

Active Retirement Ireland
Submission to Working Group on
Garda Síochána Strategy for the Older Person



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ACTIVE RETIREMENT IRELAND

What is it?

Active Retirement Ireland was founded in 1978 and our philosophy is based on older people doing things for themselves.

Active Retirement Ireland is a national network of 480 local Active Retirement Associations with over 22,000 members. ARI believes that older people have the right to be full and participative members of our society. ARI combats ageism through the reality and everyday work of the self-organised local associations and the regional councils. ARI has a large voluntary base with local, regional and national voluntary committees.

The purpose of Active Retirement Ireland is to enable retired people live a full and active life and advocate for them.

ARI aims

- To promote older people as independent, self-organised and active members of their communities.
- To act as a voice for older people and their concerns at national level.
- To promote positive ageing attitudes in Ireland
- To provide support and information to the local associations of older people in our region
- To network the local associations for peer support and information sharing

The target group is older men and women over 50 years of age who are semi retired or retired from paid or unpaid work.

ARI has 8 regional councils who co-ordinate the work of the local associations and provide support through development work. Activities include networking days, information seminars and health promotion events. We also provide social networking events when possible. Regional training and providing information is a key part of our work.

Each local association plans and delivers a range of social, cultural, learning and physical activities based on what their members would like to do and their ability to participate. These activities include social networking through tea dances, evening out and short breaks; physical activities such as swimming, bowls and walking; learning activities include IT, intergenerational projects, art and crafts. All the activities are aimed at keeping older people fit and well. Active Retirement Associations are a lifeline for many older people who would otherwise feel isolated and lonely.

Introduction

At an ARI General Council Meeting in October 2009, members were asked to write answers to three questions to find out their perception and their experiences of An Garda Síochána locally. The members comprised men and women living in both rural and urban areas.

Question 1: What role in relation to older people would you expect from the Community Gardaí?

Question 2: What would improve your relationship with the Community Gardaí?

Question 3: What actions/work would you like to see the Community Gardaí being involved in on behalf of older people?

In total, ninety (90) surveys were returned.

In response to Question 1 members' concerns were quite similar. Over twenty respondents, equivalent to over 25%, indicated that they believed that a phone number and name of a contact Garda should be issued to older people. A further seven believe that an identified Older People's Liaison Garda would be a positive step. Five respondents want an ongoing, supportive relationship with their local Gardaí.

Over a dozen members wanted the Gardaí to call regularly to older people and others want Gardaí to improve their familiarity with older people in rural areas.

Other respondents "did not know who to contact" and sought "more communication between Gardaí and older people".

Individual responses included concerns about busy road junctions, speeding cars in rural areas and older people being "pushed around on the streets".

In response to Question 2 members had a wide range of suggestions. Over fifty respondents believed that Gardaí providing advice on security in the home would improve their relationship with Community Gardaí. Another popular response was the call for a visible physical presence in towns and villages, citing the need to see a Garda presence either on foot or in squad cars.

Over thirty respondents wanted Gardaí to pay regular visits to Active Retirement Associations. Open days were suggested by others. Several respondents indicated that Gardaí should "have respect and courtesy for older people". Other respondents needed to be sure that Gardaí would come when called.

A major concern for ARI members was the situation in rural towns, where Garda Stations are often left unmanned and no answer is forthcoming when incidents must be reported.

Suggestions also included Gardaí calling to see older people, whom they know to be alone; using parish newsletters to provide advice; an increased familiarity with Active Retirement Associations and more publicity as to when Gardaí will be available at local stations to fill out forms and take reports.

Question 3 brought a range of suggestions similar to those arising from Question 2. Most respondents wanted Gardaí to maintain a list or database of older people in areas known for anti-social behaviour and to keep in contact with them and reassure them. Attendance by Gardaí at Active Retirement Association meetings was also a popular suggestion, indicating a need older people have to feel their concerns are being listened to. Also suggested was that Gardaí have a visible presence at local Post Offices on pension days.

Members also indicated they would like advice on how to deal with cold-callers on their doorsteps and on home protection. They also stated that they would like to see an improvement in the follow-up to break-ins at members' homes.

Information evenings proved a popular idea among respondents, with over a dozen members asking for Gardaí to hold such events to better "understand the community and work with the community".

Quotes:

- The Gardaí in Birr are very good at giving talks to our ARA.
- [We want] to see more of the Gardaí...we never see them except when there is a motor accident or a car double-parked.
- [There is] nothing to beat a Garda 'on the beat' walking and talking to people.
- Often local Garda Stations are unmanned and we get no answer when reporting an incident.
- Gardaí don't know people in rural areas anymore.
- I don't expect anything from Community Gardaí as I don't know any of the Gardaí anymore.
- We now go to a centre where we have to press buttons and talk to a machine at the door...it seems cold and uncaring.