National Strategy for Older People
2013 - 2016
Respond! is Ireland’s leading housing association, established in 1982. Respond! believe in delivering housing for social investment rather than for financial profit and provide housing for almost 20,000 residents around Ireland. Homes are provided for individuals, families, the elderly, people who are living with a disability and also for some of the most vulnerable groups in society including those who have lived for long periods in hostels, temporary and insecure accommodation.

Respond! seek to create positive futures for people by alleviating poverty and creating vibrant, socially integrated communities. This is achieved by providing access to education, childcare, community development programmes, housing and other supports.

Respond! employ over 300 people who work creatively within a framework of shared values and social goals. The in-house team is spread throughout the country and includes architects, accountants, technical services officers, psychologists, nurses, as well as educational, research, finance, legal administrative, IT, childcare and resident support personnel.
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“By 2041, it is projected that there will be an estimated 1.3 million to 1.4 million people aged over 65 years in Ireland, representing 20-25 per cent of the total population. A population with between 1 in 5 and 1 in 4 people over the age of 65 years in the future will have significant social and economic implications at an individual, family and societal level”.

National Positive Ageing Strategy 2013
In 2008, Respond! Housing Association completed an extensive internal survey of residents living in housing units built under the Capital Assistance Scheme (CAS). This scheme generally provides housing for older people and people with specific needs and requirements. This particular survey highlighted gaps in service provision experienced among our residents in CAS units and, specifically older people. It was with the findings in mind that we completed a National Strategy for Older People in 2010. Since the publication of the strategy in 2010, a number of significant changes have taken place in the operational landscape and Respond! has had to adapt to meet the growing needs of our residents throughout the country. In April 2013, Ms Kathleen Lynch, T.D., Minister of State for Disability, Equality, Mental Health and Older People officially launched the National Positive Ageing Strategy. Respond! has updated its own National Strategy for Older People to accord with that Strategy of Government, and the organisation is constantly planning ahead for the future.

There is no doubt that this will pose challenges to Respond! and society in general but it will also bring many opportunities as older people continue to make a major contribution to society as consumers, workers, mentors, caregivers, childminders and as volunteers.

Our main aim is to enable older people to live independently in their own homes for as long as possible with a good quality of life. This aim is developed within this updated strategy which recognises that older residents are a distinct group to be valued and supported. We aim to ensure that resident’s skills, as well as their needs, are identified and utilised appropriately to enable people to see their worth and encourage them to contribute both, to life on the estates and, to society more generally.

While this strategy is in keeping with both national and international frameworks which promote healthy and positive ageing, our focus remains firmly within the foundations of our organisation, being to alleviate poverty and create vibrant socially integrated communities. The National Positive Ageing Strategy and our own experiences of working with older people have enabled Respond! to set out clear aims and objectives to assist staff in enabling older residents to live independently while maintaining their dignity. We will facilitate our residents in achieving this by encouraging and enabling increased access to community supports, including health care.

This strategy also seeks to act as a guide or blueprint to all staff working with older people within the organisation. It will be adapted to suit regional needs and requirements, in consultation with the Senior Managers and the National Coordinator of Services for Older People. The strategy is both outcomes orientated and nationally representative, and should therefore make regional adaptation and implementation efficient and effective.
Acknowledgements

Many thanks go to Respond! Housing Association’s Chief Executive Officer, Patrick Cogan ofm, who initiated, and directed this strategy throughout the consultation process. Thanks to Ned Brennan, Chief Operations Officer, who helped to edit the document and identified potential human and financial resource options, without which the strategy could not be implemented. We are grateful to Dr. Deborah Butler, Katie Murphy, Susan Goulding, Andrew McCarthy and Philip Dillon who also assisted in the editing of this document. Respond! would like to thank Bluebird Care for kindly sponsoring this strategy and for Bluebird’s support and guidance throughout the whole process. And finally, many thanks go to all staff, volunteers, and Board of Directors of Respond! Housing Association who provided useful insights and facilitated the work by others involved directly in the development of this strategy.

Introduction

In 1982, Respond! took action to counter the numbers of older people in Waterford City that were living in poverty and extremely poor conditions. For over thirty years, Respond! has been achieving this while expanding its goal of ensuring that older people capable of living independently can access good quality, affordable homes in one of our many thriving communities throughout Ireland. Respond! believes in delivering housing for social investment rather than for financial profit and provides housing for almost 20,000 residents in over 160 estates across the country. Over the years, the company has diversified significantly and accommodation is now provided for individuals, families, the elderly and people with specific needs and requirements.

As of 2013 Respond! has provided over 5,500 homes across the country, manages nearly 4,500 of them of which 895 cater for Older People and people with specific needs and requirements.

The aim of this Ageing Strategy is to effectively highlight Respond’s commitment to our older residents and gives a clear breakdown of the type of supports available on our estates throughout the country. The strategy will also act as a guide to all staff working with older people in the country with clear aims and objectives to be implemented during the 2013-2016 period.

We encourage an environment which is informed by a positive ageing ethos. We aim to facilitate independent living by enabling and empowering older residents to develop, and maintain, participation and activation within their families, communities and wider society. The target population for purpose built older persons’ dwellings provided by Respond! is also the target population for this strategy.

Respond! work is predicated on the understanding that our drive towards anti-poverty and community development initiatives is to be delivered through the response of housing provision mainly in supported communities and, where possible, in integrated estates.
Our National Strategy for Older People is informed by this approach, and adheres to the principles of community development. We support the OECD (2009) finding that older people wish to remain in their home as long as possible to maintain their independence. To this end, Respond! work to provide supports for healthy ageing.

This strategy incorporates the principles of the lifecycle approach, in accordance with Towards 2016. In harmony with the National Positive Ageing Strategy 2013 and the UN Principles for Older Persons, we seek to enable, empower and support all of our residents in their daily lives. We acknowledge the diversity among our residents and we appreciate that extra support may be necessary for some older people living on our estates.

“It is important to recognise that ageing poses no threat to our society but there is a need to plan and make the fullest use of research to take account of this demographic transformation”

(UN, 2012)

Mission Statement

For this National Strategy for Older People, 2013-2016, Respond! seek to improve the lives of older people by:

- Providing housing in supportive communities for those in need, now and in the future
- Targeting the needs of our older residents and putting the appropriate supports in place to enable them to live independently in their own homes for as long as possible.
The Respond! National Strategy for Older People, 2013-2016, is structured into ten clear aims:

**Housing Provision**

**Aim 1:** To provide suitable housing for older persons in sustainable communities: now and in the future

**Quality Resident Support Services**

**Aim 2:** To provide the highest quality resident support services on all of our estates

**The Personal Touch**

**Aim 3:** To compile and maintain the resident’s personal profiles and to develop appropriate service plans to meet their changing needs

**Information and Advocacy**

**Aim 4:** To provide effective information and advocacy services for our older residents and to develop good working relationships with the relevant Statutory, Community, and Voluntary agencies working with Older People

**Getting Involved and Creating Solidarity among Generations**

**Aim 5:** Provision of high quality activation, socialisation and education programmes for older residents on our estates with particular emphasis on Intergenerational programmes

**Accessing Healthcare Services**

**Aim 6:** To provide practical support for older residents in our communities to access and engage with the relevant primary, community and continuing care services

**Tackling Loneliness and Social Isolation**

**Aim 7:** To develop a framework for combating loneliness and social isolation among our older residents

**Responding to Changing Needs**

**Aim 8:** To monitor and evaluate the supports in for our older residents and to develop appropriate responses to increased dependency, within an independent living framework

**Influencing National Policy**

**Aim 9:** To continue to inform and influence national policies on housing for older people

**The Respond! Team**

**Aim 10:** Identify appropriate human resources to effectively implement this strategy and to develop a comprehensive training plan for all staff working with Older People in Respond!
Map of CAS Estates in Ireland

Total Number of CAS Units: 895

Western Region 167 CAS Units
- Dungloe
- Castleblaney
- Carrickmacross
- Dundalk
- Longford
- Oranmore
- Shannon
- Ennis
- Ballybunion
- Listowel
- Limerick
- Liscarroll
- Millstreet
- Cork

Southern Region 329 CAS Units
- Ennis Shannon
- Roscrea
- Mountrath
- Portlaoise
- Athy
- Leixlip
- Limerick
- Clonmel
- Tramore
- Youghal
- Midleton

Eastern Region 399 CAS Units
- Dungloe
- Castleblaney
- Carrickmacross
- Dundalk
- Longford
- Oranmore
- Shannon
- Ennis
- Ballybunion
- Listowel
- Limerick
- Liscarroll
- Millstreet
- Cork

(CAS: Capital Assistance Scheme)
Housing Provision

Aim 1: To provide suitable housing for older persons in sustainable communities: now and in the future

What does this mean?
The provision of good quality affordable Older Persons Dwellings to enable independent living

How will this happen?
In accordance with the Respond! National Production Programme

Who is responsible?
The National Production Team in consultation with the Senior Management Team, Regional Management Team and the National Co-ordinator of Services for Older People

When will this happen?
This will be an ongoing process

Main outcomes

1. To alleviate the growing housing need among older people in Ireland today

Respond! acknowledges the importance of the home to an older person and sets out to accommodate their express desire to remain in their own home for as long as possible. If older people are to live independently in their home for as long as possible, the design type and condition of housing will need to match the requirement of an ageing population. Respond! view access to affordable housing as not just a human right but, through its provision in a social housing context, also the means to promote job creation, economic stimulation and a pathway back to employment.

2. Proximity to services and amenities

Respond! aim to provide quality housing for older people’s needs, now and in the future, in an appropriate location and at a reasonable price preferably in integrated communities. Our estates are built in close proximity to services and amenities in the community, so as to mitigate any incidence of isolation or segregation occurring directly from the location of estates. Respond! also believes that older people should be facilitated to maintain the level of activity suitable to their abilities.

“A comprehensive National Housing Plan is vital if we are to have any clear targets and directions towards secure Integrated Housing and Communities”

Respond! Housing Association Pre-budget Submission 2014

1. This will be referred to as the “CAS Survey” throughout this strategy document

2. Respondents were asked to rate a list of items, reflecting aspects of living in Respond!’s accommodation. Aspects which were rated as ‘Excellent’, ‘Very Good’ and ‘Good’ included ‘design of property’ (80.3%), ‘Comfort’ (88.7%), ‘Privacy’ (91.3%) and ‘Location’ (86.1%)
3. Adhere to best practice guidelines and regulations.

In 2008, ‘A study of the support needs of the older person in Respond! independent living accommodation’ was completed. This survey illustrated the high levels of satisfaction among Respond! residents surveyed.

Quality standards within our units have been continually improving, as evidenced by positive feedback and comments from the 2008 survey and regular residents satisfaction surveys.

It is important to note that all Respond! properties are built strictly in line with regulations in place at the time of build. Regulations are set out in Local Authority building guidelines, the Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government (DOEHLG) Building Guidelines 1999, Delivering Homes, Sustaining Communities, and the DOEHLG framework Quality Housing for Sustainable Communities. Respond! is fully aware of the changing demographic trends in Ireland today and will continue to adapt as a company to meet the growing numbers of older adults on social housing lists throughout the country.

“Since 2008, funding for the social housing budget has been reduced by 54% and there are now approximately 110,000 people on the waiting list for social housing in Ireland today”

Disability Federation of Ireland Pre-budget Submission, 2014
Quality Resident Support Services

**Aim 2:** To provide the highest quality resident support services on all of our estates

**What does this mean?**
Respond! is committed to providing the highest quality housing for older people in sustainable thriving communities throughout the country.

**How will this happen?**
When an older person accepts an offer of housing from Respond!, they undertake to attend a very comprehensive pre-tenancy programme where they will meet all of the Respond! Team.

The letting agreements are explained in full during the pre-tenancy programme and both parties are fully aware of their obligations and expectations. Our Resident Support staff work proactively with our older residents ensuring peaceful enjoyment of their dwellings and environs.

**Who is responsible?**
The Resident Support Workers will ensure that the highest quality services are in place on all of our estates. They report directly to their Regional Managers who in turn consults with the National Co-ordinator of Services for Older People who is responsible for the overall delivery of the National Strategy for Older People.

**When will this happen?**
All of our older residents and residents with specific needs and requirements presently are visited at least once a week by their Resident Support Worker. In the communities where we have Day Centres, the resident would have contact with Respond! staff on a daily basis.

“**The general interaction between housing providers and tenants should seek to discourage dependency and promote individual choice and autonomy. Achieving this will require management changes to focus on allocation policy, quality of service and maximising as far as possible individual choice and tenant responsibility across a number of inter-related areas.”**

Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government (2007) Delivering Homes, Sustaining Communities
Main outcomes

1. Enable our older residents to live independently for as long as possible and undoubtedly enhances their quality of life

In Respond!, best practice resident support services underpins our commitment to both the life cycle and community development approaches to working with older people. The National Strategy for Older People, 2013-2016, will remain consistent with these approaches and this will be very evident on the ground in all of our estates throughout the country.

2. Accommodate and support the wishes of our residents

It is true to say that resident satisfaction is at the core of everything we do as an organisation. To ensure this, the Resident Support Workers work very closely with our residents to provide for the peaceful enjoyment of dwellings and environment, through weekly home visits.

Again, the 2008 CAS Survey Illustrates high levels of positivity among respondents when asked about aspects of daily living on Respond! estates.

It is our express desire to accommodate people’s wishes to remain in their home for as long as possible. The consultation between Resident Support Workers, Regional Managers and the National Co-ordinator of Services for Older People will identify appropriate supports to mitigate further development of ageing characteristics which impact on a person’s ability to live independently.
Aim 3: To compile and maintain the resident’s personal profiles and to develop appropriate service plans to meet their changing needs

What does this mean?
When an older person first becomes a tenant with Respond! Housing Association, one of the first things our Resident Support Worker will do is to talk to the person and develop a personal profile which will enable us to tailor a specialised service plan to meet their needs. It is important to note that the personal profiles and service plans are not mandatory and are covered under the Freedom of Information (Amendment) Act 2003. They are stored in a secure location and are only viewed by staff on a “need to know” basis. The personal profiles are of paramount importance to Respond! because they give us a detailed breakdown of the residents’ support networks, medical and psychological needs, skills and interests.

How will this happen?
During our comprehensive pre-tenancy programmes, the Resident Support Workers and the National Co-ordinator of Services for Older People carry out the personal profiles and in turn develop individualised service plans for each tenant. It is important to note that the personal profiles and services plans are updated on a constant basis to adapt to the changing needs of the resident.

Who is responsible?
The Resident Support Workers and the National Co-ordinator of Services for Older People.

When will this happen?
Personal Profiles and service plans are generally carried out during the pre-tenancy programme.

Main outcomes:

1. Develop and maintain positive relationships with the residents on our estates

When carrying out the personal profiles and service plans, our staff are able to get a real sense of the older person and ascertain the type of supports that may be needed. This also gives the residents’ families huge peace of mind and a real sense of security. The information we glean from the personal profiles also enable Respond! to develop comprehensive service plans that are specially tailored to meet the needs of the older person.

2. Gain knowledge and an understanding of the resident

The purpose of compiling and maintaining a resident profile is to gain knowledge and understanding of the resident in order to ascertain the type, level and frequency of interventions that may be required during their tenancy. It will also provide information which can be used to identify the support networks already available to the resident. This should result in the delivery of a person-centred programme which is specific to an individual’s needs and skills.
3. Ascertain the level of support required

Through the identification of needs and skills, Respond! staff can ascertain the level of support a resident may require, and identify how a resident and their families could contribute towards the development of their wider community. All of this should result in the delivery of a person-centred programme which is specific to an individual’s needs and skills.

“A person-centred approach to care provision can contribute towards social well-being. This should be based on comprehensive personal profiles developed in collaboration with tenants, their relatives and referrers.”

Simon Evans and Sarah Valletty (2007) Promoting Social Well-Being in Extra Care Housing, Joseph Rowntree Foundation
Information and Advocacy

Aim 4: To provide effective information and advocacy services for our older residents and to develop good working relationships with the relevant Statutory, Community, and Voluntary agencies working with Older People.

What does this mean?
Respond! is fully aware that access to information, advice and support is a vitally important issue for older people. Too often, getting information, advice and advocacy can be extremely difficult. Respond! is committed to keeping our residents informed and empowered to make decisions which affect their lives.

How will this happen?
Respond! Resident Support Workers are required to develop comprehensive newsletters highlighting information relevant to the older person. The information in the newsletters varies in subject matter but tends to concentrate on health matters, advocacy issues, rights and entitlements, community events and education programmes running locally. Respond! will continue to establish and maintain linkages with the relevant external agencies working with older people to ensure that our residents are fully informed and have access to programmes that affect their daily lives.

When will this happen?
This is an on-going process. Prospective residents at the pre-tenancy stage are made aware of our information, advice and advocacy service and Information Newsletters are delivered on a regular basis.

Main outcomes:
1. A source of information and advice.

Frontline staff are sometimes the only contact an older person has and are an essential source of information and advice. Our Resident Support Workers also provide an invaluable signposting role and can improve a person’s quality of life by simply making a phone call or passing on the right piece of information.

“Older people often need someone to help them through the complexities of moving house, regardless of tenure. This includes emotional support, as well as help with practicalities. There is a huge unmet need for this kind of service, and a gap that is highlighted again and again”

Claire Horton (2009) Creating a stronger information, advice and advocacy system for older people, Joseph Rowntree Foundation
2. Ensure that information is given on their rights and entitlements and signposting to other support agencies.

It is recognised that many of our residents need supports, outside of accommodation, to assist them in availing of a good quality of life. This is particularly important to older residents in Respond! estates to ensure that they are well versed in rights and entitlements. It is our role to ensure older residents have access to information as this has a direct impact on a person’s ability to remain living independently.

From the aforementioned 2008 CAS Survey, we can conclude that some older people on our estates did not have the necessary information they required. The ‘results point clearly to the need for sourcing and developing age appropriate, disability friendly materials in order that information is taken up and understood by the older person’ (Respond!, 2008; p12).

3. Support residents in accessing external agencies

As stated previously, many of our older tenants encounter problems when accessing external agencies. It is our aim to ensure ease of access for older residents.

In this regard, we will break down initial barriers by putting organisational relationships in place with the relevant identified agencies. Respond! aim to facilitate access, rather than provide access to services. However, we appreciate that some people may be unable to self-refer and that support networks may be absent. In these cases, Respond! will act on behalf of an individual resident in referral.

“Alone we can do so little; together we can do so much”

Helen Keller

“...a single ‘lead agency’ in each sector could be given responsibility for the overall design and coordination of services. Other service providers in the same sector should be required to collaborate with the ‘lead agency’ to provide the ‘joined-up’ services on the ground that people need.”

National Economic and Social Forum (2006) Improving the Delivery of Quality Public Services
Aim 5: Provision of high quality activation, socialisation and education programmes for older residents on our estates with particular emphasis on intergenerational work

What does this mean?
Respond! will ensure that all of our older residents will have access to high quality activation, socialisation, education, and inter-generational programmes on all of our estates and Day Centres throughout the country.

How will this happen?
The National Co-ordinator of Services for Older People will develop a suite of programmes for all estates and Day Centres. These programmes will be based on information we receive from the residents’ personal profiles. Over the years, Respond! has developed and maintained positive links with every local Family Resource Centre, Leader Partnership, Third Level Institution, Youth Service, and Education and Training Boards throughout the country. All of the programmes we run on our estates are generally in partnership with the aforementioned agencies and this type of inter-agency co-operation will ensure that our residents will have access to the highest quality programmes. Residents will also be enabled and encouraged to avail of the FETAC/HETAC/QQI accredited courses run by Respond! College which is based in our High Park offices in Dublin 9.

Who is responsible?
The National Co-ordinator of Services for Older People and the Resident Support Workers will ensure that there are a suite of high quality programmes available to all residents throughout the country. These programmes will be supported by the aforementioned Statutory, Community and Voluntary Agencies which Respond! work with on a daily basis.

When will this happen?
Residents will be informed about all of the programmes we run throughout the country at the pre-tenancy stage. They will also receive newsletters from their Resident Support Worker on a fortnightly basis advertising all of our courses along with programmes organised by external agencies.

Main outcomes:

1. Promote access to a wide range of opportunities for continued learning and education for older people.

One of the main objectives of the National Positive Ageing Strategy (2013) is to promote access to a wide range of opportunities for continued learning and education for older people. It is reasonable to infer that activation, socialisation, education and intergenerational programmes all have a proven positive effect on the older persons’ physical, mental and emotional well-being.
This is in concurrence with Older and Bolder who found that it was strongly put that participating in physical, social and cultural activities is required to ensure that older people remain healthy and active members of society, capable of making an ongoing contribution to the life of communities. It is also in accordance with the United Nations Principles for Older Persons that older persons should have access to the educational, cultural, spiritual and recreational resources of society. Therefore, specifically designed activation and socialisation programmes will be informed by the resident’s personal profiles and best practice within the area of working with older persons. These programmes will encourage participation and increased take-up levels, and promote healthy ageing.

2. Identify areas of interest to residents and facilitate access to these programmes

Lifelong learning and Intergenerational programmes will be a huge priority for all staff working with Older People in the company over the next three years. Recognising and valuing the contribution of older residents as active citizens has undoubtedly informed this particular strategy. To this end, our Resident Support Workers and National Co-ordinator of Services for Older People will seek to identify multiple areas of interest to residents and more important to enable and facilitate access to these programmes.

3. Develop gender specific programmes when required

It must also be noted that gender specific programmes may need to be developed to encourage participation among older men.

Older and Bolder found ‘that many older men are less likely to join groups and that specific attention and proactive efforts need to be made to promote their engagement’. In the last couple of years, a number of older men living on our estates have actively engaged with the Men’s Shed’s initiative which has been a remarkable success in a short period of time. Respond! has actively encouraged the Men’s Shed initiative because it provides an important outlet for our older residents to meet and engage with men their own age in a practical way. Respond! has also developed a number of allotment programmes to target older men with an interest in gardening and growing vegetables. These men were traditionally slow to engage in typical activities run by Respond!.

“Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world”

Nelson Mandela

“There are enormous therapeutic benefits attributed to gardening and allotment programmes. It is a great social and recreational outlet for the residents to meet and share gardening tips and to build a greater spirit within the community.”

Eleanor Gaffney, Older Person’s Support Worker, Respond!
Aim 6: To provide practical support for older residents in our communities to access and engage with the relevant primary, community and continuing care services

What does this mean?
Respond! will empower and enable our older residents to access the relevant primary, community and continuing care services to ensure that they can live independently in their own homes for as long as possible.

How will this happen?
The Resident Support Worker will link with the resident’s family and other support networks around their changing health needs. Respond! in partnership with relevant external agencies will provide information and advocacy services to our residents and will also run a number of health awareness seminars and programmes on our estates. We will continue to develop positive working relationships with the local Primary Healthcare Centres and advocate on behalf of the most marginalised people living in our communities throughout the country.

Accessing Healthcare Services
“The longer people live in stressful economic and social circumstances, the greater physiological wear and tear they suffer, and the less likely they are to enjoy a healthy old age”

(Wilkinson and Marmot, 2003)

“Healthy citizens are the greatest asset any country can have”

Sir Winston Churchill

“Good health is a prerequisite to anyone expecting to lead an active and fulfilling life. Longer life expectancies for both men and women are major achievements that should be valued and preserved and will not necessarily result in higher costs to society if people are empowered to remain healthy until very old age”

(Age, 2006)
Tackling Loneliness and Social Isolation

Aim 7: To develop a framework for combating loneliness and social isolation among our older residents

What does this mean?
Respond! recognises that a significantly high number of our residents suffer from loneliness and sometimes tend to be socially isolated from the rest of the community. We are committed to developing a framework to effectively combat loneliness and social isolation through specialised activation programmes, wider community engagement and referrals to visitation and befriending services.

How will this happen?
Respond! will actively engage with the relevant external agencies working with older people as loneliness is a multi-faceted issue and effective responses should be delivered from an inter-agency approach.

Who is responsible?
The National Co-ordinator of Services for Older People along with the Resident Support Workers and Volunteers will identify older residents who present as lonely and socially isolated and will refer them to the appropriate service that best meets their needs. An inter-agency approach is vitally important to tackle loneliness and social isolation as they are both very complex areas which require supports from a number of different disciplines.

When will this happen?
This is an ongoing process for Respond! and the organisation is firmly committed to developing quality programmes and initiatives with the aim of preventing loneliness and social isolation.

Main outcome:

1. Tackle loneliness and social isolation

There is growing recognition that loneliness and social isolation are both serious problems, with far reaching implications, not just for individuals, but also for wider communities, which merits the attention of large Voluntary Housing Associations like Respond!. One of the biggest issues facing our Resident Support Workers on the ground is undoubtedly loneliness and social isolation.

Whilst in the past, loneliness was sometimes viewed as a trivial matter; it is increasingly understood to be a serious condition which can affect a person’s mental and physical health detrimentally.

“Loneliness and the feeling of being unwanted is the most terrible poverty”

Mother Teresa
Respond! is firmly committed to creating a better understanding of loneliness and social isolation and will develop mechanisms and programmes to help counteract these problems. Studies among local authority tenants in London show that acute loneliness has been consistently estimated to affect around 10-13 per cent of the population of older people (Local Government Association, 2012).

“Aside from age, several other factors are associated with loneliness. These include living alone, never being married, widowhood, support network type, poor health, cognitive impairment or poor mental health.”

(Burholt, 2011)
Responding to Changing Needs

**Aim 8:** To monitor and evaluate the supports in place for our older residents and to develop appropriate responses to increased dependency, within an independent living framework

**What does this mean?**
Respond! will ensure that the supports we put in place are achieving the declared outcomes. The company also aims to develop appropriate and timely responses to issues arising among older residents living in Respond! family estates.

**How will this happen?**
We will consult regularly with the Public Health Nurses, General Practitioners and multi-disciplinary teams and support networks with regard to the residents’ ability to continue to live independently. Where possible, Respond! will provide suitable accommodation for the older resident with specific needs and requirements based on recommendations from the various health and social care professionals.

**Who is responsible?**
The National Co-ordinator of Services for Older People and the Resident Support Workers are primarily responsible for monitoring and evaluating the supports we put in place on our estates. When an older person has higher support needs we will take an inter-agency approach as there are numerous professionals involved from a variety of health and social care backgrounds.

**When will this happen?**
This will become effective on agreement of the National Strategy for Older People, 2013-2016.

**Main outcomes:**

1. **Recognise the possible changing accommodation needs of the resident**
Respond! will have achieved optimum efficiency in the use of the company’s resources as a result of reflective practice, monitoring and evaluation of services. All of our staff will be aware of the changing needs in the older person and will be able to refer and offer the resident more age appropriate accommodation to meet their needs.

2. **Provide staff training to improve the services provided to our residents**
In achieving optimum efficiency in the use of resources, early intervention and preventative approaches are required to enable independent living for longer. It is in this regard that communication between residents and staff is particularly important. All staff working with older residents on all our estates are likely to identify ageing characteristics which may have an impact on people’s ability to live independently. Appropriate staff training will improve the speed at which issues are identified and the appropriate responses are delivered.

3. **Identify any deterioration, challenges or changes associated with ageing and offer relevant support**
Appropriately trained staff will be able to identify any deterioration, challenges or changes associated with ageing. As a person ages, or their circumstances change, alternative housing options within Respond! may well be needed.
For example, it may be the case that an older resident, residing in their family home in a Respond! estate, require adaptations to the accommodation to sustain independent living. In this case, Respond! staff will enable and empower the older person to make an application to the relevant local authority under the Housing Adaptation Grant Scheme. Older residents living in Respond! communities are regularly offered more accessible housing units to enable them to live independently for as long as possible.

We appreciate that it may not be the wish of residents to avail of these services but information will be provided so that a resident can make informed choices. Flexibility in our approach is key so that if a resident chooses not to receive any internal support that too is respected. However, first and foremost Respond! views social rented housing as a lifetime tenure, respecting that accommodation not only provides shelter, but also a home. In this regard, respect is upheld for the individuals’ right to remain in their own home, for as long as they wish or is possible.

“In some instances, housing and care services delivered in an integrated manner are essential to allowing older people to live at home for as long as possible. In other cases, older people may need to move to alternative accommodation, including sheltered housing with varying levels of support.”

Influencing National Policy

**Aim 9:** To continue to inform and influence national policies on housing for older people

**What does this mean?**
Respond! is committed to highlighting the specific housing needs of older people and will continue to participate and influence Government policies relating to Older People in Ireland today.

**How will this happen?**
Respond! Housing Association has a very strong presence in the housing sector being the largest voluntary housing organisation in the country. We have a responsibility to inform and influence policies which affect our older residents and are firmly committed to tackling social inequalities.

**What does this mean in practice?**
- Respond! regularly make submissions and presentations to the relevant government departments and lobby officials on important issues that affect older people
- Creating debate through hosting and attending conferences and information seminars on areas and subject matter relevant to the organisation.
- Linking with older persons organisations, joining with national campaigns and advocating on behalf of older persons on key issues
- Respond! regularly provides press releases and commentary on many issues on local, regional and national media.
- Respond! Housing Association is represented on a number of committee’s at a national level including the Irish Council for Social Housing Board and the Third Way for the Third Age initiative.

**Who is responsible?**
The Chief Executive Officer and the Chief Operations Officer are largely responsible for ensuring that the company as a whole are represented on the relevant national committee’s that affect the housing sector. The National Co-ordinator of Services for Older People represents the company on all matters that affect our older residents and ensures that the company actively advocates on behalf of the most socially isolated people in society.

**When will this happen?**
This is an ongoing process for the company as we are always advocating on behalf of our residents whether it is rallying against cuts to home care packages or reductions in social welfare benefits. Every year, we engage with our residents and put together a detailed pre-budget submission and provide post budget analysis. In 2013, Respond! is hosting a conference entitled “The Best Way Forward-inclusive communities for older people” in partnership with the Irish Centre for Social Gerontology in NUI Galway.

**Main outcome:**

1. Influence housing policy at a local regional and national level

Respond! has over thirty years’ experience of providing housing for older people. We wish to maximise this experience and knowledge of working with older people by influencing housing policy at a local regional and national level. We do however; recognise that our experience has mainly been with regard to providing housing for this group.
We therefore wish to highlight other issues pertaining to older people by contributing to national debate and informing older persons’ policies in consultation with other organisations working specifically in the field of ageing.

Respond! aims to build communities, not just houses, therefore we will also add to debates on fuel poverty and healthcare. Respond! was an associate member of Older and Bolder before they disbanded and participated in many campaigns including “Defend the State Pension” and “Make Home Work”. These are issues which affect older residents as the majority are in receipt of some social welfare benefit. Limited incomes constrain older residents in particular, as paid employment for this group is often more difficult to obtain. In 2008, only 12.6% residents in our Older Person’s Dwellings were in paid employment⁶.

“The state acknowledges the role of the voluntary sector in contributing to policy making and the pursuit of common objectives. The state will ensure that appropriate mechanisms are in place to give effect to this.”


⁶ CAS Survey, 2008: Pg. 29
Aim 10: Identify appropriate human resources to effectively implement this strategy and to develop a comprehensive training plan for all staff working with Older People in Respond!

What does this mean?
Respond! Housing Association is committed to ensuring the correct ratio of highly qualified staff, and volunteers on the ground to the number of older residents we have on our estates. The Resident Support Workers and Volunteers are all Garda vetted and have the appropriate qualifications to work with older people. Respond! Housing Association is operating for over thirty years and is very proud of the fact that a high number of our staff team are with the company for more than fifteen years. This is comforting for our older residents and we are fiercely proud of our record to date in engaging and building positive working relationships with our residents.

How will this happen?
Respond! Housing Association develops very detailed job descriptions and person specifications for all prospective employees, interns and volunteers with the company. Both employees and volunteers must have a background in advocacy and must work from a client centred approach. Employees and volunteers receive ongoing specialised training in areas which affect their work on a daily basis.

Who is responsible?
The National Co-ordinator of Services for Older People will highlight any staff shortages in consultation with the Regional Managers and these are reported to the Chief Executive Officer, Chief of Operations and the Company Treasurer. Respond! will liaise with the local Volunteer Centres to ensure that we have an adequate number of highly trained volunteers visiting the most socially isolated older people in our communities.

When will this happen?
Staffing levels are constantly monitored by the company to ensure best practice Resident Support services in all of our communities throughout the country. The company has specialised training programmes in place for all employees and volunteers of the company.

Main outcome:

1. Identify and provide specialised staff training

In view of the findings of the CAS Survey 2008, a growing awareness of the support needs of older people emerged. Specialised training programmes will be delivered to the Resident Support staff and volunteers working on the ground. Training will also be provided more generally for employees who have more indirect contact with our older residents. All staff in the company will attend training in the main areas of Ageism, Elder Abuse, Working with people with Dementia, and dealing with anti-social behaviour. It is crucial that interface training is provided to all staff members and volunteers to ensure that the communication of issues and concerns is comprehensible to all involved. Specialised training will also be necessary for staff in Day Centres, particularly in the area of activation.
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