

Introduction:

The challenge for our society is to change who, we are as a society, where the rules of economics governs our lives and therefore our humanity, to who we can be, a society in which the person and their humanity governs economics.

In this centenary year we will celebrate the sacrifices of those who gave of their lives to create a State, could we do any more than to honour their sacrifices by recognising those, who through blood sweat and tears spent a life time of toil, building our State, so that our democracy would be founded on principles of equality and fair play for all.

Despite the rhetoric over the decades is there equality in our society, do all of our citizens receive fair play, how should we answer, how do we as a society measure success. Is it by pretending that our new found affluence, is lifting all boats, or by recanting there are more millionaires now in Ireland than at any time since our foundation, despite economic melt downs.

It is time to shine a light into dark corners and address poverty in Ireland, time to protect the Old and Vulnerable who are living in fear for their safety, living in fear of their ability to live independent lives with dignity. The measure of a civilised society is when it can be said that all its people are cherished and protected, then and only then, can we rightfully claim to have honoured the epitaph of Connolly and all those who died for this State.

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RIGHTS OF THE OLD AND VULNERABLE:

Our country prides itself as a caring nation, a long time contributor to the third world, a country that wishes to live up to its responsibilities to care for those in need, whether they be driven out of their homes by war or famine, whether they be homeless or underprivileged. Our culture born out of strife and struggle, is to respond to need and render the best possible assistance possible. Now in 2016 we are challenged again, not to hide behind walls of self-gratification but to reach out beyond our own comfort zones and consider those we pledge to help.

The Old and Vulnerable in our society are entitled to services and benefits that are essential to allow them to live their lives with dignity, they should not be subjected to the vagaries of ever changing Ministerial discretion or ever changing departmental regulations. Rights under law are not subject to economic tides and are not therefore subject to indiscriminate economic discretion, where humanity is but a cost factor.

Cuts to benefits and essential services for those in need are implemented, by those who because they may be immune from such punitive actions operate in a world where cold economic judgements can be made, indifferent to the hurt inflicted on those who are expected to bear their loss in silence, this intolerance should be alien to our ethos as a nation of carers.

The uncertainty and stress imposed on those we claim to cherish and protect is a type of duplicity that brands us as hypocrites. What the Old and Vulnerable are entitled to expect from the country they built and the constitution that is intended to protect them is dignity. The Old and Vulnerable are part of our society, and we are cruel, when we play lip service to their rights.

The Old and Vulnerable are entitled to assurances for their future, their need for services and benefits must be enshrined as Constitutional Rights and enjoy the same protection as Property Rights. The means necessary to sustain life must be at least equal to if not more important than a piece of ground or bricks and mortar, benefits and services hard earned, are the only property most of our citizens have to sustain them and therefore their needs must rank above the possession of chattels.

That the Ireland that people worked and died for.

CHARTER FOR INDEPENDENT LIVING

There is common understanding that every person would wish to live in the place of their choosing, unfortunately age and infirmity can inhibit one's ability to maintain independent living with dignity, without a helping hand. The State carries a moral obligation in a civilised society to ensure that a "Threshold of Decency" is the standard all citizens are entitled to demand as a right. Our remarks should be prefaced by stating, that there are no short comings in the good intentions of all those who endeavour to adhere to the best standards, however, serious gaps exist in the practical implementation of crucial services that must be in place, on a continuous basis, to support those who need help.

Different Government Departments and Agencies who have a responsibility for the old and vulnerable, operate within their own terms of reference and budget management, this disparate approach leaves some vulnerable people confused as to who, and how, they can be assisted. The old and vulnerable become insecure and distressed and reach out to anyone who offers help, as a consequence of their desperation, their health suffers. This is avoidable and action must be taken to coordinate all activities that will ensure a holistic approach among all service providers and this must be a precursor to any proposed changes that may affect those who are in need of help.

The Charter for Independent Living for the Old and Vulnerable can be encapsulated in one vital word, **SECURITY**, to be certain of your income, to be sure of your benefits, to rely on your service provision, to live in your home with dignity, to be safe and in contact when necessary. The following Departments should be mandated to provide these assurances.

The Department of Social Protection

That the old and vulnerable having established entitlements to benefits and services on the basis of need, that they are entitled to retain these benefits as a right. Where individual reviews of benefit entitlements is undertaken, the right to benefits and services would be maintained pending the outcome of any such review. That Agencies engaged in the provisions of Community Services to vulnerable groups, would ensure that staff are experienced and compatible with rendering services to the people they are required to interact with.

The Health Service Executive

That the HSE would combine with all relevant agencies to ensure that services to the old and vulnerable on the basis of need would be adequate and consistent. Where an individual review of service provision such as Home Help is undertaken, that no persons welfare would be put at risk by any review. That where contact is made with families /individuals, adequacy of Food Provision would be assessed, whether Cooked, Bought, Delivered, also the adequacy of Heating Availability, would be evaluated.

The Department of Environment and Local Government

That the Departments of the Environment/Local Authorities would ensure that the Housing needs of the Old and Vulnerable is of a suitable standard, and that their living conditions would be constantly reviewed on the basis of ensuring that a "Threshold of Decency" would be maintained.

Including for example;

- **The** standard of Electrical Fittings.
- **The** type and standard of Heating System used in the home, Electrical, Solid Fuel, Oil, or Gas.
- **That** fire extinguishing equipment would be made available to the elderly living alone.

The Department of Justice

That the Department of Justice in consultation with all relevant bodies interacting with the Old and Vulnerable would consider measures that would provide security and protection to those who are concerned about their safety. One crucial measure reflecting the vulnerability of the person and or their location would be to provide contact arrangements with the nearest available member of An Garda Siochana also, in consultation with the Local Authority, the provision of an emergency alarm system would be fitted on the basis of need.

Supporting Arguments for a Charter:

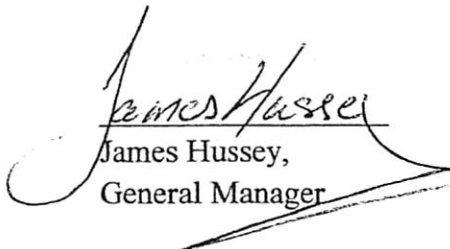
ECONOMIC BENEFITS:

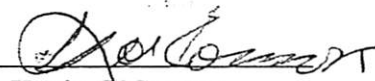
- The economic reasoning for maintaining people to live independent lives in their homes as opposed to the costs of Institutionalised care, either occupying a bed in a Public Hospital or Nursing Home Care, represents substantial savings to the State, not only in straight forward financial terms, but has the capacity to release public beds thereby reducing waiting lists and overcrowding in our acute Hospitals.

INDEPENDT LIVING (THE PERSON)

- Living out your life in the environment of your choosing is a basic human right, therefore in a civilised society, the State is obliged to protect the Old and Vulnerable in so far as is reasonable. To avoid the emotional trauma of leaving one's home and loss of independence and to be separated from familiar surroundings and friends. At local level agencies in the care of vulnerable people must review the availability of services and or alternatives to institutionalised care.
- The State at a national level seeks to spread available resources in a scatter gun approach, touching as many as possible, but for obvious reasons cannot give attention to the direct needs of those who are unseen. Those in direct contact endeavour to fill gaps and render the best service that their individual authority will allow.
- The imbalance between needs versus demands requires a framework that obliges the State to protect its citizens by enshrining rights, this is not a remote unattainable objective, it is within the power of the State to act and direct that protective measures based on common decency be as a benchmark that a civilised society will uphold in dealing with the Old, Vulnerable, and under privileged in our society.

What is needed are enduring Rights, where standards are measured in terms of need and that all Departments and Agencies are obligated to observe. If properly resourced and integrated into the fabric of local community activism it would represent an economic cost effective management that is sustainable over the long term and founded on human rights.


James Hussey,
General Manager


Kevin O'Connor
Chairman.

Published Literature both Domestic and International:

On Demographic Dependency:

Kerry County Council

Issued a document entitled "Kerry at a Glance" in March 2015. Under the heading Age Structure for Kerry, this document point to Age Dependency in Kerry, assessed at 22.1%, the South West at 18.8% and the national average at 17.4%.

Great Britain

There was no English Law that dealt specifically with safe guarding Adults, who might be at risk of Abuse or Neglect. **The Care Act 2014**, was introduced in April 2015.

Official figures, in Britain show that in 2014 that over 43,000 old people died in the winter months over the summer months.

European Human Rights Act 1998

This Act is intended to protect from all types of abuse.

Help Age International

The director **Ms Jane Scobbie** estimates that there are around 700 million people aged 60 years or over and this is expected to double by 2025.

The United Nations

Ms Rossa Kornfeld Matte, the UN expert on the enjoyment of all human rights, states that a Demographic Revolution is underway, and states that we cannot afford to leave behind millions of older persons. Age, as well as gender and where people live, affects the enjoyment of human rights by older persons, who are often stigmatised as "Non Productive" or irrelevant.

SAGE

This is a private company who are grant aided by the HSE, dealing with care of the elderly, they estimate that there are 535,000 people aged 65 years or over and that one in Five requires some form of support.

Alone;

Estimate that 170,000 people approximately live alone in Ireland.