

issue 2 • june 2009

aspire

age
sector
platform

speaking from experience

Pension Rally at City Hall



Also inside this edition...

The AGM

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The AGM

Message from the Chair

This edition of *aspire* has been easy to fill, with so much happening in the last few months.



The pensions rally held by the NPC outside Belfast City

Hall in April, demonstrated the real need for a decent state pension for all. Age Sector Platform was happy to support the NPC in organising the rally (see page 4 for details).

The launch of the new Age Concern Help the Aged NI also took place in April (see page 6) with a well attended consultation event held in the Europa Hotel, Belfast. Thank you to all ASP members who were present to provide their views on the new charity.

The AGM held at the end of May was a great success. Read the following pages for details of what happened on the day.

This edition of 'aspire' will also inform you of the recent exciting developments in the area of community safety (see pages 8-9) and provide an update on the 'Can't Heat or Eat' campaign (see pages 10-11).

I hope you enjoy!



Bill Carson

The second Annual General Meeting of Age Sector Platform took place on Wednesday 27 May 2009 in Grosvenor House, Belfast with over eighty people in attendance. Guest speaker at the AGM was Dame Joan Harbison, the Older People's Advocate; who spoke about her commitment to representing the interests of older people in Northern Ireland.

She commended the work of Age Sector Platform and commented: "Government Departments, Ministers and MLAs are ready to listen. We don't just want them to listen; we want them to take action." Dame Harbison also clarified her role as the interim advocate by explaining that she could not deal with cases or complaints brought to her by individuals; but that she could, however, investigate the principles highlighted by individual cases.

The business section of the AGM saw all nine elected representatives on the Executive Committee agreeing to stay on for another year; although three new members were also nominated and elected. The new members of the Executive committee are Anne Watson from Newtownabbey Senior Citizens' Forum, Ivan Baxter from the Civil Service Pensioners' Alliance and Indira Laugee from Carers NI. The ASP Executive Committee is now made up of twelve elected representatives and two advisors. Next year one third of the committee will step down to make way for four new members.



Cover Photo:

Bill Carson, Chair of Age Sector Platform speaks at the well attended NPC Pension Rally outside Belfast City Hall in April 2009. (See page 4 for details)

Two new member groups were welcomed to the Age Sector Platform family at the AGM; namely the Chinese Welfare Association and Pensioners Actively Lobbying Services (PALS).

The Chinese Welfare Association was established in 1986 and seeks to represent the interests of the Chinese community in Northern Ireland, including older Chinese people. PALS is a campaigning organisation with 94 member groups. It was established in 2006 and is based in Lurgan; covering the Craigavon

and Banbridge Council area. It is hoped that the two organisations will now become more closely involved with ASP's campaigns to further strengthen the united voice of older people in Northern Ireland.

The AGM ended with ASP members ranking the current campaign priorities, indicating how concerned they were about each issue.

This information will drive ASP's campaigning for the next year. Finally, those in attendance took part in a table quiz. Well done to the aptly named 'The Winners' who came 1st and many thanks to all those who attended.



Guest speaker Dame Joan Harbison with members of the Age Sector Platform Executive Committee

Eddie Lynch, ASP Project Manager, Phil Evans, ASP Vice-Chair and Bill Carson, ASP Chair welcome So Mei Vigo and Stella Tsang from the Chinese Welfare Association as a new member group



NPC Pension Rally at Belfast City Hall

The state pension increased by a mere £4.55 in April 2009 for millions of pensioners across the UK. This inadequate increase was the basis for protests being held in fifty cities; one of which took place in Belfast.

The rally which was held outside Belfast City Hall on Monday 6 April was organised by the National Pensioners' Convention as



part of their national 'Day of Action', and allowed pensioners and future pensioners to make a stand for a decent state pension. The rally was supported by Age Sector Platform and the ICTU.

Dorothy Hanna; President of the NI region of the NPC, who chaired the rally, commented: "Our state pension is one of the worst in Europe: this is shocking. Those present at the rally have supported our call to increase the basic state pension above the poverty level and increase it every year in line with average earnings or inflation; whichever is the greater."

Bill Carson, Chair of Age Sector Platform, and speaker at the pension rally, commented:



"During the last year, nearly everyone in society has experienced the negative impact of the credit crunch. Pensioners, however, have been living through a personal recession for decades."

Nigel Dodds MP, also spoke to the crowd of around 200, saying: "We will continue to lobby Westminster very hard on this. I know they will tell us that money is scarce in the current circumstances, but I think they have to recognise that with the National Insurance money, it was set up in order to provide for pensions. And that money should not be hijacked for other use."

Political Party Conferences

Pictured at the Social Democratic Labour Party (SDLP) Conference on Saturday 24 January 2009 are L-R: Francis Hughes, member of the Age Sector Platform Executive Committee, Mark Durkan, Leader of the SDLP, and Seamus Lynch of Age Concern Help the Aged NI



Pictured at the Alliance Party Conference on Saturday 21 March 2009 are L-R: David Ford, Leader of the Alliance Party and Bill Carson, Chair of Age Sector Platform

The Launch of Age Concern Help the Aged NI

By Anne O'Reilly, Chief Executive of Age Concern Help the Aged NI



Anne O'Reilly
Chief Executive of Age
Concern Help the Aged NI

Age Concern Northern Ireland and Help the Aged in Northern Ireland have come together to create a new, independent charity for older people in Northern Ireland. We believe creating a single new charity is the best way to ensure a better life for older people here: bringing together our resources will bring significant benefits for older people and will improve our ability to deliver essential services at a time of increasing need.

It is a sad situation but older people continue to be underrepresented in society and to experience neglect, live in poverty and be discriminated against. We are determined to fight to redress these issues to create a world where older people flourish. Our commitment continues to lobby government, provide valuable services and to campaign to improve the lives of older people now and in the future. We believe that through the continued support of our partners and donors and by putting older people at the heart of everything we do; this vision is achievable.

Our services include:

- Advice Service: free advice, advocacy and information for older people on welfare benefits, housing, community care, elder abuse, residential and nursing care
- First Connect: supporting older people to access services and live independently in their own home
- HandyVan: Improving home safety and security through fitting security products and under taking minor repairs
- 24 hour response service: personal alarms and bogus caller alerts
- Residential care, day care and domiciliary care: providing much needed support and care to frail dependent older people
- Specialist support for older people with dementia

For more information on our work or to contact the charity please call Age Concern Help the Aged NI on 028 9023 0666 or 028 9024 5729

A large number of Age Sector Platform members were present at a consultation event held by the new charity in the Europa Hotel on Thursday 2 April 2009, setting out the key issues facing older people in Northern Ireland and helping shape the focus of the new charity



Brendan McCormack
Chair of Age Concern Help
the Aged NI

Making Older People Equal

The launch of an important piece of research into age discrimination was officially launched at Queens University Belfast on Thursday 12 March 2009. The research report entitled 'Making Older People Equal: Reforming the Law on Access to Services in Northern Ireland' was funded by the Changing Ageing Partnership (CAP), and was welcomed publicly by Age Sector Platform.



Pictured at the launch of 'Making Older People Equal: Reforming the Law on Access to Services in Northern Ireland' are L-R: Bill Carson, Chair of Age Sector Platform, Lisa Glennon, Researcher, Dame Joan Harbison, Older People's Advocate and Brice Dickson, Researcher

The research report was produced by Professor Brice Dickson and Ms Lisa Glennon of Queens University Belfast. Professor Brice Dickson commented: "We recommend that the law of Northern Ireland is reformed in a way that makes it fairer and more respectful of older people's right to be treated with dignity."

Bill Carson, Chair of Age Sector Platform, commented: "This research highlights the fact that Northern Ireland is out of line with many other countries in not having a law which protects older people against discrimination. This situation is a shameful one to be in. We urge the Northern Ireland Assembly to consider the research findings and to establish such legislation in Northern Ireland as an immediate action. Older people can no longer be treated like second class citizens."

The research proposes that the law in Northern Ireland should be changed to outlaw age discrimination in the provision of goods, facilities and services; whilst also recommending that exceptions should be made, so that concessionary entrance rates and free bus passes for older people are not eradicated.

Major Breakthrough on Community Safety

In May 2009 there was a major breakthrough in our campaign to get a dedicated Community Safety strategy for older people. For many years our members have insisted that more needs to be done to support the older person's right to live free from fear of crime within their home and community.

The Northern Ireland Office (NIO) issued its proposals for a community safety strategy earlier this year and there was very little mention of initiatives for older people contained in it. Age Sector Platform responded to this consultation, outlining our unhappiness with the strategy and emphasising that it would not address the fears and concerns of older people in Northern Ireland.

Elderly must be protected from attacks

MORE must be done to protect older people in Northern Ireland following a wave of attacks on the elderly in the province in recent weeks, campaigners have warned.

The Age Sector Platform, which represents over 200,000 older people across Northern Ireland,

has hit out at a proposed community safety strategy from the Northern Ireland Office, which it claims will not give enough priority to older people's needs.

Police figures show in the last nine months of 2008 there was an average of 77 domestic burglaries against older people each month in Northern Ireland.

In recent weeks people as old as

88 have been attacked in a series of shocking incidents.

Michael Monaghan from Age Sector Platform called for a separate strategy for older people.

"This is something which was promised many years ago to our members, many of whom participated with great enthusiasm in a consultation process dating back to 2003, and yet six years on it has

still not been delivered," he said.

"If Government believes that the current proposal will satisfy our needs, then they are severely mistaken. Considering that policing and justice will become a devolved matter, we urge our local politicians to support our call for a separate community safety strategy for older people."

Fellow member Meg Holmes

said: "Having experienced what it is like to be a victim of crime in recent years, it is disgraceful that older people barely get a mention in this proposed community safety strategy. With separate sections dedicated to the needs of families and young people, while ignoring the interests of older people, is it any wonder that we feel overlooked and irrelevant?"

Calls to get tough on crime against elderly

A BANGOR man is leading the fight against crime which targets older people.

Michael Monaghan is a member of community safety group which lobbies for a better deal for older people in Northern Ireland, in all aspects of their life.

The abundance of attacks on older people in the last few months has served to demonstrate that more protection is needed to safeguard the most vulnerable.

That is the message being stressed by the campaigning group, the Age Sector Platform, in response to a strategy recently being proposed by the Northern Ireland Office.

Age Sector Platform, which represents over 200,000 older people across Northern Ireland, has criticised the proposed revised safety strategy outlined in 'Protecting Vulnerable Older', claiming that it demonstrates that older people appear to be well down government's list of priorities.

Michael Monaghan, a member of Age Sector Platform, explains, "Age Sector Platform is calling

for a separate community safety strategy for older people. This is something which was promised many years ago to our members, many of whom participated with great enthusiasm in a consultation process dating back to 2003, and yet six years on it has still not been delivered. If government believes that the current proposal will satisfy our needs, then they are severely mistaken."

He continued, "Considering that policing and justice will become a devolved matter, we urge our local politicians to support our call for a separate community safety strategy for older people."

On behalf of the older population, we will be contacting the Office of the First and Deputy First Minister (OFD) regarding this issue, which has responsibility for older people, to ensure that older people's concerns are heard and that they are given the priority status they deserve.

Meg Holmes, another member of Age Sector Platform, comments, "Having experienced what it is like to be a victim of crime in recent years, it is



Safety for the elderly campaigner, Bangor man Michael Monaghan.

Case study

'THIS IS NO WAY TO LIVE, TO BE REALLY FRIGHTENED'

AS a victim of crime, Belfast pensioner Meg Holmes knows the upset and distress it can cause for years afterwards.

Meg (right) found herself in the terrifying position of being locked in her house with an intruder in an incident at her home around nine years ago.

"I usually kept a chain on the door and put it on before bedtime, but on this particular night I went to put the chain on and realised the door must have been open a bit," she said.

"I didn't realise that I had locked the guy in upstairs, he was already in the house. I don't know how he got in, whether the door had been slightly ajar.

"Later on it emerged there had been someone try-



ing my neighbour's doors around the area to see if they were open.

"Suddenly he came galloping into the living room shouting and cursing at me, he took me totally unaware. Although I was physically unharmed, he made off with my bag with all my money and personal belongings in it."

Meg also found herself targeted again when intruders once more gained entry to her home.

"I had been outside the house when a neighbour shouted to me that two young lads had gone into the side of my house," she said.

"They got away, but didn't get anything."

Meg said that the fear and upset she and other older people experience from such incidents can linger on for years.

"These things badly affect your life every day — the least sound at night, anybody approaching, it does frighten the life out of you," she said.

"This is no way to live, to be really frightened."

We developed a media campaign and our spokespeople for community safety, Meg Holmes and Michael Monaghan, did an excellent job in highlighting the concerns of our members in a number of radio and newspaper interviews. We also raised this issue at several meetings with Junior Ministers Gerry Kelly and Jeffrey Donaldson in the Office of the First and Deputy First Minister, who were very supportive of our campaign.

As a result of these actions, we secured a meeting in May with the Minister responsible for Community Safety, Paul Goggins MP. ASP representatives outlined the strength of feeling among our members on this issue and the belief that older people had been let down by government after they had been promised dedicated action for older

people on this issue over a number of years. ASP outlined that the overall Community Safety Strategy needed to have a dedicated strategy on older people's needs given the vulnerable position many are in and the impact that crime has on this age group.

The Minister accepted that this was a major issue and agreed that a dedicated plan of action was needed to tackle the specific problems that older people faced. He agreed to establish a steering group made up of NIO officials, Age Sector Platform representatives and other representatives from the age sector to develop a strategy for older people over the summer period with the aim of launching the strategy in the Autumn of 2009.



Minister Paul Goggins MP

This is very welcome news and we are glad that government has listened to the voice of older people on this issue. What is also important is that older people now have the opportunity to work with government in shaping this strategy and will play a key role in monitoring the effectiveness of the actions agreed.

To ensure this strategy makes a real difference in tackling crime and the fear of crime amongst older people, much work is needed to capture all our members' concerns and ideas, so our representatives on the steering group can ensure that they are included in the strategy. This issue was discussed at our members' meeting on the Monday 1 June and a Community Safety

Committee has been established to take forward this work in the coming weeks.

A great deal of thanks to all those members who have shown great dedication in campaigning for this and we look forward to your ongoing commitment in developing this strategy over the summer and in monitoring it in the years to come.



If you have any questions about this campaign, please contact Eddie Lynch by phoning 028 9031 2089 or emailing eddie.lynch@agesectorplatform.org.

'Can't Heat or Eat' Campaign Continues

Following the 'Can't Heat or Eat' rally at Stormont back in November 2008, the Northern Ireland Executive announced a number of measures to tackle the rising cost of living in December 2008.

The most significant development was the announcement that £12.5 million would be made available to provide 85,000 pensioner households with a £150 payment to help with payment of fuel and food bills.

Age Sector Platform responded to the announcement saying that the £150 payment would be welcome for those who qualify but that the payment did not go far enough and tens of thousands of older people who needed help will not receive a penny from this package of measures.

A helping hand for 100,000 households



FINANCIAL representatives last night welcomed a £12.5 million fund for 100,000 struggling Ulster households - but warned that many older people waiting to pay bills will probably never see the money.

In the Assembly yesterday Finance Minister Nigel Dodds announced the one-off payment, along with £22 million to help tenants build energy bills, a rates freeze for small businesses, more protection for farmers hit by flooding and money for roads, schools maintenance and the fishing industry.

The newly-revealed announcement will be paid for through millions of pounds underpinned by Successor departments.

But the Can't Heat or Eat campaign, which includes the Age Sector Platform, last night said that pensioners with pension credits will miss the money of the 25,000 pensioners who should qualify will not receive their money.

The payment, which will not be means tested and will be automatically paid to those who qualify, will go to help with the income support of pension credits.

Writing in today's News Letter, Mr Dodds argued that the payment is evidence of how desperate a working sector has direct role, ensuring that households across the Province are £1,000 better off because of the Assembly's decision.

But SUIP Social Development Minister Margaret Ritchie - who had proposed a second fund payment of £200 for a smaller number of people - is deeply unhappy at a prospect of her housing budget, which she said could lead to housing initiatives improvement schemes for eradicating social housing being put on hold.

Turn to page 4

WELCOMES BOOST: Finance Minister Nigel Dodds announcing details of the £12.5m hardship package yesterday (PULCHRUM/Assembly Broadcasting)

In order for the payments to be made, a new Financial Assistance Bill had to be developed and fast-tracked through the Assembly. This meant that there was a delay in processing the payments and people didn't receive them until April. However, Age Sector Platform welcomed the introduction of this Bill as it will allow emergency help to be provided more quickly if needed in the future.

In January 2009, the 'Can't Heat or Eat' campaign was asked to present evidence to the Department for Social Development Committee at Stormont. ASP representatives provided evidence on the impact that the rising cost of living was having on older people along with representatives from Age Concern NI and Help the Aged in Northern Ireland. ASP also attended a meeting with the Minister for Social Development, Margaret Ritchie later on the same day to raise the concerns of our members and the Minister has agreed to hold further meetings on this issue during the year.

We also called for more strategic measures to be taken such as automatic payment of benefits and the introduction of social tariffs to protect the most vulnerable from future energy price hikes. ASP responded to the Utility Regulator's consultation on Social Action Plans in March and made a number of recommendations on how older people could be assisted in paying fuel bills. ASP will also respond to a consultation due to be issued on social tariffs in the coming weeks.

Winter might be over but the 'Can't Heat or Eat' campaign must continue, to ensure that older people are not faced with the same problems next winter. It is clear that the campaign has had an impact but there is still much more work to be done. Many thanks to all our members for their ongoing support and involvement with this campaign, whether it was through distributing and sending the campaign postcards, attending the Stormont rally or contributing through our committees which have been developing our responses to the main issues.



Home Budgeting Advice from The Consumer Council

We're all trying to cut back on our spending and make our money go further, but it's not easy. After you pay for life's essentials like food and heating, there doesn't seem to be much left. However, budgeting can really help. It takes a bit of time but it's worth it in the end.

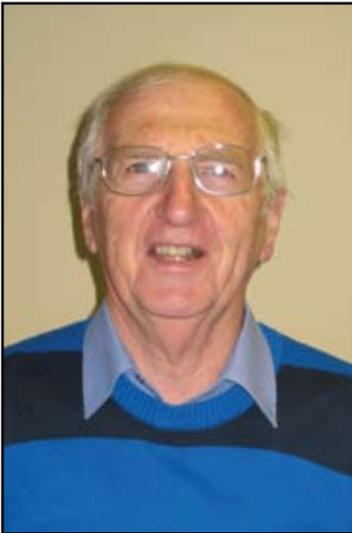
The Consumer Council's Budget Planner is a step-by-step guide to managing your income and outgoings. It shows clearly where your money goes, where you can cut back and how you can save for unexpected bills and events like birthdays, holidays and Christmas. It also helps with setting priorities for essentials like the mortgage, rent, electricity and heat.

There has never been a better time to get your finances in order so why not contact the Consumer Council to request your free copy of the Home Budget Planner. Call on 028 9067 2488 or visit our website to download your copy at www.consumercouncil.org.uk. You can also check out the money saving tips on the website which cover all sorts of topics like food, travel and protecting your money.

Member Spotlight

National Federation of Royal Mail and BT Pensioners (NI Branch)

By Michael Monaghan, Branch Secretary



The National Federation of Royal Mail & BT Pensioners is the oldest and largest occupational pensioner organisation in the United Kingdom. Founded in 1930, the Federation has over 100,000 members nationally of whom 1,500 are in Northern Ireland.

Initially membership was drawn exclusively from former GPO employees and more recently from the parent businesses of Royal Mail and BT. British Steel pensioners, with whom the Federation had a close working relationship over the years, amalgamated with us in 2001. Subsequently membership was opened up to any individual with an occupational pension. This led to the adoption of the brand name 'UNITE' for the organisation in 2004. During the past two years this has caused some confusion when the new organisation formed as a result of the amalgamation of T&G and Amicus adopted the name 'Unite the Union'. The Federation is the registered owner of the name 'Unite' and understandably this has led to some intensive ongoing discussions at national level to resolve a disagreement on the issue of the name.

During our national Annual Conference in Scarborough on 21 and 22 April 2009, it was decided that the organisation will become a Company Limited by Guarantee on 1 January 2010 under the company name 'UNITE Federation'. Consequently the Northern Ireland Branch will consider a change to the branch name at our AGM in March 2010.

OUR AIMS:

- to ensure an issue driven Branch structure is in place to effectively represent the membership in NI.
- to play an effective role in the national organisation and ensure that we have representation on the National Executive Committee.
- to establish a constructive working relationship with other likeminded organisations in Northern Ireland to ensure that Federation policies and membership views are represented in an effective manner that influences policy makers in Government;
- to play a participative and effective role in lobbying and campaigning on behalf of older people in NI;

Member Spotlight

- to protect and promote pension rights; strive to enhance the welfare and well being of our members and work with other organisations for the mutual benefit of all.
- to aid by all appropriate means the solution of problems faced by members and their dependents.
- to provide local activities, a forum for discussion on pensioner issues and opportunities for communication between members.
- to support our charity, The National Federation of Royal Mail & BT Pensioners Welfare Fund, and provide assistance to Pensioners and their dependents who are in need.

Membership is dispersed throughout Northern Ireland with the greatest concentration in the Belfast area. The Branch has an active North West sub-section in Londonderry and the local Secretary is Danny Heraghty. There is a full Branch meeting each quarter; the January, March and June meetings are held in Belfast and the October meeting takes place in Derry. Five meetings of the 14 member Branch Committee are held between the quarterly Branch meetings.

The Branch has an active Social Committee who organise an annual five day holiday in August each year together with a number of day trips and other social events.

If you have any questions about the National Federation of Royal Mail and BT Pensioners, that are not covered in this short article, you should pass them on to the Age Sector Platform office (028 9031 2089 or info@agesectorplatform.org) who can forward them to me.



Pictured L-R: Michael Monaghan, Branch Secretary, Dorothy Hanna, Branch Chair and Chair of National Standing Orders Committee and John Black, member of National Executive Committee.

Access to Benefits (A2B) Website

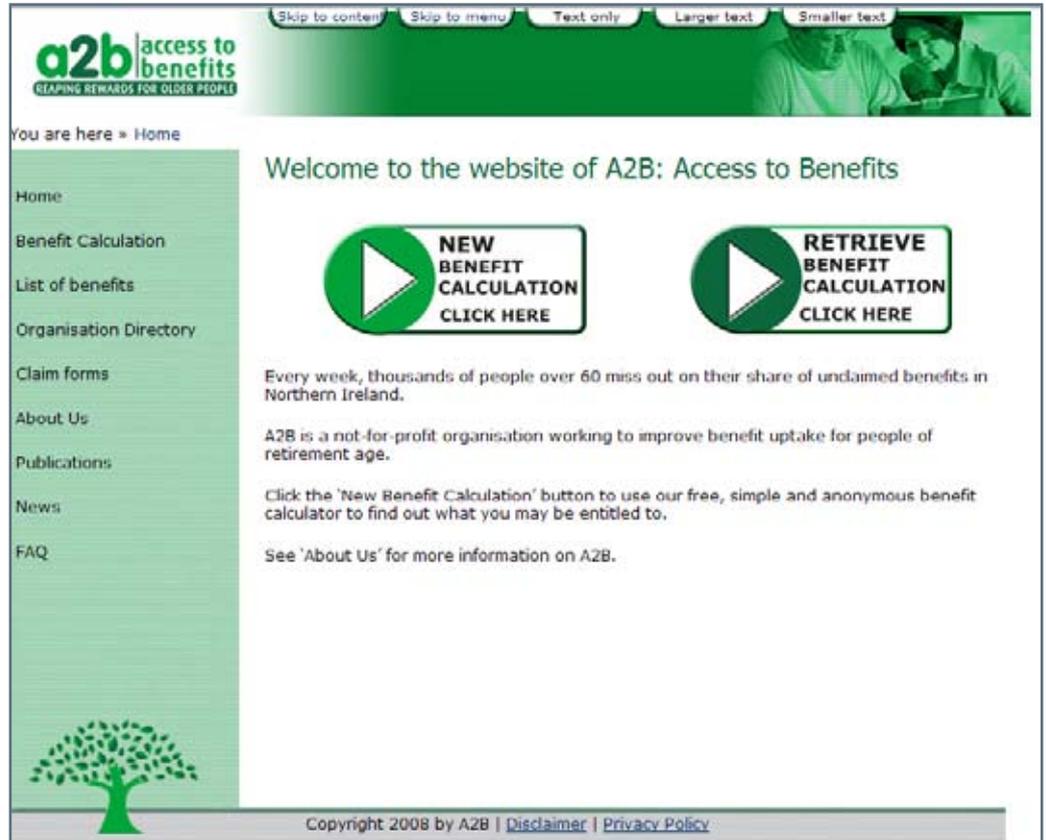
A2B: Access to Benefits launched their online benefit calculator for over-60s in Northern Ireland in October 2008. By visiting www.a2b.org.uk, you or someone acting on your behalf can answer a series of questions to find out what benefits you are entitled to. The calculator is free, simple and anonymous.

After completing the questions, you will get a report summarising the

benefits you should be claiming and this can be printed or saved. Over fifty benefits and services are covered including Pension Credit, Housing Benefit, Lone Pensioner Allowance and SmartPass.

In addition to the benefit calculator, the website also contains an easy reference list of all the benefits available, as well as a searchable organisation directory which lists benefit providers, advice organisations and some of the groups that have been trained to help older people use the calculator. If you don't have access to the internet but would like to try using the website, all local libraries now have internet access for public use.

Over £50 million goes unclaimed here each year in Pension Credit alone, so if you think you may be entitled to benefits which you aren't claiming, go to www.a2b.org.uk to find out what you are missing out on. Social security benefits are paid directly from the Treasury and this money doesn't come into our local economy unless it is claimed so it is more important than ever for you to ensure that you, your friends and family are all claiming what you have earned.



www.a2b.org.uk

Tel: 028 9075 4070

Draft Accessible Transport Strategy Action Plan 2009-2012

The Accessible Transport Strategy (ATS) was published in March 2005 and has the vision “To have an accessible transport system that enables older people and people with disabilities to participate more fully in society, enjoy greater independence and experience a better quality of life.” DRD has now published the ATS Draft Action Plan 2009-2012 for public consultation with a closing date of Tuesday 7 July 2009. A series of public meetings on the topic will be held and you are welcome to attend more than one session if you wish. Age Sector Platform has been asked to facilitate the Belfast event and will also submit a response to the consultation.

Date	Location	Venue
Monday 15th June 2009	Ballymena	Tullyglass Hotel
Tuesday 16th June 2009	Omagh	Silverbirch Hotel
Friday 19th June 2009	Derry/Londonderry	City Hotel
Monday 22 June 2009	Cookstown	Gortalowry House
Tuesday 23rd June 2009	Enniskillen	Fermanagh House
Wednesday 24th June 2009	Newry	Canal Court Hotel
Friday 26th June 2009	Belfast	Grosvenor House

All of the meetings will take place from 1pm to 3pm. If you are interested in attending any of the meetings or if you would like a copy of the document please contact Janet Watson on 028 9054 0580, textphone 028 9054 0642 or by emailing atsinfo@drdni.gov.uk. The document is also available at www.drdni.gov.uk/ats.

End of Life Care

The General Medical Council (GMC) is consulting on guidance for doctors on good practice in the care of patients nearing the end of life. The aim of the draft guidance is to ensure that all doctors are aware of the ethical and legal principles that underpin end of life care, and are supported by an agreed decision-making framework.

A local consultation event was organised by the GMC, who is working in partnership with Age Sector Platform and the Centre on Human Rights for People with Disabilities, to ensure that the views of older people and disabled people are heard as part of the consultation process.

The consultation closes on Monday 13 July 2009. You can take part in the written consultation online at www.gmc-uk.org/end_of_life_care. For more information about the consultation, contact the Standards and Ethics team by emailing standards.consult@gmc-uk.org or phoning 0207 189 5404; or contact Eddie Lynch at Age Sector Platform on 028 9031 2089.

ASP Merchandise

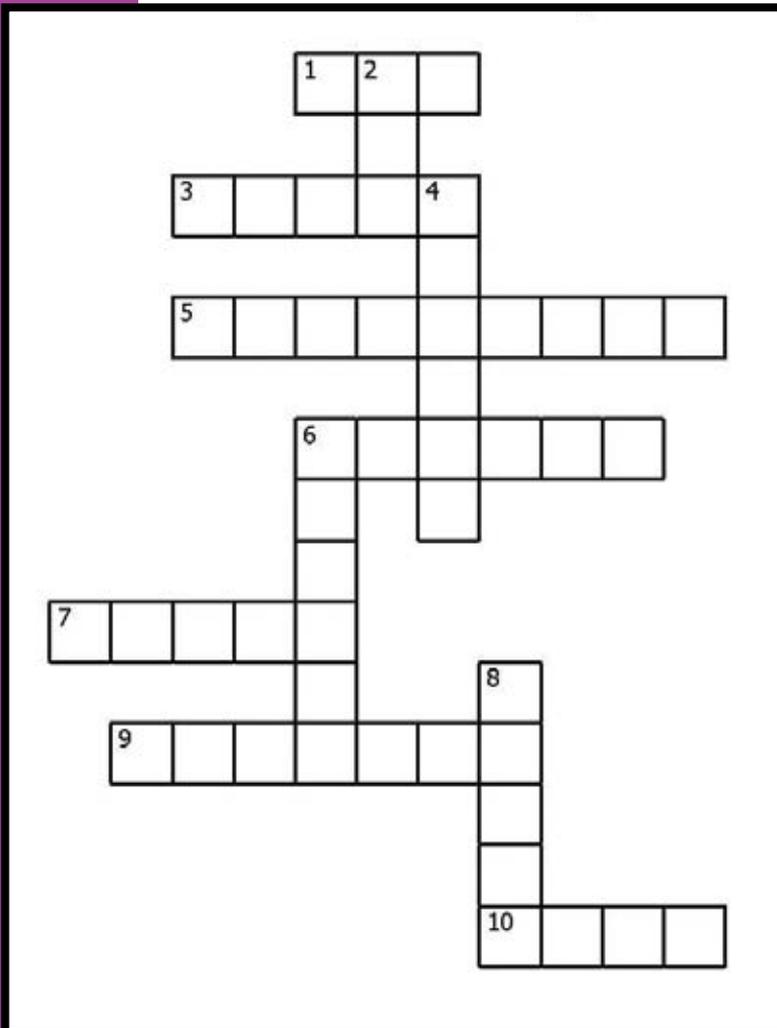


Based on recommendations made by the ASP Communications Sub-committee in March 2009, Age Sector Platform developed a variety of branded merchandise.

These products (comprising of notepads, torch keyrings and pens) will be used to promote Age Sector Platform more effectively at public events and exhibitions.

In addition, Age Sector Platform members should also receive a limited quantity of each, for their own use and to promote Age Sector Platform to others.

Crossword



ACROSS

- 1 The NI Government Department responsible for transport
- 3 The surname of the NI Finance Minister
- 5 Chair of the new Age Concern Help the Aged NI - Brendan ?
- 6 The percentage discount on your rates bill if you are entitled to Lone Pensioner Allowance
- 7 The month in which the state pension is increased each year
- 9 The new age limit for breast screening in NI
- 10 The first name of the PSNI's Chief Constable, due to step down this year

DOWN

- 2 The colour of the UK Chancellor's 'Budget Box'
- 4 An older person who uses the Internet is often referred to as a Silver?
- 6 The number of weeks that an average public consultation period lasts
- 8 Age Sector Platform's Project Manager - Eddie ?

ANSWERS AT BOTTOM OF PAGE 16

Conspiracy Theory

Have you noticed that stairs are getting steeper. Groceries are heavier. And, everything is farther away. Yesterday I walked to the corner and I was dumbfounded to discover how long our street had become!

And, you know, people are less considerate now, especially the young ones. They speak in whispers all the time! If you ask them to speak up they just keep repeating themselves, endlessly mouthing the same silent message until they're red in the face! What do they think I am, a lip reader?

I also think they are much younger than I was at the same age. On the other hand, people my own age are so much older than I am. I ran into an old friend the other day and she has aged so much that she didn't even recognise me!

I got to thinking about the poor dear while I was combing my hair this morning, and in doing so, I glanced at my own reflection. Well, really now - even mirrors are not made the way they used to be!

Another thing, everyone drives so fast these days! You're risking life and limb if you happen to pull onto the motorway in front of them. All I can say is, their brakes must wear out awfully fast, the way I see them screech and swerve in my rear view mirror.

Clothing manufacturers are less civilised these days. Why else would they suddenly start labeling a size 10 or 12 dress as 18 or 20? Do they think no one notices? The people who make bathroom scales are pulling the same prank... Do they think I actually 'believe' the number I see on that dial? HA! I would never let myself weigh that much! Just who do these people think they're fooling?

I'd like to call up someone in authority to report what's going on - but the telephone company is in on the conspiracy too: they've printed the phone books in such small type that no one could ever find a number in there!

All I can do is pass along this warning:
WE ARE UNDER ATTACK!

Unless something drastic happens, pretty soon everyone will have to suffer these awful indignities.

PLEASE PASS THIS ON TO EVERYONE YOU KNOW AS SOON AS POSSIBLE SO WE CAN GET THIS CONSPIRACY STOPPED!

Get Involved

Media Training

Around twenty Age Sector Platform members have now attended at least one session of media training, in order to become more confident in delivering key campaign messages clearly, smartly and effectively through the media. These fearless participants have recognised the vital need to ensure that the older person's collective voice reaches those sitting down to watch their television, listen to the radio or read their newspaper.

In order for Age Sector Platform to convey to the wider population; and indeed politicians, the issues that matter to older people, we need your voices. You, as ASP members, really are *speaking from experience* when you are interviewed by journalists and that makes your opinion all the more interesting and valuable.

Media training sessions are organised on an on-going basis and any individual belonging to an

ASP member group can take part! You may choose between a half day session or a full day session depending on your availability.

If you would like to register your interest in attending a media training session in the near future, please contact Alison McElhinney on 028 9031 2089 or email info@agesectorplatform.org.



"I gained the confidence to actually speak to the media, a big step for me, and I learned the importance of concentrating on getting the message across quickly and effectively. Following this training, I was able to do a live radio interview from the NPC pension rally at City Hall!"

Ivan Baxter, ASP member



Some ASP members who took part in a full day's session of media training through the Changing Ageing Partnership (CAP) in January 2009

Crossword Answers:
ACROSS: 1. DRD 3. Dodds 5. McCormack
6. Twenty 7. April 9. Seventy 10. Hugh
DOWN: 2. Red 4. Suffer 6. Twelve 8. Lynch

Have you seen the ASP website yet?

Since the last edition of *aspire*, the Age Sector Platform website (www.agesectorplatform.org) has evolved. New content has been added including:

- Consultations - read how ASP has responded to various consultations and find out how you can get involved in responding to consultations (click on the 'consultations' menu option)
- Newsletter - order additional copies of *aspire* online, and view digital versions of all previous issues (click on the 'news' menu option)
- Staff members - put faces to the names of ASP employees (click on 'about us' menu option)
- News stories - the homepage is regularly transformed by the addition of fresh news stories

Not to mention the brand new **exclusive members' section** which features:

- Discussion fora for members
- A gallery of photographs from ASP events
- Details of ASP sub-committees
- Minutes of Executive Committee & Plenary meetings
- Information on member groups' upcoming events

To register for the members' section click on 'membership'; then 'membership registration'. You will need to complete a short form to register. From the moment you receive your confirmation email, you can then access the members' section by logging in at the top right corner of the website.

Age Sector Platform is currently interested in coming out to member groups to conduct website taster sessions. During these sessions, members will learn how to navigate the ASP website and sign up for access to the members' only section.

If there are no computer facilities available to your group for a training session, we can book a computer suite in a local library.

Any member group interested in arranging a session is asked to contact Alison McElhinney by phoning 028 9031 2089 or emailing info@agesectorplatform.org.



Age Sector Platform Members

Age Concern Help the Aged NI
Amicus Retired Members
AT&GWU Retired Members Association
Carers NI
Castlereagh Lifestyle Forum
Chinese Welfare Association
Civil Service Pensioners' Alliance (CSPA)
Communications Workers Union (NI Regional Retired Members)
East Belfast Seniors Forum
Engage with Age
Friendship Federation
GMB Retired Members
Indian Community Centre 50+ Club
National Federation of Post Offices & BT Pensioners
National Pensioners Convention (NI)
Newry and Mourne Senior Citizens' Consortium
Newtownabbey Senior Citizens' Forum
NIC ICTU Retired Workers Committee
North Belfast Senior Citizens Forum
Northern Ireland Public Service Alliance (NIPSA) Retired Members Association
Older Women's Network NI
Pensioners Actively Lobbying Services (PALS)
Public Commercial Services Union (Associate and Retired Members)
Sperrin and Lakeland Senior Citizens' Consortium
University of the Third Age
West Belfast 50+ Forum

If you have any feedback or would like to request additional copies of this newsletter, please get in touch.



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