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## Autumn 2023 newsletter



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### **A message from the Commissioner for Older People for Northern Ireland:**

We have a real treat for you in this issue with a special Words of Wisdom celebrating the positives of growing older with the truly inspirational Gloria Hunniford. Born and bred in County Armagh, like my good self, Gloria highlights the importance of keeping busy as you get older and credits growing up in Northern Ireland for her strong work ethic. I wish I had half her energy!

A huge thank you to everyone who turned up at our Tacking Ageism

complete our survey online. Hearing your personal experiences has given me a unique insight into the hot issues affecting older people here. We touched on so many topics backed up with real life examples that my team are currently collating all this research into a special report which I intend to publish early in 2024 with my recommendations based on your feedback for all relevant authorities.

I also enjoyed visiting many older peoples' groups and appreciate those invitations which give me the opportunity to hear about the amazing work being carried out across Northern Ireland. I think I've been in every county at least twice in the last few months and it never fails to amaze me how these groups provide a wonderful resource in their communities, so please keep those invitations coming.

As the dark nights draw-in, I hope everybody has checked **Make the Call** by clicking on this link - [Make the Call Service | nidirect](#) to make sure you are getting all the benefits you are entitled too. This is a very valuable service which helped more than 3000 people of pension age in claiming over £19million in Attendance Allowance and Pension Credit, and an additional £11m in respect of Personal Independence Payments to support individuals with additional living costs or mobility needs as a result of a health condition or disability.

Keep an eye out for advice from our partnership with Scamwise on the latest scams being used in the run up to Christmas, when unscrupulous scammers will try to relieve us of our hard-earned cash. Don't be afraid to doubt every call, text or email you receive, genuine people will not be offended and hanging up or not replying could save you from being a victim.

Finally, don't forget to look out for our annual Christmas photographic

see all the amazing photographs coming through before I have the difficult task of selecting one for my digital Christmas Card.

Until then..



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## Great turnout for 'Tackling Ageing' events



Over 330 of you took part in our recent ageism survey and last month, the Commissioner met with more than 200 older people from across Northern Ireland to hear first-hand their views and experiences on ageism.

Visiting Antrim, Downpatrick, Armagh, Omagh, Fermanagh and Derry/Londonderry, the Commissioner and his team heard many examples of ageism from the participants. The survey also revealed that older people right across Northern Ireland believe ageist attitudes are very much present in today's society.

The Commissioner said, "I heard some shocking experiences of ageism at every single one of the events I hosted. There's no doubt in my mind that ageism remains one of the most accepted forms of discrimination in our society and I believe there is much more work to be done on tackling this."

The Commissioner will be publishing a summary report of the survey findings early next year, alongside some of the anonymised experiences that were shared at the events.

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## **Antrim welcomes new 'chatty benches'**



The Commissioner had the pleasure of launching two of the newest ‘Chatty Benches’ in Antrim. Beautifully hand crafted from recycled timber, by members of AMH New Horizon’s Antrim (Steeple) Men’s Sheds, the benches are designed to offer a comfortable perch for a natter by people using green spaces at Regional Office, Antrim and on the Holywell Hospital site.

The Commissioner said: “Loneliness continues to be a big issue for many people and can have such a negative effect on a person’s mental health and wellbeing. The chatty bench is a wonderful initiative, which offers so much more than just a place to sit – it provides an opportunity for social connection, which can have a positive influence on our health, mental health, life expectancy and wellbeing. It’s great to see another chatty bench being installed in Northern Ireland, and I hope that people will embrace the idea and use the opportunity to spark up a conversation and enjoy a chat with someone they don’t know.”

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## Positive about ageing



October is positive ageing month bringing an opportunity to celebrate all that is positive about ageing. In a research paper by Dr Becca Levy (Professor of Epidemiology at the Yale School of Public Health and Professor of Psychology at Yale University) a positive mindset about ageing was shown to increase life span by up to seven years.

This research also showed that those who have positive perceptions about ageing also experience much higher rates of recovery from illness and injury, have better brain performance, improved memory, a greater sense of control over their lives, a greater will to live and are more likely to talk to a doctor about health problems, get preventive care such as blood pressure screenings and their flu jab. Throughout our recent ageism events we found that many older people had lots of positive things to say about getting older, just some of the words they used are captured in the word cloud above.

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## **New scam awareness campaign launched for older people**



The ScamwiseNI Partnership has launched a campaign to help empower older people and those who are not regularly online to stay safe against scammers.

The six-month long initiative aims to raise awareness and educate the public by using more traditional media to reach older people who may not be online as often. The campaign material will feature on radio and newspaper advertisements, along with posters in public transport spaces, including bus shelters and inside buses.

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## Engagement round up



Autumn has been a busy season of engagements for the Commissioner, as well as hosting our 'Tackling ageism' events in each county, the Commissioner travelled across Northern Ireland for a range of events.

Starting off in September the Commissioner joined a range of speakers at Queens University Belfast's Inaugural Dementia Conference, which focused on 'Caring for today, living for tomorrow'. The Commissioner made an address to an audience of healthcare workers who provide care to people with dementia in a clinical setting or in the community, highlighting three main areas for planning for tomorrow: Diagnosis, infrastructure and support.

At the end of September the Commissioner travelled to Irvinestown, Co Fermanagh to meet with members of the South West Age Partnership (SWAP). SWAP's main objective is to work in partnership with statutory agencies to deliver services for older people in the Fermanagh and Omagh area. Discussion on the bus pass, GP appointments, loneliness and the need for better support for Older People Groups were addressed at the meeting.

The Commissioner travelled to the Causeway Coast and Glenn's on two occasions, firstly in September for the Coleraine Borough 50+ information event, which hosted more than 200 older people as well as a number of exhibitors. Then, in October Ballymoney Evergreen Club warmly welcomed the Commissioner, who gave an overview of his role and answered questions on scams, the cost of living crisis and GP appointments. The club are Northern Ireland's longest running older peoples' group.



reminded the audience of our local saying '*Our Health is our Wealth*' but pointed out that if politicians don't prioritise and invest in our health system we will all be much poorer. The Commissioner said that by mid-2027, the number of people aged 65 and over will outnumber children in Northern Ireland. Other key note speakers included Mary Peters, Ambassador for Age NI and Professor Max Watson, Palliative Care Clinician amongst others.

If you are interested in having the Commissioner visit your group or attend an event, you can get in contact via email to [communications@copni.org](mailto:communications@copni.org)

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## Words of wisdom with...Gloria Hunniford



This month's words of wisdom is with Gloria Hunniford (83) who, still working, has enjoyed a hugely successful career that now spans more than 75 years.

A wonderful example of positive ageing, as part of our Positive Ageing Month campaign Gloria took time out of her busy broadcasting schedule for a special 'words of wisdom' interview to share her thoughts with us about getting older.

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