

The History of CARELOCAL.



While cycling to work in Dublin in the late 1960's, a regular sight was that of elderly people queuing outside the Post Office, in all weathers, to collect their pensions. It appeared to me that these people were very much in need, which prompted the urge to try and help them.

In autumn 1970 I joined a social club with a focus on charitable service, where the members of the club discussed problems and chose solutions. The range of possible activities seemed to be endless. At that point, I related my observations of the elderly, seeking attention for their plight. A minority of us talked about going to visit them in pairs as conversation could be easier. We started knocking on doors and visiting older people, many of whom were living in very poor conditions, as unfortunately was the norm at that time. It was amazing how open and trusting these people were and how they appreciated the fact that someone cared enough to call. They invited us to call again, which we did. Most of those people had little more than what they stood up in. As well as bringing companionship and having a chat, we brought small gifts to let them know that we cared and that they weren't forgotten.

'Core funding' hadn't been heard of in those days, so we tried to raise money by singing Christmas carols. We stood outside on the street with old oil tins as collection boxes, but got little for our efforts. In that first Christmas we eventually collected £50 which enabled us to give a small little gift to each of our new friends. We were so delighted that we continued the carolling every year until 2007.

My late husband Martin joined the social club in February 1972 and we married in September 1974. Both of us were active in the club up to October 1975, when we felt it was dying and made a conscious decision that we should try a new beginning from our own area. We contracted a few friends and neighbours to continue the carol singing to raise funds in December 1975 and start from scratch again under the name of 'Concern for Dublin's Old Folk Living Alone.'

In 1987 CARELOCAL graduated from our box room to a location in Christchurch Place along with five other volunteer organisations. We worked from there on a donated desk and my old typewriter until we were served with an eviction notice in 1988 to make way for developers. After a few weeks a rundown building which had been part of the old Richmond Hospital was made available to a number of volunteer groups, thanks to the late Kate O'Sullivan. In due course, renovations were carried out and we were allocated a room at an affordable rate.

The direction of CARELOCAL changed during the years; as life for the older people changed, so did their needs. When we first observed their fight for survival depended on the bare necessities (food, heat, underclothing, bed-clothing, and maintaining their homes), CARELOCAL concentrated on supplying the little comforts. By degrees, goods for hampers were purchased, packed, and delivered to over seven hundred older people living alone for many years. In more recent years, when the old age pensions substantially increased, the majority of our clients were financially much better off and the coal and hampers weren't necessary. The trend changed, and families emigrated and weren't living close to their parents anymore. Thus, loneliness has become more of a problem in recent years, and CARELOCAL has adjusted by providing the volunteer visits. The success of CARELOCAL is very much as a result of the dedication of its volunteers visiting the elderly in their homes. Home is where the older person's heart is; at home they are familiar with everything and they thrive best because they receive love and security that result from valuable volunteer quality time.

- Eileen Coen.