

‘Although I have a lot of friends to do something with, I have nobody to do nothing with’

“I get particularly irritated if older people are regarded as a burden. Come on! Where would the voluntary sector be without us? We are a huge resource and Mary Nally and the Third Age has proved this, through Senior Help Line and the migrant (Fáilte Isteach) and advocacy programmes. Our national charities would simply not hold together without older people” said **Esther Rantzen**.

The campaigning journalist was speaking in Dublin yesterday (Monday October 1st) at the Third Age National Conference ‘**An older wisdom, a younger vision – Europe’s recovery through inter-generational solidarity**’.

“I downsized into a two bedroomed flat in little old lady land and found I was coming home to a dark cold place with nobody there to share a cup of tea or share the day. Although I have a lot of friends to do something with, I have nobody to do nothing with. Loneliness can act as a kind of glue that sticks the door closed.”

Esther’s research into loneliness led her to Third Age Senior Help Line, Ireland’s only telephone helpline for older people. As a result she will shortly launch The Silver Line, a UK befriending service for older people.

Conference keynote speaker **László Andor**, European Commissioner for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion spoke of how the interests of young and old people are not as opposed to each other as one might think.

“Older people depend on the success of younger people if they want to enjoy good social protection and social services; so it is in their best interest to invest in the future of the young. Younger people care about their elders and want themselves to be treated with respect and dignity when they are old” he said.

“We can and must avoid confrontation between generations by developing a positive approach to tackling the challenge of ageing. An approach focused on creating better opportunities for an active and fulfilling life for people of all ages. The key is to ensure that, as people grow older, they can continue to contribute to the economy and society, and to look after themselves for as long as possible. This is what we call active ageing.”

The conference was a celebration of EY 2012 European Year for Active Ageing and Solidarity between Generations with which Third Age has been actively involved through its various programmes. Defining recovery as ‘the development of new meaning and purpose’,

the day contributed some positive and practical suggestions to current economic and social problems by drawing on examples and ideas from across Europe and across the age range.

Other speakers included MEP's **Mairead McGuinness** and **Marian Harkin**, Irish academic and commentator **Doctor Elaine Byrne**, Independent TD **Stephen Donnelly**, and business mentor **Senator Feargal Quinn**.

Third Age, a voluntary organisation, Summerhill, Co Meath promotes the value of older people in communities throughout Ireland. Third Age has over 1,200 volunteers giving their time variously as active listeners on a Senior Help Line, as tutors teaching English to non-Irish nationals, as peer nutritionists, befrienders, advocates and more. Third Age also promotes the third age as a stage in life when people combine maturity with enthusiasm, experience with energy, realising that this time of life is one of continued growth and fulfilment.

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