Interviewer: It's a little bit different to Zoom, but it works absolutely fine. So, I'll just tell you just a little bit about what this is about and if that's OK we'll just go through some of the consent statements. You would have gone through these for this for the survey so these are similar.

Interviewer: I have to go through the consent statements because it's an interview and I need to make sure it's all ethical research practice.

Participant: I'm aware of all those rules and regulations, you know.

Interviewer: That's it exactly. So I'm not going to go through the study details again, because you've seen that very recently, you just completed the survey at the weekend.

Interviewer: So I have about 6, 7 actually, consent statements, so I'll just read through those. You can just listen to them and then at the end if you have any questions then we can go through those or else you can just let me know if you're happy to continue, is that OK?

Participant: Perfect

Interviewer: OK 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 these answered satisfactorily.

Number two, I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw my participation within two weeks of the date of 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 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

Number seven, I agree to take part in this study. So how does all that sound, <JANE>?

Participant: Everything is perfect, Sandra, I agree to everything and look use my name and number or whatever.

Interviewer: Thank you. I won't need to do that. Basically all the information, all the stories that I'm hearing, I feel I have as a researcher, responsibility to do everybody justice so it'll all be, you know, patterns and themes. There won't be anything you know specific or identifiable, so not an issue there.

Participant: There's no problem anyway Sandra. No problem at all.

Interviewer: Thanks <JANE>. So, the first thing I like to do, and I'm going to take a sip of tea as well.

Participant: Oh good. I thought I was the only one who liked my cup of tea. Oh wow.

Interviewer: Me too. Have to have the cup of tea absolutely, and I have my red and white Cork colours.

Participant: And I have my cup, my chickens there, do you see them?

Interviewer: I do.

Participant: Because we're in a small farm here as well, so I always love my two little hens there and they're lovely.

Interviewer: Absolutely.

Participant: Where are you Sandra, before you start. Are you in Ireland?

Interviewer: <JANE>, I am. I'm in Skibbereen in West Cork.

Participant: Oh, you’re from Skibbereen.

Participant: I am. I worked in Apple for many years and Heineken before that, so I've lived in Ballincollig as well.

Participant: Right, OK, and I 'm from Mitchelstown here in County Cork.

Interviewer: Only the other end of the county from me.

Interviewer: So I'm just going to go through quickly just to check, that the general information that you gave me on the on the survey is correct.

Interviewer: Your age range is 65 to 74, so you've told me that you're 72 and you don't look a day over 50.

Participant: Aww thanks very much Sandra, you're so good, thank you.

Interviewer: OK, you said your gender is female. Your Irish County of residence is Cork and you live in an urban area. Mitchelstown you told me and you live with one other person, is that your husband I see in the garden at the moment?

Participant: Yes it is. Fifty years since the first of July.

Interviewer: Oh, congratulations, isn't that fantastic? Oh my word, that's brilliant.

OK. Your highest level of formal education is upper secondary, which is probably Leaving cert, right?

Participant: Yeah, now Sandra, I didn't put down on that, but when I was 55 I did a cert in UCC in Youth and Community work so I didn't put that down because of the age at the time I did it, whereas if I put down university you’d think I went straight from school.

Interviewer: And that's exactly it, because the formal learning is the time we left school, so it could be, you know, Inter cert back in our day, Leaving cert or if you went straight to university. So we'll talk about that because that's a very important part of lifelong learning in a little while.

Interviewer: And the reason I asked you if you were comfortable completing the survey was because it just gives me a good flavour of who you are and what you're about, so I don't have to be asking those questions.

Interviewer: I can tell you're very confident and skilled with your use of digital devices and technology. You have a very positive outlook on life, your role with the Older People’s Council, so this tells me an awful lot about you, whereas the people that I will be calling by arrangement by phone, I don't have any of that information because they're not online and they cannot complete the survey, and this has been hugely helpful. So what I'd like to start with, so it's a semi-structured interview so you can talk about pretty much whenever you want, and I will guide you back to the themes that I'm looking for.

Interviewer: So, and what I would say, and this is the opportunity to talk about, for example the Girl Guides, what you learn, what they learn, your UCC programme that you talked about there too. But I do like to start by asking <JANE>, what lifelong learning means to you, and I will qualify that a little bit. We've talked about the formal learning so that’s the age that we first left formal education and then you have non-formal learning, which is a structured programme like the one in UCC. It's usually offered by a provider, but that provider could be a community group. So as part of the Older People’s Council you might get people to come in and talk to the group about different topics. So that will be non-formal and then informal is what you chat about generally with your family, with your friends and what you learn on a day-to-day basis. So that's really the distinction and how I'm looking at lifelong learning for the purposes of this research.

So, tell me then <JANE>. What does lifelong learning mean to you?

Participant: Lifelong learning is very crucial in my life. In my line, and communication with all different committees, and I am involved with so many at the moment that you know, I'm learning from each committee different things, different outlooks. I think it's very important and at our age, no matter what age you are offered, especially at my age, that we keep ourselves up to date with what's happening and locally, nationally and European-wide even, you know, and so that we can be able to talk to our grandchildren and steer them in a direction that we hadn't when we were young. We hadn’t the same educational facilities that they have now. They have computers which are brilliant and that's why I think long life learning (lifelong learning) for me was learning about digital skills. Learning about Zoom, learning about Microsoft Teams, because if I wasn't able to do that today, I would not be having this conversation with you. I wouldn't be involved in the community as much as I would be, and I felt that as I was so involved in community work that I wanted to go a step further.

Participant: So, I went and did a cert in UCC on Community Work and that really enlightened me and encouraged me and gave me a great idea of how I can come back and make our community a better place for my... and I think you know I'm a trainer in the Girl Guides and what that entails is, I teach adults on what the Girl Guide programme is and I think that if I hadn't the skills got from what I already received through my own learning process I wouldn't be able to do that. Because Sandra, if you had known me when I was about 20 years of age, I wouldn't be having a conversation with you. I came from a small farming background and I had only an older sister and three brothers in between, so I was very quiet and very reserved so. Long time learning, communication, meeting people, all those skills I was able to gain for myself and it made me the person I am today.

Interviewer: That's brilliant, thank you so much for all of that. You just covered a multitude which is fantastic. So, you mentioned, and I do want to talk a little bit about the digital and the technology. and that theme. So, take me back <JANE> to when you first came across, whether it was, you know, a mobile phone or computer. Take me back to when technology first came into your life.

Participant: Oh, I can tell you as if it was only yesterday. My son was going out with his girlfriend and she worked in Limerick County Council and they were getting a whole load of new computers so they were selling off their old lot. So she was here one night at my house and she just said “we're selling computers” and the first thing I said is “what are they?” and I remember the year well, in 1998.

Participant: So, I got my first computer and it was sitting here, where I'm actually nearly sitting at the moment, sitting there for about two years, because I was afraid to touch. Now I tried to open it and I was able to do a few things, but I was not able to delete anything because I thought if I delete that now, I’ll probably close down the whole thing.

Participant: Now I tried to open it and I was able to do few things, but I was not able to delete anything because I thought if I delete that now, I’d probably close down the whole thing.

Participant: So I was very, very nervous of it. So, in the school, the college here in Mitchelstown.

It's a secondary school, but it's called St. Flannan’s College? (Coláiste Fionnchua?) and they were doing that time, what do they call it? a driver's licence?

Interviewer: Oh yes, ECDL?

Participant: Yes and I went and I did a course on that and that was my first introduction to computers and I followed the course. It was a bit higher than what I expected. So I finished this and I was OK, but I went back then and I did a basic course with a group here in Mitchelstown. So even though I had my drivers licence, I felt I wasn't still 100% true to myself that I'd be well able to use it. So when I did the basic computer course, oh God, I was on the road then and from thereon it all developed, you know.

Participant: And then I got a mobile, an Apple mobile phone. I got an Apple computer and people say to you that it’s hard to use an Apple computer. I'd say no, that's what I have. I have my iPhone 14 now, which is the up-to-date one. I'm talking to you on my MacBook Air and I have a smaller one as well, so you know, I love all this now. But if I hadn't, you know, there's a lot of people out there, they probably feel like me and they must get an urge from somebody to do it. If that makes sense?

Interviewer: Yeah, there has to be a reason for it.

Participant: Yeah yeah, like a lot of people would love to do it, but they don't know where to start. They don’t know who to ask.

Interviewer: Yes, absolutely, and that's a good point <JANE>, so aren't there, because I'm learning a little bit about what the Older People’s Council does in the various counties, so I'm hearing it from different people who are involved in different counties. But are there people who have no interest in technology and no interest in doing what you're doing, so as part of the Council, how do you stay in contact with them?

Participant: Yes, there are a lot of people like that, but I suppose, now I can only use down here in my area now. We have a social hub, it's called social hub, but it's actually an active retirement group and we meet once a week.

So one week, we meet on a Monday, just have a chat and a cup of tea.

On a Tuesday then they do exercise for life. It's called Fitness for Life, so there's a girl there, this trainer and she does exercise with them.

And then another day they do arts and crafts. It comes under the theme mindfulness. OK, so it's not about what the product would be, but it's about mindfulness doing it and the serenity. And they have candles, lighting and it's all so beautiful and you know, it’s very good for people that are isolated or alone. Or maybe this is the only outlet that they have, might be the only place that they meet people so it can be very soothing for them.0

And then we have. This is very important, Sandra, and it's really singing for the brain. So what they mean by singing for the brain is that we have a tutor who sings all old songs going back to the 60s, the 50s, because anybody that's near dementia or anyone that's older, loves to go back, even myself, and I'm only 72 like. I would love to hear the old songs and when I hear them even on the radio I sing along with them and for that moment it, it releases their energy. It brings happiness into their body. You could feel it. You could feel the radiation from them, you know, and I think, so all this is not digital. It's all done on the spot, and I think that's where we're dealing with people that are not digitally minded. But saying that, COVID stopped a lot of that and we're doing it on Zoom and it's not the same, the singing for the brain isn't the same. There is nothing the same but thank God we're going back again at the end of the month and following the government guidelines.

Interviewer: You know that's great. It really is. And oh my goodness you've given me so much. But It does worry me a huge amount and this isn't just about, you know about COVID, but I'm sure you have group members and they live for those days and they live for those events and you know they feel that they shouldn’t be forced to use any digital devices or anything like that.

Participant: You have no idea, and I work for Tesco out in the community and listening to people they are saying “<JANE>, when are we back in the social hub? I can't wait, it was my lifeline”, you know. And like your heart would go out to them. But what I should have said also is Cork County Council are very good. They sent out a package to all older people. I think you might have heard about that package?

Interviewer: Yes. I saw it because I volunteer with Cork City Partnership’s Friendly Call programme. I ring a lady everyday who's not digitally connected, and she got one of those packages, yeah.

Participant: And the feedback we got from that and like it was around Saint Patrick's Day. So we in Mitchelstown put in a Saint Patrick's Day card and wished them all Happy Saint Patrick's Day and even that lifted people's spirits because we don't realise that because I'm so involved in work. I'm so involved in everything that you know, I never sit down and say, well thank God for everything, but I'm often now stopping and saying it because I can hear older people for the simple thing you give them, they would come and say "<JANE>, thank you so much. It lifted my spirit.” And I think if we could do that, lift people’s spirits in this time of, you know, like we're living in a new world and we have to embrace it, and I'd be telling people that we have to embrace what we have. We can still look back and think about what we had when we had it but look forward as well and I think you know that would be my key message for anyone to hear.

Interviewer: Absolutely and <JANE>, what do you think about? Because when I think about this and when I speak to my supervisor, we talk about, you know, digital first is fair enough whether it's the banks, the public services, whatever. We totally get that, but it shouldn't be digital only. So what about the people that you come in contact with? Let's say they want to get money out of the bank and they want to go to the counter in the bank and there's no counter anymore. Or one of those kind of experiences and how are they feeling, especially when you know if they ring up maybe a utility company and it's all the press 1, press, 2 press 3. and they don't get to speak to a human. What's that like for them? Trying to get access to talk to these people for me is quite problematic, so I'd love your perspective.

Participant: It's unbelievable, Sandra, unbelievable. Now about three years ago we got the bank manager from Mitchelstown up to our meeting. And she showed them how to put in money, how to take out money, how to open up new accounts and all that and that was brilliant. And they were delighted. The next thing we heard, the bank in Mitchelstown was closing. And now we have to go through the post office so at least we have the post office in Mitchelstown where they can still put in money, they can take out money.

But it's not the same because older people are more worried about their money in the bank. And is it safe there and they like to reach the bank and see is it OK and I can understand where they're coming from because with all the fraud that's going on at the moment, you know, and they're very worried about that as well. But I suppose we're lucky down here as well. We have a community guard on our committee and anytime we hear something like the bank closing down, we bring him in and he’ll come in and chat to the people.

But you see, it's OK for a lot of the older people because they have sons or daughters living nearby. So we're lucky in that respect that a lot of the older people have that contact, but you have some older people as well Sandra that don't want to let their siblings know what they're doing, or that I'm not talking to their siblings, which is very common nowadays, and that is the biggest worry for me, because I think a lot of the young people are expecting their parents to support them now. Financially and otherwise, you know, so it is harder on the older people. Yes, it's very difficult and we have given a lot of our older people here, a tablet. You know the small computer?

Interviewer: The Acorn I think?

Participant: Yes. I just wanted to make sure.

Participant: We gave them one of those and we did training with them on that computer.

So a lot of them that weren't aware are now happy that they're able to use their smartphone. We got those smartphones from Alone. So, between the smartphone and the tablet a lot of them now feel a lot more secure.

But you're always going to get a percentage Sandra that we're not going to get to.

Interviewer: Yeah and I was talking to the programme manager of Friendly Call a few weeks back. She talked about those tablets, those special Acorn tablets, and she said about half of them that they gave out were actually given back.

Participant: Well, down here, no. We’re very lucky here in the sense that we have Ballyhoura supporting us as well. And they give a lot of funding and down here with the Cork County Council as well, sitting on our committee is a councillor, she's Kay Dawson.

And we also have the head of Muintir na Tíre. We have one person from the HSE. We have the engineer in Mitchelstown. We have the person in charge of the social housing on our committee. So we got in the right people on our committee. So there were lots of different agencies and we support them and they support us, and they can see where we're coming from and our needs. And we can see theirs. So you know, it's teamwork.

Interviewer: Yes, absolutely.

Participant: But that's not probably happening everywhere Sandra, so I think it might be good for you to see that is doing well with the older people, and you'll probably meet another town that’s not doing so well, you know.

Interviewer: And this is it. And especially where people don't have the community supports. I didn't know until I went researching and I was definitely finding the county councils very useful with their with the Age Friendly programme. And that's how I got to know Mary because we put in an application for Skibbereen last year although we didn't get it. Then I heard about the work of the Older People’s Council in the counties.

<From to <JANE> shared some information with Sandra about an NGO off the record and it is not included in this transcript>

Interviewer: You're not the only person who has said that to me. I heard that from Wexford as well.

They just ignored my request totally and it's not right. It has to work both ways. I'll help you if you help me so I won't be volunteering with them again. And certainly everything that you said <JANE>. I've heard this already.

Participant: And Sandra, when Mary Creedon sent the note out about you, I thought “if I can be of any help” I said “Mary, you’ll never have to get back on to me if I put my name out there and if I’m not available I would say to the person “sorry, I’m not available, but if you ring me another day” or whatever. Yesterday I felt so awful Sandra after I forgot totally about the hairdresser... so sorry about that.

But I'd be that type of person Sandra, and when I saw the email from Mary I thought this is great for Age Friendly. This is great for the Older People’s Council with a young girl (*at 56 I’m not so young but thank you!*) there that's coming up and she's going to spread the good news about us and that's what we’re about.

Interviewer: Yeah, absolutely. And that's what I'm saying as well. And at the end of the day, I mean, this study is going to go on through the end of next year, so I've got two years to do it and I'm hoping it makes a difference because I've looked at the policies and I must say, I don't think the Irish Government policies towards digital and towards lifelong learning are good enough.

Lifelong learning from what I can see from policy research is all about getting into the labour market, moving positions, that kind of thing, and when it comes to digital skills and digital literacy, all they've done is just append digital literacy to adult literacy and numeracy. Digital skills are different, you know.

Participant: It is funny you said that now because there was a European conference on there recently and you could invite yourself on it. So, I did it, and we broke into groups, working groups, four in our group, and the first thing I said was “There's no point in talking about European conferences and about what's happening in Europe. You have to educate the Irish people first about Europe and what part we can play with Europe and what part Europe can play with us.”

Participant: And I thought, you know, because I don't know much about Europe Sandra, you know. And if I was hearing for students like you, apparently there is loads of funding there for you and all that, but sure, who knows about it?

Interviewer: Yeah, you're quite right, and to be honest, I'm paying for my own studies.

I'm self-funding because I'm not under any pressure then. I can do it in my own time within the time frame of my university.

Interviewer: But the information, the statistical data that I get, so and I'll share this one with you like, because this is quite fascinating and Age Action are not up to date with the data that they're presenting in their reports. So, anybody can look at the Eurostat database and this is where I can get my data about population in each age group, Internet use etc. It turned out that they weren't collecting data at all about Internet use or anything from the over 75's. I did a study last autumn and I basically surveyed university students at UL (where I teach part-time) to find out who helped their older family members with digital communications during lockdown. So, there was data being published from 16-65 years across but there was no data being captured for over 75's. So, I contacted Eurostat. They're really, really helpful over in Brussels or Luxembourg or wherever they were, and they said this data isn't obligatory to send to them. So, Ireland or any country in the EU is not obliged to send the data. The Central Statistic Office was not sending the data.

I sent an email to the Director General of the CSO and I made this recommendation. Lo and behold, in February this year it showed data from 2020 for the over 75s. Now because they don't survey many in that age group it’s not very reliable but it's a start, so I'm a big fan of what I can get, policies, information, data from the EU, from the OECD, from the WHO. So, this is all forming my knowledge and my learning here and it seems to me what the Irish Government is doing is not right.

So funding agencies like the one we mentioned who are getting huge huge funding to do this training is not about, and they're ticking the boxes, but not necessarily getting the results from it.

Participant: Exactly. I totally agree with everything you said.

Participant: In that European study, you said you're teaching in UL, well actually, a professor in UL was in my working group and I spoke about Age Friendly and all that. So he got back to me since. Now I can't remember his name, it was a strange name, but he was a lovely fella and he said we weren't allowed to give our number or email or anything at that session.

But he got onto an Age Friendly and he said there was a <JANE> in my group and I would love to contact her again and so Mary Creedon rang me. She said “<JANE> can I give your number?” and I said “of course you can.”

So I've been in touch with him, but I’ll his name to you Sandra.

<From to <JANE> and Sandra chatted about the Age Friendly University programme that Sandra followed up in an email to <JANE> to make the necessary introduction. Also, the panel of older people associated with the Centre for Ageing Research at Lancaster University. This is not included in this transcript>

Interviewer: I was at the British Society of Gerontology Conference in July, and you know, we got some panel members from the Centre for Ageing Research in to talk as well and they're amazing people because they get involved like this involved in research, but they're part of the university family now, and that's even more than becoming just an Age Friendly University because what they have said is that they'll go in and they'll sit in the back of lecture halls and listen to lectures. But that's not enough. These have gone much further, and they've set up their own their own community, and it was very difficult at Lancaster, you know, to get that started. You know, maybe as many years in the making, but so important, so thank you so much for that. That would be brilliant.

Participant: That’s just me. I'd be promoting what I think is good, you know, like Age Friendly programme, I think that's brilliant and the Older People’s Council they’re all brilliant and a lot of people don’t know anything about.

<Agreed the details of making the introduction>

Interviewer: Yes. And that's why I'm not sticking strictly to what I have here, because what you're telling me is so much more valuable for both of us and for Irish society generally.

Participant: I hope I'm not waffling <laughs>.

Interviewer: You're not, no, it's semi-structured. This is the way it should be. There's a couple of things I do need to go through, so let’s do that.

Participant: Email me anytime Sandra or I can talk to you anytime so don't ever worry. You know if you don't get all in or if you think of something, no problem.

Interviewer: Yeah, that's absolutely fine. But tell me a little bit about, you've got all the Apple devices and look, I'm an Apple girl. I find them all really quite easy, but sometimes you know I need help. You need help. We all need help. Who do you go to for any of that kind of help in the first instance, <JANE>?

Participant: Well, first of all there’s a help button on my computer so I go on that and I find that good. If that's not very good then I go to the Apple Store and I find it excellent because we haven’t a place here in Mitchelstown as such.

Participant: Now I remember and I wanted to get something I'm involved with transition year students in the town as well. And they would love, they ask me up once a year to talk about community work and how I got involved and how they can get involved in all this you know. So I discovered that one of the teachers was very good with computers, so I asked her a couple of things as well. I have friends that I can ask as well, you know, but you know what Sandra? Often I'd be at the computer and my answer would come up and I don't know how I got it and I'd say “how in the bloody hell did I get the right thing up?” And I’d have to work at it again. Fiddling on the computer and looking for something special and you don't know how because you have so many things up. It's often that I could, I can steer the thing, I can concentrate, and it doesn’t annoy me if I don't get it. I kind of keep at it and if I break down then I can't actually or if that's what I would do.

Participant: I would get help on the computer or I will get friends to help. But I can see where you're coming from there. Where do all the people get help if they're stuck?

Participant: Now, they can bring their iPad or whatever into our meeting, and we're there to support them because Ballyhoura have a digital trainer. And Ballyhoura supports us in that way, and that's done then in the library because our local library is where they have computers.

My role is supporting the community with Tesco, so one morning a week (now I didn't do it for a long time), but one morning a week I used to take for one hour. I used to take older people and I showed them how to open up the computer, how to do whatever they wanted. What they wanted was to open up the computer and to send emails and maybe to book a holiday. They would be three things.

Interviewer: OK, and where was that? Where did you do that, <JANE>?

Participant: Inside in Mitchelstown.

Interviewer: In the library. OK, so I'm not making the connection with Tesco because I know the libraries are great and they have digital ambassadors now, which sounds to me the role that you're playing. I'm not quite getting the Tesco connection. Can you explain that to me a little bit more?

Participant: There isn't a Tesco connection there as such. I'm given money at the beginning of the year, OK, and I can spend that money the way I choose.

Now I know we all have to go back and say what we're doing and all that, don't get me wrong, but my work week. I work 14 hours a week so out of that 14 hours I can do whatever I like. It can be going up to the school supporting transition year or it can be meeting a group of girls about something that I'm working on, like I do the Tesco Garda Youth Award. And that that's a brilliant success. It's where young people are acknowledged for the work they're doing, and that takes a lot of time to do that.

That'll be another part, and the other part I took on then was a supporting older people with computer skills. So even though I'm working for Tesco it's not Tesco that put me there if that makes sense?

Interviewer: It does. It sounds like it's Tesco’s corporate social responsibility programme. You know their contribution to the community?

Participant: That’s it exactly and I am their person and I guess because I work in the community so much they thought I would be a good person who would know people and know people needs and yes, it works great.

Got it.

Interviewer: Oh <JANE>, you're making me want to move to Mitchelstown <laughs>

Interviewer: Well, a great success so.

Participant: Yeah, it is.

Participant: A very small town of about 5,000 population here, you know. And then we've got industries here so it is a good town, yes it is.

Interviewer: Definitely. So tell me a little bit and I'm deviating, but this is important as well because there's an intergenerational aspect and learning exchanges to my study that I'm not really picking up on yet. I'm picking up more of group mentoring, peer mentoring, support, that kind of thing. But you know, you did a lot of work indirectly with the young people in the Girl Guides and directly with the transition year students.

Is there any connection, or are there any initiatives that go on between their generation and the older generation? Whether it's digital skills or any type of learning other than you know you. You said that you go up to the school and you talk to the TY students. Anything like that <JANE>?

Participant: There is. About three years ago, I had an intergenerational night with all my guides, their parents, and their grandparents.

Interviewer: OK.

Participant: And then on the night it was open to whoever. No, I think you have to have an agenda in your own mind, because otherwise the night wouldn't be structured. So I had a structure , but the whole idea of the night was to let the young people see how the older people, what their life was growing up, and how the next generation again, how their life was growing up and how the young people today, what they're doing. And at that time I would have been the third generation nearly because I’ve three generations of Girl Guides now at the moment. I had their mother, their grandmother and I’d the kids. OK so I was telling them when I was growing up I lived in a small farm and I had to milk cows and I had to get the breakfast ready. When my mam and dad were out doing a bit of farming I had to make the beds. Now I said, even though I had all that to do I had a lovely time, I had a fantastic time. We’d a great life, but these were jobs we had to do and the next generation then, which would be their parents. Their parents would lay it back a bit. They didn’t have as much to do. Computers were just coming in and motor cars were getting very popular where in my time there wasn't. There was the bicycle or whatever. And so they spoke about “we just got to the seaside, we used to go to Cork, the disco, you know travel around.” That didn't happen in my time but the third generation, they're going everywhere. They have digital skills. They have computers and laptops.

What they were missing, what we had, was conversation, and communication skills and they're gone out the door, Sandra. Some young people don't know how to communicate anymore because their parents are working. The parents come back in at night and the young ones are there and the parents say “go on upstairs, I'm tired” or whatever and they go up and they’re on the computer. The parents don't even know what they’re at. Communication with people and even the intergenerational skills. They're not there anymore because the young people don't know.

That night I was there. The young people didn't know what to say, hardly, because they had nothing that they had done that was amazing.

Where we had no, we had enough, we weren't poor, but we weren't rich.

But we were able to say about the life we had and how we played and how we went out and we made fun for ourselves, you know.

But this generation had nothing like that. All they can say is “did you see so and so on the on the PlayStation last night?” Or “have you that game at home?”

Interviewer: I think it's very sad, <JANE> as well because that's very difficult. I mean, we can talk about, and there are terms that I use in in in my research, generational awareness and generational intelligence. And honestly, there are simple ways that you know, if you could pair up two people, a young person and an older person to share exchanges and swap skills.

But what I recently heard about the local Geriatric Society. They have a luncheon club and (well, they don't now obviously) on a Tuesday and Friday and they would get the transition year students down to, you know, to entertain and maybe run errands and different things like that. But somebody had said to me, you know when it comes to if somebody wanted help with an iPad or something like that, they're not very patient and that was a theme that came out from my last study. The young people learned patience from the intergenerational exchange supporting their older family members with digital communications during lockdown.

But I think that's such a shame because it's not just a one-way street.

It can be two ways and it just feels like the young people aren't learning to the potential that they could from their older generations, you know.

Participant: Sandra, I missed out on something there now. When we're at our social hub we invite the transition year students down to help the leaders by giving tea to the older people.

But often people are looking as if to say “you can't do it the way we do it”, so it can be two-way flow as well.

Interviewer: Yes. It needs to be.

Participant: Yeah, field skip, you know, don't appreciate some of the things that the younger people are trying to do.

Participant: You know, (the older people) don't appreciate some of the things that the younger people are trying to do.

Interviewer: I think you're right and while that starts off in an unstructured way, but it does need some structure I think to be to be successful. That's an interesting area, <JANE>. I'll have to ponder some more about that.

Participant: Yeah, because I can see it now when even we got the boys down (we try and use different schools because it's not fair using one school) and I think the boys get on better with the older people, giving them the tea and biscuits, than the girls did.

My feeling would be the girls said “why should I be giving you this, you should be big enough” where the boys were feeling a little bit saddened for the older people, maybe the boys were much softer at heart?

Interviewer: A bit more empathy?

Participant: Empathy, yeah.

Interviewer: That's interesting.

Participant: Now, feelings from my experience, you know.

Interviewer: Yeah yeah. And it's just by talking to people and getting different perspectives and understandings is how we learn because you're not going to open a book or turn onto a website and find all that. It's just not there.

Participant: Of course, yeah.

For me, actually I could see that you know, the boys were very well structured in what they were trying to do and they would say “are you OK?” where the girls you know?

Now, I'm not saying all the girls were like that, but I'm only focusing on my feelings of the couple of terms I was there.

Interviewer: <JANE>, I think this is only going to be the first of our conversations, I believe, but I'm just conscious of the time and I don't want to be too long at one session. I think we've given each other food for thought. So, I think perhaps, we might get together again?

Participant: Yes you need to evaluate what we've said already and take from it what you need.

Interviewer: There's such a lot, it's just been absolutely fantastic, and I'll go through the next steps in a moment, but I do want to offer everybody the opportunity. Is there anything that, when we were arranging this’ that you said “Oh yeah, must remember now to say that” is there anything that we haven't talked about that you think is relevant that we might want to cover off now?

Participant: I think what’s very good as well. People think or when I was going to school I couldn't do this and I couldn't do that. I would have a different outlook.

<<JANE> shared a personal experience off the record that is not included in this transcript>.

Participant: And it helped me to re-evaluate myself and where I am because I could have gone one way.

It could be bad, or I could have gone the other way, so I thought to myself I had to lift myself up and I always said when I was young, I'd like to go to college.

Now what I was going to go to college for I have no idea, but journalism was in my brain because my uncle was a journalist and anytime I submitted anything to our local paper about girl guides I wrote it up myself and I heard a lot of people say “oh, that's a lovely write up on the paper” but I never said to anyone I did it because I didn’t think that would be fair, but I got confidence from that and I thought you know what? If I go back to college and do something, so I was saying to myself “what could I do?” I was 55 years of age and I thought, you know what, and my friend in Cork and was after doing a diploma in Youth and Community Work. Now she was a young person, but I knew her and I thought that something like that might be interesting. So they did an outreach programme. Now do you know what the outreach programme is?

Interviewer: So you didn't have to travel to UCC, brilliant.

<<JANE> shared details of how the personal experience off the record might have impacted her studies>

Participant: But I persevered after all that and I got my goal.

Participant: So, what I would say to everyone is “don't worry about your age. Whatever age you are, go and follow your dreams.” No matter what it is, and I think I would say that to a lot of young people and older people, and they said, “you know what <JANE>, you’re right.”

Interviewer: I totally agree. The way I say it is, “you're never too old and it's never too late.”

Participant: Yes, that’s the old saying, and I say “follow your dreams because we don't know what people are thinking about.

Participant: Now, there was one woman in particular and she had a falling out with her daughter, and she told me confidentially, when I mentioned "follow your dreams” and she said “well, it’s up to her to ring me” and I said “it’s not, it’s a two-way flow. You go and break down that barrier and give her a call. If she doesn't accept your call and you have your part done. Leave it for a while and do it the second time and do it the third time and if all fails then don't feel that guilt, follow your dreams, you've your part done.”

Participant: I think that message is a very strong message for young, old and in between.

Because sometimes things happen Sandra, and they think that’s the end of the world.

And it's not, you know. And I'm always saying, if I could only send that message of positivity to people then I’ve felt I've done enough, you know?

Interviewer: Well, I'm certainly getting the positivity from you today, <JANE>. Thank you so much for that and for everything.