Wise Social Practices in Age-Friendly Institutions for Older People in Ireland

• Carmel Gallagher, Dublin Institute of Technology, Dublin, Ireland.
• Ricca Edmondson, National University of Ireland, Galway, Ireland.
Aims and Methods

• Explore connections between ‘wise’ practices in age-friendly institutional settings and good policy outcomes.

• Analyse elements of sociality involved in successful institutions for older people.

• Based on interviews with key actors in two centres, a day centre in Dublin and a residential nursing home in Galway in the West of Ireland.

• Both centres designated excellent.
The Care Settings

• Clare centre is located in a Dublin suburb, purpose built in 2000, beside a supported housing complex but serving a 3 mile radius, mix of service users-most ambulatory, some in wheelchairs and a few service users have dementia.

• Connemara: private nursing home near the sea, long-standing, rebuilt 2009, 45 residents
Wisdom and Older People

• In the past, older people have been thought of as offering important resources to society, notably wisdom, thought of for centuries as one of the highest possible aims for a human life.

• Nowadays ‘wisdom’ may be viewed as inflexible and authoritarian; or else ignored entirely in favour of ‘expertise’.

• We argue that the search for wisdom is still a concern in the way people try to live WELL.

• We treat it as a form of learning which may be expected to DEVELOP with advancing age,

• satisfying those who partake in it / benefit from it and to some extent protecting the status of older people.
‘Wisdom’ in traditions influencing Western thought and as explored in this project

- Used in problems without obvious solutions in terms of everyday/expert knowledge.
- Uses both tacit and explicit knowledge.
- Is applied to oneself, other people, and problems of human existence.
- Entails practical /social knowledge, drawing on socio-political, emotional, ethical experience. Found in all walks of life.
Structure of Centres

- Clare Centre: ‘Our centre is a bit different … it is embedded in the community’.
- Flexible structure of voluntary organisation with different sources of funding.
- Use of volunteers.
- ‘There is a very genuine feel to it’.
- Connemara Centre: music, card playing with visitors from local community. ‘Breaking down barriers’, ‘Bringing the outside in.’
Quality of staff and relationships with older people

Clare Centre: ‘They are amazing’ (manager)
‘I think they are hand picked’ (female service user)
‘It’s the best thing that has happened in my life’ (male service user)
‘T [Manager] is a treasure (local authority official)

Connemara Centre: ‘the best holiday of my life’ (male resident)
Dignity and respect

• Talking to older people and being present- ‘you need to listen’.
• Little demarcation between staff - going beyond formal duties.
• Getting a cup of tea - indicates hospitality.
• How dinner is served - attention to small things.
Resourcefulness and skills

• ‘No great plan, things just evolved’.
• However, evidence of manager drawing on personal, local, professional, political resources, and displaying
• Patience and persistence.
• Approaching problems on their own terms.
Principles and values

• ‘The staff have a great feeling for people’
• Fostering tolerance and principles as guides to actions.
• One size does not fit all - Not all activities are popular.
• People should feel safe and happy.
Wise practices, well-being and social participation

- Wisdom in interaction.
- Well-being is individually focused and oriented towards community.
- Inter-sectoral co-operation.
- Adding value to lives.
Contact details

- Carmel.gallagher@dit.ie
- Ricca.edmondson@nuigalway.ie
Computers and Art at Clare Centre
The Care Settings

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Connemara Nursing Home
Connemara area