00:00:17 Participant

The time I left, I retired 19 years ago from the post office, having spent 46 years in it from 14 or 15 years of age wherever it was. When you went to the civil service in those days.

00:00:31 Participant

My first piece of (education after than) was I went to UCD through Age and Opportunity to do a year’s study on age equality issues for older people.

00:00:39 Interviewer

OK.

00:00:46 Participant

I’ve been doing voluntary time in all that whole area and I don't if you’ve already have heard about, well, you may if you're from Ireland, Active Retirement Ireland.

00:00:54 Interviewer

Oh yes, absolutely.

00:00:55 Participant

I’m a former national president of that from 2006-2009.

00:01:01 Participant

So in latter years now I've gotten more involved with the Age Friendly Ireland WHO programme, you know World Health Organisation for anything.

00:01:10 Participant

That's where you tweeted on that. That's where I picked it up.

00:01:13 Interviewer

Yes and that's what I was going to ask you because I was curious. I’m finding it very hard and I'm not getting a huge response. I mean there's about 200 people have seen the link now. Not everybody would be eligible to take it, but I was going to ask you how it came through because I had contacted all those organisations and with a nudge it was only Active Retirement Ireland that distributed it. And the gentleman I was speaking to this morning I was asking him and he got it through that way as well. But as you mention it, the Age Friendly programme, I was in contact with a lady in Meath County Council who runs the programme for the whole country and she's sending that out on this week's newsletter. Do you know Rachel?

00:01:58 Participant

I know Rachel Leavy and Catherine McGuigan is the CEO up there. I got. I got the Northern Ireland garb.

00:02:11 Participant

They’re a great team and I was in on the start, when the programme was introduced into Ireland.

00:02:20 Participant

I was actually at the global declaration back in 2013, and there was a conference before that by the WHO in Dublin and then it was introduced, and then it was embedded into the local authorities. And what's happened now is that it's a shared services by each local authority who puts money into, but it's the council that hosts, like you know, in Meath County Council for the whole country. But I’d still be in contact with Rachel and capturing another no. So following on then from Active Retirement. I got interested then in the whole Age Friendly programme and what it does. You know it's not a protest thing which I don't like protests. I just like working with people to achieve things and that's what that programme is all about.

00:03:14 Participant

Yes, it’s working with people and they keep emphasising working with people, whoever they are, and so for my sins I got elected Vice Chair of the National Older People's Council by the 31 local authorities last November. So I found myself doing a presentation in Canada there last year to the Canadian older people and working with people like yourself. Because I think that's where we’re encouraging our people to take part. I'm disappointed that you're not getting the cohort, and I would be preaching this. You know when I meet other people (I say) “take part in those. These are the people who could deliver for you going forward. Just talk to the students who are researching PhD whatever they're doing, whether it's in health or whether it's in Ireland that they are the people who will bring the programmes. And bring it forward.”

00:04:17 Interviewer

Oh, we're on the same page. Yes, absolutely, <MICHAEL>. And here's the thing. And you know, you might. And I don't mean because I don't want to keep you more than an hour and maybe we will definitely talk again.

00:04:28 Participant

That's part of the conversation I think. I think it's part of what you're really looking at, how I've dealt with COVID, I've dealt with COVID precisely what I'm doing with you here.

And this is my first meeting this week. I had nothing on this week, hardly anything last because everyone is in lockdown. As I turned on the computer here, I see three or four emails coming now from organisations with the Age Friendly that I’m dealing with in locally and nationally and be responding to them now so. We have office work starting to happen again.

00:05:03 Interviewer

So I think with some of these challenges, and certainly that I've found because this is an area I've been interested in researching since I retired early after 20 years working at Apple and Heineken before that and I teach part-time project management at the University of Limerick, but I wanted to do a PhD in education, but specifically to do with digital divides.

So this is why I'm doing what I'm doing, and certainly what I found in Ireland and looking at all the government policies and the strategies, they're all disconnected and they don't talk to each other at all. I've written about 5000 words…

00:05:42 Participant

I have my one on that. Here he comes again joining the dots. Yeah, that's my one line every time “will you please join the dots?”

00:05:53 Interviewer

Yeah, absolutely. And honestly, I did a study and basically it was to see how the young people, the intergenerational learning and the connections, and how all that worked. And that was really quite fascinating. And it was a nice lead into this because for a short study, I couldn't talk to older people. I didn't have the flexibility or the time that I have now, so I'll be doing more surveys and interviews or whatever through to the end of September. And then if I have to do them again next year so my thesis is due to be submitted and end of next year. So I have lots of time to do research on this and I'm doing the policy research and stuff at the moment. So when Simon Harris decided to append digital literacy to the adult literacy and numeracy strategy, I just threw my eyes to heaven. And then when I see what they came up with because I put in the consultation, I got my students to put together the consultation (submission) and yet within three weeks they kind of said “oh well, this is the way it's going to be.” So no join the dots thinking as all plus the fact that there is a positive ageing strategy that's been sitting gathering dust on a shelf since 2013. A good strategy.

00:07:06 Participant

I have it, it’s sitting back there somewhere in my archive of books upstairs. I open it every now and again and say “Mother of God, what happened that?”

00:07:12 Interviewer

We are going to make a difference <MICHAEL>. <laughs>

00:07:18 Participant

But now in fairness to the Age Friendly programme, it has been addressed within county councils, within local authorities and they are all chipping away at it, like you know.

00:07:28 Interviewer

Yes, yes.

00:08:08 Interviewer

<For context, David Puttnam locally here in Skibbereen was the Digital Champion for Ireland between 2012 and 2017>. But like the structure when they gave him the role, is a pro bono or voluntary role, and you know he did so much with it and then it wasn't picked up on. But to your point, the county councils through the libraries, have a Digital Ambassador programme, so I do think the county councils have a big role to play and it's nice to see them coming together like that.

00:08:33 Participant

At least that's coming through the Age Friendly programme as well, you see that digital thing. I'm sort of, I'm technology minded but not very good at it now, but I keep preaching it, I mean I'm on the wrong side of 80. Like you know, the north side of it.

00:08:54 Interviewer

Never, never. <laughs>

00:08:56 Participant

Yeah yeah, I was 80, thank God, touch wood, I jumped that hurdle back in April and I am involved in assisted technology for older people in the medical know-how that's been working in a pilot scheme in our own county (Wexford) at the moment under the Age Friendly programme. And that was of interest to the Canadians because they have started working on something similar, and I was very interested in what they were saying because they were saying the same things.

And it's the fear of older people of technology, that's the big one, you know, just the total fear or “I can’t do that.” I'm trying in my messaging (aside: maybe I'm going off what we're supposed to be talking about?)

00:09:49 Interviewer

No, keep going. We'll get back on track, but no, this is important, go ahead.

Participant

I keep saying to them “it’s like COVID, it’s here to live with us” and I remember I worked in the post office in the public service which it was in those days, the Department of Posts and Telegraphs, and I remember typewriters were being brought in where all the lads would be at the desk writing in longhand or replies and it was uproar because the typewriter was going to do away with jobs and they wanted allowances to be trained in typewriters. So wanted extra money for it.

So we moved on from that obviously, and so the next thing was computers started to be introduced, whatever basic computers were coming in and they wanted extra allowance for using the computer to do their work <laughs>.

00:10:44 Interviewer

Disturbance money?

00:10:47 Participant

I remember this as clear as it happened and it's true. I'm retired nineteen (years) so 20 or 40. Now we could be talking about 50 years ago or might be more, probably more maybe.

Well anyway around that and it was starting to come in and, I remember the trade union official when he was arguing with the guys about they were looking for money and he said “lads, it's like the tide coming in every six hours”, he says, “onto the shoreline, you can control how far it comes up the beach, but you can't stop it.”

00:11:30 Participant

Computerization is going to come in. What we need to do is control it. Keep control of how you use it and I'm using the same analogy in introducing technology in medication and having people not go to the doctor and all this. Whether people like it or not, that is going to be the way. We never go back to, never going back to, waiting in a doctor’s surgery for an hour waiting for the doctor to come and see you. That’s gone. You’re going to be put on a computer or a laptop or something, and he's going to talk to you face to face and have a look at you… I wonder if he’ll go so far as to say “take your shirt off and I’ll have a look at you” <laughs>. And that’s the space I’m in with people? Like it or lump it.

00:12:32 Interviewer

So <MICHAEL>, on that one. I do have a specific question I'd like your thoughts on. Is it the fact that the technology keeps changing? You just want to send a text message or you just want to do a video call or you know, well, you can't use Skype anymore, you have to use something else and what is your experience of meeting people? What are their fears about that? Is it that the technology keeps changing and they get comfortable with a certain phone for example, then they can't get the same phone as a replacement? What are your thoughts on that?

00:13:06 Participant

Yeah, that has to be playing a role. But then I go I go back to the tide changing you know, you've got to try and accept that this is what's happening, I mean we went from the donkey and cart to a bicycle, to a car, to a helicopter, to an aeroplane or whatever. So it just keeps moving and life keeps moving. And I feel that I have some experience in life, insofar as there's a picture up behind me there of 18 grandchildren with three great grandchildren in it. You know my life. And my life has come in circles. I was single for 26 years. I was married for 26 years and a widower for 28 years.

I've seen it all.

So got to try and convince people to embrace the change, but it can be frustrating just when you have captured how to do something and some other bloody thing comes in. It’s the same with the computer. I hit some button and I go back into it and that's why even when I was starting with you someone just rang into me there just now. And I said I'm here now, I hope this lady is on the line because I was pressing buttons here and I'm wondering why there's nothing happening. When you came on, I said “Hallelujah.”

00:14:46 Interviewer

And honestly, just because again this is new. Perhaps you haven’t had to use Microsoft Teams before?

00:14:53 Participant

I have used it before. I think the County Council uses Microsoft and won’t use any other platform. But I find Zoom the simplest one and I have set up little bits on Zoom myself during the lockdown for family. But older people, I know them. I have a friend for the last couple of, a good few years now and she just says “I don't want to know.” But I say “Roisín, you’ve got to know.”

00:15:36 Interviewer

Now that's interesting because I want to talk to you about people that you know, like that who are just not interested….

00:15:42 Participant

And she's only, she's younger than me. She's 69 now, I think.

I said “Roisín, I can't understand it.” She's a retired nurse as well, not that she's an uneducated person, you know. I said “I can't get it into my head that you would not want to be able to communicate.” “I have a mobile phone, that’ll do me” <she responds>.

This is the new way and if you want to attend meetings, she's been coming to my house now to attend some meetings here because she's very involved with Special Olympics and there's stuff online. Well then, I got to set it up and then when she was doing it she was comfortable.

00:16:29 Participant

Now I have another person whom I work with and she has a mobile phone. And she doesn't know how to send texts on it. But we're still, people are still her texts and she doesn't know how to read them. I met her on the street and she said “would you have a look at that? See what that is?” And these are intelligent people. So I find it hard to get my head around it, to be honest with you. I can see where they're coming from, but just take women. We invented the electric cooker when we got rural electrification and that did away with the pots and pans. I wouldn't be able to turn that knob on the washing machines so what's the difference?

00:17:26 Interviewer

<MICHAEL>, yeah, absolutely. And it's the demographic that I'm interested in because I'm finding it very hard to access. I'd love to talk to these people because, you know, I just want the insights. I volunteer every day with the Friendly Call programme in Cork. So I ring one or two clients from Cork City like Alone?

00:17:52 Participant

I researched that first in Scotland because they had some of them programmes going in Scotland because of the remoteness.

00:17:57 Interviewer

Yeah, it's very good. And I ring this lady every day and I do feel for her because she's on her own. She has her pets. She is dyslexic so she can't read text messages. You can only, you know, call her on the phone and the phone had to be changed and she couldn't get the same phone as previously. And all these kind of challenges and you know, because she has no one at all to help her.

So I think that's interesting to explore, and it might be something you might want to watch out for as well, so you know, these ladies now that you're talking about, do they have you know children or partners that they live with? Who can help them? If they're on their own you can see where they would absolutely benefit from being, you know connected. Whereas if they have someone who does it for them, like that's the situation with my cousin who has a lot older husband and you know all he needs the iPad for is to look up RIP every day to see who's died. That's all he cares.

00:19:01 Participant

At least he's participating, participating in society, the fact is.

00:19:11 Interviewer

Yeah, but his wife does everything else for him and that's the way. Now when they wanted to change the car, she showed him how to use Carzone and he was looking up the values of cars so very much purposeful, but you know they're happy, celebrating nearly 50 years of marriage and it works well for them.

But I do think if anything happened to her in the morning, he then becomes quite isolated and it's the social isolation and the potential for it, that we can guard against now for later years. And yeah, I mean look, I think we're preaching to the converted. We're on the same page here, but yeah.

00:19:59 Participant

I know, I know the cohort you’re trying to get at you see. I called this recently in my Canadian talk. There is a huge cohort of older people. Possibly now would be in the 70 plus or maybe a little further in who had no access, or weren't part of, secondary education which was only introduced in 1966. I was one of them. I was gone, I would have loved to education apart from my parents not being able to afford it. I would have loved it because it wasn't available to me and I remember speaking to transition year students in my local Community School. And my opening remark was “there’s a lovely big new Community School and everything in it” and my first opener was, I said “aren’t you very privileged to be here, to receive an education in this building” and they looked at me with mouths open <laughs>.

A teacher told me after, that that provoked such a discussion among them and realised what they had that we didn't have. You know, and as I said at the outset there, I saw the inside of the university at 62 years of age. It was the gates going by UCD or somewhere <laughs>.

00:21:36 Interviewer

So what was that course you were telling me about? What was the name of it <MICHAEL>?

00:21:41 Participant

It wasn’t a full year, about 300 hours or something like that in equality studies for older people.

00:21:53 Participant

I mean, just to give you an idea like where I was coming from. My only primary school education and there was words being used that I had to look up in the dictionary to see what are they talking about and I remember the head of the course, Professor Murphy was her name I think, and I was up on one of the second days or something like that and she said “I want you to write an essay of at least 1500 words, or thereabouts, next week on issues facing older people in Ireland”. And I was half laughing, sitting back in the seat and she says to me, “what's wrong, <MICHAEL>?” So I say, “you’re after asking me to write an essay of 1500 words. I went to primary school and I didn't write 1500 words in the whole time I was there, and you’re asking me to do it in a week” <laughs>.

00:22:53 Interviewer

But you did, no bother, and that's interesting. Have you heard of (because I’m just trying to make contact with a few of these), there's an Age Friendly University programme. It's worldwide, but DCU and Trinity, UCD are all involved.

00:23:08 Interviewer

Have you heard of that?

00:23:10 Participant

DCU, yeah, I've been up with them way back in their programmes and still they send me stuff and I get a thing from UCD every year, like offering courses, because I qualified with them, that I can have an entry like you know that I don't have to have a Leaving cert.

00:23:32 Participant

I was up in DCU way back, I think it was about two days with them away back, on age friendliness and I did another piece with… not Coventry. Yeah, one of those universities in the UK. I think it's Coventry. And, there was another one then in Edmondton in Canada.

00:24:07 Interviewer

OK, yes.

00:24:09 Participant

So yeah, I’m in the circle talking to people who are four times the education that I ever had, like you know, and that's why I keep saying to people, “say it as it is, not what you think they want to hear.” Just say it exactly as it is because people like yourself are able to put the meat on what I'm saying or dress the stuff in their in the proper language.

00:24:47 Interviewer

But we have to have the information first and that's what I'm finding. If people will give me the information. So, even locally, like I volunteer, I do a bit of volunteering, so I'm involved with the local Tidy Towns group and I can't get much in the way of responses. And from a community perspective, a group who really was impacted significantly by lockdown and COVID and all that, and nobody is wanting to talk. I'm approaching this organically <MICHAEL>. So I'm looking for the national groups. I'm not going after people I know asking “will you fill in my survey?” It doesn't help. So, for example, the Men’s Shed, another fantastic organisation. I sent two emails. Yesterday I picked up the phone and I said “have you been getting my emails?” and I said “I think this is important research and I think some of your participants, your members, might be interested in” and he said “oh send it on to me to this email address and we'll have a look.” So I find that quite disappointing, whereas like I said, right, who else now do I know? what other organisations? So I went to the Wheel, Rachel at Age Friendly and I'm hoping that that will make a difference because the way they do their weekly newsletter. There's no clicking through and hyperlinks are all there, so you can pretty much see it on one page, so I'm hoping that will be the case, but I find it quite disappointing. So like Age Action, Alone, Senior Citizens Parliament. Quite disappointed with their lack of response, and they're all charities, all NGOs. They're all trying to do the same thing…

00:26:42 Participant

You mentioned Senior Citizens Parliament where I would have been part. I actually know the new CEO, Sue Shaw. I know her quite well. I met her over the years in this sector and she worked for Active Retirement Ireland as well. She was one of our development officers way back and when she got the job, actually I didn't know. She emailed me “Here, <MICHAEL>, I would like to have a chat with you. I'm after taking over Senior Citizens Parliament” and I went to Dublin where we had a three or four hour chat in Dublin where I was sitting in with the older people saying what was happening out there. And what's happening is, I feel anyway, is some of those organisations are, they’re gatekeepers. They do not want you to start representing the people that they are trying to have in and I’m afraid that I have issues with Age Action, very much so. They were doing a piece of work similar, and it was somebody from UCC Cork, somebody with the name Siobhan McCarthy, I think was her name.

00:27:49 Interviewer

Fine Cork name.

00:27:53 Participant

She was doing a piece of research on an older people's issues and all that kind of stuff, barely what you’re at right now, but she was doing it for Age Action.

And I listened to her presentation like and as we are here now and I picked her up on stuff.

And I said, “but that's already happening”, I said, “with the Age Friendly programme” and I said “particularly around housing and health.”

But she wasn't touching that area.

And she said privately to me after, and she says, “<MICHAEL>, I didn't bring it up at the meeting”, she says, “but I did get your email afterwards” and she came back to me.

And the one message I was trying to get across to her was while she was doing all the other elements for older people. And she did it around health. The link between housing and health is so important. It's going back to Stone Age. Man sheltered first. And then he looked after his health when he had shelter. So you've got to have the houses right. And then you get the health because one is impacted on the other.

00:29:13 Interviewer

Yeah no, I think you're right and I think the other thing just to pick up on the Age Action. I was at a webinar a couple of weeks ago and Sue was speaking and it was about the language of ageism and the Age Action guy was there, you know. And It was all very interesting, but I sent my request off to the new policy and communications person of the parliament and got no acknowledgement…

00:29:32 Participant

I didn't join and some of this stored in my head in this language. Yes, because older people are to blame for the language and are feeding into themselves by not participating with you.

00:30:03 Interviewer

A policy person, Una I think was her name and I just sent her an email directly and said look, this is really interesting. Thank you for a wonderful webinar and could you share my study details. I think people shouldn't feel threatened by me because I'm just independent, I'm impartial, I'm just trying to make a difference, that's all I'm trying to do. I have no vested interest in anything and that's why I wonder why Age Action stayed out of that. You know, seven of them came together recently to form the Alliance of Age Sector NGOs, but Age Action didn't. What is going on there politically, right?

00:30:39 Participant

Take my point I made earlier.

00:30:43 Interviewer

Yes.

00:30:43 Participant

Just take it. They have always been that way.

One of the first CEOs, which I won't talk about, but I knew him at the time and they were getting more grant money than any NGO dealing with older people in Ireland and (anyone

That) were getting HUGE <emphasis> government support. Way above any other NGO and I looked up some other programmes, I guess they got €100,000 to roll out a programme. Staff costs, 75 to 80% went on staff costs.

00:31:15

OK.

00:31:22 Participant

The programme only, and that's my problem with them all the time and I just looked them up. I look them up all the time. I see the programmes they are at and then you start looking at the funding, restricted funding, and then it’s all going on staff costs.

00:31:37 Interviewer

<*This section was Sandra’s experience of volunteering with the Age Action Getting Started programme and removed from the transcript since it is not directly relevant*>

00:33:19 Interviewer

It’s all down to the money, <MICHAEL>, isn’t it? And the funding?

00:33:23 Participant

That is why I've really moved away. I still love Active Retirement Ireland. I know CEO Maureen Kavanagh well and Peter Kavanagh and there's new staff up there I don't know now, but I mean I recruited Maureen and I was on the interview panel because I was President when we appointed her and I know her a long time.

Of course it's not the Active Retirement that I was involved in 10 years ago and it's this huge rivalry between the groupings.

And you had the Senior Citizens Parliament and Active Retirement Ireland and you have Age Action, three main ones and another group up in Summerhill.

00:34:17 Interviewer

Third Age? Yes I came across them.

00:34:24 Participant

Well you see, I used go up there. Mary Nally was the head up there at that time and I said “Mary, what are you getting next up here at all?”

Anyway, look we're staying on all over the place. I feel like I'm dragging you all over the place without maybe getting the information that you want.

00:34:40 Interviewer

No, no. We can talk again, <MICHAEL>, but I am conscious of where we're at, so perhaps what we'll do because there was a few things that on your survey.

So the way I'm approaching this is, I'm looking at the survey and theoretically we should go through the consent now again, but I think we've probably got a little bit beyond that at that stage.

00:34:59 Participant

Carry on.

00:35:01 Interviewer

But there was a couple of things that I really did want to have a look at.

So obviously it was the primary education and you've spoken all about that, so I was really keen on understanding how you're as progressive as you are and you've explained all that to me. So I think all of that's clear.

And if you remember doing the statements. So, I had statements on digital skills and confidence and I felt you were being very honest about how you self-assessed.

So obviously the technology works for what you need it to do, but you're not pretending that you're, you know, you're not overly confident about downloading an app or anything like that, and I think that's where you have your grandson or granddaughter to help you, right?

00:35:47 Participant

Yeah, I probably am able to do some of it, but yeah, but to answer a survey, the answer would be what I said. That’s not to say I can't do some of this.

00:36:02 Interviewer

I know absolutely you can from talking to you and the survey for me, is just the tip of the iceberg. It's to get the access. These conversations are the real meat on the bones of my research because this is what will make a difference, not what's on the survey. That'll tell me, you know, the age cohorts, who lives in your household, where you get your support from, but it doesn't tell me like, what if you offer support and that would be something that a lot of people do with peer mentoring, and I think that's where you are.

And I really like what Active Retirement Ireland does because, you know, we have a local group here and my neighbour who was here yesterday, so his wife is involved and they do a lot of good stuff.

00:36:45 Participant

I’m trying to think of who I might have known in the Skibb group because I would have known people, you know, back in my term as President, I would have known development officers and all. I know one of our development officer. She's still there. She's down there and she lives around down there, Ann O’Brien is her name. She's the development officer for that that Southern part, Cork, she’s there for years.

<*This section was Sandra’s experience of getting the survey distributed and removed from the transcript since it is not directly relevant*>

00:37:58 Interviewer

So, really, that's what the survey was about. And because it's a semi structured interview, the kind of things I wanted to talk about were pretty much what we have gone through. So the themes were to do with lifelong learning, which you've talked about, you know.

00:38:16 Participant

On that one with the universities, with some of them through lifelong learning. I urged with the development boards, I said “I wish that lifelong learning was what that means - lifelong learning.” But the funding for lifelong learning is confined to people who are available for the jobs market. That's the whole focus - on people learning in their 40s and 50s, so they're ready to go back into the job market.

00:38:50 Interviewer

<MICHAEL>, yes. I have to send you my chapter because that's exactly what I’ve found in the policy research.

00:38:53 Participant

How is this for me? Because it's not for the 65 year olds. No, what’s there is in name with the funding and then I have heard with the universities, I mean a lot of that is happening now. Actually I'm going back 10 years maybe, more like you know, 15 years maybe since retired.

If the universities are serious about lifelong learning, they've got to bring lifelong learning to the communities. You can’t expect someone from West Cork to be going to UCD or UL or somewhere in Cork and call that they have to go. You've got to bring it to them, to bring the light back into the community.

00:39:42 Participant

A lot of that's happening now. I mean that it is happening a lot like you know there's more and more.

00:39:46 Interviewer

Just staying on that topic because this is important. Like here (in Skibbereen) we have an ETB so you can go off and learn how to use your iPad and horticulture and do all sorts of stuff. And we have a branch of the College of Commerce campus. So you can learn how to do hairdressing, but again, it is largely for the jobs market so well, so what you're saying there is exactly what I've seen in the policies and all this.

So when I think of lifelong learning, I think of formal learning, which is, you know your education to whatever time you leave it. Non-formal learning is like what's offered for adult education by the ETB whether for work or not. But then you have the informal learning, so the stuff that you would share with your local retirement group and things like that.

So I think there has to be more community power and you know it's not just waiting for the the universities. I think it has to be kind of like a grassroots approach as well and I'm just thinking, and maybe this is something I could ask you to think about.

You know, what lifelong learning means to you and what it should mean, because I think you've got a very clear picture. But how could we make lifelong learning truly lifelong? That's really what I want to do this research about.

00:41:11 Participant

Look, I'm a great believer in education. But education is not about how many degrees you get in uni or somewhere else. Obviously we need all those people as well. But unfortunately what I feel is that the whole emphasis is on your Leaving cert and how many points you get My grandchildren, not even any neighbour, and I never ask them about how many points about you. See how you did and I got great. That's how I would know you know. Gosh, great.

And then the next thing is, the next question that society keeps asking is which university you’re going to or which technical college you’re going to. Is there anything in there about lifelong learning? Living life, living life, I mean. I have grandchildren who are gone through universities and are not able to boil an egg.

But there's something wrong here.

But it’s not Learning for life and learning things for life that's more than a.

I don't know about education. To me it’s a two way street because it's like, it's coming from me and you're bringing it back to me because you have developed your education into a certain space which can be working. I feed into that yeah. There's there's this thing about, this whole old thing about, churning out people out of universities.

That shouldn't be - living for life and how to live life.

00:43:25 Interviewer

Yeah, I agree.

00:43:26 Participant

I don't know, maybe I'm, maybe I'm off.

You see, I’m one of these people, everyone says to me “you think so much outside the box.

And you pose something to me or I hear something as a meeting with issues or whatever like, my first question is and I just might say to myself, “well, how does that affect Mrs. Murphy on the side of the road? How does it affect her?

Then you have them thinking. So it's a little bit like what you're saying there about “how am I going to reach the people I want to reach?”

How has our education system done that to us, like is this what's happened?

That there's that level of people that understand things, and there's this cohort that don't understand or don't want to understand.

There was this thing the other day. Now I might not get this right. And it is “to understand… to be understood.” Understand comes in the dictionary before I think I understood if I get this right. So I would say that you need to go to “understood” first before talking about the “understand” <laughs>.

00:44:57 Interviewer

It's so true. It is very, very true.

00:44:59 Participant

So I know it's a sort of a way of putting something, so you’ve got to be understood to understand and can't understand unless you’re understood.

00:45:09 Interviewer

I think also in terms of you know, being listened to and being heard, and I think that's what pains me is that I want to listen to so many people, but they don't want to be heard.

You know they don't want to engage or they don't want to connect. I find that quite disappointing. I do.

00:45:27 Participant

I mean, that's me and you keep going down the survey in case you haven't gone through it all.

00:45:39 Participant

And then when I got the invite to do the interview, I said to myself “exactly what did she ask me in that survey?”and I was trying to think back and I couldn't remember.

00:45:52 Interviewer

But no, that's fine, and I think to be honest, like the information you know you're sharing with me is so rich, <MICHAEL>, like a lot of this, really doesn't.

00:46:02 Interviewer

It really doesn't matter, but and the the one piece that I haven't actually talked about and I well, we have a kind of like a little bit, but it's to do with the social inclusion and the digital inclusion, and I think we kind of touched on that with the, you know, with the COVID and certainly the students. I had 442 completed the survey fully. This is back in the autumn and 56% of those actually helped an older family member with, a lot with Zoom. But what was interesting was that it wasn't just about that, and it was a learning exchange because and I hope to have a paper published. But the young people. They all learn patience. Patience came up time and time again and the fact that as you had said already, they take technology for granted and that learning made it worth me doing that study, amongst that group of students now. Having said that, when I asked them to share this new survey with the same older family members that really didn't happen at all, so that's where I kind of think, I’m trying to be so hopeful, but it's not quite working out that way.

00:47:22 Participant

Doing some of those and I've just been working with my own Age Friendly county programme with my own project manager in the chair for Wexford and we've just getting ready to write our next strategy. And having the person who is doing the research for us, to have somebody who understood the cohort they were dealing with, you know, and one of the things I tried to do some paper, so help with paperwork. I know I got some of the surveys in hard copy to just given to people, you know, to get them to fill them in. I remember reading and talking to the project manager, our own project manager for Wexford, I said to her “the problem is we have to be careful of who we actually get to do these surveys because, in my experience, there's a question asked in the surveyI asked him to fill it in. They answered me with a question what do I put there?”

00:48:38 Interviewer

I know, yeah.

00:48:40 Participant

I said “you just have to be extremely careful and we dispense with them. You're going to get wrong answers. It's not going to be a reflection. You’ve got to try and do it some other way.”

00:48:52 Interviewer

Yes, I totally agree and that's where like focus groups, now I know that's particularly difficult at the moment. And surveys are just kind of like an easy way and which is why you know, I you couldn't realistically do a PhD with just a survey anyway.

So, but that's just really to get access. You know, to the people. So I'm totally with you on that one. And the other thing is, well, just talking about, you know, with Age Friendly, so I mean I had put in an application last year for Skibbereen to become an Age Friendly town.

We didn't get it, but I think it was, you know, I was thinking outside the box because I was thinking about this kind of stuff and all they really wanted to do was to put car parking spaces with age friendly written on them. And I’m kind of going OK, but it's only €10k.

Then you know Cork is a big county and look, I'm glad now that I'm connecting with the two ladies in that programme, Mary Creedon and Noelle Desmond. I'm just glad now, having made connection with Rachel, because I do feel that there's maybe better opportunity that you know, like the work that you do is very progressive. In Wexford you know and how that works.

00:49:59 Participant

You talked about Cork there. Now you see, talking about Age Friendly shopping, I did a video for Age Friendly Ireland as part of the Chambers Ireland. A presentation on Age Friendly shopping and I did this with the Chair of Waterford council and the other lady was from Castlemartyr.

00:50:35 Participant

I can see her dark hair. Her name is just evading me off hand, but she'd done it in a rather upmarket outlet in Castlemartyr, a ladies boutique.

00:50:55 Interviewer

Castlemartyr is small place, I should be able to find it. It's a small place.

00:51:00 Participant

She’s the Chair of Cork and I think Cork is divided into city and county. I'm not sure.

00:51:07 Interviewer

Yes it is.

00:51:17 Participant

So we did a thing on Age Friendly shopping and they put it all together and presented it. But she was on it from Cork so the three of us, the age friendly parking and the shopping and this is to be found on the age friendly websites.

00:51:53 Participant

We did a piece of work with it and with the younger people’s council, things went to clubs as in our younger people…

00:52:03 Interviewer

Gaisce?

00:52:05 Participant

No no no.

00:52:08 Interviewer

The youth council?

00:52:09 Participant

It (the name) doesn't matter but they have them in most counties like you know, whatever to be sort of more or less transition year students and that.

00:52:35 Participant

But we did just like on a one-to-one like this. You see about how we were coping with COVID so all that stuff is, going on the Age Friendly website. So you will find quite an amount of stuff in there. You may find stuff in there. Because anything in that Age Friendly site is all, coming from people like myself. It's not coming from researchers, it's coming from people like ourselves “as is”.

00:53:11 Interviewer

And what I like about it, and it just certainly feels like you know, I talked to some of my classmates and they're talking about what we’re calling people helping us with our research. Are they interviewees, survey participants or co-researchers?

And the way I think of it is, well there will be some people who will just, you know, answer your questions and they will definitely play the role of interviewee, but in terms of the discussion we're having right now, <MICHAEL>, this is very much in terms of co-researching, you know?

So we're working together and collaborating to a common goal, which I believe will be the case, and I think that's most important because as you engage, as you talk about, you know, engaging with the different people and, even just coming back to the car parking spaces. All they did, they didn't make them wider. They didn't put the little pathways down between them. It's the same size so what's the point? You try to swing the door open and you're going to bang the car next to you and I’m kind of going “people, did you not do a walkabout or an audit with a measuring tape?”

00:54:10 Participant

That's it.

They need to be designed it the same way as the disabled parking. Now some of the councils put them in and some supermarkets have put them in as well, like at my local supermarket. As one of your SuperValu have one in the car park.

00:54:31 Participant

But you see there's a particular colour that should be used and that's all in a specific colour that you use for age friendly parking and obviously the logo has. I mean it's each part of the logo means something and that has to be reflected in the parking and the message is you've got to get that turned into everyone's mind in the same way as disabled parking.

People don't realise that it's not free parking, you know it's not free parking. You're under the same rules, it's just that you leave the space and only this week we build the new town park in Gorey.

00:55:56 Participant

I went up there on Sunday now to do a bit of a walkabout, walkability study on it, and I'm just waiting to get on to my own council now to have a meeting later this week. In fact, she's looking for me now in an email, so probably chatting to her after this.

First thing that hit me was there was no age friendly parking spaces put into it (the new town park). They had all the recreation, encouraging older people to walk the park. They have the outdoor gym equipment. Arlene, which was all geared towards older people. Those gyms were never meant for, you know, for to be putting a sort of a unit anywhere, they were meant to be put on walks.

00:56:41 Interviewer

Yeah, that's right, yeah.

00:56:42 Participant

Because I remember being involved in the first demo in Dunshaughlin in Meath and that was an idea that came in from Italy. And the idea is that they're in Australia, that you're walking along. If you want to get on your arms that. So far whatever reason the County Council decided the first one, to put it up just like a gym, an open gym just in the one space. All the things in there.

00:57:08 Interviewer

No, not that's it. Yeah, it doesn't make any sense.

00:57:08 Participant

Get back to your questions there again before the whole day is gone.

00:57:14 Participant

I mean I can wander all over the place. I can talk about this for hours on end you know.

00:57:25 Interviewer

Well, we could, but we're not going to do that today because I just want to let you know what happens next.

And so I've got a 57 minutes of recording there. That all has to be transcribed now. So this will be done automatically. But then I have to tidy it up. So my plan from here is that I will do that in the coming days. I'm still doing yesterday's so it could be probably the weekend before I get to it, and what I'll do is I'll send that to you and the way I'm approaching the transcription, it's called a denaturalized approach, so I'll be taking out the ums and the ahs, and you know whatever, so making it show as a conversation.

00:58:13 Interviewer

Now, to be fair, the Word software that I'm using for this will do that quite well, and it puts in the time stamps and it'll distinguish between your voice and mine, so it does all that.

Which is kind of good. And then what I'll do and could probably be into next week, so I'll send that to you and you can say, oh, Sandra, I thought of this, I thought of that but I want to see that it fairly represents what we talked about because we've gotten through everything that I had on the list for sure, and definitely more.

But you know, maybe we want to talk a little bit more and another time because this is, yeah, this isn't just going to finish now with this round in late September. You know at this point, so I would be very grateful if you could, you know, maybe encourage people you're talking to say, “ I was talking with Sandra and look, here's the link to a survey it will only take you 10 or 15 minutes. And if you want to talk to her then she’d be more than happy.” I wouldn't be turning anybody away. I have too many come in the 55 to 64 cohort and I'm kind of going OK, but they're not giving me anything particularly different, so I want to go to the over 65s.

<*This section was general conversation about Sandra’s background and interest in this research topic - removed from the transcript since it is not directly relevant. Sandra spoke about her chapter on policy research that she would like to send to <MICHAEL> to take a look at in a couple of weeks*>

01:03:59 Participant

That's my life now, just doing this type of thing and I answered a thing on COVID, you know, about the lockdown over the 18 months and I was here, I think it was the bank holiday weekend in May of the first lockdown, which was last May 12 months. Now I had a PC, an old PC going back and I obviously felt my fingers were too big for using laptops and was never interested in buying one. But anyway, I made up my mind. I was going to get a laptop anyway. I was tossing it around and then lockdown came in March, couldn't get out.

I’m very happy I have two pensions. I have a company pension and the state pension.

I hadn't drawn them for five weeks or something, hadn’t been outside the house and just you know, this is May, 1st May. I phoned one of my nephews and I said to Denis (in that he works for IT and he works in that whole field you know, I don't know who's working for at the minute but for one of those companies anyway).

And I said to him, “Denis, I’m thinking of a laptop. Would I get some reasonable around 400 or 500 Euro. I’ll pay for it, you know, the money was there, I just hadn’t spent it. Everyone was feeding me <laughs> even on my own so he phoned me anyway. It was the bank holiday weekend. “<MICHAEL>” he says, “I see Harvey Norman have a sale on laptops so this weekend so there's one being offered and it’s more than you wanted to spend but I've checked it up, and there's a genuine display price of €999 on it but they’re taking €150 off this weekend for it. But it has to be paid for and bought over the weekend.” “Get it for me Denis” and it's like driving a new car. I have it in front of me here now and I don't know some of the controls and I'm still learning the controls on it.

01:06:32 Participant

So on that note we leave, I think.

01:06:35 Interviewer

Yes, we will. <MICHAEL>, thank you so much. I really appreciate it and I will be in touch over email in the next one and we'll definitely talk again. Thank you.

01:06:43 Participant

Cheers. God bless.

01:06:51 Interviewer

Take care. Bye bye.