

90% reduction in client loneliness after 16 months in the programme

AgeWell, a care co-ordination programme, is proof that giving time, attention and relevant health information to older people at home can add dramatically to their health and wellbeing. The latest results show a 90% reduction in client loneliness after 16 months in the programme, with participants reporting they feel more emotionally and practically supported in their everyday lives.

AgeWell is a programme of Third Age, a not-for-profit organisation headquartered in Summerhill, Co Meath, providing programmes for thousands of people throughout Ireland, and services, activities and programmes for hundreds of older people in Co Meath.

This unique project meets many needs in an ageing Ireland in a thoughtful and cost-efficient way. It works through weekly home visits made by trained AgeWell Companions to vulnerable older people. As well as providing contact and friendship, the Companions act as a link to local health, social and community services. The aim of the programme is to contribute to improved health, happiness and social engagement outcomes for clients, and is an early warning system for health problems that may arise.

Each Companion has been trained in the use of a customised 20-question Health App, which was created by gerontologists. This App gives a continuous fortnightly audit of client's physical, emotional and mental health and well-being, so that any changes can be immediately noted. Any appropriate concerns are communicated by the AgeWell team with the local services, allowing early action to be taken for the client.

AgeWell is delivered in partnership with the HSE. Being a peer service is part of its strength, and many clients particularly appreciate being visited by another local older person, with whom there may also be wider community connections.

Each AgeWell client receives a baseline assessment on entering the programme, covering their physical, mental and emotional health, and successive assessments every four months.

206 clients were referred to AgeWell since March 2018. Only 3% sought to leave since enrolment, and seven people improved to the point that they no longer needed the service at this time. 68% of clients are over 80 years of age, over three-quarters are female and 64% are widowed.

4,015 home visits have been made, triggering 692 referrals from the Companions to the Third Age team. A minority of referrals needed intervention by the local primary care health team, and all 692 referrals have been acted upon and brought to a satisfactory conclusion.

The latest results show improvements right across the board. For example, 27% of clients were at risk of poor wellbeing at the start. This has dropped significantly in that **no client** is at risk today. There has been an almost 90% reduction in reported loneliness. As the programme has progressed, the proportion describing their health as 'good or excellent' has increased threefold, with a positive increase also in client activity – clients getting out and about, seeing friends and taking exercise. A massive 97% of all participants said that they are very satisfied with the programme, and 99% said they would recommend it to friends or a family member.

Avril Hevey is Manager of AgeWell. 'The programme helps people in so many practical ways. For example, we realised that one client had several falls prior to becoming engaged with us. We discovered this was partly due to steps to her door being in need of repair, and also because she has

mobility problems. We linked this client with the local council, helped her to fill in forms to have the steps fixed, and there is now a ramp in place. In addition, we linked our client with the Public Health Nurse, and she now has the correct mobility aid, adding greatly her security and quality of life’.

Aine Brady is CEO of Third Age: ‘AgeWell works to support families enabling people to remain in their own homes and communities for as long as possible, invariably their wish. It brings peace of mind to the family. The programme captures relevant health issues, intervenes at an earlier point to prevent possible crisis, also reducing burden on downstream emergency and long-term services. AgeWell is caring, pragmatic and helps people to age in place’, she says.

For more information, contact the AgeWell team at 046 95 57766, agewell@thirdageireland.ie