



Valuable Volunteers: The Importance of ‘Meals on Wheels’ to Rural Ageing

Gabrielle Kane, B.A.

MA in Rural Sustainability

School of Geography and Archaeology

National University of Ireland, Galway

Research Advisor: Dr. Therese Conway

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Abstract

Everyday real and measureable improvements are made to the quality of life experienced by countless people living in our local communities as a result of the work of volunteers. This research project was conducted as part of the MA in Rural Sustainability curriculum. The aim was to examine the importance of voluntary organisations such as ‘Meals-on-Wheels’ to rural ageing dwellers. Defining the rural is often fraught with difficulty due to its lack of homogeneity. The needs and demands of rural dwellers vary between place and place as there is no homogeneity in the rural. With the use of a mix methodology, data was collected in the form of six interviews conducted with representatives of ‘Meals-on-Wheels’ organisations and fifty two in-depth surveys in the surrounding areas. In the form of a thematic analysis and with the use of various other programs the data was analysed. The results highlighted the benefits of the voluntary sector, the poor provision of services in the rural, and the importance of the ‘Meals-on-Wheels’ organisation. With the use of the literature review and results recommendations were devised. The dependence on the voluntary sector needs to be acknowledged and future research needs to be conducted.

Declaration of Originality

“I, _____, declare that the dissertation entitled ‘*Valuable Volunteers: The Importance of ‘Meals-on-Wheels’ to Rural Elderly*’, for the partial fulfilment of the MA in Rural Sustainability is entirely my own work. Neither the work, nor parts thereof have been published elsewhere in either paper or electronic form unless indicated otherwise through referencing. With the exception of quotes obtained during the data collection, which remain anonymous for ethical reasons”.

Date: ____/____/ 2015 Signature: _____

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Glossary

CSP – Community Services Programme (Pobal)

RSS – Rural Social Scheme

TUS – Community Work Placement Initiative

HSE – Health Service Executive

FÁS – Irish National Training and Employment Authority

MoW – ‘Meals-on-Wheels’

SPSS – Statistical Package for the Social Sciences

IRL – Irish Rural Link

PAR – Participatory Action Research

PRA – Participatory Rural Appraisal

HeSSOP - Health and Social Services for Older People

NCAOP – National Council on Ageing and Older People

CSO – Central Statistics Office

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Chapter 1 – Introduction

1.1 Introduction

‘Meals-on-Wheels’ is one of the many crucial services available to elderly people that is under researched. This chapter outlines the justification for this study and explains the necessity of it as the content may possibly influence future rural development policies put in place in favour of voluntary organisations. The aim and objectives are outlined within this chapter in addition to the data sources and logic behind the study and the ways in which the research questions will be investigated.

Aim, Objectives and Data Sources

Aims:

The aim of this project is to, and to explore the extent to which ageing rural residents benefit from the ‘Meals-on-Wheels’ program and other voluntary activities, and the potential to greater develop the current networks and future networks.

Objectives:

- Identify literature in the rural context on:
 - Defining the rural and rural development
 - Service provision
 - Volunteerism
 - ‘Meals-on-Wheels’
- Find ‘Meals-on-Wheels’ organisations in Ireland
- Collect primary data from organisations and the general public
- Highlight the benefits of Meals on Wheels to both recipients and volunteers
- Identify variations in provision of services
- Identify and highlight gaps in service provision
- Produce recommendations based on the data collected
- Construct a research report

Data Sources:

Irish Rural Link

General Public (Survey)

Representatives of 'Meals-on-Wheels'

1.2 Background and Context

Everyday real and measureable improvements are made to the quality of life experienced by countless people living in our local communities as a result of the work of volunteers. "Volunteers fill gaps in meeting social, economic and community needs" and are "vital to protecting, retaining, and maintaining rural communities" (Brennan, 2005; pp. 60). In previous years development approaches were solely based on economic aspirations. But due to the new rural development paradigm concern for the welfare, quality of life, and services that are associated with rural communities has increased in recent years. It is thanks to the dedicated work of voluntary organizations in many rural areas that have enabled people live in their homes happily as long as possible. The movement to the new rural development paradigm is outlined during the literature review chapter alongside the other theoretical underpinnings of this research project.

Following the literature review the methodology and data analysis techniques are outlined. The use of the mixed methodology allowed for numerous findings to emerge. The impact and opinions concerning service provisions, the importance of the voluntary sector, ageing in the rural and different facets of the 'Meals-on-Wheels' organization will be explored. Volunteerism benefits more than just the immediate recipient. It offers you wonderful opportunities for professional development and personal growth. The associated benefits are outlined in the results chapter which is followed by recommendations based on the findings. The paper will end with an overall conclusion and discussion chapter followed by an appendix containing samples of the interview consent form, interview invitation letter, volunteer survey, semi-structured interview questions used. Additional results can also be found in the last chapter.

1.3 Conclusion

In order for the elderly in rural areas of the country to remain independent in their home certain services and facilities are needed to sustain an adequate standard of living. Isolation and loneliness among the elderly has sever implications on their health and mental health wellbeing. It is due to the dedicated work of volunteers in organizations such as ‘Meals-on-Wheels’ that it is possible for reductions in the feeling of isolation and overall increased standard of living in rural areas. The data collection, analysis and creation of the recommendations and conclusions were all performed in a way which best suited the aim and objectives outlined.

Chapter 2 - Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

A literature review “provides a context for the proposed study and demonstrates why it is important and timely” (Rudestam and Newton, 1992; pp. 46). The key themes explored in this research project included the perceptions and realities of the rural, ageing in the rural, volunteerism, and the impact of voluntary activity in rural areas. The importance of social capital, networking, knowledge transfer and adequate support are recurring sub-themes throughout the entire research project. Firstly this chapter outlines the shift of development approaches in the rural and the emergence of the new rural development paradigm. The aftermath of these changes are then explored in the context of living in the rural with particular emphasis on ageing rural dwellers. Finally, volunteerism will be explored in depth. Defining volunteering, who volunteers, the importance of the voluntary sector and an overview of the importance of voluntary organisations such as ‘Meals-on-Wheels’ to ageing rural dwellers is outlined.

2.2 Defining the Rural – The Rural Idyll

There is no precise definition of the rural internationally due to the complexity, diversity and ever changing nature of the rural. Nevertheless the RDP (2014) state that “comparable statistics show that Ireland is by its nature very rural’ and has a much higher percentage of its territory and population living in rural areas than the EU 27 average”. This fact alone states the importance of rural research and understanding for future economic, social and environmental sustainability success. Many terms and concepts which take place within the rural lack a precise definition due to its complexity. However for the purpose of this research project the relationship between the rural elderly and the voluntary sector will be explored. Rural ageing is for many older people an increasingly complex and variable process, and indeed an increasingly complex research setting (Walsh et al., 2012).

In recent years, there has been an increase in the recognition of the indefinite functions and meanings of rural space, which has in turn assisted in the acceptance that rural space is an ambiguous and complex concept (Woods, 2011). Due to our perceptions being continuously shaped by the wide range of stimuli constantly surrounding us and the diversity of rural areas, individuals often disagree on the definition of the rural (Woods, 2005). The way in which the countryside is imagined in popular discourse, can often have little or no correspondence with the actual realities of rural space and rural life (Woods, 2011). Nevertheless, the rural is of great importance due to its many functions (Woods, 2005). All in all regardless of the fact that there has been no success in obtaining a definition of the rural descriptively, there has been a realization that it is more beneficial to approach the rural as a social construct (ibid). The social construct is sometimes referred to as the rural idyll.

The rural idyll is one issue which is faced on a daily basis in the development of policies for the sustainable development of rural areas. Bell (2006) conducted research on the origin of idylls, with emphasis on the rural idyll, and concluded that they seem to originate in the urban. It is what people have conjured up in their minds, due to their surroundings and from certain perceptions portrayed by the media for example (ibid). The rural idyll may only exist in the imagination, as a symbolic landscape as urbanisms other, but the importance and sensitivity of the rural idyll to a person living in the rural should be of great importance when planning development (Bell, 2006). Rural idylls can be the same, or differ greatly depending on a person's personal experiences (ibid). Subsequently, if policies and management strategies are being created based on the rural idyll, which is a social construction, the actual understanding and appreciation of the differences in rural areas may be getting overlooked, and the appropriate attention required to achieve long-term sustainable development is not being achieved (Sharp et al., 2002).

2.2.1 Rural Development

Similar to defining the term rural, rural development is a concept that is fraught with difficulty and some may say impossible to define (Woods, 2005; McDonagh, 1998). Due to

forces such as globalisation, there continues to be geographically uneven results produced at a variety of social and spatial levels, with areas either stagnant or declining while other regions are flourishing (Day, 1998). Nonetheless, the rural is rich in terms of its social capital, values, culture, sense of community, heritage, traditions, and recently rural development has been prominent in terms of political, economic, social and environmental discussions (ibid). Van der Ploeg et al. (2000) describes the new rural development approach as a multi-level process that requires engagement with the various levels of society, which is in contrast to previous approaches or lack thereof. The Cork Declaration Act, which was presented in 1996, also highlighted the importance of endogenous rural development approaches in contrast to the previous top-down approaches. In terms of a broad, yet complex, picture of rural development it was emphasised that an “overall improvement in the economic and social well-being of rural residents and in the institutional and physical environment in which they live” was of great importance (Jasma et al., 1981 in Keane and Quinn, 1990; pp. 2). The use of top-down approaches to obtain economic survival and prosperity in rural areas often resulted in various negative impacts due to the lack of an overall integrated approach. Loss of social values such as culture, a sense of community, heritage, and traditions which are now being acknowledged as the unique richness of the rural were a common occurrence (Day, 1998). The use of integrated approaches, subsidiarity and partnerships between state and local actors through the use of networks are now portrayed as the superior approach to sustainable rural development.

Certainly while this is the theory, enabling this to happen in practice is far from straight forward. A communities and even an individual’s perception of what their rural area and rurality entails significantly impacts and contributes to the success of rural development in terms of its programmes, processes and policies, and in order to obtain, build, and respect these perceptions a bottom-up approach is essential (Shortall, 1994). Acknowledgment of this fact has resulted in the creation of local action groups and community groups throughout Ireland which are run by both paid and un-paid staff. The involvement of the voluntary sector in these organisations is crucial to the future sustainability of rural areas. The nature around

rural development processes has evolved and is continuing to evolve and one aspect which long been noted is that older adults living in rural areas have significant, unique, and often unmet needs which need to be addressed and the use of local groups may provide the most successful processes (Krout and Bull, 2006). Volunteering, although always prominent in society and development, is also an activity which requires engagement with various levels of society to be successful and most importantly sustainable.

2.2.2 Sustainable Rural Development

The concept of sustainable development has been evolving for many years and has become a meeting point of discussion for different ideas, alternative understandings and even human betterment (Dryzek, 1997). Due to its rewards, sustainable development is becoming more widespread and incorporated into various sectors of society, becoming a common universal goal (ibid). Yet similar to the rural, we still experience difficulties in defining it. The major discussion initiating the theory sustainable development is found in the report of the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED, 1987). The Commission's Report, commonly known as the Brundtland report, defined Sustainable development as "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (ibid). This definition established the need for integrated decision making that is capable of balancing the economic and social needs of the people while balancing the capacity of the natural environment (Rogers et al. 2008). Sustainable development is thus not just concerned with just preservation of the physical environment, although it is important and most commonly affiliated with it, is also concerned with socio-cultural and economic impacts on society and their quality of life (Strange and Bayley, 2008).

2.3 Ageing in the Rural

The practicalities of living in the rural have also changed drastically. No longer solely a place of production, the rural is now characterised as a highly dynamic area made up of different

beliefs, ethnicities, employment needs, and practices (McDonagh, 2001). This change in rural areas has subsequently resulted in a transformation of the needs and demands. Although welfare needs and demands vary between rural areas depending on the circumstances in question, it is of great importance that social, economic and environmental concerns are equally addressed (van der Ploeg., 2008). The movement from addressing predominately economic concerns towards the inclusion of environmental and social concerns is evident in the development of the new rural development paradigm (ibid). Emphasis on the importance of social capital, area-based development, and social inclusion through the use of endogenous development approaches have been and continue to be implemented in a hope of empowering rural communities (Reed, 2008; Mahon, 2007). But not all communities have enough social and financial capital embedded in their area to thrive.

Everyone will experience some critical moments during their life course. Specifically, older people due to the nature of increasing age and fragility often include moments such as the transition from work to retirement, active to passive, good health to poor health, from caregiver to cared recipient and ultimately from life to death (Milligan, 2009). The older one becomes, the more they are at the mercy of organizations, individuals, businesses and even family and friends (Harber and Ginsberg, 1990). The elderly face many problems, including issues such as loneliness, security and health problems regardless of geographical location.

There are many advantages to living in a rural area, but unfortunately there is also many disadvantages faced by rural dwellers with many having a greater impact on ageing rural residents. Ideas surrounding growing older in rural areas is similar to the constructions of rural idylls. Rural areas can often be portrayed as a problem-free idyllic environment with strong social ties and a slower pace of life, however it does not always match up with reality (Connolly et al., 2012). Although growing older in rural areas has its advantages, it also has its disadvantages with valid arguments backing both standpoints (Wenger, 2001). In terms of disadvantages, there are a number of distinct challenges linked to ageing in a rural area that have been argued. Some of the most common disadvantages faced by rural dwellers is the lack of availability, accessibility, and adequacy of health and social service provision

(Glasgow, et al., 2004; Krout and Bull, 2006). These disadvantages are not restricted to ageing rural dwellers but the impact is often to a greater extent. Due to the move to the new rural development paradigm and increased concerns for social and environmental welfare, improvements have been made. While many more improvements are essential, several of the disadvantages faced by rural dwellers can be alleviated by supporting the voluntary activities and services that need to be established or are already established and poorly supported.

2.3.1 Service Provision in Rural Areas

Services have a “pivotal role” to play “in ensuring quality of life and developing the rural economy” (Missingham et al., 2006, pp. 134). The nature, causes and impacts of the lack of service provisions generally affect the older population more as they have a greater need for services, but the disadvantages are complex and affect all age groups living in rural areas (Krout and Bull, 2006). One barrier identified in relation to the utilisation of services they required was knowledge, people can only decide on using a service if they know its existence. Deficits of service provision are directly linked with decreased overall quality of life and for this reason there needs to be an increase in the amount of research to highlight what needs to be considered in developing and implementing successful programmes for rural elders (Krout and Bull, 2006). The disadvantages faced by rural elders is a complex topic with many facets changing from person to person. Due to the geographic isolation of many rural households the proximity to simple day to day necessities such as a shop can be extensive. In most rural areas, an automobile is the only means of transportation which for some means there is a reliance on family, friends and neighbours to travel (Krout and Bull, 2006). The lack of transportation is one disadvantage which then can directly impact the level of face to face interaction a person might encounter on a daily basis in turn creating a sense of isolation. There needs to be a range of quality services available, appropriate to ageing dwellers varying needs, abilities and preferences to allow them to live out their older years in confidence, with dignity and respect. The National Council conducted a study,

Health and Services for Older People 2001, highlighted the fact that 87% of people wanted to remain living in their own homes even though 10% of older people found carrying out daily tasks such as preparing a meal difficult unaided (Garavan et al., 2001). Fortunately, in recent years there has been an increase in the number of organisations alleviating some of the disadvantages faced by rural dwellers. Community Support Services are one example of the organisations that are available in a select few areas providing services such as laundry, transport, meals, and even befriending services. These services are generally simple day to day tasks, however the positive benefits which arise as a results are invaluable. Allowing the transfer from home to a home to be delayed. The Harmony Centre which is the community support service in Castlebar is a fantastic example of a successful agency and one of the key reasons is the presence of a highly dedicated voluntary team.

2.4 Social Capital and Networking

One definition of social capital is the “features of social organization - such as networks of secondary associations, high levels of interpersonal trust and norms of mutual aid and reciprocity - which act as resources for individuals and facilitate collective action” (Lochner et. al., 1999, p. 260). Definitions of social capital vary, some definition focus on norms, values and attitudes while others focus on social structures and some including both. Social capital have been recognised as being vital for functioning markets and economic activity for centuries and as by Adam Muller “a communities stock of social and entrepreneurial capital largely determines its economic fortunes” (Woolcock, 2008, p.153; MA Rural Sustainability, 2005). However most researchers agree that a key component to social capital is the networking element. The network is based around relationships between entities such as organisations or people that connect for a variety of purposes (Scott et al., 2008). Networks exist in a number of formations including horizontally, vertically and diagonally (Michael 2007). Putnam suggests that social capital must be embedded in a network in order to be powerful because a society of many isolated individuals although positive is not as beneficial. It is “the connections among individuals – social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them” that allows an area to be

considered rich in social capital (Putnam, 2000; pp. 19). It is not the individuals themselves or the “networks that are so important but the objects and relations that flow through them” (Murdoch, 2000, p. 417).

The CEDRA report (2014) indicated that niche markets can lead to fragmentation of a common purpose which inhibits local development (CEDRA, 2014). This theory can be applied to the development of voluntary organisations such as ‘Meals-on-Wheels’. Collaboration with other organisations and embarrassing both the embedded and disembedded social capital can be detrimental to its future. Disembeddedness entails that a group of a local area looks outside their own and promote other areas within the same region as a way to establish other forms of socioeconomic support from a diversity of sources. Networks with similar organisations promotes the sharing of knowledge and information along with innovation (Costa et al. 2008).

Unfortunately in recent years, rapid social and economic development due to processes such as globalisation and modernisation have depleted a society once rich in social capital. People working longer hours and increased distances between daily necessities and activities are just two of the many reasons that a more individualistic and impersonal lifestyle is beginning to emerge. Advances in technology have enabled this processes as it has increased the availability and accessibility to information and resources which can be seen as beneficial. However it is in conjunction with a substantial reduction in face to face interactions with other people including community members. The reduction in active community memberships and social networks has in turn resulted in closures of many rural community centres, sporting groups, activity groups and local events. This decline of social capital, closure of local facilities and downsized groups in rural areas increases isolation of rural areas both geographically and socially. The reduction of social capital negatively impacts both urban and rural areas, however the externalities reflected in rural areas are detrimental to the future sustainability.

2.5 Volunteerism

According to Brennan (2005) volunteers ‘fill gaps in meeting social, economic and community needs’ and are “vital to protecting, retaining, and maintaining rural communities” (Brennan, 2005; pp. 60). This dependence is the reason why an understanding of the various aspects of volunteer participation is crucial for future sustainability. Voluntary contribution is often strengthened by the building of relationships and networks between individuals that share common interests and concerns. The relationships and involvement of individuals are actions which are closely related to the deeply researched concepts of social capital and endogeneity, however in order to fully understand the impact of voluntary contribution in the rural, it is important to understand the motivations of voluntary participation and what factors shape voluntary contribution (Fyfe, 2005; Ryan et al., 2005).

2.5.1 Definition of Volunteering

There is no universally agreed definition of volunteering. The Government’s White Paper Supporting a Framework for Voluntary Activity defined volunteering as the “commitment of time and energy for the benefit of society, local communities, individuals outside the immediate family, the environment, and other causes” which are “undertaken at a person’s free will without payment” (Whitepaper, 2000; pp. 83). Wilson (2000) defines volunteering as “any activity in which time is given freely to benefit another person, group or cause” (Wilson, 2000; pp. 215). Specific facets of volunteering such as the reasons for engaging in volunteering based activities is one particular topic that has been and continues to be debated on many occasions by researchers, who have support to back up each debate (Wilson, 2000). Nevertheless, most definitions demonstrate that there is an element of exchange in volunteering. Overall literature regarding the definition of volunteerism and social activism is open to debate for a number of reasons but the general definitions do not differ greatly.

2.5.2 The Volunteer – Benefits and Importance

“Life is a wonderful journey and you never know where it will take you. Volunteering can help you be more than a passive traveller” (Merril, 2001). Volunteers operate in thousands of different organisations in a variety of different roles. In recent years there has been substantial growth in the demands placed on the voluntary sector. But the rate at which the number of people are engaging in voluntary roles is not at a matching rate. Bussell and Forbes (2002) describes it as “striving to recruit from a decreasing pool of volunteers (Bussell and Forbes, 2002, pp. 245). The reasons for engaging in voluntary activity has also changed in recent years. Engagement in voluntary activity was originally dominated by altruistic motives (ibid). Often to be considered a volunteer, an altruistic and selfless motives are required to be the core motivation (ibid). This has shifted due to extensive literature and awareness raised around the additional benefits of the voluntary sector. The topic of volunteering is usually assumed to take place to benefit the recipient, when in reality the recipient, participant and surrounding family, friends and community members are also positively impacted. There is extensive literature that documents the relationships between volunteering and positive outcomes (Morrow-Howell et al., 2009). Findings are inconsistent as to whether some groups benefit from volunteering more than others but some of the most commonly associated benefits include:

- Incredible networking opportunities - development of life long personal and professional relationships
- Helps in the retaining and sharpening of old skills and developing new skills – employers seek well-rounded and experienced individuals
- Increased self-confidence – allows for practice of new techniques and skills by observing others and seeing best practice examples
- Expansion of new career options – strengthening of networks and skills and the development of invaluable teamwork skills are highly sought after
- Self-satisfying, energising and renewing – can reduce the feeling of social isolation through involvement, can give balance in life, and allows for a break in routine

(Merril, 2001)

Regardless of whether engaging in voluntary activity is just be a once off or it is a thing where the person gets fully embedded and if it is or isn't for altruistic motive volunteering in a complex topic that has numerous definitions of which all have an element of exchange (Bussell and Forbes, 2002). In Morrow-Howell et al. (2009) research it was reported 90% of volunteers believed that the people or community served by a program were better off in addition to the personal benefits obtained (Morrow-Howell et al., 2009).

2.5.3 Volunteering in Ireland

There has been a long tradition of voluntary activity and charitable service in Ireland that has been shaped by religious, political and economic developments forming a substantial element of national economic and social life (AVSO 2004; Volunteering Ireland, 2009; GHK, no date). Since 2000, there has been an increasingly extensive body of literature available on the complex issue of volunteerism within the area of social partnerships and local government reform in Ireland concerning volunteerism. However prior to 2006, the only quantitative data on volunteering were based on a number of sample surveys (CIB, 2010). Due to the collection of data on volunteering in the 2006 census, there is now an idea of the national profile of volunteering in Ireland. The volunteer questions compiled results including age, motive and incentives, social class, occupation and various other characteristics which influence a person's engagement. The data from the 2006 Census provided an interesting data set to compare to the primary data collected for this research project on the rural elderly. Overall, volunteers make an enormous contribution to the well-being of society and the importance of continued support and fostering of the voluntary sector is crucial. It is recognised that the voluntary and community sector is not just about providing services and that having people interacting voluntarily at a community level can bring about an innovativeness that would not be there if carried out directly by the state. The involvement of local bodies is a reflection of the endogenous rural development approach. The Governments White Paper on a "Framework for Supporting Voluntary Activity" which was launched in 2000 was the first time that the importance of developing relationships

between the state, community and voluntary sector and the invaluable contribution that the voluntary sector contributed to society was identified for the first time.

2.5.3.1 White Paper “Supporting a Framework for Voluntary Activity”

Everyday real and measureable improvements are made to the quality of life experienced by countless people living in our local communities as a result of the work of volunteers. The White Paper’s core agreement was that the work of volunteers is crucial to the well-being of our society as a whole and is structures because “an active community and voluntary sector contributes to a democratic, pluralist society, provides opportunities for the development of decentralised and participative structures and fosters a climate in which the quality of life can be enhance for all” (White Paper, 2000). The purpose of the White Paper was to formulate a coherent strategy for the support of the community and voluntary sector. It recognised the great differences in scale from sector to sector, from the small community projects to the large organisations representing particular groups, all of which are invaluable and require support and strength to continue their contribution to the development of our society. The community and voluntary sector are diverse and complex and for that reason the paper was created to highlight the main issues and recommendations faced by all organisations. There were many promises within the paper including funding which has unfortunately not been witnessed to the same extent to date.

2.6 Conclusion

This chapter has weaved together some of the many theoretical underpinnings that informed both how the field-based data was collected and how the recommendations were devised. It has illustrated the significant changes experienced inside the rural, the change from top-down approaches to bottom-up approaches, the impact of the changes have had and are having rural society development, the concept of social capital and networking in development, and most importantly the volunteerism. Defining a volunteer, who volunteers, the benefits of volunteering and volunteering in Ireland were also introduced. It must be

noted this study was conducted in a very short time frame and is by no means an exhaustive list of the facets which should be considered in the planning, execution and evaluation on this topic.

Chapter 3 - Research Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This chapter provides details on the methodology utilized to examine the importance of the voluntary sector in rural areas and the invaluable nature of 'Meals-on-Wheels' organizations which provide services to ageing rural residents. It is structured into four main sections. Firstly the choice of research design, chosen methodology will be highlighted and theoretical framework will be outlined. Following this, the methods of data collection and how the data was analyzed will be explained. Lastly, the research considerations coupled with this research project, such as the ethical considerations, will be discussed.

3.2 Developing a Research Proposal

Geography is a very diverse subject which broadly speaking is broken up into two disciplines including the study of human behaviour and the physical environment. Despite its complexity, all geographers regardless of their methodological approach or philosophical stance must make common decisions and go through common processes when embarking on research (Clifford et al., 2010). The specific questions being addresses and the audience in question must be considered during the preparatory work which involves thinking through the practicalities of the data collection, how the data will be managed and analysed, and how it will be presented must all take place (Clifford et al., 2010; Frentling, 2002). Some of the preliminary yet crucial considerations include health and safety, evaluating the ethical issues, time constraints and the practicalities of the methodology proposed (Flowerdew and Martin, 2005).

This research project falls under the category of human geography. At many levels rsearch for a human geographer involved the process gaining a better understanding of the relationships between humans, space, place and the environment (Kitchin and Tate, 2013). In order to present an interpretation that advances the understanding of interactions within the world, the researcher must carefully generate and analyse evidence before reflecting and evaluating the significance of the findings (Kitchin and Tate, 2013).

3.3 Theoretical Framework

Philosophy, which focuses on how things and people are in society, is important in the field of human geography (Graham, 2005). Due to the partially philosophical nature of the project, in order to understand the perspectives of the voluntary sector both a postmodernism and interpretivism approach were engaged with. Kitchen and Tate (2000) state that postmodernism is based upon the view that there is no one answer and there is no truth outside of individual interpretation (ibid). While by moving away from the positivist approach, interpretivism engages with the understanding of the phenomena (Reilly and Love, 2000; MA in Rural Sustainability, 2015). For this research project it was of great importance to gain insights into the lived experiences of the participants and through the use of an interpretive approach and mixed methodology this was obtainable (ibid).

3.4 Data Collection – Mixed Methods

Generally, a quantitative approach is widely recognised by physical geographers due to its explanation of phenomena through the gathering of numerical data and use of measurements and observations (Longhurst, 2003). Whereas as qualitative approaches, frequently associated with human geographers, includes the collection of data which cannot be expressed in words or in a numerical format (Clifford et al, 2010). Qualitative approaches are used to “emphasize quality, depth, richness and understanding, instead of the statistical representativeness and scientific rigour which are associated with quantitative techniques” (Clifford et al, 2010, pg. 9). Yet in similarity to each other as stated by Preston et al., (2011) non-tangible facets such as attitudes and beliefs can also be analysed statistically. Nevertheless, no single method of fieldwork provides unmediated, unbiased, or privilege access to a topic (Bosco and Moreno, 2009). “All knowledge is produced in specific circumstances and those circumstances shape it in some way” (Rose, 1997, pp.65). For that reason fieldwork typically requires the collection of primary and secondary data through a variety of means. Studies based on solely either quantitative or qualitative data alone can often be inferior to the use of mixed methods (Frentling, 2002; McKendrick, 2009). Mixed methods often allows for data triangulation during the analysis stages which sequentially results in superior comprehension, credibility, and believability in the projects accomplishments (Frentling, 2002; McKendrick, 2009). For this research project a mixed

method approach was chosen and two primary data collection methods were selected, including semi-structured interviews and in-depth surveys. To effectively answer the proposed research questions it was crucial that the primary data collected would be both qualitative and quantitative. Evidence of this accomplishment is visible on inspection of both the semi-structured interview and survey questions and answers as information that had not been considered surfaced and increased the credibility of the findings with data triangulation. Although only two approaches were chosen in the preliminary stages, upon contact with the selected organisations the varieties of data attainable expanded as opportunities to participate and observe the daily workings of a few of the organisations were presented. The in-depth surveys and semi-structured interviews alone provided a substantial amount of data on the various understandings and aspects of the voluntary sector and the 'Meals-on-Wheels' organisations. Furthermore, a reflective journal was utilized throughout the entire data collection process and the participatory action research (PAR) allowed for greater data triangulation and greater insight (Chambers, 1994). Combining the two approaches, both qualitative and quantitative, together with a mixed-methodology, can improve research findings by ensuring that the limitations of one type of data are balanced by the strengths of another.

3.4.1 Surveys

Surveys as a research method has been an important tool in geography for several decades and today considered an essential component of a human geographers tool kit (Clifford et al., 2010). They are particularly useful for eliciting people's attitudes, complex behaviours, social interactions and opinions about social, political and environmental issues (Clifford et al., 2010). The chosen survey design must also be clear and easy to understand for the chosen sample of respondents as even small things such as choice of wording can have a significant impact on the answers obtained. Complex wording, use of jargon, use of multiple questions in one, and unclear/unrefined terminology can all hinder the validity of data collected (Clifford et al., 2010). Prior to developing a survey it is important to have an understanding of the research topic. This particular research topic investigates complex behaviours and opinions. Therefore it was imperative that all questions were worded carefully to avoid influencing the respondent's answers. A portion of the questions were open-ended to allow for unbiased responses with the remainder being close-ended questions in order to obtain

descriptive statistics to compare against previous data sets. To obtain a more accurate data set a large sample was decided upon. The high quantity of surveys required more time and effort in the conducting and analysis stages, but resulted in richer data. Overall the survey was both qualitative and quantitative based and the results of the 52 in-depth surveys collected provided an invaluable snapshot of the voluntary sector and its impact on society.

3.4.2 Semi- Structured Interviews

Semi-structured interviews with representatives of ‘Meals-on-Wheels’ which service rural areas were an instrumental component of this research project as they provided qualitative in-depth knowledge of data. Traditionally an interview is defined as a “face-to-face verbal interchange in which one person, the interviewer, attempts to elicit information or expressions of opinion from another person or persons” (Maccoby and Maccoby, 1954, pp. 499 in Dunn, 2005). The three major forms of interviews include structured, semi-structured and unstructured and in order to be successful careful planning and detailed preparation is required (Dunn, 2005). Each form vary in their strengths and weaknesses depending on the research project and for the purpose of this research project a semi-structured interview method was employed. The conduction of semi-structured interviews involves “the researcher entering with a guide, and a set of possible questions” (Secor, 2010, p. 201). A semi-structured interview often has some degree of predetermined open questions scheduled, but are flexible in the way that they can be addressed, empowering the researcher to redirect the interview if it happens to travel to far off topic (Dunn, 2005). The open ended questions allows for the informant to express in their own words their opinions, experiences and understandings which often expand or fill gaps in knowledge that other data collection methods were unable to obtain. It allowed for an understanding of the different meanings among different people and both verified and scrutinized any misunderstandings and predetermined conclusions. The process of gaining participants for the interviewing process can be described as purposive sampling (Guarte and Barrios, 2006). In the preliminary stages of the research project it was decided to aim for organizations in reasonable proximity to each other for comparison reasons. To accommodate each interviewee, contact was made in advance in order to set suitable times and dates. On initial contact a brief outline of the research aims were highlighted in addition to their rights as a participant and guaranteed

anonymity. The connection with Irish Rural Link and attendance at their recent launch of the Western Region ‘Meals-on-Wheels’ Network and base location in Moate, County Westmeath resulted in the organizations selected being predominately in the West and Midland regions of Ireland as visible from *Image 1 – Map of Interview Locations*. Ease of accessibility of contact information for the organizations was also a key determining factor. The six interviews that took place were with ‘Oughterard Meals-on-Wheels’, ‘Castlebar Social Services’, and ‘Brickens Meals-on-Wheels’ which are located in the western region of Ireland and the for the midland region ‘Longford Meals-on-Wheels’, ‘Tullamore Meals-on-Wheels’ and ‘Ballinasloe Meals-on-Wheels’

Image 1- Map of Interview Destinations



(Author Source, 2015)

were interviewed all providing incomparable insight. Four of the interviews took place in the designated ‘Meals-on-Wheels’ headquarters for their location with the remainder taking place in close proximity to their headquarters. Each participant had a key role in their local organisation and were chosen to provide a comprehensive view as they were identified as having expertise and knowledge in the desired topic of research. Each interview time was different due to varied responses with the average overall time being 45 minutes. With the written consent form signed by all of the participants in addition to verbal consent, each interview was recorded with an Olympus Digital Voice Recorder to avoid vital information from being overlooked in addition to the observation notes taken in the reflective journal.

3.4.3 Reflective Journal and Participant Action Research (PAR)

During both the semi-structured interviews and survey distribution all observations were recorded in a reflective journal. Keeping a reflective journal is noted as a research process that allows for the creation of transparency and having concrete effects on research design (Ortlipp, 2008). The use of a reflective journal is an accepted methodological practice by many including constructivist, feminist, interpretivist, and poststructuralist perspectives

(Denzin, 1994; Lather, 1991; Ortlipp, 2008). The use of a reflective journal during this research project allowed for critical self-reflection and helped avoid any messiness in the research process by adapting approaches to their specific circumstances. The critical self-reflection was also carried out during the PAR. Participatory research methods is a process of conducting the research with the people whose life and meaningful actions are being studied allowing the research questions to develop from the convergence of two perspectives (Bergold and Thomas, 2012). The participatory research process can be a very demanding process, but it enables researchers to rethink any predetermined interpretations of situations by allowing for a step back from familiar routines, interaction, and power relationships to be taken (Bergold and Thomas, 2012). The term PRA, Participatory Rural Appraisal, is also used to describe this approach from a rural perspective (Chambers, 1994). PRA is often said to be in congruence with the shifts in rural development from top-down to bottom-up approaches, exogenous to endogenous development, and from blueprint learning to learning during the processes (Chambers, 1994). PRA enables local people to share, enhance and analyse even their own knowledge with the researcher and when carried out correctly can have astonishing benefits (Mascarenhas et al., 1991; Chambers, 1994)

Following invitations being sent out to participate in the interviews, three of the six organisations presented the opportunity of guided tours around their facilities with one organisation additionally facilitating engagement with the average daily routine. The daily routine consisted of meal preparation, packaging, delivery and reporting any abnormal developments to headquarters. Upon consent from participants a Canon IXUS 310 HS camera was used to obtain pictures, an Olympus Digital Voice Recorder was used when appropriate, and the use of the reflective journal was utilised to record various observations. Additionally, due to an invitation from Irish Rural Link the launch of the western region's 'Meals-on-Wheels' database (Image 2).

Image 2 - IRL Launch of MoW



(Author Source, 2015)

3.5 Data Analysis

Geographers are faced with a vast array of potential subject matter, techniques for data collection, visualisation and analysis (Clifford et al., 2010). The variety of primary data and variables obtained during the fieldwork in addition to the secondary data obtained from rigours desk research was extensive. Due to the use of a mixed method approach numerous different analysis techniques were required. Regardless of the data collected codes were applied to protect the anonymity of the respondents. The 52 surveys and 6 interviews were numerically categorized in no particular order to prevent the breach of privacy. Outlined below are the methods that were used. For the purpose of this research project various programs were utilised to compile, analyse, and create aesthetically pleasing displays of the qualitative and quantitative data including:

Table 1 - Programs and Search Engines Used

Programs	Search Engines
Microsoft Excel	http://www.mapcustomizer.com/
SPSS	https://tagul.com/
Paint	https://www.google.ie/

(Author Source, 2015)

3.5.1 Qualitative Analysis

All of the data generated by the semi-structured interviews and in-depth surveys were analysed using an open coding approach based on grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006; Corbin and Strauss, 2008). Commonly the preferred method of analysis of qualitative data involves a thematic analysis (Aronson, 1994). Firstly the interviews were transcribed. While the process of transcription can be tedious, it allows for a better analysis of what was discussed and prevents the loss of any information that may have been overlooked in the note taking process. On completion, all transcripts were entered into an Excel spread sheet, as seen in Image 3. The use of Excel allowed for efficient identification of the themes, recurring ideas and patterns across all six interviews. The qualitative data from the surveys were analysed in a similar fashion. The information was then cross-referenced in order to establish a correlation between the interviewees and surveys. Cross-reference with the reflective journal

proved advantageous as any observations noted alongside the transcriptions resulted in greater clarity and interpretation of the answers given (Adami and Kiger, 2005)

Image 3- Screenshot of Interview Data in Excel

1. What is the main structure of the organization?	2. When was the organization established?	3. Why was it established?	4. How was it established?	5. Was there any support structures present during the establishment?	6. What current support structures are in place?
We are private but we are managed by the HSE.	It is an organization that started more than 40 years ago	started a little bit over 40s years ago. the aim was to ensure people who were unable because they weren't able to afford or unable because they were feeble and old and lost their confidence to ensure they would get a decent meal per day and I'd say there were some people that have depression or some stuff or whatever or lack of motivation would not cook even if they were physically able to do so and means to do so, some people especially men the bachelor fellas, to ensure people in need got a decent meal.	it was established by a nun whose name escapes me even though her name is mentioned in an agm we had a couple years ago there to celebrate 40th, started a nun and I dunno 5 or 6 little old laddies and a couple young ladies because we still have 2 ladies who were there on day one, one of whom delivers every Christmas day even though she had children and grandchildren now, delivers meals still now every Christmas day since day one	unlike other than funding, rumoured that meals used to be cooked in the homes where needed with their own food. may not be correct so I think the meals were cooked in a building which is no longer there which is off the back where the HSE have the place. now some place like a country home or one of these type of place like a nursery home type place the meals were cooked in there the hse as far as I can see are the equivalent to the health board or whatever it was called at the time, until a few years ago the drivers and the meals on wheels committee had the responsibility of buying the food and we had the responsibility of collecting the money off the people that the meals were given but we don't do that anymore because	voluntary organization which is now run by the health board motion and we are now in recent years we are just voluntary drivers and we get a thing that size from the health board and the kitchen. Now cooked in nursing home
Yes we are private	Let me think. It was around 1998 I think, so around 16 or 17 years	Well it was two ladies that started it. Two retired ladies by themselves and I think they just knew of a few individuals in the area that needed meals. So it started off for just two or three and as it grew they gathered volunteers and they felt it was important.	Yeah so I guess it was just two retired ladies which were active in their community that knew of a few who could benefit of the meals on wheels.	No, no they very much so did it themselves. Got in their car, went to the local hotel to collect meals and delivered them to whoever needed it. They did it themselves. And they have only just retired. They have been involved up till now	Well we have applied a grant from the HSE, if that what you mean. And a couple of other grants... the lottery... Vincent de Paul I suppose, there is a local conference here and they have actually given us a support, gave us a big grant a couple of years ago they have been very helpful, now we haven't gone back to them since but we know they are there if need them.
voluntary, registered charity, limited organization	established 1972 made limited 2007	established because CSP needed to be limited to get funding and more established with board of directors.	Sisters of mercy established it in 1973 and ran it 2007 when money ran out and needed funding. Nuns had no money but gave the building to the organization which is community based.	Nuns had no money but gave the building to the organization which is community based.	Partially funded by HSE and we get section 39 grant to support meals on wheels Takes about 35 to run the service for the year. We get a HSE grant 50k and community service grant of about 90k for staffing and rest from income from building through renting out rooms to different groups.
We are a voluntary organization. All voluntary	We started in 2006	we just saw a need for it. we were cooking dinners in house and people coming in but we found it was a bit of trouble for people to go through the trouble of getting dressed coming out and have to get a lift someone to drop them if they can't drive. so we decided to start doing meals on wheels.	part of care center	it was just ourselves here who founded it. we just saw the need for it	yeah we got support from the hse and we section funding from the hse, and we also have the csp public funding which pays 5 full time staff plus wages, and we have 60 workers, we have a tus worker and we have rcs.
Voluntary Company, Charity	Over 40 year circa 1971,	there was a need.	A nun and a Doctor started it. They went to Kilkenny on a fact finding mission to see the	Midland health board at the time	We get some funding from HSE but mostly church gate and local funding (different events like night

(Author Source, 2015)

The process of coding and identification of themes is referred to as a thematic analysis and allows for a researcher to gain a better understanding, as well as numerous other advantages, of the phenomenon being studied (Marks and Yardley, 2004; Anderson, 2010). Braun and Clarke (2006) define a thematic analysis as a qualitative method of “identifying, analysing and reporting patterns and themes within data”. (pp. 79). The use of coding in this research project allowed for the identification of common themes which were central to the analysis, as it highlighted the reoccurring topics and in doing so accentuated their importance. The identification of themes and sub-themes were then cross-referenced against previously generated data sets to identify similarities.

3.5.2 Quantitative Analysis

The quantitative data was analysed using SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences). SPSS is a comprehensive and flexible statistical packages that analyses and manipulates complex data with simple instructions for interactive and non-interactive use (<http://www.spss.co.in/index.aspx>). Image 4 displays a portion of the survey data in SPSS.

Image 4 - Screenshot of Survey Data in SPSS

	var1	var2	var3	var4	var5	var6	var7	var8	var9a	var9b	var9c	var9d	var9e	var9f	var9g	var10a
1	Male	18 - 24	Student	No	Never	Yes	No	No	No	Yes	No	No	No	No	Yes	Yes
2	Female	18 - 24	Student	Yes	Occasionally	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	No	No	Yes
3	Female	18 - 24	Student	No	Never	Yes	No	No	Yes	No	No	No	No	No	No	Yes
4	Female	25 - 35	Employed	Yes	Occasionally	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	Yes	No	Yes
5	Female	36 - 45	Employed	Yes	Very Frequ...	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No	Yes	Yes
6	Male	56 - 65	Retired	Yes	Very Frequ...	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
7	Female	18 - 24	Employed	No	Never	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	No	No	No
8	Female	18 - 24	Student	No	Never	Yes	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	Yes
9	Male	25 - 35	Employed	Yes	Very Rarely	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	No	No	Yes
10	Female	56 - 65	Employed	Yes	Very Rarely	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	No	No	Yes
11	Female	18 - 24	Student	Yes	Never	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No	No	No	No	No	Yes
12	Female	56 - 65	Employed	Yes	Frequently	Yes	No	No	Yes	No	No	No	No	No	No	Yes
13	Female	56 - 65	Employed	Yes	Occasionally	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No	No	No	No	No	No	Yes
14	Male	46 - 55	Employed	Yes	Rarely	Yes	No	No	No	Yes	No	No	No	No	No	No
15	Female	56 - 65	Employed	Yes	Frequently	No	Yes	No	No	No	No	Yes	No	No	No	Yes
16	Female	25 - 35	Employed	Yes	Occasionally	Yes	No	No	Yes	No	No	No	No	No	No	Yes
17	Male	18 - 24	Employed	Yes	Rarely	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes
18	Female	18 - 24	Student	No	Never	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	Yes
19	Female	18 - 24	Student	Yes	Frequently	Yes	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	Yes
20	Male	25 - 35	Employed	Yes	Occasionally	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No	Yes	No	No	Yes
21	Female	25 - 35	Employed	No	Never	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No
22	Female	56 - 65	Retired	Yes	Occasionally	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No	No	No
23	Female	36 - 45	Employed	Yes	Occasionally	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No	No	No	Yes
24	Female	36 - 45	Employed	Yes	Occasionally	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No	No	No	Yes	Yes
25	Female	36 - 45	Employed	Yes	Occasionally	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No	No	No	Yes
26	Male	25 - 35	Employed	No	Never	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	Yes	No	No	Yes
27	Male	18 - 24	Student	Yes	Occasionally	Yes	No	No	No	Yes	No	No	Yes	No	No	Yes
28	Female	25 - 35	Employed	No	Never	No	No	No	Yes	No	No	No	No	No	No	Yes
29	Female	25 - 35	Employed	Yes	Very Rarely	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	No	No	No	No	No	Yes

(Author Source, 2015)

SPSS software was a key element in utilizing the data for this research project as it enabled the cross tabulation analysis of different variables which through the use of traditional methods would take considerable time. SPSS aided the process of producing the data visually and extensively through the use of tables and graphs.

3.5.3 Data Triangulation

The purpose of conducting the studies with these organisations was to validate the information obtained during the desk research and to gain an internal perspective and understanding. A better understanding of the day to day workings within the organisation

and the benefits and challenges faces on a daily basis are invaluable in developing a conclusion to the research project. The use of the information obtained in the surveys and the interviews together allowed for data triangulation. Data triangulation is particularly useful in researching previously under research areas. Data triangulation in research refers to the use of multiple techniques in the collecting and analysing of data within a single study (Adami and Kiger, 2005). Confirmation of apparent findings and completeness of a research project are two of the main purposes of data triangulation (ibid).

3.6 Research Considerations

A risk assessment was carried out in the primary stages to identify any potential issues that could arise as it allows time for appropriate action to take place and mitigate them (Flowerdew and Martin, 2005). Categories which usually arise when discussing social structures within a community, such as the elderly, are strongly grounded in a personal nature which consequently requires a sensitive and ethical approach on investigation to avoid conflict. Practical issues including time constraints, ethics, reflexivity and availability may materialise during any research project and were taken into consideration and all of the possible obstacles were either completely avoided or minimized (Clifford et al., 2010). As the literature review on ageing people residing in rural areas illuminates vulnerability, frailness, and an overall lack of social support a number of precautions were taken to ensure the wellbeing of the participants and anyone involved. Ethical suggestions and guidelines were sought from the Research Ethics Department of National University of Ireland Galway. A few precautions which took place during the collection of the fieldwork included accurately informing the participants of the purpose of the research project, the wearing of personal identification, and constant reassurance that there is complete anonymity on all information gathered as outlined on the consent form. Knowledge is constantly being influenced by surroundings such as the media, and although a researcher must carefully generate and analyse evidence before reflecting and evaluating the significance of the findings, constant self-recognition and recognition of the participants' position must be taken into account regularly (Rose, 1997; Kitchin and Tate, 2013). This recognition is crucial

during all stages of the research project from the start to finish. Regardless of the time constraints and potential ethical issues that could have arisen the amount, quality, and credibility of the data was extensive.

3.7 Conclusion

This chapter addressed the theoretical framework and methods used in this research project. It paid particular attention to the use of a mixed methods approach and thematic analysis. An interpretive and reflective approach was adopted and the use of a mixed methodology supported this choice. In total there were 6 semi-structured interviews conducted and 52 surveys were completed. Interviews were transcribed verbatim after which an extensive thematic analysis was conducted. Ethical guidelines were followed and anonymity was guaranteed to all participants.

Chapter 4 - Results

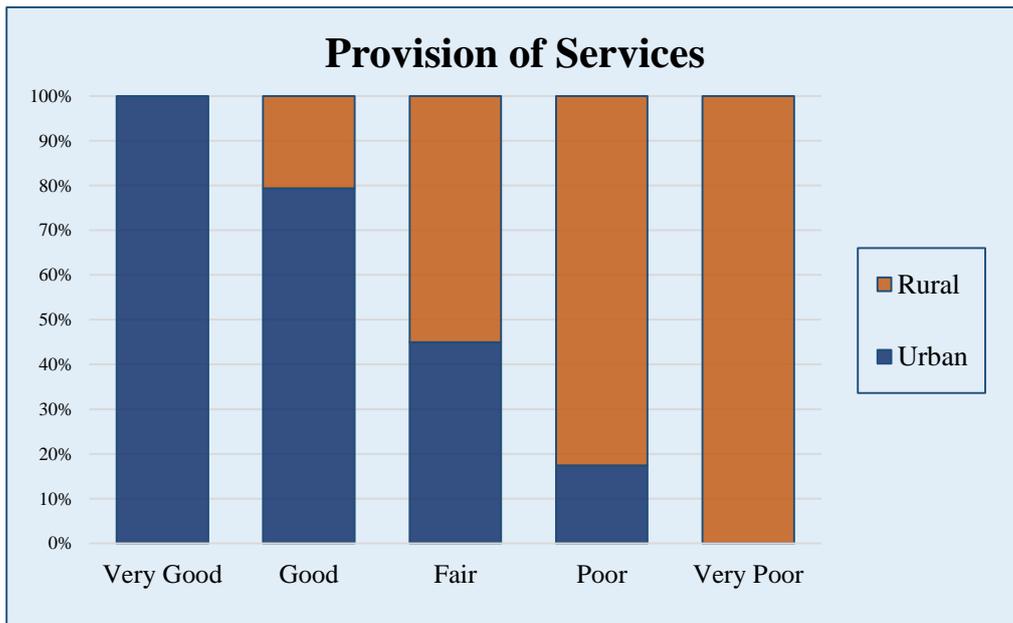
4.1 Introduction

Days spent at the desk planning the task, inputting the findings into various computer programs and ultimately analyzing the results were matched with days spent collecting primary data. The use of the mixed method approach provided a valuable trade-off between breadth and depth in the findings (Frentling, 2009). Additionally, the use of data triangulation techniques across data sets allowed for an increased credibility of the research all of which is evident in the results below (McKendrick, 2009). In this chapter the results which are organised into three themes including ageing in the rural, the impact of the voluntary sector in rural society and the ‘Meals-on-Wheels’ organisation will be discussed and presented through the use of charts, tables, figures and quotes. Sub-themes including an overview of ageing rural residents, the impact of service provisions, the factors affecting voluntary engagement, the average age demographic of volunteers, the importance of the social capital, levels of awareness and knowledge transfer, and an insight into the workings of ‘Meals-on-Wheels’ organisations interviewed will be discussed. The process of conducting this research was both a collaborative and solidary activity.

4.2 Ageing Rural Residents

The way in which the ‘rural’ is imagined, can often have little or no correspondence with the actual realities of rural space and rural life due to its complexity and diversity (Woods, 2011). However one issue which is frequently noted in literature by researchers, such as Missingham et al. (2006) or Krout and Bull (2006), is the impact on quality of life from a poor provision of services. Services have a “pivotal role” to play “in ensuring quality of life and developing the rural economy” (Missingham et al., 2006, pp. 134). The disadvantages associated with a lack of services differs greatly depending on a person’s circumstances, and unfortunately ageing rural residents are often at a greater disadvantage due to their increasing vulnerability. Figure 1 created using the combined quantitative data obtained of two different survey questions displays the opinions of urban areas service provision on contrast to rural areas.

Figure 1- Survey Data on Provision of Services



(Author Source, 2015)

The general consensus was that urban areas have a superiority in the provision of services in comparison to rural areas is. However, there was an additional disadvantage highlighted. It would seem that many of the elderly are unwilling to ask for help and the authority’s awareness of such occurrence seems minimal. This is of great concern to all. This is visible in Quote 1

Quote 1 - “There is a lot more that needs to be done. But the support is there... but a lot of them are not willing to avail of it. You know independence comes in and pride comes into it, and all that, even getting the dinners... Sure many of them would think ‘why can’t I make a bit of dinner for myself’. So like there is pride involved and independence, they don’t want to give up their independence... they don’t want to say that they can’t cook their dinner. That generation would have a lot of pride.”

Reference to the awareness problem and willingness of people to reach out for help was also stated as visible in Quote 2.

Quote 2 - “So much more could be done and they are so undemanding. But communication is huge. They will never ask but are willing to accept. Better communication would probably help the amount of people willing to accept... like there is a stigma attached to some extent.”

During the preliminary stages of the rigours desk research, locating information on ‘Meals-on-Wheels’ organisations for example was generally scarce, outdated or unavailable in both directories and online. This can be problematic for the reason that anybody seeking information on behalf of a suitable candidate is minimal. The combination of the lack of accurate and sufficient information of the few, if any, services that are available in any given area greatly impacts a potentially sustainable future. The Health and Social Services for Older People, HeSSOP, report discovered 87% of people who prefer to remain living at home, yet only 1% of people knew about and were availing of the ‘Meals-on-Wheels’ service (Garavan et al., 2001). This number could be drastically increased with the addition of more organisations and increased awareness of the already present ones. As elaborated in section 4.4.2, the additional benefits derived from the delivery of one meal a day by ‘Meals-on-Wheels’ often include a reduction in the feeling of isolation. Organisations are often started due to a demand and need for a particular service and it crucial that organisation heighten awareness.

4.2.1 Impact of Service Provisions in the Rural

Isolation and poor provision of services are two negative characteristics commonly associated with living in rural areas, both of which are independent issues of their own. But, the frequent use of the positive terms “safe”, “privacy”, “comfortable”, “picturesque”, “close-knit”, community and most importantly the word “home” greatly outweighed all, if any, of the negative remarks of living in a rural area (Survey Data). Quote 3 is a prime example.

Quote 3 - "(MoW) is invaluable especially in rural areas. Some of our clients have been moved off the farm into town by well-meaning family. But now they are surrounded by people they don't know and neighbours who are sometimes gone all day and they end up worse off. If left in the rural homes, neighbours know to check up on each other and can report anything suspicious. So, sometimes it is more isolating for the elderly in the urban area" (Group 3)

For many, the benefits gained from staying at ‘home’ in the rural are priceless and although the overall opinion on the number of services provided in rural areas was negative great hope for the potential of developing on the services already available was evident throughout.

4.3 Volunteerism

Volunteers “fill gaps in meeting social, economic and community needs” and are “vital to protecting, retaining, and maintaining rural communities” (Brennan, 2005; pp. 60). This dependence is the reason why an understanding of the various aspects of volunteer participation is crucial for future sustainability. Below the influences of voluntary engagement, what makes a good volunteer, who volunteers, and the benefits of voluntary activity are discussed with the use of the primary and secondary data collected.

4.3.2 Who Volunteers?

Prior to 2006, the only quantitative data on volunteering was based on a number of sample surveys (CIB, 2010). The 2006 census was the first census to introduce questions regarding voluntary engagement so there is now an idea of the national profile of volunteering in Ireland. The volunteer questions compiled results including age, motive and incentives, social class, occupation and various other characteristics which influence a person’s engagement. Table 1 displays the quantity of voluntary activity by gender from the 2006 census data.

Table 1- Census 2006: Voluntary Activity by Sex and Aggregate Rural Areas

Social/Charity (2006) - Aggregate Rural Area		
	Quantity	Percentage
Male	32,906	42%
Female	46,081	58%
Total	78,987	100%

(CSO, 2007)

Table 2 below displays the quantity of voluntary activity by gender from the survey data collected.

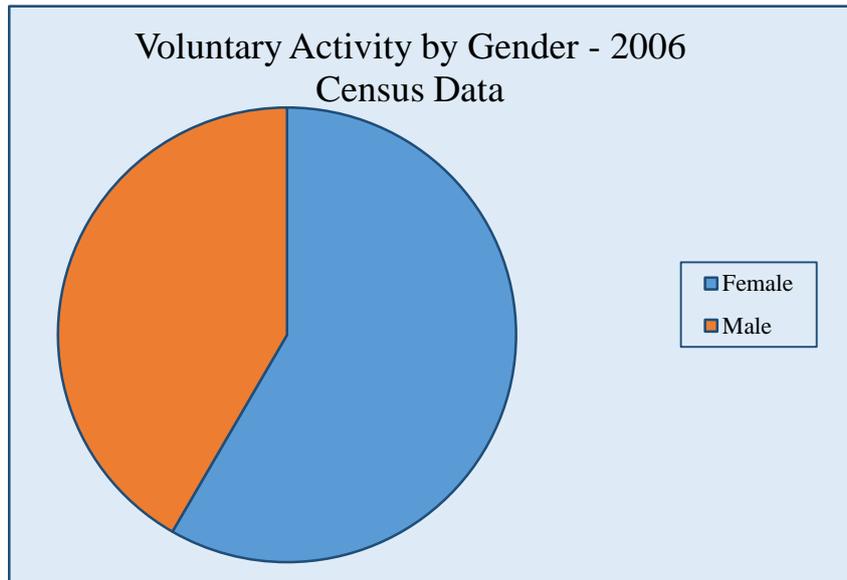
Table 2 - Survey Data: Gender and Voluntary Engagement

T-Test	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Male	19	36.5	36.5	36.5
Female	33	63.5	63.5	100.0
Total	52	100.0	100.0	

(Author Source, 2015)

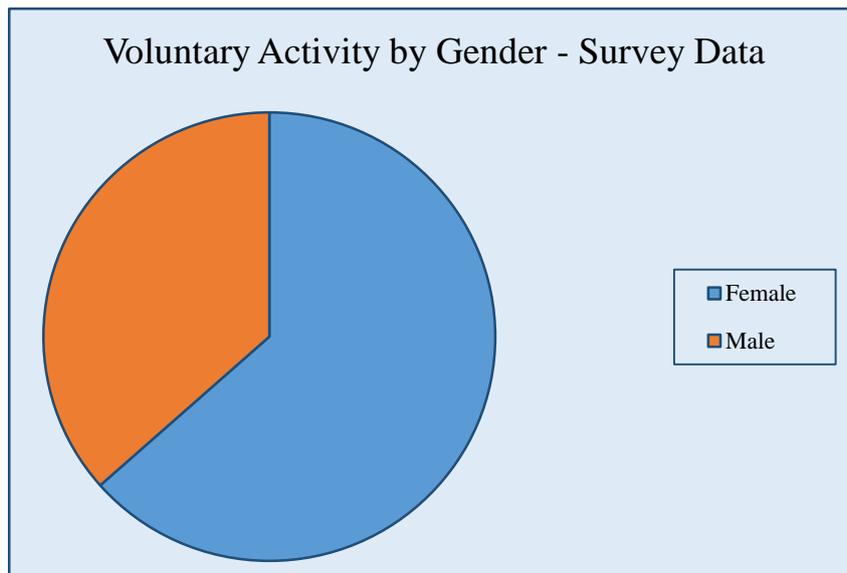
Both data sets, although different in quantity, display similar percentages. Respectively to the previous tables, Figure 2 and Figure 3 display the data in the form of pie charts.

Figure 2- 2006 Census Data on Gender



(CSO, 2007)

Figure 3- Survey Data on Gender



(Author Source, 2015)

In addition to the data sets on gender being analyzed and cross-referenced with the Census data, the average age of people involved was investigated. The higher percentage of female engagement in voluntary activity was also evident in the makeup of the ‘Meals-on-Wheels’ organizations interviewed. Another similarity which arose during the cross-referencing of the data sets was the average age demographic of volunteers. As evident in Table 2 which highlights both the gender and average age demographic make-up of the organizations interviewed. Table 2 was created using details obtained during the six different interviews. The makeup of the voluntary sector of each organization varied in size, but the demographic of the participants were similar.

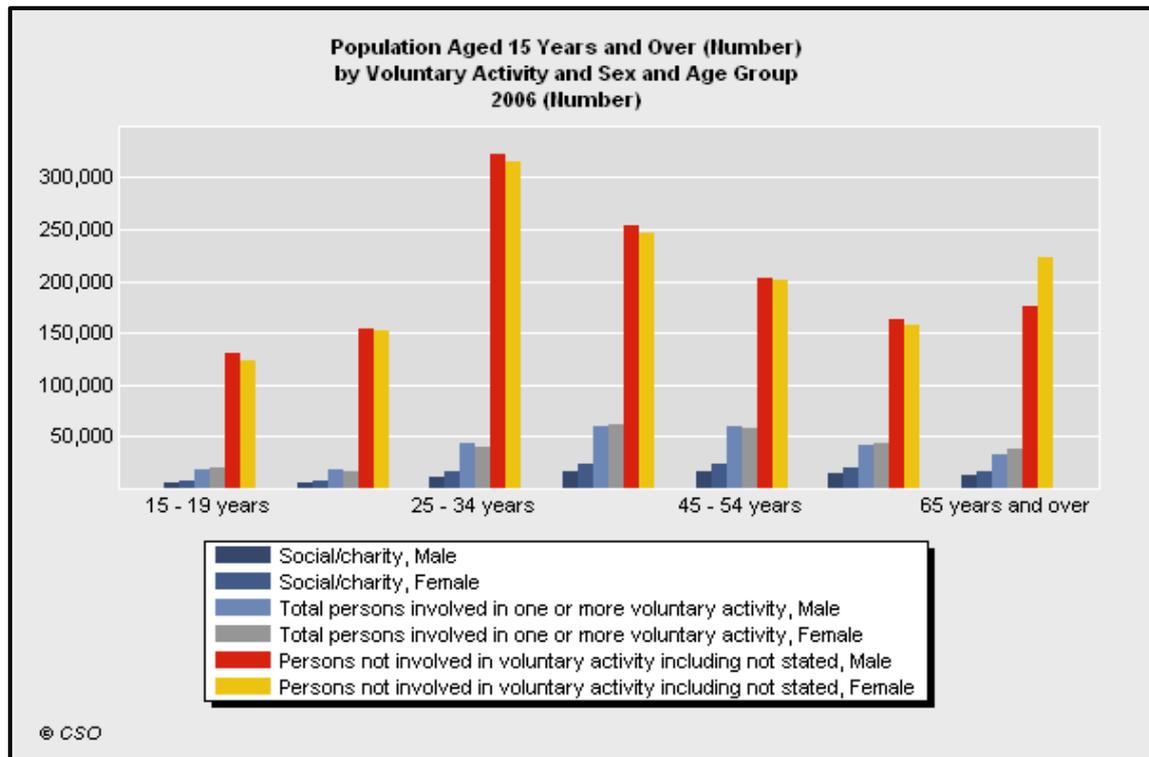
Table 2- Data on MoW Organisations Interviewed

Meals-on Wheels Staff	Group 1	Group 2	Group 3	Group 4	Group 5	Group 6
Volunteers	Yes	Yes	Yes	No - All Paid	Yes	Yes
Quantity	90	20	50	7 (Paid)	16	13
Occupation	Mostly Retired	Mostly Retired	Mostly Retired	Employed Social Schemes	Mostly Retired	Mostly Retired
Paid/ Voluntary	All Voluntary	All Voluntary	All Voluntary	Paid	1 Paid Social Schemes	1 Paid Social Schemes
Full/ Part-time	Mixed	Majority Full-Time	Mixed	All Full-time	Majority Full-Time	Majority Full-Time
Gender	Majority Female	Majority Female	Majority Female	All Female	Majority Female	Majority Female
Age	Majority Retired	Majority Retired	Majority Retired	N/A	Majority Retired	Majority Retired
Local Resident	All Locals	All Locals	All Locals	All Locals	All Locals	All Locals
* All groups are numbered in no particular order to protect anonymity.						

(Author Source, 2015)

This bar chart on the following page, Figure 4, was obtained from the CSO database and displays on all variables discussed above including gender, age and occupation

Figure 4 - CSO Data on Volunteering by Age and Gender



(CSO, 2007)

Although the age, gender, and occupation of volunteers were investigated, the majority of answers regarding what characteristics make a ‘good volunteer’ were not age or gender specific but rather about personality. Volunteers make an enormous contribution to the well-being of society and the importance of continued support and fostering of the voluntary sector is crucial.

4.3.1 ‘Good’ Volunteers

‘Meals-on-Wheels’ is one organisation available to ageing rural residents, of which this research project concentrates on, that is predominantly run by the dedicated work of volunteers. Compassionate was a characteristic used to describe a good volunteer. Unfortunately, literature reiterates that fact that recruiting ‘good volunteers’ or any volunteers is a challenging task. Willingness to volunteer and the practicalities of actually engaging in voluntary activity are often problematic. Physical and mental commitment required with voluntary activity can differ greatly between organisations with the level required by an organisation such as ‘Meals-on-Wheels’ being substantial. Unreliability and

The majority of the responses were based around 'time' with the mention of 'awareness', 'commitment', 'help', and 'experience' also frequently occurring. Reference to 'time' and 'commitment' was frequently apparent in all of the data collected surrounding voluntary activity and the characteristics of a good volunteer including the interviews as visible in a statement obtained from Group 6 "Someone who is committed, their heart in it be it a day or an hour.". This opinion is replicated in Quote 6.

Quote 6 - "To start out they have a good heart for offering, compassion, is important. Strength can be good for a physical lift and very important to give them a lively lift." (Group 4)

This results additionally match up with information obtained in a previous studied conducted by King (2004) where 57% of the respondents were quoted using "I don't have enough time" when asked "why they do not volunteer" (King, 2004, pp. 63).

4.3.3 Importance of Voluntary Sector

Since 2000, there has been an increasing extensive body of literature available on the complex issues of volunteerism of which the long tradition of voluntary activity and charitable service in Ireland has been highlighted (Volunteer Ireland, 2009). The Governments White Paper which was launched in 2000, on a 'Framework for Supporting Voluntary Activity', highlights the contribution of the voluntary sector to Irish society and outlines the important steps which need to be taken to ensure a sustainable future. The importance of the voluntary sector was made reference to in only a positive manor by all respondents. It is "extinct but vital", is one short yet powerful quote which resonates the majority of opinions surrounding the presence of the voluntary sector. The importance of voluntary participation in many organizations is alluded to in Quote 7.

Quote 7 - "So many organization could not be there without volunteers. Think it is terrific, people like to do it for themselves also and to be able to "give back"" (Group 2)

Quote 7 also highlights the fact that voluntary participation is detrimental to the presence of many organizations. "Who would replace me?" (Group 2 and 4). Recruitment of volunteers willing to dedicate so much of their time is of concern. The work undertaken by the

representatives of the organizations interviewed all went above and beyond their job descriptions.

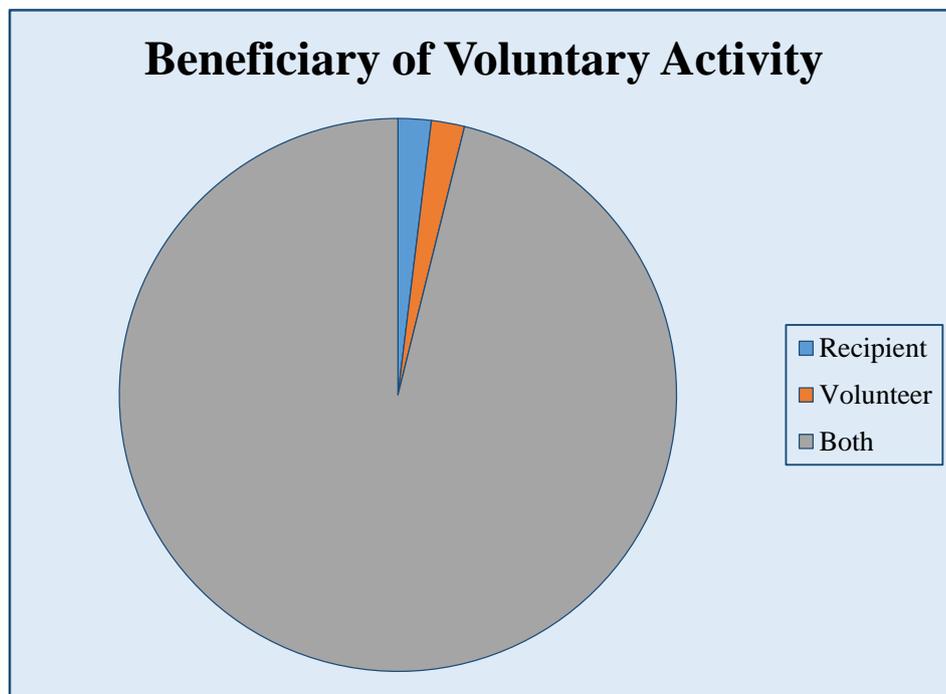
Quote 8 - “If a man is not home the driver will check back on numerous occasions and report it when finished their run, and often the driver might ask the neighbours if they know where he/she is in” (Group 1)

Quote 8 is an example of a ‘Meals-on-Wheels’ volunteers daily routine. The job description is to only deliver meals to recipients where in reality the volunteer usually has invested interest in the recipients.

4.3. Benefits of Voluntary Engagement

One definition of volunteering is “any activity in which time is given freely to benefit another person, group or cause” (Wilson, 2000; pp. 215). But this definition fails to highlight that the benefits of voluntary activity applies to both the recipients and participants. A mere 2 respondents of the survey carried out did not believe that both the recipient and participant benefited, as seen in Figure 5 and Table 3.

Figure 5- Beneficiary of Voluntary Activity



(Author Source, 2015)

4.4 ‘Meals-on-Wheels’

‘Meals-on-Wheels’ organisations are advertised as a service which is available to the elderly and vulnerable in need of a nutritious meal for a set price. Table 4, contains the various information obtained regarding the different organisations. Although the main aim of the service is providing a nutritious meal the makeup of the organisations different across the board.

Table 4 - MoW Details from Interview

	Group 1	Group 2	Group 3	Group 4	Group 5	Group 6
Category	Private-Managed by HSE	Private	Voluntary-Registered Charity Limited	Voluntary	Under Social Services	Voluntary-Registered Charity Limited
Funding	HSE	HSE, Lotteries, SVP, CSP, Fundraiser	HSE, Section 39, RSS, CSP, , Fundraisers	HSE, Section 39, CSP, FAS, TUS, RSS, Fundraisers	HSE, Section 39, CSP, Fundraisers	HSE, Section 39, Store Front, Fundraisers
Solely MoW	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No
Established	40+ Years	1998	1972 - Made Ltd. 2007	2006	1972	1971
Management Board – MoW	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
No. on Board	9	3	8	7	1	2
Voluntary	9/9	3/3	5/8 *	0/7 *	1	1/2
Full-Time	9/9	3/3	3/8	7/7	1	2/2
Gender	Majority Female	Majority Female	Equal	Majority Female	Majority Female	Majority Female
Age	Majority Retired	Majority Retired	Majority Retired	N/A	Majority Retired	Majority Retired
Local Resident	All Locals	All Locals	All Locals	All Locals	All Locals	All Locals
* Self recognised as volunteers- paid under various schemes (Pubble, TUS, RSS)						

(Author Source, 2015)

Involvement from the HSE, although differing in amount, was prevalent throughout and all registered volunteers were from the locality were of two similarities. Source of funding was an additional similarity. The specific funding by name is mentioned in the table but all groups highlighted the constant need to seek out additional funding.

Quote 9 - “We apply to anything we see regarding funding either online or in the paper... We get some funding from HSE... but mostly church gate and local funding ... different events like night at the dogs, table quiz.” (Group 6)

Further discuss on the topic of funding can be found in section 4.4.3 Future Prospect and Aspirations, as it is a vital element to ensuring a future and is a shared hurdle faced by most of the organisations interviewed. One element which was highlighted during the interviews and PAR was the daily routines. All the organisations provided nutritious meals to their recipients but the manner in which it is prepared and delivered varied. Image 8 is an apparatus used by five out of the six organisations to seal the meals in a plastic container. One organisation had a strong feeling about sending out the meals in plastic containers and insisted on using proper crockery, seen in Image 7.

Image 7- Plated and Boxed Meals



(Author Source, 2015)

Image 8 - Food Packaging Machine at MoW



(Author Source, 2015)

In addition to the choice of packing of the meals was the temperature at which the recipients received it. Two out of the six interviews opted deliver the meals cold and let the recipient heat it up when suited them best. The reason for the cold delivery was also for nutritional purposes. The heating of the food during the cooking process reduced the number of times the meal would need to be reheated. This is of great importance to the recipients as repetitive reheating results in significant nutritional loss. This particular element of the organisations differed across the board with each representative strongly backing their choice of method, evident in Quote 10.

Quote 10 - “We cook the meals here, we used to send out meals hot but now changed as it was losing its nutritional value. We now freeze blast it and it can be heated when required as some people have different eating times.” (Group 3)

Image 7 displays the plated meals in their crates ready for collection by the volunteers, whereas Image 9 displays the prepared meals in a hot box that is collected by the drivers for that day; the box is powered to keep the meals hot until delivery.

Image 9- Hotbox for Meal Transportation



(Author Source, 2015)

4.4.1 Importance of ‘Meals-on-Wheels’

Majority of ‘Meals-on-Wheels’ organisations are structured around the needs and demands of their recipients. Group 3 has annually checks to see if the needs and demands and still being meet; “We do an evaluation once a year with the recipients to see if they are happy etc. and use the feedback.” Regardless of the differences, ‘Meals-on-Wheels’ is a service which provides nutritional meals who are no longer able to do so themselves. ‘Meals-on-Wheels’ “service sometimes prevent unnecessary admissions to hospital for minor things that nutrition can solve” (Group 2). The meal, although only once a day, is often the “only nutritional meal most recipients would have the entire day” (Group 4). The nutritional benefits derived from ‘Meals-on-Wheels’ is the core aim of the service but it by no means the only benefits. The service is a daily check up on the residents. As seen in Quote 11 the service has resulted in numerous terrible situations being alleviated often saving lives.

Quote 11 - “We have found people in some terrible situations and sometimes saving their lives. Families now know with our service that we check on them every day and can call for help if ye get no answer at the door etc.” (Group 4)

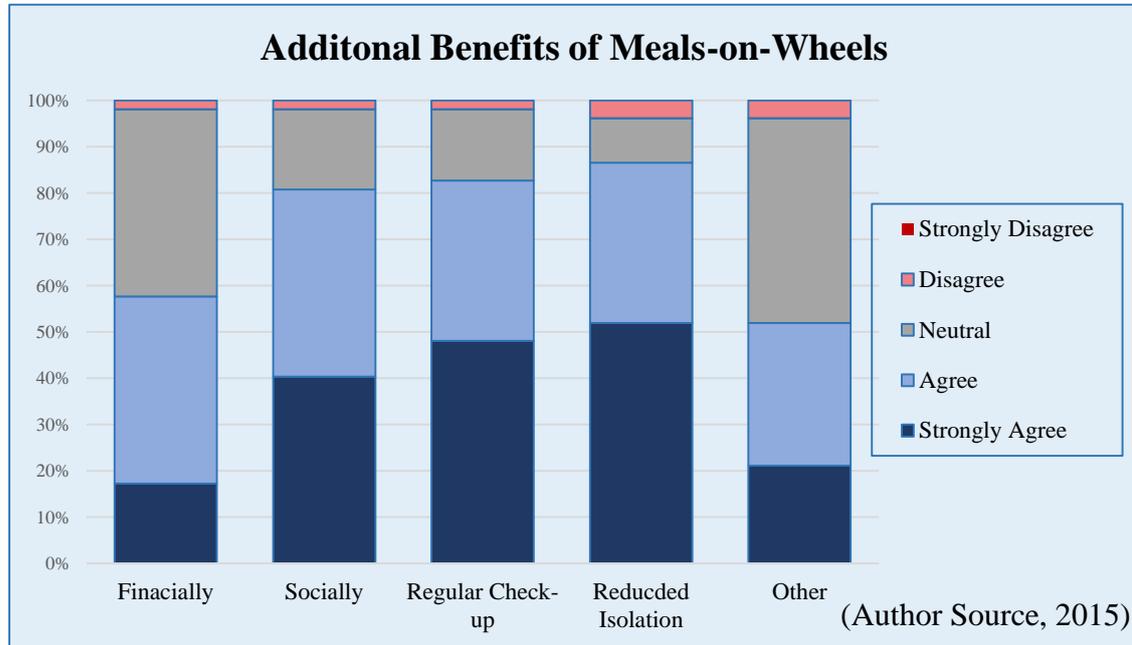
This fact is also apparent in Quote 12 the daily check-ups also give the friends and family members of the recipients a sense of comfort that their loved ones are being checked up on and having a nutritional meal.

Quote 12 - “Huge benefits. Some of the families of the elderly are now having to work, leaving them less time to mind their family member. Knowing we can fill that gap and check in on them with a fresh healthy meal is a huge benefit to that family” (Group 3)

Figure 6 on the following page, is a combination of five of the survey questions into a bar chart. On inspection it is clear that there was not one single person who strongly disagreed with the additional benefits derived from the service. The reduced feeling of isolation can be seen as both a geographical and social benefit. As mention previously, some elderly who have been moved into urban areas can often experience more social isolation than rural

dwellers. The social interaction with the recipients upon delivery may be the only face-to-face interaction that person may have for the day, regardless of living in an urban or rural area.

Figure 6 - Additional Benefits of MoW



The questions in the survey were aimed at gaining an insight into the benefits of receiving ‘Meals-on-Wheels’ service. The benefits of volunteering with the organisation were in similar to the overall benefits associated with volunteering. Overall the benefits were felt by the person, their family and friends and their community. Table 5 is created with the data obtained from the surveys when asked how important they would rate ‘Meals-on-Wheels’. As the benefits are far beyond just receiving a nutritious meal it is of no surprise that the opinion on the importance of the service is in agreement.

Table 5 - Importance of MoW

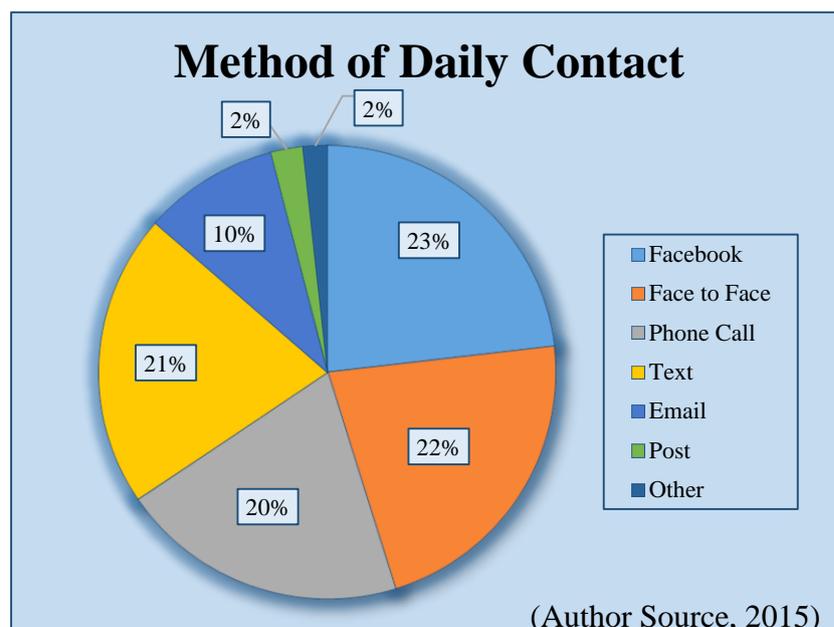
Importance of the Meals-on-Wheels	Frequency	Percent %
Very Important	31	59.6
Important	15	28.8
Neutral	4	7.7
Somewhat Important	2	3.8
Not Important	0	0
Total	52	100

4.4.2 Keeping ‘Meals-on-Wheels’ on the Road

The additional benefits derived from ‘Meals-on-Wheels’ in addition to the 59.6% of people who agreed that it is a very important service emphasises the importance of the organisations future. Unfortunately the difficulty in recruiting good volunteers, difficulty in obtaining adequate funding with ease, constantly increasing regulations, lack of support, and lack of collaboration between organisations are all detrimental to future sustainability.

All of the organisations, in particular the smaller ones , expressed interest in collaborating with other ‘Meals-on-Wheels’ organisations to gather best practice examples and guidance. “A problem in is all the regulations that are coming in. Calories and allergy content are adding more cost, headaches, etc.” (Group 2). The introduction of new regulations and increased paperwork is impacting the time available to actually provide and potentially expand the service. Aspirations of expansion were expressed by all, as said by Group 1 “like to see service expand and numbers increase" and Group 5 “We hope to use Rural Link and hope to connect and discuss problems and help each other”. Collaboration with longer established organisations could also benefit the awareness of the organisation. The increased awareness could alleviate the pressures on recruiting a sufficient number of volunteers and could expand the number of beneficiaries.

Figure 7- Method of Daily Contact



Currently, word-of-mouth is the most common use of advertisement and awareness and can be accredited to the organisations success to the present day. But the overall consensus was “No”, it is “defiantly not” advertised sufficiently. As seen in Figure 7 on the previous page, face-to-face contact was only used by 22% of the survey respondents on a daily basis (Survey Data). Integration of information of ‘Meals-on-Wheels’ into daily contact sources such as Facebook could be more beneficial.

4.5 Recommendations

In relation to the research findings these recommendations have been created.

4.5.1 Recommendation 1

The first recommendation is based on the recruitment of volunteers. Many organisations briefly outline the requirements to be involved where in reality the required time is usually greater. The physical and mental hours put in by all of the organisation representative was astounding. Increased numbers would be ideal as it would alleviate the pressures place on the select few involved. Increased advertisement and more accurate information can help people undecided about volunteering.

4.5.2 Recommendation 2

Outlining the fact that the benefits of volunteering is also felt by the recipient and wider community would also increase voluntary activity. Participating in voluntary activity can increase skills and open pathways to future employment.

4.5.3 Recommendation 3

Greater recognition of a volunteer’s participation could be extremely beneficial. Appreciation felt by the volunteers could result in more volunteers willing to joint he particular organisation and decrease the number of people choosing to leave.

4.5.4 Recommendation 4

Raising awareness on 'Meals-on-Wheels' could both help increase the numbers and ensuring that the information is accurate could help reduce the amount of negative stigma attached to service. There were no negative remarks made throughout the entire data collection of the research project by recipients towards who receives meals. The opinion that there is shame and loss of pride needs to be addressed. The recipients are still living at home and caring for themselves the remainder of the day.

4.5.5 Recommendation 5

Additional research into the working of 'Meals-on-Wheels' organisations is a key recommendation. The potential for expansion is enormous if greater support financially and secretarially was available. The increased understanding of the organisation could also result in support to bring about conformity amongst organisations. Unfortunately, the conformity even with solely the preparation of the meals is going to be costly.

4.5.6 Recommendation 6

Finally, this recommendation is in relation to the research project itself. Although extensive data was collected and analysed additional data could add more depth to the project. Time constraints reduced the number of data collected. Interviews with volunteers of the organisation, recipients of the meals, family members of recipients, HSE, and even the general public are all possible research candidates that could provide influential information.

4.7 Conclusion

The use of the mixed methods approach and data triangulation resulted in a numerous results as outlined in this chapter. Similar to many voluntary organizations, 'Meals-on-Wheels' faces many challenges and opportunities on a daily basis. How the organizations continue to

respond will ultimately determine their future sustainability. This chapter provided evidence on the impacts of ageing in the rural, the importance of the voluntary sector, and the additional benefits of 'Meals-on-Wheels'. Drawing on these findings the recommendations were devised which may be beneficial to the expansion and continuation of 'Meals-on-Wheels'.

Chapter 5 – Conclusions

5.1 Introduction

The aim of this project was to explore the extent to which ageing rural residents benefit from the ‘Meals-on-Wheels’ program and other voluntary activities, and the potential to greater develop the current networks and future networks. Upon completion the research project was structured into five chapters. This chapter will outline the conclusions from each chapter with reference to the recommendation devised, as outlined in previous chapter.

5.2 Research Project

Firstly is an introduction chapter outlining the projects aims and objectives and was followed by a literature review which highlighted some of the theoretical underpinnings which guided the research process. The literature review was based upon a broad collection of published research papers and data sets used but is by no means is an illustration of the available data on the topic of volunteering, service provision in rural areas, or ageing rural dwellers. However the first time research was conducted on the ‘Meals-on-Wheels’ organisation and published was in 2008 by the NCOAP. Further research is crucial to ensure the future sustainability of such an important organisation. The feedback and interested showed by all of the organisations representatives, volunteers and recipients were beyond positive and enthusiastic.

Following the literature review chapter was an outline of the methodology and data analysis techniques utilized. The theoretical framework and reasoning behind the use of a mix methodology approach were outlined. The mixed methodology approach allowed for a collection of data rich in both depth and breadth. Interviews with additional organisation representatives would be beneficial in developing a greater data set for comparison analysis. The use of time management skills highlighted the impracticalities of conduction additional interviews. The time allocated for data analysis would have been negatively impacted if additional data was collected. The time constraints also restricted the possibility of creating an additional semi-structured schedule to be conducted with volunteers, recipients, or HSE

representatives. Nevertheless the methodology employed resulted in an extensive and valuable data set. Various search engines and software programmes were used to conduct the data analysis. The use of Excel as an alternative to Word allowed for easier cross referencing and in turn a greater thematic analysis. SPSS proved a vital program as it allowed for the cross referencing of variables to construct conclusive results. Tables and data analysis generated was put into Excel to increase the choices in graph layouts. The use of the word clouds added an extra element to the visual representations. Upon reading qualitative data coding can highlight themes and sub-themes and word cloud allows for a visual representation to be presented to the reader. Overall the data analysis and methodology proved appropriate for this particular research project as it generated numerous results. Additional results are available in Appendix D.

Upon completion of the data analysis, results and recommendations were devised based on the literature reviewed including previous research projects published on the topic. The importance of the voluntary sector to rural ageing dwellers was illuminated in all findings. There is serious concern for the future recruitment of volunteers and sustaining the services provided. The ageing demographic of volunteers was an issue which each group were aware of. But one major funding which impacts the entire organisation is the allocation of funding. The number of regulations and paperwork required to keep an organisation afloat continues to rise and if not addressed will be detrimental to the future of many organisations. Funding was being sources from every possible avenue due to the dedicated work of the committee members and volunteers. But the time required to fill out the paper to hold a fundraising event as small as a bake sale is substantial. Support from the HSE and other official bodies such as IRL was highly sought after and if granted alleviated many of the daily stresses. ‘Meals-on-Wheels’ is without a doubt an invaluable organisation due to the dedicated work of many volunteers. The importance of highlighting the positive impact of such a service is unmeasurable. These actions are outlined as recommendations in the end of the results chapter.

5.3 Conclusion

This chapter provided a snapshot conclusion for each of the preceding chapters. The community and voluntary sector are diverse and complex and for that reason it is impossible to highlight all issues that are faced by organisations. Nevertheless in end to the overall research project, the preliminary aim and objectives outlined were achieved and additional data was gathered. The time constraints and various other limitations were handled appropriately throughout the entire process. This research topic has great potential to gather additional information that could benefit the overall sustainability of voluntary organisations in rural Ireland. An international perspective would also be beneficial in future research.

Appendices

Appendix A – General Public Survey

No.: _____ Date: ___ / ___ / 2015

Location: _____



OÉ Gaillimh
NUI Galway

Participant Profile

1. **Gender:** Male Female
2. **Age:** 18 – 24 25 – 35 36 – 45
46 – 55 56 – 65 Over 65
3. **Occupation:** Student Employed Unemployed Retired

General Volunteer Questions

The purpose of this survey is to gain a better understanding of the various aspects of volunteering. Firstly, some questions about your experience with volunteering.

4. **Have you ever volunteered in your local area?**

Yes No

Please Elaborate (*when, where, why*): _____

5. **How often do you volunteer?**

Very Frequently Frequently Occasionally Rarely Very Rarely Never

6. **Have you ever participated in a voluntary activity that helps someone? E.g. Cooking, transporting, campaigning, laundry, walking, shopping and other.**

Yes No

Please Elaborate (*who and why*): _____

7. Is there a specific organisation that you frequently volunteer with?

Yes No (Please specify): _____

8. Do you have a personal connection to the organisation that you volunteer with?

Yes No

Please Elaborate:

9. How did you hear about the (se) organisation(s)?

Word of Mouth Library
Family/ Friends Newspaper
Facebook Parish Council

Other (Please specify): _____

Please Comment:

10. How do you keep in contact with friends, relatives, neighbours, etc.

Face to Face Post
Phone Call Text
Email Facebook

Other (Please Specify): _____

11. Would you say that most of the time people in your neighbourhood try to be helpful to others?

Yes No

Please Comment:

12. Do you believe that by working together, neighbourhoods can influence decisions that affect them? Yes No

Please Elaborate:

13. How important do you think voluntary organisations/ services are in your local area?

Important Neutral Not Important

Please Elaborate:

14. In your opinion, what are the benefits to being a volunteer?

Please Elaborate:

15. Who benefits from voluntary services?

Recipient Volunteer Both

Please Elaborate:

16. What influences your ability to volunteer?

Please Elaborate:

17. In your opinion, what is the main reason people do not participate in voluntary activities?

Please Elaborate:

18. What do you think would increase the number of people participating in voluntary activities?

Please Elaborate:

Community Social Services Questions

19. How would you rate the provision of services in the rural?

Very Poor Poor Fair Good Very Good

Please Elaborate:

20. How would you rate the provision of services in the urban?

Very Poor Poor Fair Good Very Good

Please Elaborate:

21. How would you rate the support for the elderly in rural areas?

Very Poor Poor Fair Good Very Good

Please Elaborate:

22. What services for elderly people living in rural areas are you aware of?

Please Specify:

Meals-on-Wheels Survey Questions

23. Have you heard of Meals-on-Wheels?

Yes No

24. Where did you hear about Meals-on-Wheels?

Word of Mouth Library Facebook
Family/ Friends Newspaper Parish Council
Medical Services

Other (*Please specify*): _____

25. What do you know about Meals-on-Wheels?

Please Elaborate:

26. Do you or family member/ friend avail of the Meals-on-Wheels services?

Yes No Please Elaborate: _____

27. How important would you rate the importance of the Meals-on-Wheels services?

Very Important Important Neutral Somewhat Important Not Important

Please Elaborate:

28. In your opinion, is Meals-on-Wheels sufficiently advertised?

Well-Advertised Advertised Neutral Poorly Advertised Not Advertised

Please Elaborate:

29. Below are additional benefits associated with Meals-on-Wheels' services. Do you agree with these statements?

Statement:	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Financially more sustainable					
Social Interaction (<i>Be-friending</i>)					
Regular Check-ups					
Reduced feeling of isolation					
Other: (<i>Please specify</i>)					

Additional Comments:

All information and responses in this form will be used for academic research purposes. Responses will be kept in strict confidence with results reported in aggregate form only.

Appendix B – Semi-structured Interview Schedule

Name: Gabrielle Kane

ID: 09519351



OÉ Gaillimh
NUI Galway

Interview Schedule

Local Community Group Representatives

From my desk research, I have an understanding of the structure of your organisation. However, for the purpose of this interview I have compiled a list of questions I would greatly appreciate you could answer.

Group Profile

Organisation: _____ **Representative:** _____

1. What is the main structure of the organization?

➤ *Charity, private limited company, etc.*

2. When was the organization established?

3. Why was it established?

➤ *Aims and Objectives*

4. How was it established?

5. Was there any support structures present during the establishment?

➤ *Financial? Training? Advice? Other? – Most Helpful?*

6. What current support structures are in place?

- *Financial? Training? Advice? Other? – Most Helpful?*

7. Is there a management board in place?

- *Size of board? Demographic (retired)? Voluntary?*

8. How many members do you have?

- *Active members? Financial beneficiary?*

9. Who are the members?

Other Roles? (Job)	
Paid or voluntary?	
Full time or part-time?	
Male or female?	
Average age demographic?	
Locals?	

10. How often are meetings held?

- *Board meetings? General meetings?*

11. Who attends the meetings?

- *Committee and volunteers?*

12. Is there any difficulties in getting people to attend the meetings?

➤ *Main excuse?*

13. What services/facilities do you provide to the local community?

14. How do people find out about these services and then avail of the organizations services?

Personal Profile

15. What is your role in this organization?

16. When and how did you get involved?

17. Why did you get involved in this organization?

18. What encouraged you to continue being involved?

19. What role have you played in the voluntary sector?

➤ *Past?*

20. In your opinion, how important is the voluntary sector?

➤ *General? Rural development?*

Volunteer Questions

21. Why do you think people volunteer?

22. What do you think could help increase the number of people willing to volunteer?

23. What roles do the volunteers play in the organization?

24. How many volunteers are registered with the organization?

Other Roles? (Job)	
Paid or voluntary?	
Full time or part-time?	
Male or female?	
Average age demographic?	
Locals?	

25. How are volunteers recruited?

➤ *Advertisements? Word of Mouth?*

26. How would you describe the current volunteering trend?

➤ *Quantity change (more/less)? Demographic change?*

27. How is contact maintained with volunteers?

➤ *Phone, email, text, Facebook, online, post?*

28. Is there a sufficient number of volunteers to continue providing the services offered or are more needed?

29. What makes a good volunteer?

30. Who do you believe benefits from voluntary activities? Please elaborate.

➤ *Volunteer, recipient or both? Free passes?*

31. How would you rate the support for elderly in rural areas?

32. Are there any services that this organization offers solely to the elderly?

Meals-on-Wheels Questions

33. Meals-on-Wheels is one service which the organization offers. How important do you think Meals-on-Wheels is? Why?

34. In your opinion, do you think Meals-on-Wheels is sufficiently advertised?

35. What are the benefits of Meals-on-Wheels?

36. Apart from the meal, do you think there are any other additional benefits derived from the Meals-on-Wheels service?

37. Does the organization collaborate with anyone on a daily basis?

Social Capital and Networking Questions

38. Why do you link with these people/ organizations?

39. Where are these people/ organizations located?

40. Is there any organizations you would like to collaborate with but have not to date?

➤ *Why?*

Future Prospects Questions

41. Are the current roles different to what the original aims and objectives were upon establishment?

42. What would you like to see change?

43. What future do you see for this organization?

Additional Comments:

Appendix C – Letter of Invitation for Interview

Address



Date: July 1, 2015

RE: Interview for Master's in Rural Sustainability Research Project

Dear _____,

I am writing to you to request your participation in a research project which I am conducting for my Master's thesis at NUI Galway. The research relates to volunteering in rural areas. My project is supervised by Dr. Therese Conway, School of Geography and Archaeology, NUI Galway.

The project investigates the overall voluntary sector in rural areas with particular emphasis on the impact it has on elderly rural dwellers. To do this I will be conducting numerous interviews with representative of community organisations and will also be distributing an in-depth survey. The interview will take roughly 30 minutes. It will discuss topics relating volunteering and the role your organisation plays in advocating and aiding elderly rural dwellers. The information that you provide will be treated in strict confidence.

I would be most appreciative if you would be willing to meet with me to discuss the project, as your expertise will greatly enhance the research. Alternatively, perhaps you could suggest a colleague whom I should contact. I am available both weekdays and weekends. I hope that it will be possible to arrange to meet with you at a mutually suitable time. I will telephone within the coming days in order to discuss this with you.

If you have any queries in the meantime please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely,

Gabrielle Kane

MA in Rural Sustainability

Email: g.kane1@nuigalway.ie

Phone: 0858634383

APPENDIX D – Interview Participant Consent Form

Name: Gabrielle Kane

Email: g.kane1@nuigalway.ie

Phone: 0858634383



OĒ Gaillimh
NUI Galway

Interview Participant Consent Form

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview for this research project. This form details the purpose of this study, a description of the involvement required, and your rights as a participant.

Purpose of the Study

This study intends to provide a better understanding of the importance of community social services and voluntary organisations in rural areas with particular emphasis on the Meals-on-Wheels service. The primary research question that will guide this study is: *What impact does the voluntary sector have on providing services to elderly rural dwellers?* The data collected in this study will be used to complete a research report as part of a Master's in Rural Sustainability curriculum.

Subject's Understanding

- I agree to participate in this study that I understand will be submitted to the National University of Ireland, Galway.
- I understand that my participation is voluntary.
- I understand that I will not be identified by name in the final product.
- I am aware that all records will be kept confidential in the secure possession of the researcher.
- I acknowledge that the contact information of the researcher and his advisor have been made available with a duplicate copy of this consent form.
- I understand that I may withdraw from the study at any time with no adverse repercussions.

Subject's Full Name: _____

Subject's Signature: _____

Date Signed: ____ / ____ / 2015

Appendix D – Additional Results

Below are additional results gathered during this research project. Unfortunately do not fit into the results section?

Establishment: Comments surround the establishment of the organisations were very similar. All were established as there was a need for it and were generally established privately by retired professionals.

“The aim was to ensure people who were unable because they weren’t able to afford or unable because they were feeble and old and lost their confidence to ensure they would get I suppose one decent meal per day and I’d say there were some people that have depression or some stuff or whatever or lack of motivation wouldn’t cook even if they were physically able to do so and means to do so, some people especially men the bachelor fellas, to ensure people in need got a decent meal.”

Reason for establishment again.

“We just saw a need for it. We were cooking dinners in house and people coming in but we found it was a lot of trouble for people to go through the trouble of getting dressed coming out and have to get a lift someone to drop them if they can’t drive . So we decided to start doing meals on wheels.”

Reason for establishment again.

“It was just two retired ladies which were active in their community that knew of a few who could benefit of the meals on wheels. So it started off for just two or three and as it grew they gathered volunteers and they felt it was important.”

Reason for establishment again.

“A nun and a Doctor started it. They went to Kilkenny on a fact finding mission to see the plan there and followed it.”

Image to the right is a visual of one of the many roads travelled on a daily basis to deliver meals. A comment made during another interview highlighted the problems associated with delivering to rural areas. “Rural is more expensive with diesel etc... and slower with bad roads etc... especially in the bad winters but will still go regardless. We have great driver and staff.”



Image to the right was obtained at the Irish Rural Link Western Region ‘Meals-on-Wheels’ launch addressed by Taoiseach Enda Kenny. The launch was attended by numerous enthusiastic volunteers, committee members and recipients of ‘Meals-on-Wheels’.

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