

A STATE *of* INDEPENDENCE

THE IRELAND FUNDS ARE HELPING
COPE GALWAY MEET THE
NEEDS OF THE SENIOR COMMUNITY,
ONE MEAL AT A TIME.



COPE Galway

Let's help together



COPE Galway has been providing vital social services throughout Galway for over 40 years. Their services for older people, the homeless, and those affected by domestic violence have helped thousands of people since the 1970s. Most recently, a grant from The Ireland Funds Promising Ireland Campaign has helped them grow their innovative Lunch Club program that tackles the isolation and loneliness often experienced by the elderly.



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LAST YEAR, COPE GALWAY

prepared and delivered over 50,000 nutritious and customized meals to older people living in Galway. Their Community Catering program is an award-winning approach that breaks the mold of the stereotypes many people associate with "meals on wheels." Instead of a cookie-cutter menu with no choice, meals are prepared based on recipients' dietary requirements and preferences. Over 200 meals a day, each marked with an individual's name, are delivered to homes by a network of more than 140 volunteers. On 16 routes that range from the urban center to rural routes in the Galway countryside, a highly personalized system ensures that if someone is unable to eat sodium, or simply doesn't enjoy apples, those items will never be included in their delivery.



What are always delivered, however, are kind words, a listening ear, and an eye for any issues that may require a helping hand. The volunteers who bring the meals are often the lifeline for older people who maintain a proudly guarded independence, but may need assistance on occasion.

Geraldine Ryan, Executive Chef at COPE Galway Community Catering, said, "Our service is not new; however, our approach to it is new in a sector which now needs to embrace change. While we have advanced significantly with the production aspect of our service, we are proud to have maintained equal emphasis on the value of the daily social contact. This is rated by older people as being of equal importance to the food they receive. The flexibility and the personalization of our service are unique. Our ability to respond in a way to our service users cannot be achieved via commercial ready-to-eat meals."

THE LUNCH CLUBS

A Place, A Song, A Meal Together

Another facet of COPE Galway's outreach to older people is their Lunch Club program. For those who are able to come out and socialize with others, COPE Galway sponsors weekly Lunch Clubs at locations around Galway where older people drop in, enjoy a beautifully prepared and nutritious meal, and also enjoy the social aspect of an

"I came to the Lunch Club and thought, 'Hey...there's something going on here!' If I don't go, they ask after me. The staff has the best of humour; they have a heart of gold."

-PAT, lunch club attendee and volunteer



"I come every week. The lunch club has given me a new lease on life. I have new friends. You can stop in for a lovely cup of tea and some biscuits. I'm living on my own and it has made a big difference. And there's never a bad day on the menu."

-ARTHUR, lunch club attendee



afternoon with others. The opportunity often allows them to learn about the other services available to them through COPE Galway such as their Day Centres, where activities like cooking, art, exercise, and computer training are offered.

At one Lunch Club held in the local GAA hall, over 20 people gathered on a Monday afternoon. On the menu were hearty Irish stew and beautifully prepared salmon. Volunteers welcomed diners to set tables and conversations from the week before were resumed. The affectionate joking made it clear that many had known one another for decades, but those new to the Lunch Club were also welcomed.

Anne Kenny, Manager of Senior Support Services with COPE Galway, and Jacque Horan, CEO of COPE Galway, sat down to discuss COPE Galway's impact today and what the future would hold. Anne explained, "It is hard for people of any age to participate in organized activities. But we say to people, 'You can come just for lunch...that's OK, or you can engage with additional services.' There is a relationship building element to what we do. Many of the folks that come to our Lunch Club may not have realized the services that are available to them. We build that trust and then can see that they benefit."

Jacque elaborated on why their programs will continue to be important in the future. "Ireland's population is aging. The statistics tell us that over the next two to three decades, a quarter of our population will be over 70 years old and a significant number will be over 80 years old. This tells us that our planning needs to gear to this. One of our goals is to get the older population to think about their nutritional needs. Part of opening that conversation is the establishment of our Lunch Clubs. The positive association they have carries over to the time when they may need our meal delivery service."

"The grant that came from The Ireland Funds last year made a significant difference to the services we provide here in the city," said Anne. "Thanks to that funding, we have a community worker who was able to go out into three new communities to begin additional Lunch Clubs."

We asked Jacque what it was like running the organization at a time of great need in Ireland. Had it become harder to do the work that was needed in the community? Jacque answered, "There is a strong coming together of community now. I think that this was missing during the Celtic Tiger. People want to offer their time and their services in a way that helps communities. An increased number of older people are experiencing loneliness. I think this is why the Lunch Clubs are coming into their moment. And here, they can come together once or twice a week to have a nutritious meal in great company. We are constantly seeking new sources of funding to bring lunch clubs to more and more areas of the county as older people are often very isolated in rural areas."

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- ANNE KENNY

Manager of Senior Support Services with COPE Galway

