustrates the information gathered during the survey by using graphs and pie charts. It is important to note that the level of information provided by ARA's may depend on how long each ARA has been established, as well as the resources available to that ARA, e.g. time, human and financial resources etc.

FINDINGS & ANALYSIS

1. RESPONSE RATE

In total 350 completed questionnaires were returned to ARI out of a possible response of 470. This equates to almost three quarters of all ARA's or just less than 75%, which is a considerable response rate. The pie chart below illustrates the percentage of surveys returned versus those, not returned.

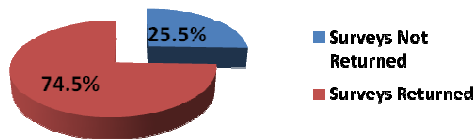
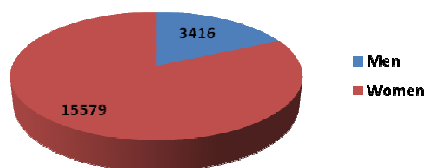


Figure 1: Percentage of Surveys Returned

2. GENDER BREAKDOWN

One of the first questions asked in the questionnaire was the number of members in each ARA as well as the gender breakdown. When this information was analysed it identified a significant disparity between the numbers of men versus the numbers of women involved in local ARA's. The pie charts below show the large membership involved in ARA's locally, as reported by respondents, and illustrates the percentage gender breakdown of ARA members.

Figure 2: Numbers by Gender



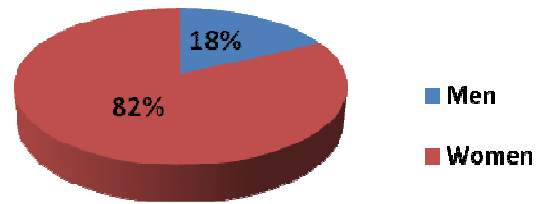
According to respondents calculations, men make up almost three and a half thousand members, while women make up more than fifteen and a half thousand members. This means there are approximately five times more women involved in ARA's locally than there are men. The next pie chart illustrates the gender breakdown of members as a percentage of the total number of questionnaires returned to ARI (350).

Figure 3: Percentage Gender Breakdown

Figures 2 & 3 illustrate a number of important points. Firstly, the sizeable membership of ARI, based on the numbers provided in the survey, amounts to almost 19,000 individuals

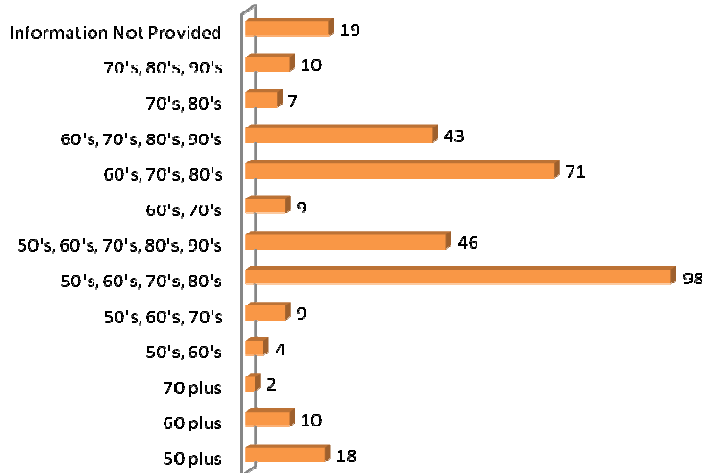
(18,995). In addition, this number cannot accurately reflect the true membership of ARI as it does not take into account the membership of ARAs that did not respond to the survey (25.5%). Therefore, it is reasonable to assume that a more accurate reflection of the membership may be closer to 25,000 individuals or more. Representing such a significant proportion of older people in Ireland should strengthen ARI's position when seeking sponsorship and funding or when lobbying for improvements in the lives of older people in the future.

Secondly, the pie charts illustrate the dominance of female members and the shortfall in the percentage of men involved in ARA's locally.



AGE RANGE

Figure 4: Age Range of Members

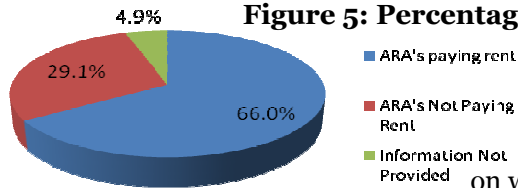


The graph above identifies the diverse responses given by ARA's when asked about the age range of their members. The open-ended question allowed respondents to describe the age ranges of ARA members in their own words. Some respondent's described the age range in broad terms, such as 50 plus (18 respondents), 60 plus (10 respondents) or 70 plus (2 respondents) but the majority listed member's ages as ranging from 50-80 years (98 respondents). A further 71 ARA's have members ranging in age from 60-80 years. Fewer ARA's overall have members in their 90's or older, although a very small number reported having a member over 100 years of age.

Taking all the responses to this question together, it is evident that ARA members range in age from 60 years old to 80 plus years (309 respondents in total). This equals 88.3% of the total number of questionnaires returned (350). A small number of ARA's reported members who were younger than 50 years of age and in one or two cases, members as young as 35-45 years of age.

PREMISES

Figure 5: Percentage of ARA's Paying Rent



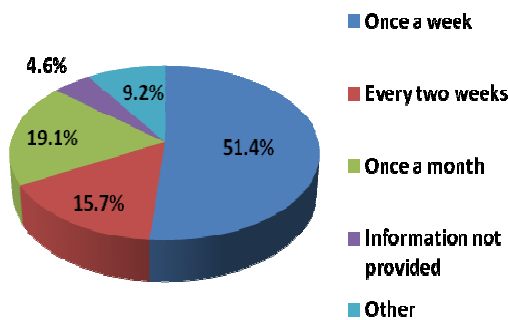
The questionnaire also gathered information on where ARA's meet and whether or not they pay

rent for their meeting place. The types of meeting places used by ARA's include rooms in community centres, parish halls, HSE or Department offices, in sports clubs or schools, as well as hotel conference rooms, pubs and restaurants and member's own homes.

Figure 5 illustrates the percentage of ARA's paying rent for premises. The majority, 66% pay rent. Almost 30% (29.1%) of ARA's do not pay rent, although only one ARA reported owning their premises. The amounts of rent paid and the methods of payment varied greatly from ARA to ARA. Some pay annual fees, which vary from €100 per annum to €5000 per annum. Others pay weekly, fortnightly or monthly; while paying rent by the hour or per meeting is also common, particularly among ARA's using hotels as meeting places. The cost of renting premises per hour or per session can range from €5 to €50 depending on the venue. Some ARA's do not pay a formal rent but instead make a 'contribution' or 'donation' toward the heating and electricity costs for premises. Among those surveyed 4.9% of respondents did not provide any information on whether or not they rent premises.

HOW OFTEN DO ARA'S MEET?

Figure 6: Frequency of Meetings



As Figure 6 above shows, over half of the ARA's surveyed meet once a week (51.4%). Almost one fifth (19.1%) of ARA's meet once a month and over 15% (15.7%) meet fortnightly. The remaining ARA's meet more often, such as twice or even four and five times per week or they meet less regularly, either per quarter or two/three times per year. The number of ARA's meeting at these intervals was small however and when combined constituted only 9.2% of the total number of questionnaires returned (350). Some ARA's do not meet all year round instead members take a break at certain times of the year, for example at Christmas or during the summer months. A small percentage of respondents did not provide any information on how frequently the members of their ARA meet (4.6%).

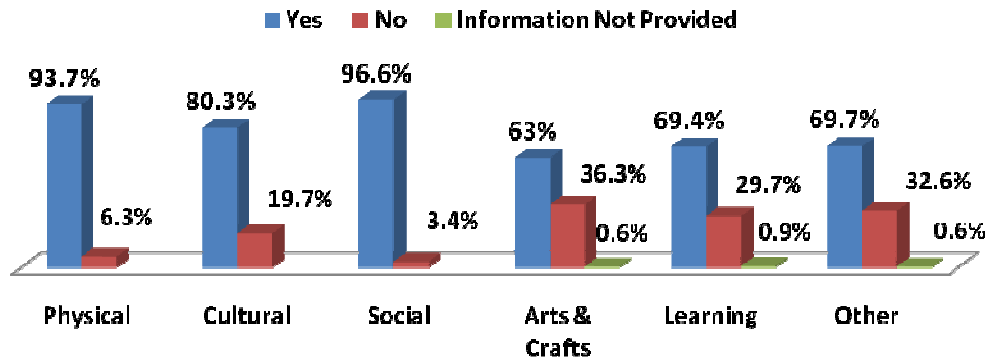
ACTIVITIES

The main body of the questionnaire concerned the types of activities, which ARA's are currently involved in or have been involved in over the previous 12 months. The questionnaire broadly categorised activities under the following headings:

- Physical
- Cultural
- Social
- Arts & Crafts
- Learning
- Other

Respondents were asked to provide details of the types of activities the members of their ARA are involved in under each of the categories listed above. Figure 7 shows the percentage of ARA's involved in each of these broad categories of activities and the percentage not involved.

Figure 7: Level of Involvement in Activities

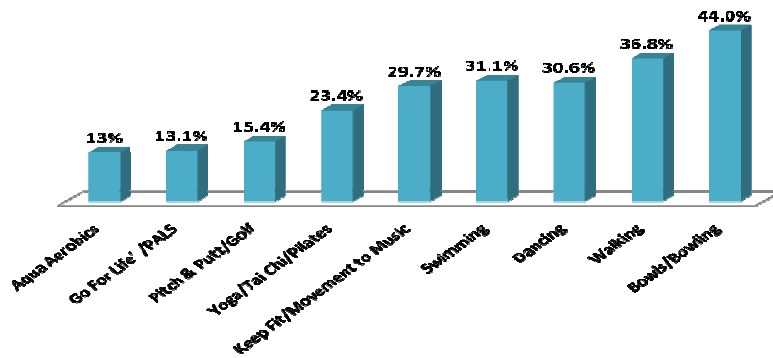


More than 93% of respondents recorded involvement in physical activities, while over 80% said members of their ARA have been involved in cultural activities in the previous 12 months. The vast majority of ARA’s (96.6%) engage in social activities of some variety on a regular basis. 63% of ARA members are currently, or have been involved in creative activities like arts and crafts, while 69.4% are involved in some form of formal, informal or non-formal learning activity. The remaining category, described as ‘other’, encompasses a variety of activities which cannot be grouped with the activities from among the categories identified above. Almost 70% of ARA’s are involved in ‘other’ activities (69.7%), all of which will be presented in greater detail below.

PHYSICAL ACTIVITIES

The following graph illustrates the popularity of various physical activities among ARA members.

Figure 8: Range of Physical Activities



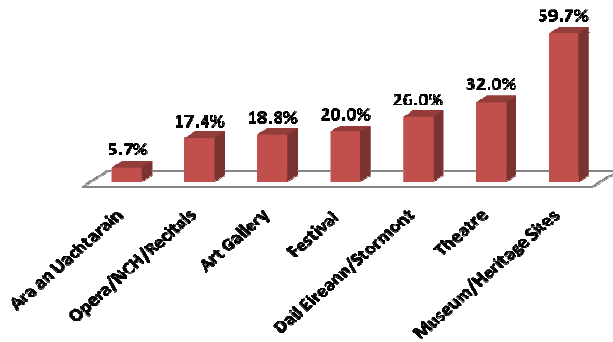
Survey results revealed 44% of ARA’s host bowls, boules or bowling as part of their activities programme, making the sport the most popular physical activity among ARA members. Walking is also a very popular activity among members, cited by almost 37% of survey respondents (36.8%). Swimming, dancing and movement to music or ‘keep fit’ are also common physical activities, each listed by 30% or more of respondents. The choice of dancing styles on offer are also diverse, with respondents listing line dancing, set dancing, waltzing and salsa, among others.

New trends in physical exercise are also represented in the survey results, with almost a quarter of all ARA’s participating in yoga, Tai Chi or Pilates at some point in the previous 12 months. The *Go For Life* exercise programme is used by 13.1% of ARA’s, including participation by selected members in the *PALS* training course. A small number of ARA’s in Sligo and in Dublin also take part in a ‘Senior Sports Fest’, a sport and recreation activity day for older adults run by local sports partnerships and city/county councils.

CULTURAL ACTIVITIES

The next category identified in the questionnaire was broadly termed Cultural Activities. The following activities were defined by survey respondents as cultural events which their members engage in or had engaged in over the course of the previous 12 months.

Figure 9: Range of Cultural Activities



Visits to places of historical, political and civic importance as well as an enjoyment of the Arts were identified by respondents as the main focus of interest within the cultural activities category. The seats of power for both parliaments on the island of Ireland, Dail Eireann and Stormont are popular destinations for ARA members on cultural outings at 26%, while visits to the President’s residence were also named by 5.9% of respondents. By far the most commonly cited cultural activity was a visit to museums, heritage sites and stately homes and gardens, named by 59.7% of respondents.

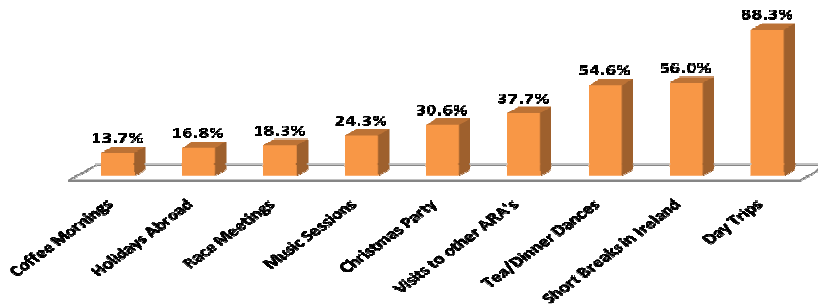
ARA members’ enjoyment of the Arts include visits to the theatre (32%), visits to art galleries (18.8%) and attending an opera, musical or recital or attending events held at the National Concert Hall (17.4%). Another frequently cited cultural activity involved the hosting of, or participation in a parade or festival(20%). Examples referenced include local St. Patrick’s Day parades, the Bealtaine Festival held in May and the *ARA Go On!* Festival, Golden Years Festival, as well as numerous smaller festivals held in local cities or towns.

SOCIAL ACTIVITIES

The next category in the questionnaire dealt with social activities. The graph below illustrates the specific types of activities engaged in and the percentage of ARI members involved.

Among the respondents, 13.7% listed coffee mornings or afternoon tea as a regular social activity among members of their ARA. Almost one fifth (18.3%) of ARA members attend race meetings for both horse racing and greyhound racing. Almost a quarter (24.3%) of respondents listed members attendance at or hosting of music sessions, sing-a-longs and concerts. 30.6% of respondents stated their ARA’s host Christmas parties each year for their members, while other respondents listed Halloween, Valentine’s day and Easter parties as common social activities among members.

Figure 10: Range of Social Activities

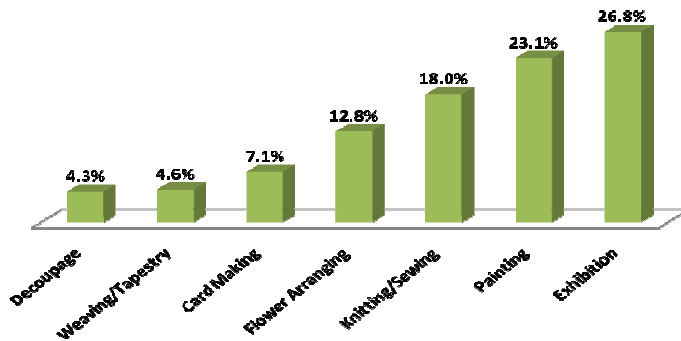


Another popular activity among ARA's, at 37.7% is arranging visits to neighbouring ARA's or hosting visits from other ARA's. More than half of all respondents listed tea dances and dinner dances as a favoured social activity among members (54.6%) while more ARA's (56%) have organised at least one short break holiday in Ireland for members in the previous 12 month period. Holidays abroad are less common, occurring among only 16.8% of ARAs. Taking day trips proved to be the most popular social activity by far, cited by 88.3% of respondents. These include bus trips to local areas of interest, scenic boat tours, trips to Dublin zoo and Fota wildlife park and outings to garden centres, among others.

ARTS & CRAFTS ACTIVITIES

The next category in the questionnaire required respondents to describe the types of arts and crafts activities the members of their ARA are involved in or have been involved in over a 12 month period. It should be noted here, however, that while more than 63% of survey respondents indicated that members of their ARA engaged in arts and crafts activities, a significant number did not elaborate any further or offer details of the types of arts and crafts activities participated in by members. The following graph shows a breakdown of the types of arts and crafts activities described by the remaining respondents but it cannot offer a full picture of all the arts and crafts activities undertaken.

Figure 11: Range of Arts & Crafts Activities



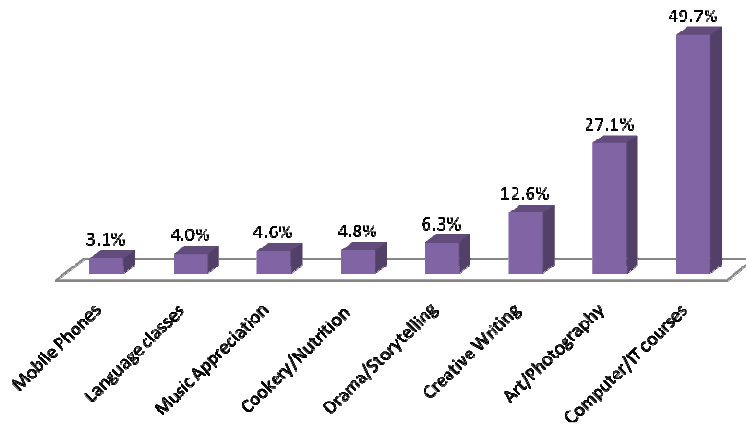
A small percentage of ARA's listed activities such as decoupage (4.3%) and weaving, including basket weaving, tapestry and making St. Brigid's Crosses (4.6%), as well as card making, e.g. Christmas cards (7.1%). Flower arranging is popular among almost 13% of members and 18% of respondents listed knitting and sewing as popular activities among members of their ARA. The most common arts and crafts activity cited by almost a quarter of respondents was painting, at 23.1%. More than a quarter of respondents stated that members of their ARA had exhibited the pieces they had created, for example in the exhibition held as part of the ARI AGM each year. In some instances exhibitions were held locally, specifically to showcase the ARA members arts and crafts work, often in local libraries or city/county council offices.

LEARNING ACTIVITIES

The survey results show that ARI members engage in a wide variety of learning activities. Almost half of all respondents (49.7%) listed computer courses, including introduction to internet and email as a learning activity engaged in by members of their ARA. More than a quarter of ARA members participate in an art or photography courses, including digital photography (27.1%). Creative writing courses are also popular among ARA members, listed by 12.6% of respondents. Other learning activities listed include drama workshops and storytelling (6.3%), cookery and nutrition classes (4.8%), music appreciation and choir

(4.6%), language classes, such as French, Spanish and Irish (4%) and 3.1% of members had taken courses in mobile phone instruction, including how to send text messages.

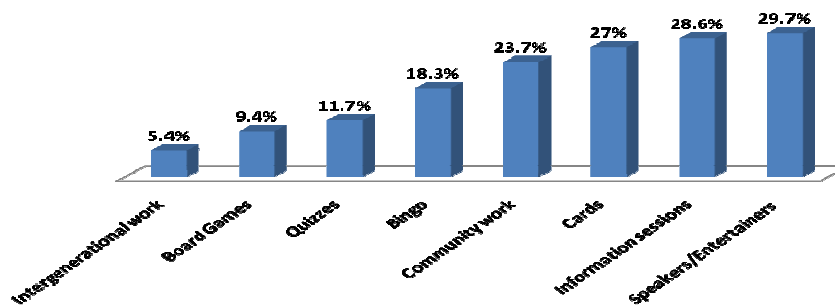
Figure 12: Range of Learning Activities



OTHER ACTIVITIES

The final category in the activities section of the questionnaire relates to ‘other’ activities. These are activities which do not fit among the five categories preceding it but are defined by the respondent as significant and noteworthy. The questionnaire provided space for each respondent to give details of ‘other’ activities which members of their ARA engaged in. As a result, this category houses a diverse and eclectic mix of activities but also illustrates the philanthropic and pioneering activities engaged in by members of ARA’s around the country. These activities will be discussed in greater detail in the analysis section below.

Figure 13: Range of Other Activities



A significant percentage of ARA members enjoy playing cards (27%), bingo (18.3%) and board games such as scrabble (9.4%), as well as participating in quizzes (11.7%).

5.6% of respondents identified intergenerational work as an activity carried out by members. This activity varied in scope from ARA to ARA. Intergeneration work included informal attendance at local primary schools to tutor young children in reading, writing or maths or to learn from the school children how to use mobile phones. Intergenerational work also included projects which required more structured involvement with secondary school pupils, such as part of the *Living Scenes* Programme of Intergenerational Learning run by NUI Galway, which promotes “*equality, empowerment and personal development in an intergenerational context*”.¹ Other intergenerational work took place outside the classroom, for example joining with primary school children to work on cultivating a community garden or on an anti-litter campaign and clean up.

As illustrated by the graph above, 23.7% of ARA’s are involved in ‘community work’. This catch all phrase encompasses many philanthropic acts which can be grouped as follows:

- Volunteering
- Fundraising /Donations to Charities
- Representation at local and national levels

VOLUNTEERING

There are high levels of volunteering among these ARA members and the time members give goes to support a variety of organisations and programmes. For example, some members visit the sick in hospital or those in nursing homes and organise entertainment and parties at Christmas. Other members provide practical support to adults with learning difficulties attending third level institutions as part of the ‘*Seat at Our Table*’ *Mid-Way Project*. Other ARA members support young mothers involved in a networking project locally. Also, a number of ARA members offer their time and a listening ear by volunteering to operate the local senior help line.

FUNDRAISING/DONATIONS TO CHARITIES

ARA members engage in a large number of different fundraising activities such as organising fashion shows, raffles, a whist drive or coffee mornings, which are all popular ways of raising money for charities. However, two events stand out as particularly well supported by ARA members; these are the sponsored walk on World Heart Day for the Irish Heart Foundation

¹ For further information visit <http://livingscenes.nuigalway.ie/concept.html>

and the 'Big Brew' Tea Day for the Alzheimer's Society of Ireland. The contribution of time and effort by ARA members to these and other charities are considerable and the monies raised run to tens of thousands of euro.

As well as fundraising many ARA's donate gifts to charities supporting people both in Ireland and all over the world. Some members donate items created through arts and crafts activities, such as knitted blankets and toys to local children's hospitals, nursing homes and those in need in places like Biafra and Belarus.

REPRESENTATION AT LOCAL AND NATIONAL LEVELS

A number of ARA's are involved in community affairs and issues of local governance such as consultation on traffic and planning issues as well as various community fora, health promotion fora etc. Many ARA's also have representatives on the Senior Citizen's Parliament and there is strong participation in ARI regional and national meetings.

Finally, the most commonly cited activity within the 'other' category is the scheduling of regular guest 'entertainers' (29.7%) who carry out demonstrations or give talks to members of the ARA on subjects of interest such as flower arranging or local history and the scheduling of/attendance at information sessions (28.6%) on subjects which are pertinent and of relevance to this age group, for example on health and nutrition or legal matters like making a will or rights and entitlements for people of retirement age.

The following section offers a brief analysis of the survey findings which have been presented above.

ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS

The overview of the Active Retirement Ireland network provided by the findings outlined above, suggests a robust and vibrant membership base engaged in a wide variety of activities which promote physical and mental health, creativity and learning as well as social

interaction and civic engagement. *“It’s a good time to be an active retired person.”*² Some of the findings identified through the survey require further consideration here.

- The disparity between the number of women and the number of men joining local ARA’s is considerable. The reasons for low levels of involvement among men may be due to lack of interest, as expressed here by one survey respondent *“the men are only interested in holidays and bowls.”*³ This quote suggests that men are less likely to participate in the full range of activities offered by ARA’s. However, unless more men join, ARA activities will continue to reflect the interests of the majority, in this case women, which in turn may further alienate potential male members from taking part.

Some ARA’s reported having applied for much needed funding in order to promote and encourage greater social contact with isolated men, particularly those in rural areas but without success. Without funding to support this work, men may remain harder to reach.

- Information gathered from respondents confirms the huge differences in rents paid by ARA’s. The impact this has on each of the ARA’s financial resources must be considerable especially those hit harder by high rents. These ARA’s may need to rely on increased fund raising throughout the year or reduce their programme of activities in order to cut expenses.
- The findings in relation to the types of social activities undertaken by members identify ARA’s as important vehicles for positive social interaction, whether a chat over coffee for an hour, an afternoon sing-along, an evening at the races, a short weekend break in Ireland or a week long holiday abroad. This regular social interaction can, in turn, reduce solitude and isolation, and feelings of loneliness or depression. ARA social activities provide countless opportunities for engagement and companionship with others, as well as stimulation and enjoyment.

The impact of positive social interaction on members lives is captured in the following quote:

*“Active Ret. is a godsend to us. It has opened up a whole new world.”*⁴

² Survey Respondent

³ Survey Respondent

⁴ Survey respondent

- As identified in the preceding section, day trips are the most common social activity engaged in by ARA members (88.3%). ARA's often rely on buses and coaches when arranging these and other trips, including visits to other ARA's and functions such as dinner dances etc. However, limited public transport, particularly in rural areas coupled with the cost of coach hire was identified by a number of respondents as prohibitive and this impacted negatively on the ARA's ability to arrange regular trips or attend functions. *"We find the cost of bus hire a big outlay as it costs €300-400 a day for a trip."*⁵ Where publically funded transport options exist ARA members benefit greatly. *"With the help of the local flexi-bus service we are able to bring members into meetings free of charge."*⁶ However, when these services are reduced or cut completely ARA members can suffer. *"We organised (or really had to) an auction bring and buy day to raise funds to keep rural transport bus going one day per week as 'Pobal' cut off our supply. The money raised will only cover another few months."*⁷
- The diversity of courses listed under learning activities illustrates the diversity of interests among ARA members and highlights the importance of being able to access a wide variety of learning opportunities locally. The high level of interest in and take up of computer and ICT related courses reflects findings from earlier research⁸.

Anecdotally, ARI is aware that many ARA members are interested in learning more about mobile phones and how to use them, particularly in relation to text messaging, however only 3% of ARA members are currently receiving instruction in mobile phone use. Perhaps this is due to limited learning opportunities available locally or lack of information on how to source training.

- A review of findings in relation to the 'other' activities category highlights the invaluable role ARA members play in their communities through volunteering efforts and fundraising as well as active involvement in local affairs. Of the 350 ARA's which responded to the survey, 23.7% engage in 'community work'. From the total number

⁵ Survey respondent

⁶ Flexi-bus is a Meath Accessible Transport Project initiative funded under the rural transport initiative

⁷ Survey Respondent

⁸ 'Don't Stop Me Now!' The Lifelong Learning Needs of Older People in Ireland (2008), AONTAS

of members identified (18, 995), this equates to potentially more than 4, 500 people (4, 541) involved, to some degree in acts of charity, volunteering or civic engagement.

ARA's also satisfy an important information provision role through their regular programmes of lectures and guest speakers.

The next and final section of this report offers some brief recommendations for the future based on the analysis of findings from the ARI membership survey.

RECOMMENDATIONS

These recommendations are based on a number of findings identified in the previous section of this report. ARA members may consider implementing some of these recommendations, while others will require the support and coordinating efforts of ARI.

- Given that the majority of ARA's are currently renting temporary premises, often at high rents, **ARI recommends the introduction of capital funding for premises which would become permanent residences for local ARA's.** One possibility is the sharing of premises with the proposed new 'Youth Cafes'. This would reduce the rental costs for the majority of ARA's, increase the ARA's stability by providing a permanent home for the membership and facilitate positive regular interaction between generations.
- **Increased interaction with younger generations, perhaps from local schools, would also facilitate the sharing of skills and knowledge.** ARA members could benefit from **instruction in the use of mobile phones** or other ICT resources such as internet and email while local children could learn **traditional skills or hear about local history.**
- The transfer of skills and knowledge could also be facilitated between members and between different ARAs. The survey identified a very large bank of talent and expertise which could be pooled and shared between ARA groups. For example, members with 'PALs' training, as part of the 'Go For Life' programme are available to organise physical activities and senior sports days with ARA's other than their own. Some members already tutor other members in traditional crafts such as crochet and lace making. Others are knowledgeable on subjects such as gardening, ornithology or local history and entertain members with informative talks or demonstrations.

As almost 40% of ARA's already engage in the practice of visiting other ARA's, **ARI recommends the establishment of an annual 'exchange week' where members visit neighbouring ARA's and share skills sets and knowledge beneficial to all members.**

- Sourcing additional funding is often a concern for some groups, as indicated in this quote from a survey respondent. *"The number of physical activities and learning activities had to be curtailed because of the cost involved. A number of members are interested in a computer course but no funding available at present."*

To secure additional funding for relevant projects ARI might consider these options: **Draft a proposal to draw down funding for mobile phone training similar to that received by Muintir na Tire for the 'Community TXT link' training programme, funded by Department of Communications under the 'BenefIT' programme (includes funding to produce a training kit and develop training for trainers).**

A number of ARA's located in border counties reported making regular visits to retirement groups in the North for tea dances and music sessions. ARI might consider drafting a **proposal to draw down a portion of PEACE III (2007-13) funding, worth €300 million, to support cross border interaction between retirement groups in the North and South.**

- ARI should consider engaging in **consultation with male members to identify means of increasing men's participation** in ARA's locally
- ARI should consider engaging in further **research** to determine:
 - The impact of the **cost of renting** on ARA's ability to engage in programmes of activities to support the argument for capital funding.
 - The impact of the **cost of private transport/insufficient public transport** on ARA's ability to engage in programmes of activities – position paper to Government Departments, Pobal etc.