**Launch of SeniorLine Ireland’s only peer telephone service for older people**

**When Listening Is Helping.**

Describing the service as an ‘inspiring, incredible project’, Minister of State, Jim Daly, launched SeniorLine in Dublin on June 27 in one of his first public events. Remarking that improved health care has contributed to people living better for longer, Minister Daly said that older people can and do continue to contribute: “An example of this is the contribution of SeniorLine volunteers. SeniorLine is a life line for some older people, giving them the support they need, enabling them to open up about themselves. This is facilitated by the SeniorLine approach, which has older people listening to older people”, he said.

SeniorLine is a national confidential listening service for older people provided by trained older volunteers, the only such peer service for older people in Ireland, and one of the few worldwide. SeniorLine today announces a new **Freefone number 1800 80 45 91**. The service now takes up to 1,000 calls per month from older people throughout Ireland. SeniorLine has changed its name from Senior Help Line as research indicated that the word ‘help’ can prove a disincentive to those callers who do not perceive they have a problem, and phone for company and conversation. The new name will give a more inclusive message.

Keynote speaker Eamon O’Shea, Professor of Gerontology NUIG discussed the needs for connection of older people, and looked forward to his own future: “I still want a voice. I want to be empowered to make decision in my life. Personal development does not stop at a certain age. You are still relevant, you still have meaning for someone”, he said.

Ten years ago, Eamon O’Shea conducted a social and economic evaluation of SeniorLine, concluding that the service had made a significant contribution to the health and wellbeing of older people in Ireland at relatively low cost. He found that the service demonstrated the positive effects of volunteering for older people, and the value and effectiveness of peer-to-peer communication for regular callers. He recommended that it become a branded national service and become part of a holistic model of healthy ageing for older people.

Professor O’Shea yesterday expressed pleasure at the development of the service and its current emphasis on listening and empathy: “SeniorLine is part of a boarder context of connectivity. Listening is helping, connecting, understanding, empowering. There is something fundamental about the voice. We all want to be heard, listened to, we have a need to connect and there is a basic humanity in the need for that connection. ” he said.

Aine Brady, CEO of Third Age said that SeniorLine is recognised as a primary health care service, helping to keep older people living independent lives at home for longer. “This is the wish of many, and part of government policy. SeniorLine uses the anonymised information from every call to advocate on behalf of each caller and for older people generally. SeniorLine regularly publicises the need for home services for older people, good rural public transport, and retention of local services such as banks, post offices and hospitals – particularly relevant this month with the announcement of reduced services in some bank branches,” she said.

She welcomed the findings of a survey SeniorLine commissioned from the independent poll company, Behaviour & Attitudes. Half the population questioned said that if they were an older person with a problem, they would phone a line dedicated to listening and supporting older people. SeniorLine volunteer Anne O’Loughlin gave a heartfelt insight into the world of the caller, many of whom may not have spoken to anyone else that day or indeed for many days.

**For more information, contact Communications Manager, Anne Dempsey 087-7450721**