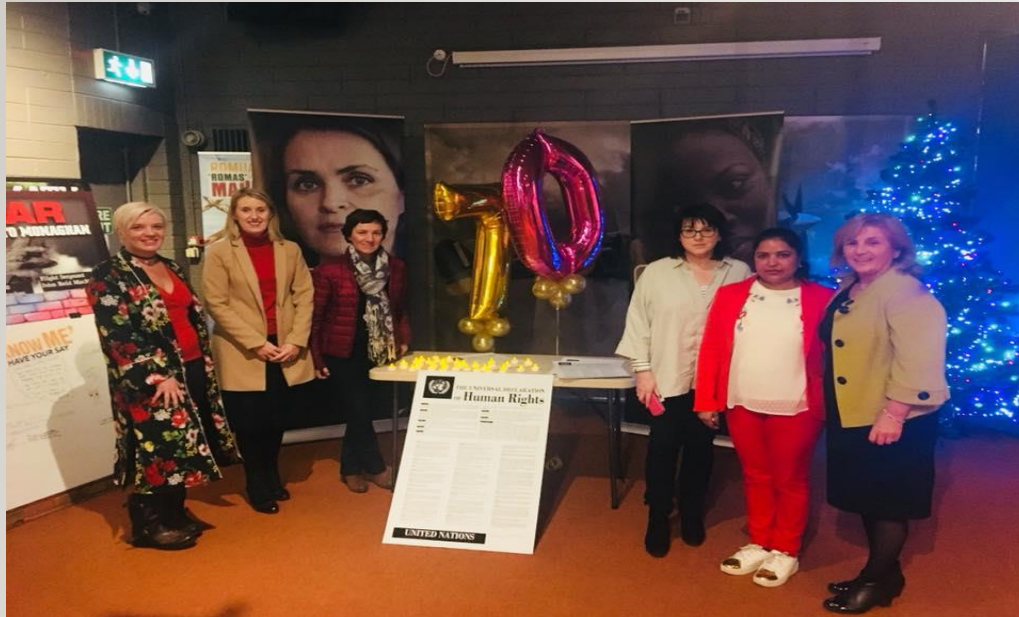


Removing barriers -Improving Service Delivery



Bernie Bradley –Monaghan County Council

WHAT IS GOOD CUSTOMER SERVICE ?



Good Customer Service allows **all** customers and potential customer services access services and information easily and without added barriers.

CUSTOMER SERVICES SHOULD BE FOR ALL CUSTOMERS



To achieve this we must know who our customer base is and some of the challenges they may have in accessing information, services and supports in our typical service delivery methods.

A PROFILE OF MONAGHAN

- Over 70% of the population of Monaghan live in a rural community.
- 13% of the population are over 65
- 13% of the population have a disability.
- 16% of the population were born outside Monaghan.
- 1 in 4 people have significant difficulties with reading and writing.
- 39% of people with a disability in Monaghan are over 65.
- 20% of the population of Monaghan had no formal education.
- 60% of people over 65 in Monaghan have no access to a computer/laptop.



CULTURAL DIVERSITY

There are people in our communities who have come from very different cultures who don't understand how local government works in Ireland.

Do we inform customers of how our services operate?

My name is Rala and I am an **asylum seeker**

My message to YOU, **"KNOW ME"** not the Stereotype

My name is Rala, I fled my home in Sudan after the civil war that had raged for years finally came to my village. I chose to flee south to the Ugandan border. It turned into a waking nightmare. Everywhere I walked I saw bones, the terrible smell of bodies rotting. My husband was killed. They caught him and tied him to a tree. Then they beat him and they set fire to his body. My journey ended in Ireland. I am an Asylum seeker. I live in a direct provision centre while I wait for the government to process my application for asylum and decide if I can stay and become a Refugee. I receive bed, breakfast, lunch, and an evening meal and a weekly payment of €21.60. **It's lonely but I am safe. I am so grateful to Ireland for giving me peace and safety, I do hope I can stay. People sometimes shout things at me on the street. They tell me to go back to where I came from. If only they knew I would love to go home.**

"SCAMMING THE SYSTEM OVER HERE IT'S RIDICULOUS"

"WE SHOULD LOOK AFTER OUR OWN FIRST"

CULTURAL DIVERSITY

There are people in our communities who have come to Ireland escaping war, conflict and trauma.

Are we aware of how these life experiences may present in a customer service setting?



My name is Ahmad, I came to Ireland from a large refugee camp. I was very happy in my life in Syria, I was a teacher in my community. War destroyed my community, my life and my family. War killed my parents, and my friends. I spent 3 years in a refugee camp with my children. The Irish Government offered us refuge in their country. Stereotypes hurt me, I am not ripping off a system, I did not choose this life, I did not choose to watch my parents die, but that is the life I was given, I am so grateful to Ireland for giving me and my children peace and safety. I am happy to work and to repay the Irish Government with the same kindness they gave me.

“IF THEY’RE NOT HAPPY, LET THEM GO BACK WHERE THEY CAME FROM”

“THEY’RE NOT HERE FOR ASYLUM, THEY’RE HERE FOR WHAT THEY CAN GET”

My name is *Ahmad* and I am a **Syrian Refugee**

My message to YOU.
‘KNOW ME’ not the Stereotype

LANGUAGE BARRIERS

There are people in our communities who do not speak or read English well.

Do we provide services and information in a way that people with limited or no English can avail of these services?

“COMING HERE TAKING OUR JOBS”

“FOREIGNERS GET EVERYTHING FOR NOTHING”

I'm Dimitri, I came to Ireland in 2008 from Lithuania. My life was hard in Lithuania, I was unemployed for almost ten years, I wanted to work but there was no work for me and no money for my children. **Ireland has been good to me, I work long hours but I can provide for my family.** Life in Ireland is lonely too, my English is not good so it stops me from getting involved in my local community. My children can speak great English so they help me. Sometimes I hear negative things said about people from other countries living here, it's upsetting, **I am no different to any other man working to provide for his children.** I do miss Lithuania, I miss my family who still live there.

My name is *Dimitri* and I am a **migrant worker**

My message to YOU, **'KNOW ME'** not the Stereotype

LITERACY BARRIERS

There are people in our communities who do not have basic literacy skills.

Do we offer support to *all* customers to ensure they understand the information we have given them?

Do we offer support in completing application forms?

My father always told me to be proud to be a Traveller and I'm proud to be a Traveller. I grew up a Traveller and I will die a Traveller. It's not easy, I got called names, I got picked on. So I just stopped going. **No one stood up for me in school. I am a father now, and my children still get called names.** I've worked since I was 15, I pay my way and volunteer in my community. I know there are Travellers who break the law, but there are settled people who break the law too but not all settled people are tarred with the same brush.

My name is *Patrick* and I am an **Irish Traveller**

My message to YOU.
"KNOW ME" not the Stereotype

"HE'LL JUST ROB YOU"
"KNACKERS ARE ALL THE SAME"

AN AGING SOCIETY

Currently in Ireland there are **600,000** people aged 65 and over accounting to **12%** of the population.

This is set to rise to **1.4 million** by **2041**, accounting for **22%** of the population

My name is Kathleen and I am recently widowed. I am now living alone in our family home. My children are all abroad and I only see them a few times a year. I have arthritis and hearing loss. I can't really carry things or even write most days and I wear a hearing aid. I don't like people to know these things about me. I am very lonely. Discrimination posts me as it forms opinions about people of my age, yes we are older, but we are not useless. I'm not grumpy, I'm not stupid. I am a person dealing with huge changes in my life and in my body. I'm not doddery. I am aging and my body is slowing down.

My name is *Kathleen* and I am an **older citizen**

My message to YOU.
"KNOW ME?" not the Stereotype

AN AGING SOCIETY

- The natural aging process impacts on a persons ability to easily access, process and understand information.
- The natural aging process impacts on mobility, getting in and out of buildings, standing for long periods.
- The natural aging process impacts on dexterity, causing difficulties writing, using a keypad, mobile phone, computer



PEOPLE WITH A DISABILITY



My name is Jimmy, I am 19. I have Down syndrome, which means it takes me a little bit longer to learn new things but it's no big deal. **I will sit my leaving cert this year. I am the first person with Down syndrome to sit the leaving cert in my school.** I hope to go to college and get a part time job next year. People with intellectual disabilities can and do progress through education and employment with the right supports and opportunities. **People are often shocked to hear I'm doing my leaving cert, they still think people with an intellectual disability don't have the skills or ability to complete school and live an independent life.** Discrimination means people decide what I can and can't do without ever meeting me or having a conversation with me. Don't make assumptions about me based on outdated stereotypes. Get to know me and I will tell you all you need to know!

My name is Jimmy and I have an **intellectual disability**
My message to YOU, **'KNOW ME'** not the Stereotype

"SURE YOU'RE A GREAT WEE FELLA GOING TO SCHOOL"
"PEOPLE WITH DOWN SYNDROME WOULDN'T BE FIT TO HAVE A JOB"



My name is Laura, I'm 27 and a wheelchair user. I am not confined to a wheelchair, my wheelchair actually supports me to get out and about. I have a degree in computer science and would love to work in this area but I find it so hard to get a job. **People see my wheelchair, not me. I really am no different to the rest of the community, I have talents, interests, skills and abilities.** Discrimination stops people with a disability reaching their full potential. Discrimination puts unnecessary barriers in front of people. If you meet me or other people with a disability don't assume you know anything about their ability, everyone is individual.

My name is Laura and I have a **physical disability**
My message to YOU, **'KNOW ME'** not the Stereotype

"WOULD SHE LIKE A CUP OF TEA"
"AH GOD LOVE HER, IT'S AN AWFUL BURDEN"

PEOPLE WITH A DISABILITY

- Are our services accessible by people with a physical disability?
- Do we provide alternative solutions to service delivery for people with a physical disability?
- Do we promote accessibility of services in the community?



PEOPLE WITH A DISABILITY

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SURE YOU'RE A GREAT WEE FELLA GOING TO SCHOOL

"PEOPLE WITH DOWN SYNDROME WOULDN'T BE FIT TO HAVE A JOB"

My name is *Jimmy* and I have an **intellectual disability**

My message to YOU, **"KNOW ME"** not the Stereotype

Do we provide information and services in a way that people with an intellectual disability can understand?

CONSULTATION & RESEARCH

CUSTOMER SERVICE RESEARCH

Research focused on three specific questions

- Knowledge of the services provided by Monaghan County Council.
- Experience of accessing/using the services of Monaghan County Council.
- Suggestions for improved service delivery in Monaghan County Council.

PUBLIC SECTOR DUTY PILOT

Pilot Project with IHREC/LGMA

- Knowledge of the services provided by Monaghan County Council.
- Experience of accessing/using the services of Monaghan County Council.
- Suggestions for improved service delivery in Monaghan County Council

KEY FINDINGS - CUSTOMERS

- 100 older people interviewed 100% accessed information about County Council services elsewhere.
- How to get a service is often unclear.
- Telephone services is main point of contact in rural communities.
- Often lack of staff contact details to make telephone service easier.
- Language used is complex, difficult to understand.
- Confusion with regard to services provided by other statutory agencies.
- Some services were easier to access than others, not consistent

KEY FINDINGS - CUSTOMERS

- People with literacy difficulties typically do not readily volunteer information about their literacy problems.
- Ageing brings with it mobility and sensory changes which subsequently impacts on the ability to access services and information easily.
- Language barriers create significant problems for both customers and staff.
- Cultural differences create misunderstandings and confusion.
- People are reluctant to ask for help.

KEY FINDINGS -STAFF

- Little awareness among staff of the different needs some people have when trying to access services.
- Little awareness among staff of the diversity and multicultural population living in the county.
- Cultural differences often misunderstood in customer services setting.
- Little awareness among staff of the level of literacy difficulties in the county.

KEY FINDINGS -STAFF

- Significant changes in customer profile for front line staff in recent years.
- No training or support in dealing with customers with mental health difficulties.
- Lack of awareness of barriers experienced by older customers
- Inconsistent approaches across the organisation, good practice should be shared.
- Little or no promotion of services and supports available to access them.

ISSUES FROM THE CONSULTATION

- **Access to services and information-** *what services are delivered, how to access them and who to speak to.*
- **Understanding services and application forms-** *complicated language, small print, limited understanding of filling out forms.*
- **Lack of IT skills or access to facilities to avail of online services.** – *Digital divide, with the move to more and more online services many people are being left behind.*
- **Embarrassment about literacy** and the need for assistance.
– *People with literacy difficulties very unlikely to ask for help, but would take help if offered.*
- **Embarrassment about aging** and its impact- *Older people reluctant to tell service provider that they can no longer see/hear/write as well as they used to.*

ISSUES FROM THE CONSULTATION

- Customer service depends on personality rather than policy.
- People with any challenges tend not to ask for help or assistance, but if offered they will accept it.
- Many customers left council looking for help from elsewhere to fill out forms etc.
- No seating area for older customers to wait.
- Poor signage to indicate where departments/services are located.
- Inaccessible buildings.
- No contact person named for a service if you ring in.
- No offer of confidential space to discuss private matters.

SUGGESTIONS FROM SERVICE USERS



- Confidential space for people to discuss private matters with council staff.
- Alternatives to online services, not everyone has access to the internet or the skills to use online services.
- Range of ways to access services should be available not just one way.
- A service should have a contact name and number so people know who to look for.
- The same approach to customer service should be across the organisation.

SUGGESTIONS FROM SERVICE USERS

- Service providers need to look at an application form or information **through the eyes of those who will be using it** then the difficulties may become clear.
- **Awareness** raising on the needs of some service users (particularly older people, people with disabilities, people who don't speak English).
- If support was offered it would be accepted **people are too embarrassed to ask** for help.
- At least one office/room that is fully accessible that could be used by staff and customers if needed.
- Customers should be informed of the option of using this accessible location should as sometimes



AGE FRIENDLY GUIDE TO COMMUNICATION

- Looking at service delivery from an age friendly perspective doesn't just support older people, but everyone in the community.
- This booklet looks at the ways in which public services communicate about their services.
- The booklet identifies the barriers that arise in each of these communication methods
- The booklet identifies an age friendly approach to each communication method and how to overcome the barriers.



AGE FRIENDLY GUIDE TO COMMUNICATION

- This initiative is an effective community development model of improving customer service delivery.
- It looks at the potential service user and considers the challenges that may exist for some members of the community when trying to access services and information of local government.
- The age friendly communication booklet has been adapted and reprinted in a number of other local authority areas.
- Monaghan County Council delivered Age Friendly communication training in every Age Friendly county in the country

AN AGE FRIENDLY GUIDE TO COMMUNICATION



- Sensory Changes
- Physical Changes
- Changes in Cognitive Function
- Emotional Changes

AGE FRIENDLY COMMUNICATION TRAINING

- Customer focused training workshop
- Each participant is given a profile of a customer that uses the services of the LA.
- The workshop looks at customer services in the local authority and the barriers that may present for the profile characters.
- Participants focus on their own organisation and how the experience their character profile would have accessing the services of their organisation.
- Participants then identify the changes that can be made within their own work practices and their organisation.

PUBLIC SECTOR DUTY –PILOT



- Linked in with DHPLG to ensure the duty is reflected in the new Corporate planning guidelines.
- Preparing a cultural profile of the county and barriers that may arise in the area of customer services
- Inclusive Consultation policy
- Inclusive Customer service policy

Inclusive customer service policy

My name is Ablaa. I am thirty two and a Muslim woman. I am proud of my Muslim heritage but I am saddened by the horrible acts extremists have committed in the name of Islam. I do not understand their actions and the vast majority of Muslims like me reject their violence. I am a doctor working in the busy maternity unit in the nearby hospital, so I am caring for people all day. **I have found Irish people to be warm, kind and funny, but I know people make assumptions about me when they see me in my hijab (headscarf).** I often have to treat people who may be wearing a medical relic on their clothing and my colleagues tell me this is a symbol of their faith, the headscarf I wear is a symbol of my faith too. Some of my friends have negative comments said to them and their children because of people's stereotypes about the Muslim religion. This is hard and can be difficult for children to understand but hopefully in time this will improve.

My name is Ablaa and I'm a muslim woman

My message to YOU, **'KNOW ME'** not the Stereotype

"I WOULD PREFER A REAL DOCTOR"

"THAT POOR WOMAN FORCED TO WEAR THAT YOKE ON HER HEAD BY HER HUSBAND"

Inclusive customer service highlights the key areas for consideration when we plan the delivery of services.

- *Physical mobility*
- *Literacy skills*
- *Sensory impairments*
- *Language barriers*
- *Privacy*
- *Personal support*
- *Cognitive function*
- *Cultural norms*

Inclusive Customer Service policy

All services and information should be easily accessed by the following customers

- Customers with limited use of their hands or fingers.
- Customers with impairment of eyes/ears/speech.
- Customers with limited physical mobility.
- Customers with intellectual disabilities, memory loss or dementia.



Inclusive Customer Service policy

All services and information should be easily accessed by the following customers



- Customers with limited literacy skills.
- Customers with limited or no English language skills
- Customers with limited or no IT Skills.
- Customers from different cultural backgrounds.

Inclusive Consultation policy



- Set outs the steps to be taken to ensure everyone in the community has the opportunity to participate in a public consultation process.

Training Training Training



- Policies are ineffective unless staff are giving training on :
- Why the policy is in place
- How the policy relates to their day to day work.
- Who to contact if they need further information on any aspect of inclusive customer service.