00:00:00 Participant

You’ve made my weekend because nobody listens to older people anymore and I’m so happy to be able to take part with you.

Interviewer

I’m so pleased and I’m quite excited about this because it’s very hard to reach people who are not connected online and this is the cohort I desperately want to reach so hopefully between us we’ll be able to persuade a few more people to come and talk to me. So <ANNIE>, are you okay if I record this interview?

00:00:01 Participant

I have no problem whatsoever. And I just hope that I would be able to help somebody with my interview.

00:00:04 Interviewer

So <ANNIE>, I've just pressed the record button now. I have just technology here on my computer, but I have you on my phone on speaker so that the computer picks up your voice. So I hope you can hear me OK.

00:00:23 Participant

I can, yes, I can hear you, Sandra. I have made out a list that I want to tell you about.

00:00:23 Interviewer

OK, fantastic.

00:00:28 Participant

I hope I don't bore you.

00:00:30 Interviewer

Not at all, not at all.

00:00:35 Interviewer

So <ANNIE>, what we’ll do. This is semi-structured interview so I do have a few questions.

You obviously have things you want to talk about. We'll go through absolutely everything, and I have all the time in the world, if you have?

00:00:49 Participant

Oh, I have Sandra, yes.

00:00:41 Interviewer

Lovely, so <ANNIE>, I'll start off if that's OK, I just want to tell you a little bit about the study and what I'm trying to get out of it and then if you have any questions, you can ask those and then I'll just read out some consent statements. So, it's important that you're, you know, consenting freely to chat with me today, but I have to have that recorded for ethical purposes, you know?

00:01:16 Participant

No problem with that Sandra and I’m delighted to be able to do it.

00:01:19 Interviewer

Oh, and I'm so delighted to have you, so let's see how we get started.

00:01:23 Interviewer

So just a little bit about the study, <ANNIE>, it aims to explore the experiences of older adults and lifelong learning with specific focus on intergenerational exchanges and digital skills. Little is known about the concept of intergenerational learning in Ireland, outside of formal learning environment. By taking part in this study your insights will help contribute to our understanding of the contribution intergenerational learning can make to the lifelong learning and digital skills development of older adults, so at a very high level, that's the sum<ANNIE> of what it's about.

00:02:05 Interviewer

Now I'll just go through these consent statements. <ANNIE>, if you could just listen to them and then at the end I'll ask you if you agree to them.

00:02:13 Interviewer

So number one, I confirm that I understand the information about the study that has been explained to me. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had those answered satisfactorily.

Number two, I understand that my participation is voluntary and if I'm involved in interview, I am free to withdraw my participation within two weeks of the date of the interview without giving any reason and my data will be removed.

Number three, I understand that any information given by me may be used in future reports, academic articles, publications, or presentations by the researcher but my personal information will not be included and all reasonable steps will be taken to protect my anonymity when I'm involved in this project. Anonymized data will be offered to Lancaster University Archives, which is where I'm doing the study, and will be made available to genuine research for reuse.

Number four, I understand that my name will not appear in any reports, articles or presentations without my consent.

Number five, I understand that interviews will be audio recorded and transcribed and that data will be protected on encrypted devices and kept secure.

Number six, I understand that data will be kept according to university guidelines for a minimum of 10 years after the end of the study. And finally I agree to take part in the above study.

So <ANNIE>, how does that all sound? Do you have any questions you want me to clarify?

00:03:55 Participant

I have no questions whatsoever. I'm absolutely thrilled and honoured to be invited to take part.

00:04:01 Interviewer

Excellent, well, I'm thrilled and honoured to have you, so it'll make such a difference to my work.

00:04:06 Interviewer

OK so I have just about 7 questions here, just to tell me just a little bit about yourself. And they'll only take a moment. And then what we'll do <ANNIE>, is I think, we'll go into your list today, and I think that'll make sense. And then whatever I have questions on my list that I want to ask you, we could pick those up afterwards. Does that sound OK?

00:04:31 Participant

No problem, Sandra, lovely.

00:04:33 Interviewer

Lovely, so I suppose the first question <ANNIE>, and Andrea shared this with me was your age range, so I believe you fall into the category 75 years and over?

Participant

Yes. I’m 79 since the second of August.

00:04:46 Interviewer

Oh, belated happy birthday.

00:04:49 Participant

Thank you.

00:04:50 Interviewer

Your gender is female.

Participant

Yes.

00:04:55 Interviewer

Your Irish county of residence is?

Participant

Limerick

00:04:59 Interviewer

 Do you live in an urban or rural area? And by that I mean a population of under or over 1500.

00:05:13 Participant

I would say over 1500. Yes definitely.

00:05:15 Interviewer

Do you live alone or do you live with one other person or more than one other person?

00:05:25 Participant

No, I live on my own.

00:05:26 Interviewer

OK like myself, <ANNIE> like myself.

Participant

And very happy.

Interviewer

Me too. I do have my dog Rainbow here so she's great company, but she's promised to be very quiet today.

OK, and one final question in this category <ANNIE>, and it just asks about your highest level of formal education.

00:05:47 Interviewer

So what I mean by formal education, it's what the central statistics office clarifies, they give us categories of you know, pri<ANNIE> school, lower or upper secondary school and then they talk about a higher certificate, a Bachelor's degree at Ordinary or honours level. They talk about technical or vocational education and apprenticeship or a postgraduate diploma, degree or doctorate degree.

That's a bit of a list <ANNIE> so would you be able to select one?

00:06:26 Participant

That's pri<ANNIE>, because of my age, Sandra.

Secondary school was only for the people that could afford it, the parents that could afford it going back many moons ago, so I was pri<ANNIE> (school).

00:06:41 Interviewer

That's perfect, and there was somebody I was talking to last week and he said that the (free) secondary education only came in in 1966.

Like that I think he was a couple of years older than yourself and the same kind of logic applied so I understand that.

Participant

Yes

00:06:56 Interviewer

OK, so <ANNIE>, that's perfect. That's everything that I wanted to go through now. So honestly, I know you're chomping at the bit to tell me about your experiences. So, will we go through those for maybe a little bit? And then I think I might have questions and I will stop you from time to time and maybe ask you to explain something a little bit further.

00:07:21 Participant

Well, I hope I don't bore you now, Sandra.

00:07:23 Interviewer

Not at all. This is fascinating, this is research I've been wanting to do for three or four years now, and now I'm just privileged to be able to do it.

00:07:34 Participant

Well, I’ll start so. First of all, the government, our government let down the older people, very badly. I felt I was discriminated against. I was cut off and I felt I was punished because I wasn't able to use modern technology.

00:08:00 Interviewer

OK, and <ANNIE>, I just want to check, because obviously we've had the COVID-19 pandemic. Was this before that happened at all?

00:08:10 Participant

Oh, since the pandemic, now I know you know, different things had to happen.

Well, you see before the pandemic Sandra, I was able to go out and I was able to do things. Then when everything closed down and I wasn't able to go out, that's where the problem started for me.

00:08:31 Interviewer

OK, I totally understand that. And before that <ANNIE>, what about if you had to, I don't know, get something from the government. If there was some form you needed to complete, were you able to, you know, go to an office or ring somebody up and get the paperwork sent out in the post?

00:08:53 Participant

Yes yes yes.

00:08:55 Participant

I mean, it wouldn't be much communications that I would have to have with the government, but one of the things I can tell you. I drive a car and my car tax. Now I'm a law-abiding citizen. I would not drive without tax and insurance. So, my car tax was up. The office was closed. And I rang with few times. Now just because of lockdown, and all I was told was “you have to do it online”, but I wasn't able to do it online.

Now I'm lucky that I had Andrea (<ANNIE>’s daughter who brought my study to her attention). But I have friends my own age group or a couple of years younger me that never married that are completely on their own and they wouldn't have anybody to (help them). I felt if I drove without tax I’d get a fine but when I wanted to pay it the office was gone.

00:09:54 Interviewer

That makes total sense and just talk to me just a little bit about having Andrea help you because we would call her a warm expert or a proxy user. And obviously as your daughter you can trust her, so you would have had to give her, you know bank details or a card number but your friends obviously couldn't because they didn't have anybody to do that and it wouldn't be a secure.

00:10:24 Participant

Yeah, yeah. You’re left in limbo like as I say, I was lucky. Now I don't like to have to ask any of my family to do anything because I'm a very independent woman.

00:10:34 Participant

Now my next trying thing was my car insurance. It was up in June last year. Now I've been with the same company in Tipperary for years. I got my renewal and everything. What I normally do... Now I’m one of the older people, I'm able to use my mobile and I'm able to text but as regards anything else, I don’t do anything because I’m from a different era.

So when I get my renewal package I drive to Tipperary and pay my money. So the renewal came and I rang them and I couldn't pay it because the office was closed. They were working from home.

00:11:19 Participant

So I said where do I go? “Well, you have to pay by credit card" “But I don't use a credit card” and I'll tell you Sandra, my son did it for me but would you like it if I said to you “Can I use your credit card, Sandra?” You wouldn't like it.

00:11:35 Interviewer

No, indeed no.

00:11:37 Participant

I had to ask my son and there wasn't a problem but I didn't want to, you know, and he did it for me but that made me very sour.

00:11:48 Interviewer

Yes, I can understand.

00:11:50 Participant

Yes, so they send out renewal but there was no place to pay.

Now, the next thing. I have a lovely bank out in Castletroy (the AIB) and I must be going in there for over 30 years now. I know with COVID restrictions and everything but pre-COVID I have no intentions of moving on with technology, Sandra. At 79 years of age I just want to relax and have a good life. But every time I go into the bank, they brought in all these machines, there's a floating body going around and they know me like the dogs in the street, and I'm approached every time “do you want to come and use the machine?” and I am very polite and I say “no, I want to go to the counter.” “But we'll show you” and this happens every time. And there's a lovely man, somebody that you can talk to, a human above at the counter and even last week I said, “you know, it's lovely to be able to talk to somebody.” You know, you're being forced to do it. And I don't want to do it.

00:12:51 Interviewer

Yep, you're not alone, <ANNIE>.

00:12:52 Participant

And I’m not being stubborn, Sandra, but why should anybody dictate to me what I have to do?

00:12:59 Interviewer

Exactly, yeah.

00:13:01 Participant

Now, health insurance. When my premium was up I was ringing and ringing and ringing. Going through all the monologue you have to go through and then it was “go to the website.” You know, soul destroying. Then when, you know the way you shop around for car insurance to see if you can get a better deal and I would dial numbers off my mobile and you'll get the same thing: “go to our website.”

Interviewer

Yeah.

Participant

Then the COVID passport that we had to get. I was vaccinated by my doctor so mine was a letter that had to come and about two weeks had gone and I hadn't got it and friends of mine had got theirs. So I’ll ring up because I’m not going anywhere but I just want to have it. And getting through to the HSE “If you have a COVID query go to our website.” Now where does that leave me Sandra? So frustrating and you just feel punished because I don't want to learn it.

00:14:14 Interviewer

And that's your right.

00:14:14 Participant

You know, maybe if I was in my 60s Sandra, I would, and I have nothing against technology. I think it's wonderful, but nobody should put a gun to your head and say... like if I went to university and I'm going to do maths and it's like “you can't do maths, <ANNIE>, you’ve got to do English.” I’d say “well, I’m not.” You know, you have to have a choice.

00:14:39 Interviewer

You do, and that's absolutely a good point. And I've been saying this to my supervisor of this study, and I keep saying, well, “digital first is fair enough, but it shouldn't be digital only”, and that seems to be where the problems are. They're not offering the choice.

00:15:00 Participant

Yeah, you know, even a beautiful hotel we were staying at up in County Mayo, with my other daughter last year, and I thought I'll ring in March when they reopened, March, April and again “welcome to Mount Falcon. For information, please go to our website.”

Interviewer

Yeah.

Participant

I just feel like, as I say, I think it's great and I've granddaughters that can use it and I think it's wonderful, but it's not for me Sandra at this hour of my life. I couldn't even stress myself to learn it.

00:15:40 Interviewer

Yeah, and that should be your choice absolutely, but it doesn't feel like that.

00:15:47 Participant

No, no. I just feel if you’re not able to go to the website, to hell with you.

Interviewer

Yeah.

00:15:56 Participant

That's great to be able to do things online, and if you can do it, and I know it's marvellous, people can do things and it is marvellous but for people like me who don’t have a computer.

00:16:11 Interviewer

And that's your choice again, you know, it feels like your choices are being taken away from you and <ANNIE> when you know when all the pandemic is done, and you know they're opening up again. What is your feeling about? Presumably with the County Council, you'll be able to go and get the car taxed.

00:16:32 Participant

Yes no problem.

00:16:41 Interviewer

But the commercial organisations, so the banks, the insurance companies. These are all commercial and they want to make money.

Do you feel that they're going to open up the desks and the counters like they used to before? What are your thoughts on that?

00:16:52 Participant

To be honest, I don't think they will because I think people weren't number one.

Properties are being rented, and if the lease is out I think that could have an effect on us, but people have got used to working from home.

And now a lot don't want to go back, but I can't see it being back, not for the next two years anyway.

00:17:17 Interviewer

No, so that being the case, you're in the same limbo with your, you know, with your health insurance with your motor insurance, anything like that and you made a very a very valid point because you know you're in the fortunate position where you do have family members to help you. But you also mentioned friends who don't. So, what do they do?

00:17:39 Participant

Yeah absolutely. Absolutely nobody. You know, they wouldn't be online, educated very same as me, and they had nobody. I just feel we’re being punished because of our beliefs in life.

00:17:59 Interviewer

Yeah.

00:18:01 Participant

You know nobody can make you go online or anything. It's my choice and you know, Sandra, I would love if I was able to, you know, with all the different things, but it's not for me.

00:18:14 Interviewer

And <ANNIE>, if I could explore that a little bit, because when I was doing this pilot with my cousin's husband, so I think he's just turned 77 and he doesn't do text messages. His wife, my cousin, showed him how to look up the RIP website, that's all really he was interested in, but he said, like you, “I'm not interested. Technology has passed me by. It's not for me at this stage of my life” and that seems to be something that you're saying as well. And it's in relation to choice.

00:18:50 Participant

That's true Sandra. And I agree totally with that gentleman because like I was about 60 when I got a mobile phone first. Now I can text. I learned it but I quite happy with that. And you see, when you're not a working person, it doesn't, it's not around you. If I was working, OK, I probably would have to but I don't want the stress of having to learn and do all these things at this hour in my life.

00:19:21 Interviewer

Yeah, that's a very good point <ANNIE>. And if you could just chat to me a little bit about the experience of the phone. So, you've had the phone for what, it sounds like close to 20 years, so it's probably not been your only phone, so I'd like to, you know, have you had to change phones? How did you manage choosing one? How does the texting work for you? It sounds like you've got a good handle on it and it works for you, but I'd like to hear, you know, has that been a process? A learning curve? What happened when you have to get a new phone, etc.

00:20:00 Participant

Well, as you know, every now and then you have to (upgrade). I have only the very basic phone, Sandra, I don't get photos. Phone calls and texts. That's all I want, but only for Andrea showing me how to text, showing me how to receive texts, you know, I learned that way, but my needs are very basic on it.

00:20:20 Interviewer

Yeah, but it does what you want it to do?

00:20:23 Participant

Exactly, receive a call, make a call. Send a text and if I want to receive a text, that's all.

00:20:30 Interviewer

Yeah, and <ANNIE> on that, I remember, I mean I would have had a work phone and again I just used it for basic things. But then when I left work someone said “we need to do a WhatsApp group” and various things like that. Do you find that from maybe, you know, your friends or maybe younger family members, that they're encouraging you or they want you to use the phone in ways other than you want to?

00:21:02 Participant

No because my granddaughters and my daughters know I'm happy the way I am. They're all on WhatsApp and they know it wouldn't be my thing, Sandra. So, I'd be under no pressure there because they know I wouldn't do it anyway.

00:21:17 Interviewer

OK. So, I have a good understanding now of how technology plays a small role in your life.

So I have a couple of questions here, just in relation to, technology and quality of life. I'm trying to understand about how not being digitally connected affects quality of life in positive and negative ways.

So, if it were me, I would say “oh great, well, the phone isn’t pinging all hours of the day and night so I'm, you know, better off, my quality of life is better by being disconnected” and it's probably helpful, <ANNIE>, if I can explain what I mean by quality of life and I look at it in terms of three elements, health, well-being and happiness. So, for example, you could be healthy but you might not be happy. You might have, you know, very positive well-being but you might not be healthy and that kind of thing. So I have a few statements here I want you to think about and select one option. I will read out the statement and then you can tell me what you think about this, is this true, and the options are “often, sometimes, not often, and never” and what this does <ANNIE>, it puts things into a scale so I can get a measure for how you perceive your quality of life in relation to your digital experience and so on. Does that sound OK?

00:23:04 Participant

No problem, Sandra.

00:23:05 Interviewer

All right, so the first statement, and this is general quality of life, <ANNIE> and you know, I think I can guess these from talking to you already for the little while that we've been on, but I'm just going to read out each of these statements and you can pick from one of them.

So, the first one says “I enjoy the things that I do” so <ANNIE>, “often, sometimes, not often or never.”

00:23:31 Participant

Well, all the time, Sandra.

00:23:33 Interviewer

OK great. The next one is “I enjoy being in the company of others”

00:23:42 Participant

Yes, I would be a good mixer, yes.

00:23:45 Interviewer

OK, the next one is “I can do the things that I want to do”

00:23:52 Participant

Yes, anything I want to do, I can do it.

00:23:57 Interviewer

The next one is, “I feel that I can please myself what I do” so it’s quite similar to the last one.

00:24:04 Participant

Yes, exactly.

00:24:05 Interviewer

OK, next “I feel free to plan for the future”

Participant

Yes.

00:24:11 Interviewer

OK, “I feel that life is full of opportunities”

Participant

Yes.

00:24:16 Interviewer

OK, and “I feel that the future looks good for me”

00:24:22 Participant

Yes, I have no problems. I have good health and I'm very independent and the future looks very good for me.

00:24:28 Interviewer

OK, brilliant, that’s great and a very positive outlook. That's exactly as I would have expected from listening to you and speaking with you, <ANNIE>.

So the next few questions are to look at I suppose, the COVID-19 pandemic and the impacts of that because I think as you rightly point out, I think there are far further reaching impacts into the future that unless we call them out and do something about them that will you know, as you said, for example, insurance companies may only open their doors once a week, and you know that kind of thing.

So, I have a few questions here I want to ask you. So, before the pandemic, before that first lockdown in the spring of last year, “how often would you visit or be visited by family in a typical week?”

00:25:27 Participant

5 or 6 times a week my family would be here.

00:25:30 Interviewer

OK, so every day pretty much?

00:25:32 Participant

Oh yes.

Not altogether, but at different times. My granddaughters would visit me, you know.

00:25:39 Interviewer

OK. So, the same type of question but this time “how often would you telephone or be telephoned by family and friends in a typical week?”

00:25:51 Participant

Oh, 7 days a week.

00:25:56 Interviewer

Uhm, at any point, so this and I'm just asking you want to ask this one specifically, but during that first lockdown you know that that horrible word cocooning, you know, staying at home being locked up, not being allowed out at any point, and again, because you live on your own as well did you at any point think that technology might be helpful in staying connected with others?

00:26:22 Participant

Absolutely not, absolutely not.

Because I painted every bit of my house indoors when I was locked up, my mind was completely occupied and like people said they got depressed, I was one of the lucky people, I never had a bad moment.

00:26:40 Interviewer

Excellent.

00:26:41 Participant

I didn’t enjoy being locked up, but I got so much done, I got gardening done and I kept myself so occupied.

00:26:48 Interviewer

Fantastic. So, before that period, before the pandemic, what types of social activities did you engage in <ANNIE>?

00:26:59 Participant

Well I had, I mean I still have a very good life.

I went to Fuerteventura on holidays four times a year.

I went to my local inside in Limerick every Saturday and Sunday night just to meet my friends, you know, great banter and then apart from going to Fuerteventura with Andrea I think I’d have two weekends away with my other daughter, in Ireland, maybe Killarney or Donegal or somewhere, you know.

00:27:28 Interviewer

Oh my goodness ,yes, jam packed social life then?

00:27:32 Participant

I have a great life, yes.

00:27:34 Interviewer

OK, so what about when that all stopped. I mean, yes, obviously you know you kept yourself busy and took these projects on. But what about the, I suppose the lack of human contact, the physical contact. How was that for you during the lockdown <ANNIE>?

00:27:54 Participant

Well, you know, my family couldn't come in at the very start. They could only come to the window like every other mother and grandmother.

You know, Sandra, I coped very well with it. I kept my mind so busy now and then you see,

and I was so frightened of the pandemic. I couldn’t go shopping, Andrea would do my shopping and leave it outside the door.

I was so frightened because you know, it was on the radio and I didn't worry about how I felt because I was saying I was very safe and you see, vaccinations as you know, hadn’t come in at that stage.

No, I was very happy in my own bubble, exceptionally happy now because I felt safe. Naturally I missed going out and obviously like that. But I put it to one side because I had to be sensible.

00:28:44 Interviewer

And what about then when things started opening up a bit more, and probably this year, you know, once the vaccination programme started happening and we started to get out and about a little bit more. How was that transition for you, <ANNIE>?

00:29:08 Participant

I gave it a good break, as I say, Andrea did everything and then I made out my list and I was sitting in the kitchen and I thought I’ve just got to get on with it now. I’ve had my first vaccine and I thought well I've got to get on with it.

But now the first time I went shopping, grocery shopping, it felt a bit weird and I just thought I have a list and I just want to get in and get out because it was my first time out in nine months. But you know, after two trips to Dunnes and Aldi. Now I'm very, very careful, masks and gloves and everything, but my mind relaxed. The first time was hard because you were cocooning for so long and all of a sudden you were in the outside world, is the only way I can put it. Oh, now I loved being in my garden, which I absolutely loved every day.

Well, I knew what I’d got to do, but it just felt as if you're going out into the big bad world. Now maybe if you weren't cocooned like I had been you wouldn’t feel that way but from the first day I just felt that way. I was a bit nervous, but you know when I came home and put away my shopping I thought I managed it.

00:30:23 Interviewer

And that's you know, such a positive attitude, just getting on with it, really, you know.

00:30:32 Participant

Yeah, well you have to Sandra because nobody would listen to you whinge and like now, I don't go shopping. I used to go four days a week just shopping, but I've restricted it now to when there is no crowd around. I'm sensible about it and you know, I look forward to that Wednesday, getting dressed up and getting out.

00:30:54 Interviewer

Lovely, that makes sense and maybe just tell me a little bit about, and maybe some of your friends might agree to chat with me as well because the more people I can speak to about this, the better evidence that I have that digital only is not the way to go. But what about you mentioned you know going into town and meeting them. With everybody getting vaccinated and you're very careful about being out, but are you getting to see any of your friends now, socially?

00:31:29 Participant

I am getting to see friends because I. Do you live in Limerick, Sandra?

00:31:33 Interviewer

No, I'm in West Cork, but I lived in Limerick when I went to university.

00:31:35 Participant

OK. Well, we have a farmer’s market on a Saturday. Andrea’s involved in it and I started going back there I was going pre-COVID casually and you know, lovely friends. But it took me a while but I started going back there on Saturday morning and we have coffee and you know, back in the lovely circle, social distancing and being careful. But it's just, well I was never in bad form, but it's given me something to look forward to.

00:32:17 Interviewer

Is it the milk market <ANNIE>?

00:32:19 Participant

Yes, the milk market.

It's brilliant, and it's a very happy place and you know, I've made some lovely new friends, that’s one thing about it now, I've made some lovely new friends.

00:32:32 Interviewer

OK, so tell me about, how that came about.

00:32:34 Participant

Because I wasn't going to the pub with my usual friends I've made lovely new friends.

00:32:39 Interviewer

Fantastic.

00:32:42 Participant

We're going to Kilkee now tomorrow, Andrea and myself, until Thursday and one of ladies I met in the market is coming with us.

00:32:49 Interviewer

Isn't that lovely?

00:32:53 Participant

And I was worrying over the past 12 months, but you know, you either like a person or you don’t, Sandra, and I love this lady, so I just said and she gets on great so the three of us are going off tomorrow. You know something different so that’s a new side I got out of it.

00:33:09 Interviewer

Well, and I think that's most important because you know anybody I've spoken to. And again, just people I know, and it's all really quite, you know, negative and they're talking about, you know, just getting back to normal.

But you know what you're explaining to me is just a whole new positive experience that might not have come about otherwise.

00:33:33 Participant

I've made all these friends and a lovely retired psychiatrist, Peter, and I'm actually going to Irish classes with him in the milk market on Friday.

There’s a group and when I was young and going to school, Irish was a good subject for me and I'm going into classes that never would have happened to me, so I've come out a very good side of it, Sandra.

00:33:56 Interviewer

You definitely have and I have another theme now about the lifelong learning that I want to talk about, because especially since you brought up about the classes and you know, having left school at the pri<ANNIE> level, at 14. So over your lifetime. When I think of lifelong learning, I think of the whole of the life course or the lifespan. So investing in our knowledge, our skills and competencies throughout our lives. And yet the policy research I've been doing at the Irish Government level, at EU level and OECD and other ones, but certainly in Ireland, it seems to be that lifelong learning is to equip you with the skills to, you know, move around in the job market, re-enter the job market, which to me it's not that at all, so first of all, I'd like to ask you, what does lifelong learning mean to you, <ANNIE>, and would you consider yourself to be a lifelong learner?

00:35:01 Participant

Oh yes, Oh yeah. Like I left school at 14 and I went to England with my friends when I was 15. And things were different when you went to London, we had a great time. We were self-educated, we were shrewd, we didn't have money, but we were very shrewd.

And you know, and I think the fact now, I only went to England, I was there for a few years.

I think that's the best thing I ever done, because in those days, in the 50s, life was so different and everything, and you know you kind of had to like if I was at home, my mother and father would be there but I wanted to be independent. So we took off and it was great process for me.

00:35:49 Interviewer

Yeah, a great experience. I mean my parents met in London. They're both from Ireland, but they met in London in the 1960s and again they always talked about the experience and the cultural differences and that was a real learning.

00:36:02 Participant

Aah Sandra, I can absolutely agree with them. Well, you see now people can go to Australia but it was a big thing in the 1950’s to go to England, like going to Croatia <laughs>.

00:36:19 Interviewer

Yeah, and what kind of jobs did you work at over there <ANNIE>?

00:36:23 Participant

Well, I worked at a lot of things.

I worked for a printing company first and they printed magazines, cruise ships, and they'd come often the machine and you'd have to go through them and pick out mistakes which you could see, produced with misprint.

And then I worked for a very famous place in Piccadilly Circus called Lyons’ Corner House, Lyons’ Tea. They had these big houses, Trafalgar Square, houses with 7 restaurants now and very posh in those days. So I was on the cheese counter and I was trained as a cheese assistant.

00:37:08 Interviewer

OK.

00:37:09 Participant

And then I went to Chelsea. I kinda got a notion that I’d like to be a butcher and I went to Gardiners supermarket in Chelsea and but I wasn’t mad about it. And I came back to Oxford Street and I worked for British Home Stores and then there was a new place being build across the road from it, Littlewoods, you’ve heard of Littlewoods?

00:37:33 Interviewer

Oh absolutely. Yep, yep.

00:37:35 Participant

Yeah, and there were two brothers from Liverpool who knew it and they had advertised for shop assistants, so they had advertised for staff, counter staff. So British Home Stores is lovely and I went ahead and had my interview. Everything was written in those days, and I don’t tell this to a lot of people, but there was no printing out back then, you had to write everything. So I applied for a job as a shop assistant, I had the experience. And I was called back and called in to the Managers Office and he said “<ANNIE>, we're going to offer you a job in the office since your handwriting is so good.” So I went in as a scheduling clerk.

And we had all the invoices and had to check with the stores that all the stuff came in, and pricing them and making up the bills and passing on to get paid. And it was the happiest time in my life. And you know like if I was in Ireland, they called them clerks there, but I wouldn't have applied for it because I wouldn’t have the education and I did that for four years.

Then I worked in Limerick for 25 years. Have you heard of Krups?

00:38:51 Interviewer

Oh yeah.

00:38:52 Participant

I was 25 years in Krups until they closed.

00:39:03 Interviewer

 Big, big employer at the time, yeah?

00:39:11 Participant

Oh my God, 1200 at the time.

And I was 25 years there and I would have stayed on until I retired because I absolutely loved it. We were treated so well it was a pleasure to go to work every evening. I was an evening worker but then they closed. So at that stage you know, I didn't work anymore, well I was in my 50s then.

00:39:36 Interviewer

Yeah, I have horrible handwriting. That's why I type everything up. But given that you left school at such an early age, do you remember, were you a good handwriter at school?

00:39:55 Participant

I would have been yes. A lot of my classmates, they would have been scribbling, I don’t know if you’ve ever heard that word, scribbling?

Interviewer

Yes.

00:40:03 Participant

But yes, I would have been a nice handwriter and my sisters and my father had lovely handwriting.

00:40:29 Interviewer

I have great admiration for people who do have nice handwriting because I’m a scribbler.

And it obviously paid off with that, you know, with that job, which is great. OK, fantastic.

So, I'm just coming back then to the lifelong learning, and over the years, would you have taken, you know, evening classes, night classes, or since you were in Krups as an evening worker, maybe daytime classes. Anything like that?

00:40:56 Participant

Going back a good few years I did do evening classes in dressmaking.

00:41:02 Interviewer

OK, how was that? How did you find that?

00:41:06 Participant

Fabulous. Andrea is a twin, you know, and when they were young I was able to make dresses and I used to go to work at 5:00 o'clock in Krups and I often would be in town early in the morning (because I was a young one flying around), I would get material, I’d go home and make a new dress. I loved it now. Haven’t done it for years. You know, it's a great thing.

I didn't realise the little things put you right (at the classes).

00:41:35 Interviewer

Yeah, yeah, I think so too. And my mum was a great dressmaker and when I was little she used to make all my clothes and I couldn't sew a straight line <laughs> you know with the sewing machine, my brother is pretty handy. I think he's got the old family Singer machine. You know the old fashioned machines, not electric, yeah, and he does repairs and stuff like that on it. So yeah, I think it's a great skill.

So, <ANNIE>, going to classes to learn those skills and develop those skills, talk to me a little bit about the social aspect. Did you like interacting with other people there and swapping threads and...?

00:42:13 Participant

Oh I did.

And the teachers were dressmakers, there were lovely people there and we at times we made mistakes. But nobody gave out to anybody saying how stupid we were, you know.

When I think about it a 12-week course was fabulous.

00:42:34 Interviewer

Yeah, because I I do think that's something like there's great classes that we can take online and that kind of thing. But I would certainly miss that social aspect, that interaction with others, yeah.

00:42:46 Participant

And you know you kind of wouldn’t wear what you wore last Monday night, well I wouldn’t anyway.

00:42:56 Interviewer

Yeah exactly, yeah. I think that social aspect. I think that's important.

So I’m conscious we're just coming up to about 45 minutes now, <ANNIE>. But I did want to ask you about community and that kind of thing because this is something that I'm kind of interested in as well with various groups so community work, volunteering. Are you involved with any groups in any of those kind of areas?

00:43:31 Participant

No, absolutely not... It was never my scene to get involved in the community.

00:43:45 Interviewer

That's fine. And the reason I asked is because I'm interested in, you know, talking to people who would have met as groups, and then the pandemic hit and they stopped and they didn't take to digital meetings and stuff like that.

All right. I think that pretty much covers off everything that I want to ask you <ANNIE>. Do you have anything on your list that we haven't gone through yet that you'd still like to talk about?

00:44:12 Participant

No, I think I’ve gone through everything.

Like oh my God, the monologue that you had to listen to and then “go to our website.”

Yeah, it's just two things that annoyed me more than anything.

I know it was the pandemic but my car tax when I was able to go back out driving.

Andrea did it for me but I felt if I didn't have Andrea, I was absolutely being punished. The office was closed, and just because I wasn't able to go online, I would have to stay in.

The one thing that got to me because if I went out and a guard pulled me, I was wrong and I was wrong when I tried to pay the tax and I think that is very, very unfair. And my insurance, to have to ask my son could I use his credit card, which I wouldn’t do in a million years, Sandra.

00:45:24 Interviewer

Absolutely, and I mean they're both legal requirements. Like you, you shouldn't drive without tax, a licence or without insurance.

00:45:42 Participant

And I wouldn’t drive without tax, Sandra, NCT or insurance. I’m a law-abiding citizen but I felt like when, you know that girl spoke to me and I said “how do I get online? I don’t know how to do that”. And I got over that, but I think having to ask my son for his credit card number for my insurance.

00:46:01 Interviewer

Oh, I know. And <ANNIE>, just on that one, when you told them that “I don't have a credit card. I don't know how to go online.” What was their response?

00:46:11 Participant

But this should work if you're in the office, but we're all working from home.

00:46:16 Interviewer

OK, because like we had said earlier, there's some of this that's going to continue into the future. And you'd explained the scenario of your the AIB bank and I know some of the banks like here where I am in Skibbereen, in West Cork, the Permanent TSB bank branch now has no counter there at all now. So, if you need counter service you have to go 20 miles away to Clonakilty and I think that's the worry because if we don't, if we just sit on this and do nothing about it and not bring these stories, then it's going to continue.

00:46:58 Participant

Exactly. In the university branch in Castletroy, now there used to be three people, three tellers on that counter and it was great, they knew me like the back of their hand, and I remember when they cut it down to two, there was one very nice person and I said “do you not object to this?” Now I was very involved in the union, SIPTU, I was an official in Krups, a shop steward, and I had great experience in things like that. And I said to her “your jobs will be gone.” Now she’s gone out of the bank, she was transferred and there’s one lovely man.

I mean, with these machines and you know, it's not everybody wants to do that. I just feel I shouldn't be made that I’ve got to go to a machine. And I'm kind of making excuses every time that they come over to me.

Now, I have reason to go to the bank tomorrow, and as sure as anything, they’re very nice, I’ll be approached and I’ll say “no, I just need to go to the counter.” And this is going on pre-COVID.

00:48:17 Interviewer

Oh yeah, and it will continue.

00:48:18 Participant

They just want to have no bodies in there.

00:48:20 Interviewer

Yeah, and that's the way they're all doing it. It's all the banks, they're commercial bodies, it costs them money to have people coming to the counter and to be manning the counter, and that's the way that they see it. And it's just not right.

00:48:37 Participant

But it's not fair. It's not right, Sandra?

00:48:39 Interviewer

No, no, definitely not.

00:48:43 Participant

No it’s not right. I just feel when they come to me. I'm very polite to them, they know me and they’re lovely but they’re only doing what their manager is telling them. And I feel like telling them “F-off and leave me alone” <laughs>.

00:49:03 Participant

Well, I hope I’ve been of some use to you Sandra, and I hope I didn’t bore you.

00:49:07 Interviewer

No, not at all. <ANNIE>, this has been fantastic and I wish I could say that this will make a difference, but as I said, the banks, insurance companies, they're there to make a profit.

But I think all of these stories, I think are important to get out there, so you know, when I put all my data together and come up with some recommendations and so on. I think there are some policy changes, hopefully, that I plan to send off to the Irish relevant government ministers and so on, because there's a lot of good work going on in this country, but it’s not enough and not well thought through all the time.

00:49:49 Participant

I just feel that older people are being punished, now if I wanted to do that sort of thing, it would be my choice. I have no interest in it and there’s nobody can make me do it. But I just feel that because you can't do it, you’re the underdog.

00:50:03 Interviewer

Yes. You're absolutely right. And you know there's some good work going on. Certainly the county councils, they have age friendly programmes and they have older people councils.

Participant

Yes, absolutely brilliant and I wouldn’t knock anybody.

But the pandemic has highlighted to me, you see I could go to the county council for tax, to Tipperary and pay my insurance but when all that was gone it highlighted to me that if you’re not digital-minded or online-minded you don’t matter.

00:50:44 Interviewer

Yeah, absolutely, and I think my motto and I think it's your motto as well <ANNIE> is “digital first but not digital only”.

00:50:52 Participant

Yeah, yeah. And I think it's wonderful and I see what Andrea can do, and research and everything. I think it’s wonderful and I would never knock it but at 79 I don’t want to go down that road.

00:51:08 Interviewer

And you shouldn't have to. Well <ANNIE>, I'm going to leave this here. I'm going to stop the recording and thank you, you’ve given me a huge amount (of data that will help me with my research).