



Drogheda & District Support for Older
People (DDS4OP)
Service Evaluation

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Background

More people are living longer and healthier lives and international focus is on ensuring people can live where they wish to, often in their own homes, for longer. Maintaining longevity is not only about retaining physical health, but with longer life and better health comes the need and desire to live meaningfully for longer. Age-friendly community projects have been contributing to initiatives across the spectrum of 'healthy ageing', 'active ageing', 'productive ageing' and the many other approaches to support better ageing in all its forms. Louth Age Friendly County Office and the Health Service Executive (HSE) have been supporting and nurturing community groups in this regard since the first Age-Friendly County alliance was set up in Louth in 2008. One such community group is Drogheda District Support 4 Older People (DDS4OP). This report outlines findings from an evaluation of DDS4OP as part of the EU Smart Health Age-Friendly Environments (SHAPE)¹ project, which aims to improve policies and practices in seven European countries through learning and sharing best practices.

Method

The data sources for this evaluation included both qualitative and quantitative data:

- Secondary data: Organisation reports, website, audio-visual media
- Primary data: Stakeholder Interviews (Team, leadership, service users, volunteers, HSE partners)

Using a logic model approach, DDS4OP was evaluated by examining: inputs, activities, outputs, outcomes and impacts. The Theory of Change framework is applied to examine the overall goal of DDS4OP and map how this goal is achieved. With the stated purpose of DDS4OP in mind, Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs is used as a lens to ensure the personal impact of the activities of DDS4OP are evaluated in tandem with the organisational level evaluation. Data were analysed using a descriptive thematic analysis approach, using Nvivo 12 software. The findings represent the most current data available from organisational reports, in addition to the qualitative data provided in the stakeholder interviews. Data are presented in accordance with the logic model and Theory of Change evaluation categories.

Historical quantifiable data were limited, with activities for earlier years of the organisation presented in a lay summary annual report format. Where relevant and available, historical data are provided to illustrate progression of the organisation and/or individual services. At the time of the evaluation the reports and data available were for the period up to 2019. The COVID-19 pandemic impact on the activities of DDS4OP and its volunteers is still being assessed. Since it is hoped to return to 'normal' service delivery soon, the evaluation has not taken 2020 into account, though the potential impact of the pandemic will be addressed in the conclusion statement.

¹ <https://www.interregeurope.eu/eushafe/>

DDS4OP



DDS4OP is a charity, established in 2011 by a small group of volunteers, led by Dave Turner. The organisation is located in and serves the town of Drogheda (pop. 40,956)², which incorporates a region in south Louth and north Meath. The offices of DDS4OP are located at Haymarket, in the centre of the town. A distribution centre run by DDS4OP is located in Greenhills Industrial Estate on the north of the town.

The mission of DDS4OP is to *provide support for the health, safety, and wellbeing of older people through community involvement*. This is translated as about finding ways to support older people to be more **comfortable in their lives**. The focus of DDS4OP is, therefore, is on **quality of life** and on providing opportunities, through volunteering, to help people feel like **they are still people**, not just 'older people'. The target audience for DDS4OP is, therefore, older people in Drogheda both as volunteers and as beneficiaries of the range of activities and services offered by the volunteers. Access to older volunteers is accomplished through a range of activities (outlined below) which usually serve three purposes (1) to create community contribution opportunities for their volunteers (2) to raise the profile of DDS4OP to attract volunteers, and (3) to raise awareness that DDS4OP is available to provide support for older people in the local community.

Inputs

To achieve the goals of any organisation requires a range of resources. The inputs necessary for each organisation will vary. For DDS4OP, the key inputs are: human resources directly related to delivering the activities of the organization; funding to support and sustain the activities; and a range of strategic relationships necessary to ensure the human and financial resources are secured and sustained.

Human Resources

DDS4OP is an entirely volunteer-led and run organisation operating with a level organisational structure. A committee of active volunteers make operational decisions. Members are invited to join

² Central Statistics Office 2016 Sapmap Area: Settlements Drogheda [online] available at: http://census.cso.ie/sapmap2016/Results.aspx?Geog_Type=ST2016&Geog_Code=3322F7F8-96A1-450C-9703-23C4EDADF3A

the committee only after one year of active volunteering. Board members, which includes Dave Turner, have an oversight role only, meeting just 2-3 times annually.

Board	Team	Committee
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 3 members • Focus on Governance • Meet 1-2 times/year 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 120 Volunteers • 2 paid staff <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • P/T Volunteer Coordinator • P/T Receptionist • 2 CE scheme (20 hrs/wk) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 13 active members • By invitation after 1 year active volunteering • Makes operational decisions

The Team

DDS4OP is an entirely volunteer organisation, with only two part-time paid staff and two Community Employment (CE) scheme workers. From a small group of initial volunteers the DDS4OP team has grown to 120 active volunteers across all of the organisation’s activities. The volunteers contributed 16,900 hours in 2019.

The leadership of the organisation provides a significant input, not only in terms of hours volunteered but also as a committed, responsive resource enabling DDS4OP to react with both speed and creativity where a need is identified in the community. The organisational structure and close working relationship maintained between members of the working committee and the leadership are all components of the leadership style and operation within DDS4OP, which is difficult to quantify but apparent in all aspects of the delivery of services.

Funding

Operating costs are approximately €90,000 p.a. across all of the services and activities. This includes €15,000 p.a. operational costs, for the Distribution Centre. Since 2017, costs are mainly (70%) supported by grants from the Health Service Executive (HSE), including funding to run the Distribution Centre. HSE grants are awarded under Section 39 of the Health Act, 2004³, which provides funding for Non-acute/Community Agencies. These grants are competitive and require an annual submission for funding, and are not guaranteed from year to year.

The remaining costs (30%) come from local fundraising activities including an annual Easter raffle & coffee morning,

- Flag Days & bucket collections (bag packing etc.)
- Personal donations

These fundraising activities also provide an opportunity to raise local awareness about DDS4OP. Volunteers from DDS4OP also support other local organisations in their fundraising efforts, thereby building relationships across and between local agencies and community organisations.

³ <https://www.hse.ie/eng/services/publications/non-statutory-sector/section-39-documentation.html>

Relationships

While less quantifiable than volunteer numbers, hours volunteered or funding raised, ensuring mutually beneficial relationships with individuals and organisations requires time and effort. It is clear that some such relationships are essential to the operations, growth and potential sustainability of DDS4OP. Key relationships include those with statutory bodies, in particular with the local authority, Louth Age Friendly County Office and with the Health Service Executive (HSE) Primary Care manager for South Louth and the HSE manager for services for older people.

Relationships with other local organisations also support mutual referrals, volunteer recruitment and increasing the range of activities available for older people to access. Some key local organisations include: Alzheimers Drogheda support group, ALONE, the Cottage Hospital, Louth Volunteer Centre, and the Lions Club. A key source of referrals to DDS4OP services is the volunteers, who identify needs and often refer people to other services or activities offered by DDS4OP.

Membership of the national befriending network, led by ALONE, has also resulted in access to the customer relationship management (CRM) system provided by Servisource and used by ALONE, for collecting data on activities. This data is available to ALONE, to support national befriending activity reporting, and has recently increased the ability of DDS4OP to quantify activities and outputs for data entered into the system.

The first three evaluation criteria in the Theory of Change Framework can, therefore be summarised for DDS4OP as follows:

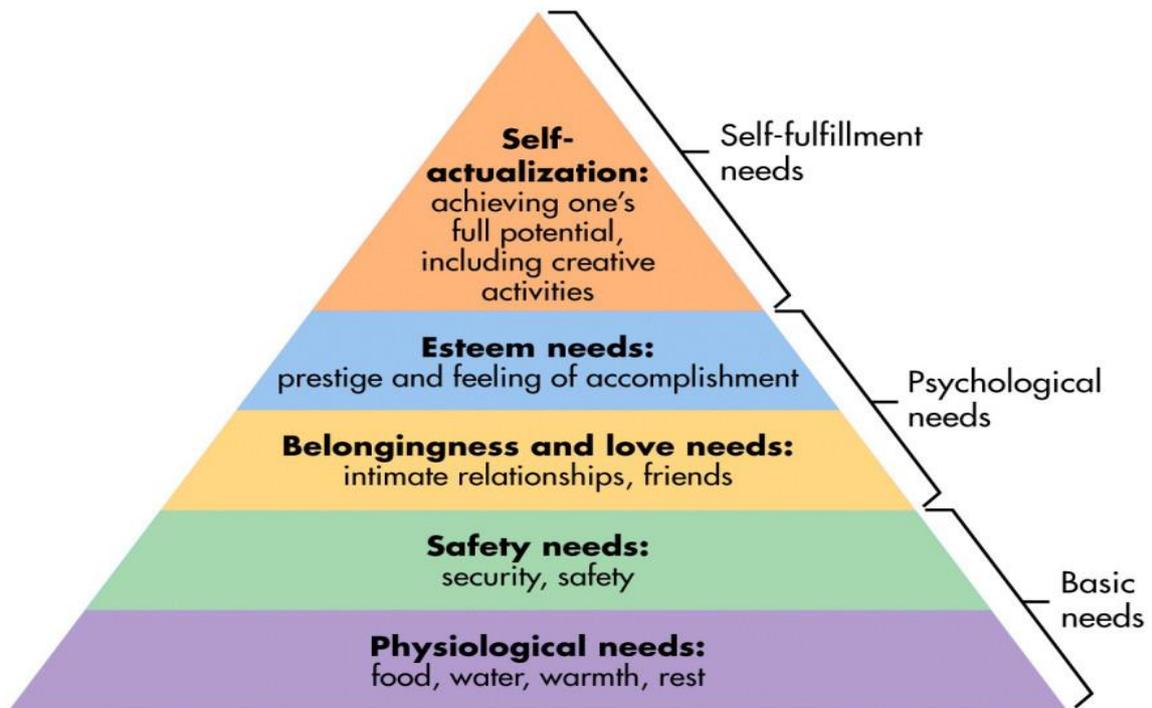
Problem to be solved	Key Audience	Entry Point to Reach Audience
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Older people often not adequately valued in society• Older people seek ways to contribute and to actively participate in their community	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Older people in Drogheda• Care networks of/for older people (including health care providers, neighbours, family, other voluntary groups etc.)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Publicity - referrals & self-referrals• Local fundraising• Event participation• Within DDS4OP referrals• Relationships with:<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Local organisations• Statutory services

The next elements of the Theory of Change framework consider what steps are needed to bring about change/problem resolution and the effect of the work being done. The next sections outline the various activities and outputs from DDS4OP, using a logic model approach and Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs⁴ as a conceptual framework for the analysis of personal impacts. While a service evaluation is often focused on higher-level aspects of organisational function, the ethos of DDS4OP and the clear mission to have a personal impact suggests that this person-centred approach may be the most relevant in this instance.

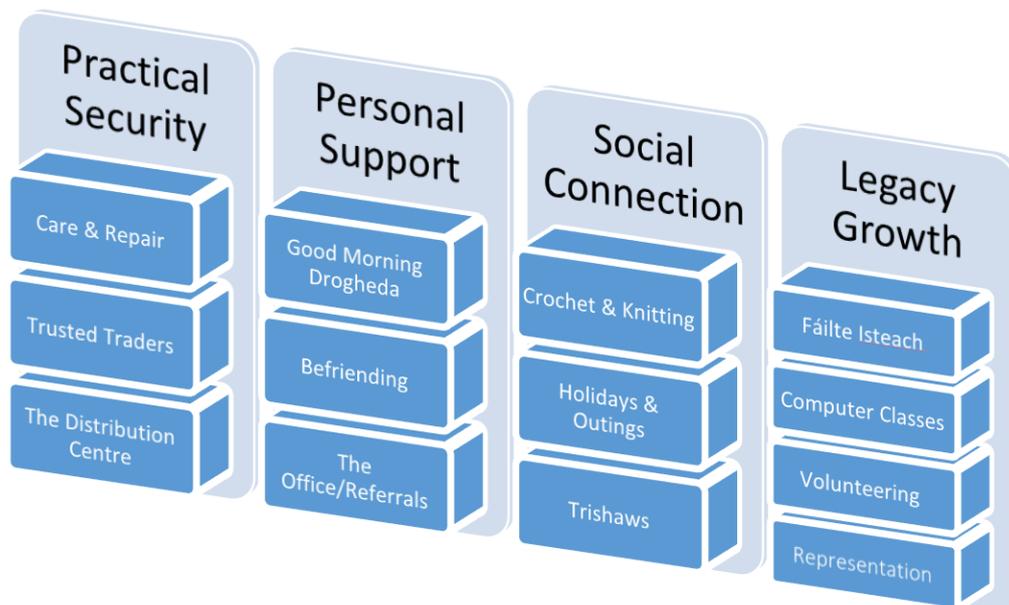
⁴ Maslow, A. H. (1943). [A theory of human motivation](#). *Psychological Review*, 50(4), 370-96.

Activities & Outputs

A wide range of services and activities are provided/delivered by DDS4OP. These fall under four pillars. Each pillar represents two categories of Maslow's hierarchy of needs addressed by the services within the pillar.



Four Pillars of DDS4OP Services

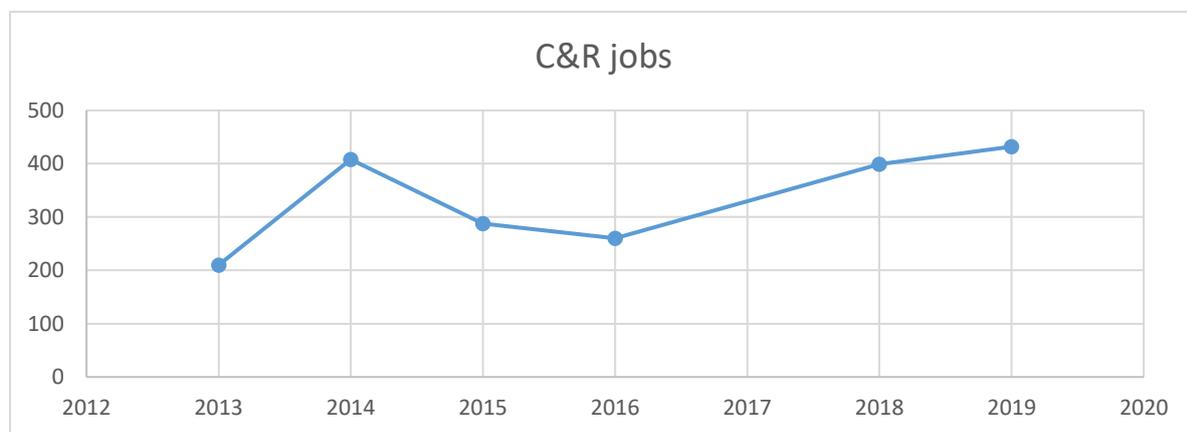


The services under the **Practical Security** pillar, addressing Maslow's Basic and Security needs, offering immediate and practical support at the point of inquiry (such as help completing a form at

the Office) or shortly thereafter (such as arranging for the Care & Repair team to replace a light bulb). These services often involve providing supports to ensure safety. One example is the installation of grab-rails to reduce the risk of falls.

Care & Repair

A team of 10 volunteers undertake odd jobs around the home or garden, for older people in the community. When DDS4OP began, a local equipment hire company, Halco Hire, provided the equipment to the Care and Repair (C&R) team at no charge. This continued until Halco Hire closed in 2015, at which time equipment and a van were purchased for the C&R volunteers to use. Care & Repair jobs have continued to increase steadily from 210 jobs reported in 2013 to 432 jobs in 2019. Jobs vary in nature with 261 gardening, 33 household-related and 32 handrails completed in 2019. Installation of hand/grab rails is now at 36-56 per year, partly due to an automatic referral to DDS4OP, by occupational therapists and public health/community nurses, when a grab rail is 'prescribed' for an older person in Drogheda district. The C&R team also offers a de-cluttering service and frequently make trips to the recycling centre for older members of the local community.



The funding structure of the C&R was originally on a donation basis, however, in 2015 this was changed to a pre-agreed donation amount before the work was undertaken, though needed work will still be undertaken even if the person is unable to make a financial donation. This change has resulted in a regular annual income, in excess of €1000, through C&R. During 2018, a state-funded work-scheme employee joined the C&R team through the Tus Programme. In 2019, the C&R team from DDS4OP received the Louth Public Participation Award for voluntary teamwork.

Trusted Traders

Where a task is too large or specialised for the C&R team, a list is maintained of trusted tradespersons, vetted and approved by DDS4OP, who can be recommended to provide services to older people in the area. Local older people can contact the office to access this Trusted Traders list and then make their own arrangements privately with the individual trader.

The Distribution Centre

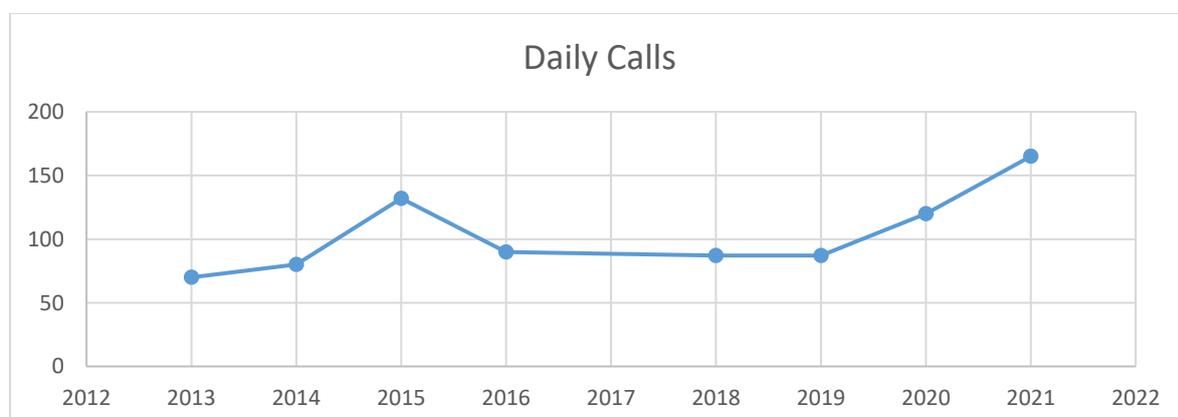
The Distribution Centre was established in 2018, with funding and referral support from the HSE Primary Care Services division, for the distribution of continence wear to people across Drogheda in

receipt of HSE-funded continence products. The service, run by 10 volunteers, includes facilities for collection, a reception area to stop and have coffee and a chat while collecting supplies, and a delivery service. In 2019, the first full year of operation, 3,278 orders were filled and 19,306 packs of continence wear distributed. The centre is open for collection 3 days/week or clients can have their order delivered. Prior to the pandemic, 10% paid a nominal fee for delivery but due to cocooning during the pandemic, the volunteers delivered to many who would ordinarily collect their supplies. This shift in service is an example of how DDS4OP and volunteers respond quickly to needs identified within the community. The effectiveness of the service management in improving efficiencies has also resulted in some cost-savings for the HSE – as DDS4OP have identified people on the HSE ‘list’ who no longer require continence supplies or who require fewer packs of supplies than originally prescribed. The extent of this savings has yet to be established.

Services offered under the **Personal Support** pillar address the Security and Belonging needs identified by Maslow. These include the need to feel connected to others, to belong to a community and to feel safe in making those connections.

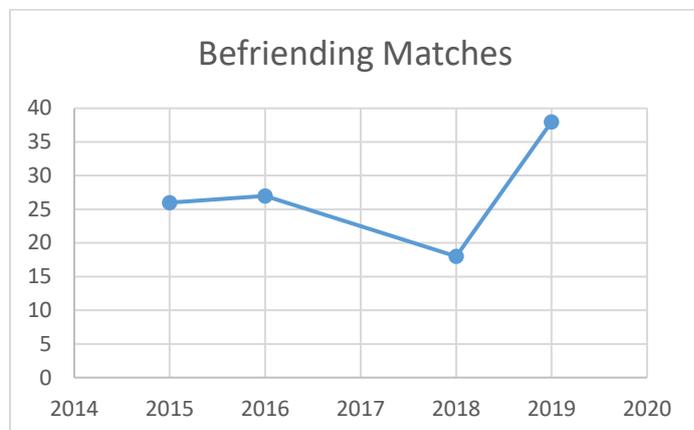
Good Morning Drogheda

A volunteer provides a Good morning call up to 5 days per week. The purpose of the call is to check-in and have a chat and usually lasts just a few minutes. Calls increased to over daily during 2020 and continued to increase as the pandemic continued, with 165 calls daily currently made by volunteers. This significant increase since the beginning of the COVID pandemic is partly linked to the reduction in befriending visits, as well as the impact of cocooning during the pandemic. Furthermore, calls are taking longer than prior to the pandemic, with older people having access to fewer people, due to restrictions on personal contact. Volunteers previously made the calls from the office; however, during the pandemic most volunteers have made the calls from home. The volunteer coordinator identified a key part of her role since March 2020 has been to ensure the calls are not excessively onerous for the volunteers making them, especially considering many of the Good Morning call volunteers are also older and, therefore, under the same restrictions as the service users. Balancing the demand for calls with the pastoral care of volunteers remains a feature for DDS4OP. It is not yet possible to estimate the trajectory of the Good Morning calls but little reduction is anticipated in the short-term.



Befriending

A volunteer is matched with a local person who receives a weekly social visit from the befriending volunteer. Befriending matches had been steadily increasing prior to the pandemic with 38 regular befriending pairs operating in 2019. The pandemic has resulted in a temporary transfer from face-to-face befriending to telephone calls. Befriending is expected to resume once restrictions are lifted.



“it has made a great difference, having someone who genuinely wanted to discuss with me my interests...we have had lots of laughter going over the older times....When you get up in the morning...and someone comes to visit you, it makes a big difference to your life.” Joan

The Office

People can call or drop by with any query or need and the office team will endeavor to address it. Seen as a one-stop-shop, supports provided in the office range from helping people to find out about rights and entitlements, supporting people to complete forms or making calls on their behalf, or making referrals to other relevant organisations such as the local dementia support services.

	Top Queries
2014	Local property tax, water charges, medical cards, utility bills only in one person’s name (where a couple) and need to change details upon death/transfer to long-term care..
2015	745 interventions/cases dealt with. Largest categories were entitlements/social welfare.
2016	Increase in concerns about utility bills, pensions, other entitlements and UK pensions as well as an increased interest in panic buttons. 250 forms completed for people.
2017	Utility bills, application forms, pensions, entitlements. Also now helping people to book flights & print boarding cards as well as to find car and house insurance. Panic button inquiries have increased. Facilitated installation of 56 personal alarm units in 2017.
2018	100% increase in requests for panic buttons, installed 110 this year. Trusted Traders list continues to grow. Inquiries relating to utility charges, entitlements, local taxes, form filling, house adaptation grants, wills, the Fair Deal scheme. Some new cases also dealt with: supporting a person to have cataract surgery in the North, help getting a pension from previous work on the Isle of Man, fighting a harsh littering fine, extermination of rats from a house.
2019	In addition to usual queries, 152 personal alarm unit installations were completed. Passed on a donated mobility scooter to a local person.

Services offered under the **Social Connection** pillar address the need for Belonging while also meeting the need for activities and opportunities to enhance and develop personal self-esteem.

Crochet & knitting

Classes provide opportunities to learn or develop a skill while meeting with others at the centre.

Outings & holidays

Organisation of day trips and outings for local older people as well as identifying people to take up places in local tea dances, outings and annual holidays sponsored by DDS4OP and/or the Lions Club or self-funded. Data are not available for every year but the table below shows a sample of the steady delivery of social outings and opportunities for holidays.

	Day Outings/Events	Holidays Facilitated
2014		5 to Trabolgan (Lions Club)
2015	30 attended Tea Dance (Lions Club)	2 to Trabolgan (Lions Club funded)
2016	30+ attended Tea Dance (Lions Club) Volunteers x-mas party 5 year celebration dinner dance	6 to Trabolgan (Lions Club funded)
2017		40 attended 3 days holiday in Mayo including outings and entertainment
2018	40 attended Tea Dance (Lions Club)	6 to Trabolgan (Lions Club funded) 30 on a 3 day trip to Donegal
2019	day trip to Farmley House	6 to Trabolgan (Lions Club funded) 3 day trip to Wexford

Trishaws



The trishaw service was launched in 2019 with a trishaw donated to DDS4OP by Louth County Council. The Drogheda Lions Club donated a second trishaw, and sponsorship of a third is currently under consideration. Through relationships with the local cycling club, 10 volunteers from the cycling club received training as trishaw pilots. Primarily offering the trishaw rides to local nursing home residents, the trishaw guests are taken either around the grounds of the nursing home or brought along the banks of the Boyne river from Drogheda to either Oldbridge House or Baltray. Following the opening of cocooning restrictions in 2020, older people who had been cocooning were offered the trishaw service in summer of 2020. This was a success and the trishaw service is expected to resume in the summer of 2021, as it is a weather-dependent activity.

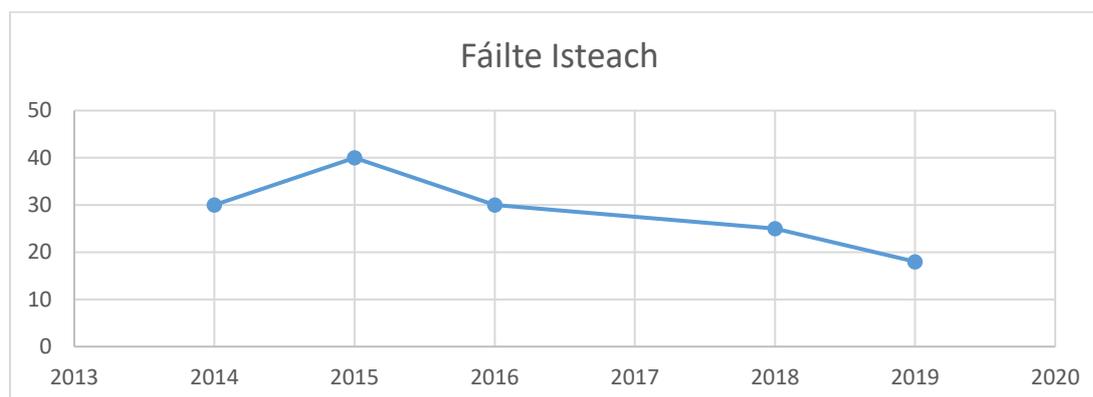
Services offered under the **Legacy Growth** pillar address Esteem and Self-actualization needs, providing opportunities for personal growth as well as for leaving a legacy, something older people are often eager to do.

Computer Classes

One-to-one peer tutoring provided by DDS4OP volunteers, to older people wishing to learn computer or digital skills. This activity was set up in 2013 with 11 tutors who trained over 100 learners to use the internet, use Skype and access Facebook. Classes ran 3 afternoons per week but by 2017, it was noted that demand for the classes had been gradually reducing, possibly due to the increased use of smartphones. In 2018, the classes were suspended due to lack of volunteer tutors. The pandemic has seen an increase in digital technology use, however, and DDS4OP plans to re-visit digital skills classes as part of a planned Technology project when services resume post-pandemic.

Fáilte Isteach

Volunteers tutor new immigrants in conversational English in small group classes. Learners receive a certificate of completion. While the numbers have declined somewhat annually since the service started, 2019 still saw 18 students and 12 volunteer tutors participating per week. The decline reflects the shifting immigration patterns nationally but the service continues to provide a valuable opportunity for volunteers to contribute to the changing social fabric of Drogheda as they build relationships with learners and are active participants in the emerging Drogheda and District community.



Volunteering

In addition to opportunities to volunteer in any or all of the services offered by DDS4OP, the team of volunteers also support other local organisations. By representing DDS4OP as a volunteer with local events such as festivals or major fund-raising campaigns for other local groups, the volunteers make a contribution to the wider local community while also representing DDS4OP and increasing the profile of the group locally. This in turn attracts both volunteers and service users.

Representation

Volunteers have an opportunity to represent DDS4OP on relevant local and regional committees to support the development of relationships with other local organisations as well as giving presentations to local schools and organisations to highlight the work of DDS4OP and the need for their services. The table below illustrates the extent of involvement by DDS4OP in building relationships with other groups in the area over recent years.

2014	Member of the Louth Age Friendly Alliance; participated in the Community Conference & contributed a video about services of DDS4OP; Represented at SOSAD (suicide prevention charity) open day; provided input to Drogheda public art project & workshop organized by the Northern Ireland Arts Council; articles in local newspapers throughout the year.
2015	Representation on the EU-funded Genio project in Dundalk. Louth Age Friendly Alliance representative. Participation with Boomerang (youth) Club by volunteers to create a video showing what society would be like without young or old people. Guests on LMF radio to discuss the impact of funeral costs. 12 volunteers represented DDS4OP supporting Drogheda Maritime Festival. Volunteers helped at Knights of Columbanus Drogheda Camino Walk. Presentations on the work of DDS4OP were given to Osmond Home in Mornington, to East Meath Active retirement group in Julianstown and to new healthcare students at Drogheda Institute of Further Education (DIFE). Stands were manned at the Home Security/Crime Prevention Expo in Navan and at the SOSAD suicide prevention event in Drogheda. A presence is maintained at the Drogheda Library. Hosted 24 [second-level] Transition Year students from St Olivers VEC for an information session about DDS4OP services and its work.
2016	Took part in Expo in Dundalk; gave a talk at East Meath Active Retirements Group, Julianstown; 12 volunteers helped at the Maritime Festival; Positive Ageing Week participation; Participation on Genio 'Flourishing with Dementia' project committee; Joan Martin CEO of LCC attended the 5 year anniversary dinner dance.
2017	Donated gardening tools to the local allotments to replace stolen equipment. Visit to Memory Technology library in Dublin. Continued to make contacts with social workers, Public Health Nurses (PHNs) and the mental health dept. for older people.
2018	Spoke at Drogheda Irish Countrywoman's Association (ICA) branch; attended Louth Support Group conference. Positive Ageing Week activities. Attended ALONE seminars & Carers Assn event.
2019	Took part in Rotary Club Remembrance Tree fundraiser – volunteers manned the trees outside Tesco, Laurence Centre and at St Peter's Church. Received a cheque for €4000 as thanks. Instrumental in newly formed Positive Ageing Week community group run by LL Partnership.

Theory of Change

What are the measurable effects?	What are the wider benefits?	What is the long-term change envisioned?
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Outcomes & Effects

The quantifiable outputs have been identified above but it is more difficult to measure the effects/outcomes and the wider benefits/impacts, as these are often more qualitative in nature. Furthermore, when considering that DDS4OP remains, an entirely voluntary run and led organisation, rather than a company or business, it still has little in place by way of structured processes for quantitatively measuring outcomes. Whether this lack of regular organisational evaluation is a weakness, or a threat to the future of DDS4OP, is discussed below. The qualitative data analysed for this evaluation identified a number of general outcomes/effects of DDS4OP.

One outcome is that older people in Drogheda have somewhere safe to seek help and support in DDS4OP. That DDS4OP serves as a 'one-stop-shop' for any manner of inquiry was identified as a unique feature. In considering the nature of DDS4OP, it is clear that it plays a complementary role, filling the gaps between existing services and organisations without intending to substitute or replace them. DDS4OP is past the 'Growth' stage and has reached the 'Established' stage of organisational development. At this time, there is no appetite within DDS4OP to replicate or expand to other geographical areas, despite requests to do so, though continued growth and expansion of services in Drogheda can be expected, in response to local needs as they emerge.

When the outcomes achieved by DDS4OP are measured against the purpose for which it exists, it is clear that much has been achieved. Specifically, DDS4OP continues to provide relevant, creative and appropriate opportunities for older volunteers in Drogheda and the surrounding district, to contribute to their community. This is evident in comments by volunteers such as:

'Every day is different. You never know when you come in [to the office] what you'll be doing that day.' (Volunteer)

In addition to providing a sense of purpose for volunteers, the manner of engagement with volunteers also achieves a desired outcome of 'helping people to still feel like people, not just older people', as is illustrated by a comment by another volunteer:

'It is wonderful to know there is someone willing to come and change a light bulb, who won't think less of you because you can't do it yourself.' (Volunteer)

The effect of the work of DDS4OP volunteers has been recognized with: Age Friendly Business awards from Louth Chamber of Commerce (in 2013 and 2016) as well as Community & Voluntary Awards from Louth Public Participation Network (2016, 2018 & 2019).

Many of those who spoke about DDS4OP spoke of how the volunteers are 'on-the-ground' and know what people need. This real-time access to people and their needs, combined with the voluntary nature of the organisation and its level organisational structure, results in the ability to respond to needs in a nimble and creative manner without the constraints of excessive layers of decision chains. Consequently, DDS4OP is in an excellent position to represent the needs of older people in the community to policy makers and local statutory decision makers, with whom strong working relationships have been developed. A direct outcome of this influence is that for many local decision makers, in the areas of ageing and older people, DDS4OP is described as their 'go-to' organisation if they need to know the experiences of older people or wish to roll out programmes or supports to older people in Drogheda.

replacement surgery (@€14,000) this equates to a cost savings of approximately €2m over three years for the health service, without counting the additional potential cost of the person having to move to long-term care post-surgery.

It is considered that the distribution centre is contributing to savings for the HSE. This is due to DDS4OP identifying:

1. Individuals who were on the original HSE list of recipients, who no longer require continence wear (due to death or moving to residential care etc.).
2. Individuals who do not require the standard prescribed quantity of continence pads (for example may only require the night time pad and not the additional 3 daytime pads).

While these efficiencies have not yet been quantified, the extent of the impact on the HSE has resulted in the exploration by the HSE of a similar distribution centre to be set up elsewhere in Louth in the future.

Personal Social Impact

A review of the services offered by DDS4OP identifies that they address all of the personal and social human needs outlined by Abraham Maslow including Basic/Physical, Safety/Security, Belonging, Self Esteem, and Self-actualization needs. In addition, many older people express a desire to 'leave a legacy' or make a significant social contribution. The fundamental purpose of DDS4OP facilitates local older people in meeting this need, through its opportunities to volunteer in the community. One of the secondary aims of DDS4OP, mentioned during an interview with the office team, was the hope that their work would contribute to social change by example. Specifically, the team hope that by maintaining visibility of their work in the community, that members of the community, of all ages, would imitate them and 'take care of their neighbours'. If leading by example contributes to social change, the best representation of the personal/social impact of the activities on service users and volunteers is evidenced by the following quotes:

'Nothing is too much trouble, no matter what you need or want' (Service user)

'They [DDS4OP] would put you in touch with someone trustworthy who you wouldn't mind having in your house.' (Service user)

'I just felt so vulnerable [after my husband died]. You have no idea what that call means to me.' (Service user).

'They make older people feel wanted...makes you feel like you have an extended family.' (Service user & volunteer).

'I'd feel safe and secure in contacting them.' (Service user)

'People used to call me crying with distress ... The misery they have eliminated by the distribution and safe supply of continence wear is immeasurable.' (Primary Care Services Manager, HSE).

'... the huge impact DDS4OP has on our ability to facilitate people from Drogheda returning home from hospital. They have made the critical difference to the discharge process.' (HSE Manager of Services for Older People).

Finally, even if the statistics and quantifiable 'evidence' is limited and, therefore, hampers the completion of a full service evaluation, the ethos and purpose are succinctly reflected in these final quotes, suggesting DDS4OP is effective in doing what they set out to do, surely a measure of success in itself:

'They are so approachable. Nothing is too much trouble. They treat you like a normal being, a human normal person, not like a 'little old lady'. (Service user).

'It gives me a reason to get out of bed in the morning.' (Volunteer)

Transferability

Analysis of the data identified a number of themes pertinent to the potential for replication of the DDS4OP model. The first is the importance of the **Leadership**. This was repeatedly identified as a key factor in the success of DDS4OP and was seen as specifically relating to Dave Turner and his leadership style. The most frequently mentioned aspects of this style were his: accessibility; ability and willingness to respond immediately where an urgent situation presents; his creativity and openness to trying different ideas in response to identified needs; his connections and the relationships he nurtures; and, the equalitarian and inclusive culture cultivated within DDS4OP under his leadership. It is suggested replicating the DDS4OP model would require many of these traits in the leadership of a similar new organisation.

In addition to strong leadership, the **Ethos** and **Purpose** of DDS4OP are central to their success. One reason for this is the clear and simple purpose (to provide support for the health, safety, and wellbeing of older people through community involvement) and the equally clear ethos (to help people feel like *they are still people*, not 'just older people'). A relevant feature of this ethos and purpose is how it has sustained since the organisation was established. It can be easy for an organisation seeking to address the needs of the community, to diverge from its original purpose as new 'needs' emerge. DDS4OP has remained steadfast in purpose but has shown creativity in how it has expanded its activities and service, within the parameters of its original objectives. As the DDS4OP impact demonstrates, a clear, simple and sustainable ethos is an important component of this model to be considered if it is to be effectively replicated.

The strength and nature of strategic social alliances and **relationships** are always important to the success of community and voluntary organisations, because without local community trust it can be difficult for such groups to survive and thrive. This theme emerged from the data in a number of ways. Relationships central to the success of this model include:

- Relationships with volunteers and service users. In particular, this is about the nature of these relationships as based on respect, dignity and equality.
- Relationships with other organisations in the community (both voluntary and statutory), which facilitate cross-referral and mutual support.
- Strategic alliances with statutory decision makers such as the Louth County Age Friendly Office and key decision makers in the local health service departments. The manner in which these alliances are negotiated by DDS4OP, however, is based on building relationships founded on personal trust. These relationships are essential to the potential for DDS4OP to be as effective as it is and, therefore, would be a key element of the replication of this model elsewhere.

Volunteers are central to the purpose of DDS4OP's existence as well as being central to the operation of all of the activities and services offered. DDS4OP places considerable emphasis on nurturing relationships with volunteers and identifying opportunities to recognise the efforts of volunteers through application for relevant awards, in addition to providing training and internal recognition. This is an important component for inclusion in a replicated model.

Funding is always a concern for voluntary and charitable groups. A sustainable source of funding would be an important element in replication. A note made by the team was to avoid engaging in excessive fundraising activities as volunteers find this type of activity boring.

A theme of '**Local**' was identified in the data and considered pertinent to the effectiveness of DDS4OP. This relates to the nature of the organisation as a *local* organisation where local older people provide support for other local older people. The local nature of this delivery of support was recognised as important as, even within the town of Drogheda, where one is from (even north or south of the town!) can be a factor in how or whether people will engage with the services, including fundraising support. As one team member stated, '*you are their place*', a recognition of the value of the knowledge gained from growing up, living in and being of the local community.

This is not likely to be unique to Drogheda, and probably not even unique to Ireland, but may still be relevant to consider in replication. In particular, this may mean that a model like DDS4OP may have the greatest potential for success where the organisation grows from within a community, rather than coming 'in' from 'outside' it. Interestingly, the team also suggested there might be value in the leader of the organisation not being from the local area, thereby bringing a somewhat neutral perspective. Either way, the 'local' aspect appears to be relevant to consider when replicating.

Finally, the team advised that any replication should focus on starting with one visible project that engages volunteers directly and visibly 'on-the-ground' in the community. Additional projects and services can then progress from there, as the reputation and trust in the organisation grows. This direct approach also facilitates opportunities to listen to clients and potential service users, within the target group, and to develop projects in response to needs identified and solutions requested.

Sustainability

A SWOT analysis was conducted from the data and the findings are represented in the table below. DDS4OP recognise that some of these areas need to be addressed, such as data management and protection protocols. However, this evaluation process was the first time many of the questions asked had been put to the organisation for their consideration. As DDS4OP negotiates the new social landscape crafted by the COVID-19 pandemic, they will continue to re-assess the needs of the local community and re-calibrate their responses, guided in part by their experience of this evaluation process.

SWOT Analysis

<p>Strengths</p> <p>Strong, creative, effective, respected leadership.</p> <p>Level organisational structure means decisions to respond to needs can be made quickly as well as being made collectively.</p> <p>Only active volunteers on the operational committee means the committee is informed and able to be responsive.</p> <p>Reputation and high levels of community trust from the public as well as from voluntary and public sector groups.</p> <p>Prior work experience of volunteers brings a wide skillset to the organisation.</p> <p>Local volunteers are recognised as important in building relationships of trust with local service users.</p> <p>Relationships with statutory organisations, particularly with the managers of older persons services, primary care services and Louth Age-Friendly office.</p>	<p>Weaknesses</p> <p>Absence of clearly defined processes such as a data management protocol.</p> <p>Unstructured approach to reporting. A standard reporting format is advised, to facilitate annual output comparisons.</p> <p>No 'succession' plan is in place for handover of leadership.</p> <p>Limited formal forward planning, partly due to lack of sustainable funding stream.</p>
<p>Opportunities</p> <p>Access to CRM data provides an opportunity to fine-tune resources dedicated to activities and to support future service planning.</p> <p>Growth in use of digital technologies may support a revised Technology service offering.</p> <p>Potential to build on the operations sustained during COVID-19 pandemic.</p>	<p>Threats</p> <p>Potential for data breach and related reputational damage.</p> <p>Withdrawal of HSE funding is always a risk due to the requirement for an annual application to a competitive funding call.</p> <p>Capped Section 39 funding grant means no additional funding is available through this source, to support expansion of services.</p> <p>Reducing levels of volunteering and difficulty replacing older volunteers who leave DDS4OP represents a risk, since DDS4OP is an entirely volunteer focussed organisation.</p>

Conclusion

DDS4OP has a clear definable purpose and ethos, which it effectively executes, as has been demonstrated in this evaluation. The personal and social impact of DDS4OP on the people, community and health & social service provision in Drogheda is significant, even if it is difficult to quantify. It is worth remembering that DDS4OP is not a statutory body and, as such, its focus is on the delivery of its activities and meeting its organisational objectives, rather than counting and measuring what it does. Nonetheless, the growing expectation that charitable organisations should be accountable, even to those who 'only' throw a few euro into a bucket once a year, means there is an onus on DDS4OP to move towards a more robust system of quantification of its activities and operations. This is already underway, using the Servisource CRM system supported by ALONE as is the consideration of developing a robust data management protocol.

This report will be available to DDS4OP for consideration by their leadership committees. The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in the temporary withdrawal of many activities and in a reduction in volunteers. Uncertainty about how services will or can re-open in the coming months will mean application of the findings from this evaluation will need to be considered in the context of the re-opening of services post-pandemic restrictions. The past decade has clearly shown that DDS4OP, its leadership, and its 120 dedicated volunteers and staff, are more than able to face these challenges with grace, dignity, creativity, enthusiasm and commitment to the people of Drogheda.

It only remains to acknowledge the incredible contribution made by all the volunteers, staff and employment scheme personnel at DDS4OP. This group, despite its voluntary and charitable organisational status, has become essential to the community of Drogheda. The commitment to remain operational during the COVID-19 pandemic is an indication of why DDS4OP is not just an exemplar service, but is the home of over 120 local heroes who deserve our gratitude for their quiet but critical contribution to their community.