

South Kerry Development  
Partnership Limited

# **Rural Men Outreach Project**

March 2006-March 2008

## **Summary Report**



### **Community Development Department**

South Kerry Development Partnership Ltd  
Library Place, Killorglin, Co. Kerry.

## ***Preface:***

This summary report is drawn from the Interim Evaluation Report and the Final Project Reports undertaken by Institute of Technology, Tralee.

## ***Acknowledgements:***

South Kerry Development Partnership wishes to acknowledge the valuable contribution and assistance of the following;

- Willie O’Sullivan & Sile Ni Shuilleabhain, outreach project workers
- Hilary Scanlan HSE, Chairperson of the project committee
- Agencies epresented on the committee; Department of Social and Family Affairs, Citizen’s Information Service, Kerry Education Service, as well as SKDP Board members
- Denise O’Leary & Dr Siobhán Ni Mhaolrunaigh, project evaluators, Nursing, Health and Social Care Research Unit, Institute of Technology, Tralee.
- The Dormant Account Fund, administered by Pobal on behalf of the Department of Community, Rural & Gaeltacht Affairs.

## ***Background***

Social isolation has been widely recognised as an important issue facing policy makers. Men have smaller social support networks and are more likely to be socially isolated than women, yet, as is highlighted in a report from the Irish Central Border Area Network, men who are socially excluded often do not have support from government agencies as the support tends to be directed towards other vulnerable groups. This is despite the fact that exclusion impacts on both physical and mental well being and that as a group, socially isolated men suffer economic, health and social disadvantages. Living alone appears to make men particularly susceptible to these disadvantages, as does advanced age. Older men living alone appear to be twice as likely to die as their female counterparts, have more health problems, be more at risk of suicide, are more likely to be excluded from social networks, and have lower incomes.

There is evidence to suggest that interventions that use educational and social activities reduce social isolation among participants. Additional research indicates that programmes targeted towards older people which foster social contact, encourage creativity and use monitoring have a positive impact on the health and well-being of the participants. Furthermore, the level of social support resources dedicated to older adults has been shown to correlate with levels of depression and suicidal behaviour suggesting that investing in social support can have a direct affect on rates of depression and suicide among older adults. Thus, programmes targeting socially excluded men can improve their physical health, mental health and quality of life.

## ***Background to the Project***

The *Rural Men's Outreach Project* was initiated and planned by a sub-committee of the South Kerry Development Partnership. The Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs through Dormant Account Funding supported it financially. Originally, the project was conceived in response to a report on the situation of rural men in South Kerry that highlighted the issues facing many men, relating to social exclusion, lack of skills, health care and social services. The report recommended the development of outreach activities in the region (O'Connell, 2002).

In the initial stages of project development, the focus of the planned outreach activities was on education and training, to target forty men. This approach was taken by a number of community development organisations in the past such as, the North Leitrim Men's Group (2007), and the Dingle Men's Group (Nexus Research Co-operative, 2006). However as planning progressed, it became clear that the basic steps of outreach were necessary to establish trust and to determine the issues of importance to the targeted population. Accordingly, the project development team was highly responsive to the perceived needs of men in the region. Consequently, the social care element of the outreach project became the dominant theme and the proposed target number of forty increased.

## ***Aims and Objectives***

The overall aim of the project was to identify a target population of rural men who may be experiencing social exclusion aged over 40 in the region in order to improve their lives. This involved establishing their needs.

Objectives:

- To provide a client centred support and outreach service to rural men
- To identify pathways for inclusion
- To provide social opportunities
- To respond to issues identified
- To network with similar projects
- To disseminate outcomes

## ***Structure and Process for Implementation of the Project***

A committee established to oversee the running of the project included representatives from across the social care arena. The organisations represented were the Department of Social and Family Affairs, South Kerry Development Partnership, the Health Service Executive, the Citizens Information Service, and the Kerry Education Service.

The committee established a set of clearly defined requirements for the post of outreach worker. The characteristics emphasised were empathy, perseverance, personal experience and being of the community or one similar. The workers began outreach activities in April 2006.

Both workers began by contacting health and social care professionals working with members of the target population for example, the community welfare officer, public health nurse and the FÁS Community Employment Scheme administrator. These professionals gave them a list of contacts that created a snowball effect whereby those men informed them of others in their area. Locating the target population also involved visiting houses door-to-door. In establishing contact with the men, the outreach workers gave a brief overview of the outreach project and proceeded to establish and address the needs of the clients where possible. Monthly meetings with their supervisor and the committee were held to keep all personnel involved in the project abreast of progress.

## ***Role of Project Personnel***

- The role of the outreach workers encompassed identifying men living alone or in isolated areas in the region, making contact with them, establishing their needs and facilitating these when possible.
- The outreach workers reported to the Head of the South Kerry Development Partnership Community Development Programme once a month, whose role was to provide feedback and support.
- The Rural Men's Project Committee met once a month. The role of the committee was to provide a support structure to the outreach workers and an outlet for them to discuss their work.

## *Levels of Outreach*

In the planning stages, the project focused on providing educational outreach to a limited number of men. However, the focus of the project shifted to embrace a wider population of men at a more basic level of outreach as it became clear that the target population had yet to be identified and within that population, a wider pre-development type of focus rather than a more targeted focus on outreach was appropriate.

The outreach project personnel have been highly successful in identifying a target population in the region (approx 180 men visited), documenting their needs and addressing those needs when possible. In doing so, they have identified a number of sub-populations of men and the different levels of outreach appropriate for the sub-populations.

## *Evaluation Methodology*

To evaluate the value of the outreach programme for the participants, a questionnaire (Appendix I) was designed to elicit information on the demographics, living situation, transport use and needs, occupation, and social connections of the men who had taken part in the programme. They were also invited to offer their views on the usefulness of the programme.

The men in the sample were visited in their homes and were asked to answer the survey questions. In most cases, the outreach workers asked the questions and filled out the answers on the questionnaire. The evaluators recognise that an element of bias could have been introduced due to their presence but this was deemed necessary due to the fact that some of the respondents required assistance. In some cases, the men filled out the answers themselves.

The questions covered the following topics;

### **Demographics**

- Age
- Household occupancy
- Health

### **Housing**

- Type of housing
- Housing concerns

### **Transport**

- Car ownership
- Patterns of use of mode of transport

### **Occupation & Learning Activities**

- Occupation
- Learning activities

### **Social Inclusion**

- Avenues of social contact
- Impact of the outreach programme on social inclusion

### **Economic Situation**

## *Recommendations*

In considering the evaluation report, and in light of the learning from the project, South Kerry Development Partnership makes the following recommendations;

- 1) Interagency and mainstreaming
  - Relevant agencies and stake holders would need to examine the report findings in considering new approaches to the issues identified. Across the board inter-agency collaboration and commitment will be needed.
- 2) National Cooperation & Dissemination
  - There is a need to disseminate the findings from this project and to campaign at a national level to highlight the issues arising.
  - It is important to build on the experience and knowledge gained from this work through cooperation with new programmes such as that being piloted by the GAA, IFA and other agencies.
- 3) Housing
  - Need for flexibility in grants for house improvements, as sometimes the individual contribution required is prohibitive.
  - Insulation. Examine the possibility of having a South Kerry home insulation project.
  - Continue RSS house improvements. Develop links and referrals from groups including Home Help and Community Alert.
- 4) Transport
  - This is a major factor. Further outreach, innovation and flexibility required to address needs. Use of Community Car service and voucher scheme should be investigated.
  - Greater use of existing buses should be examined, as many are not being used to their capacity.
- 5) Education
  - 50% or more will participate in courses and training, but for many the use of the term education is discouraging due to their poor experience of education. Identify from the men courses of relevance and interest. Offer as local as possible to avoid transport issues.
- 6) Health
  - Examine initiatives between service providers and community-based organisations to identify gaps, greater coordination of activities, and new approaches to delivery.

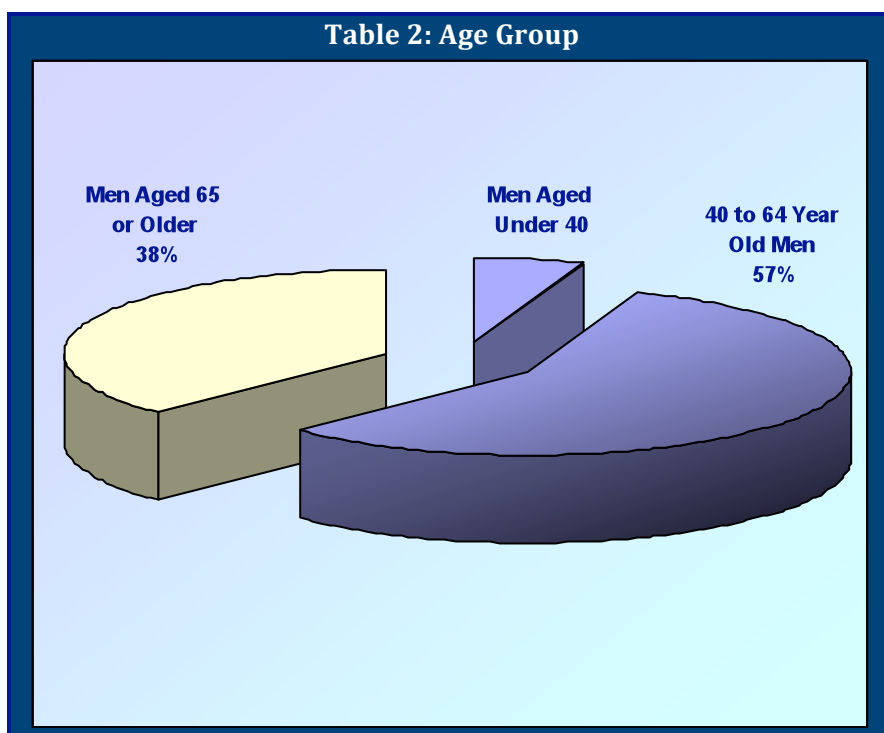
## Programme Evaluation Tables

The following tables illustrate the profile of the men in the programme, some of the issues arising, and how the workers engaged with the men.

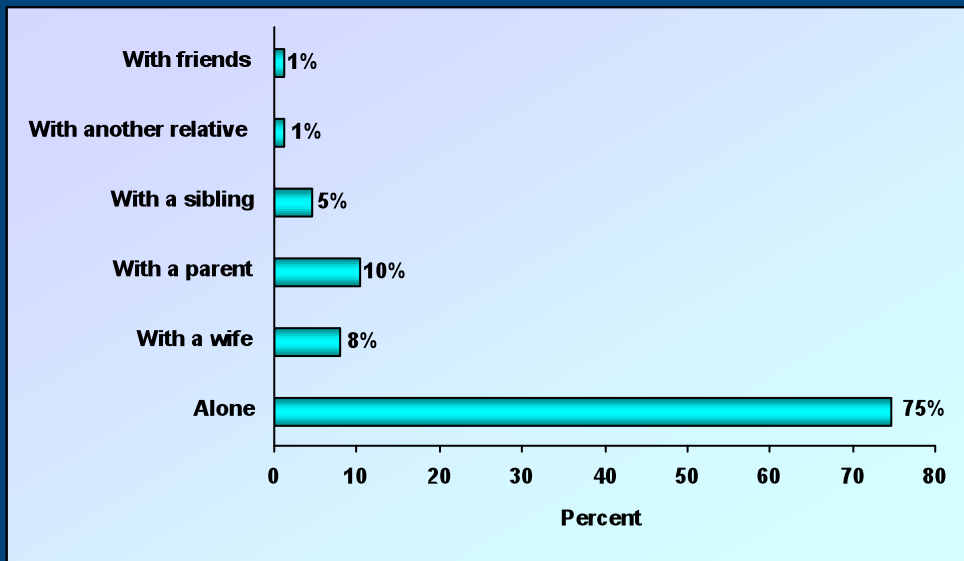
**Table 1: Value of the Programme to the Respondents**

	<b>All respondents</b>	<b>Respondents aged under 65</b>	<b>Respondents aged 65 and older</b>
Someone to Talk To	53%	44%	68%
Received Help Filling Out Forms	52%	50%	55%
Information on Entitlements	51%	58%	39%
Received Help in Contacting Agencies or Companies	40%	34%	48%
Participated in Outings	36%	38%	32%
Participated in Skills Training	19%	28%	3%
Received Other Help	9%	10%	6%

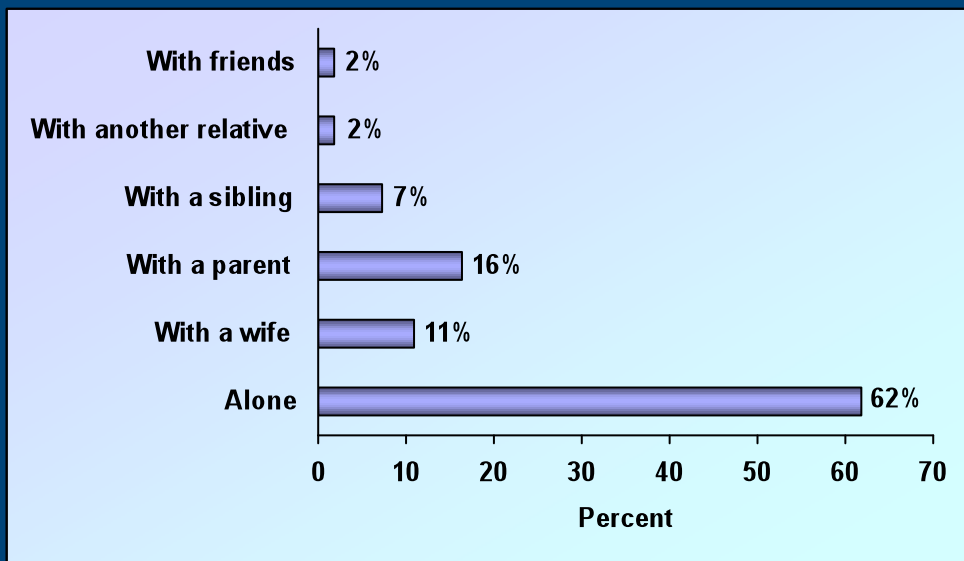
**Table 2: Age Group**



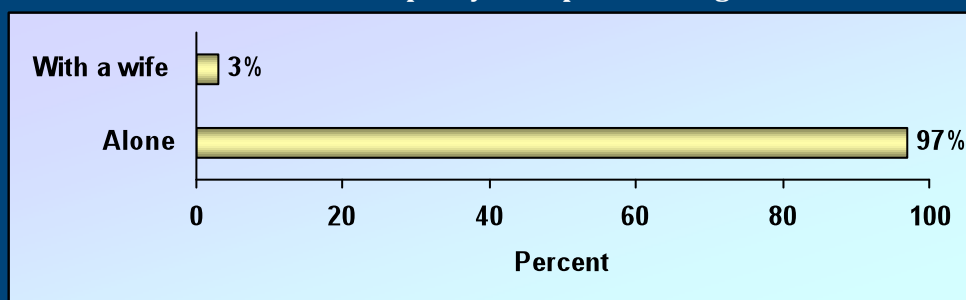
**Table 3: Household Occupancy – All Respondents**



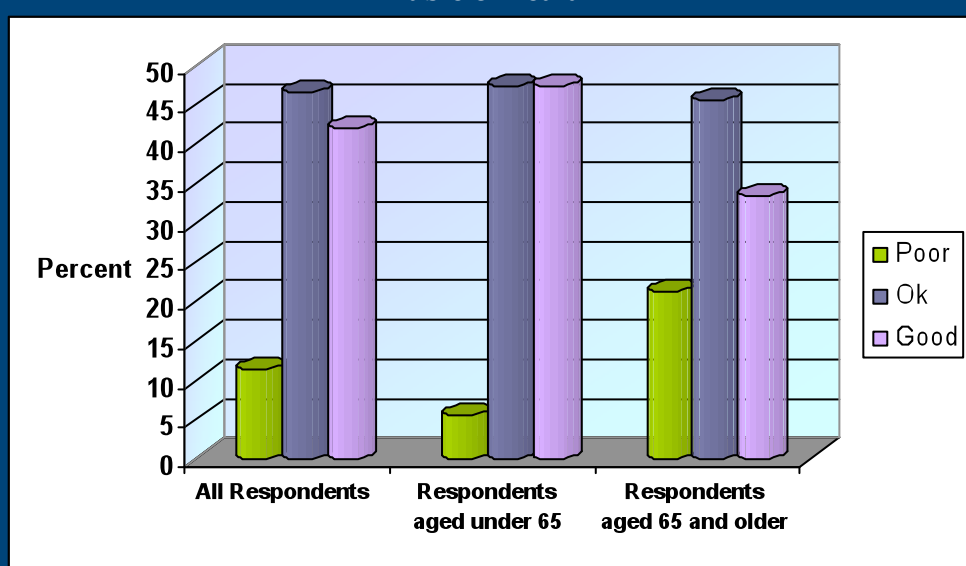
**Table 4: Household Occupancy – Respondents Aged Under 65**



**Table 5: Household Occupancy – Respondents Aged 65 or over**



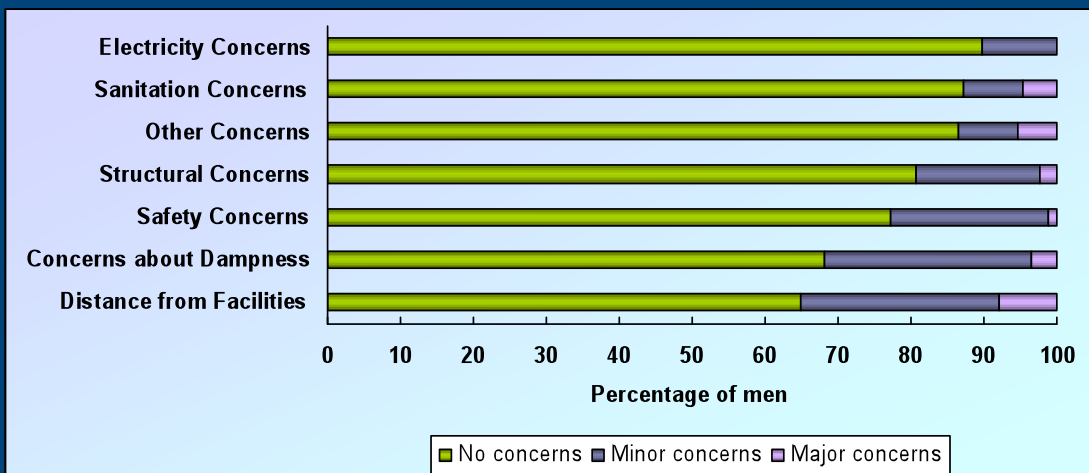
**Table 6: Health**



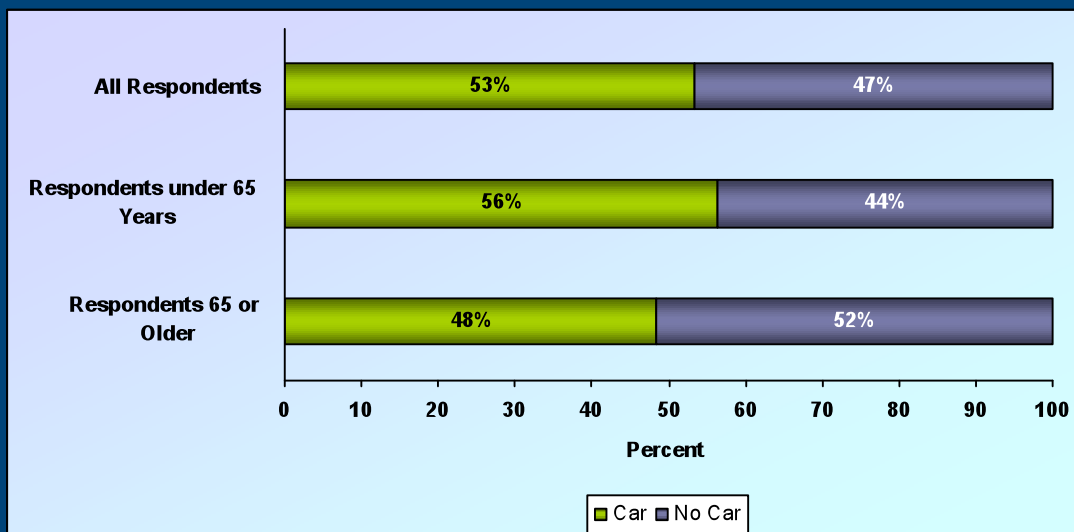
**Table 7: Type of Housing**

	All respondents	Respondents aged under 65	Respondents aged 65 and older
House	89%	87%	91%
Mobile home	2%	2%	3%
Rented accommodation	8%	9%	6%
Other	1%	2%	0%

**Table 8: Accommodation Concerns**



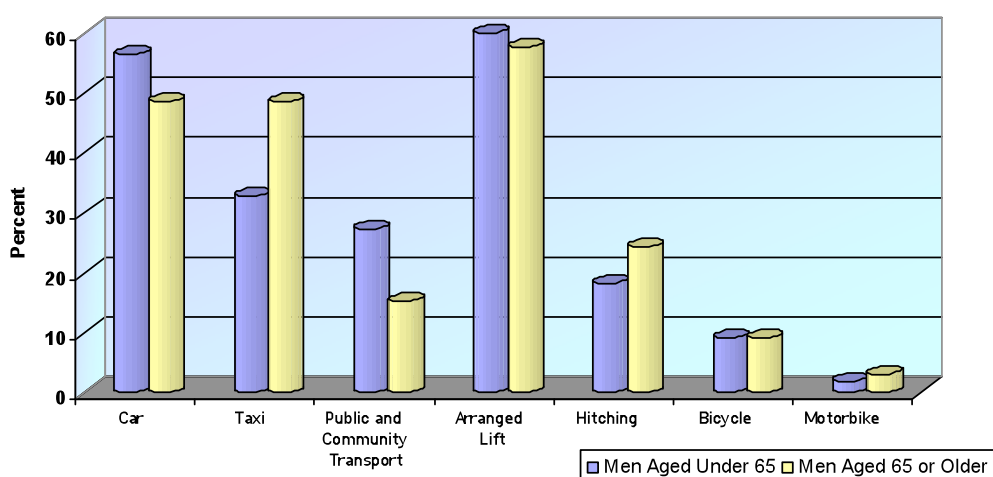
**Table 9: Car Ownership**



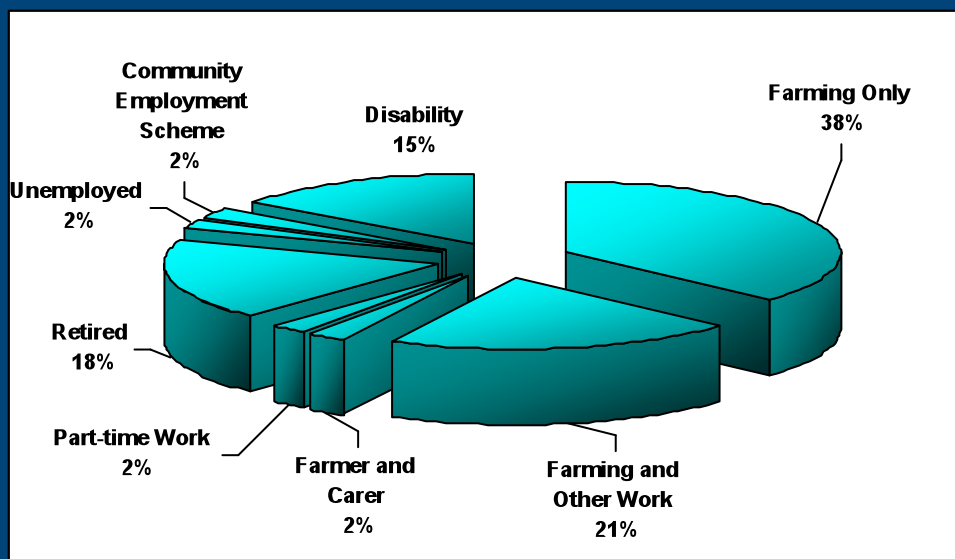
**Table 10: Frequency of Use of Modes of Transportation**

	<b>More than Twice a Week</b>	<b>About Twice a Week</b>	<b>About Once a Week</b>	<b>Once or Twice a Month</b>	<b>Never</b>
<b>Car</b>	53%	0%	0%	0%	47%
<b>Taxi</b>	6%	6%	7%	20%	60%
<b>Public or Community Transport</b>	1%	2%	7%	13%	76%
<b>Arranged Lift</b>	7%	13%	10%	30%	40%
<b>Hitching</b>	1%	3%	3%	13%	79%
<b>Bicycle</b>	3%	1%	3%	3%	89%
<b>Motorbike</b>	1%	0%	0%	1%	98%

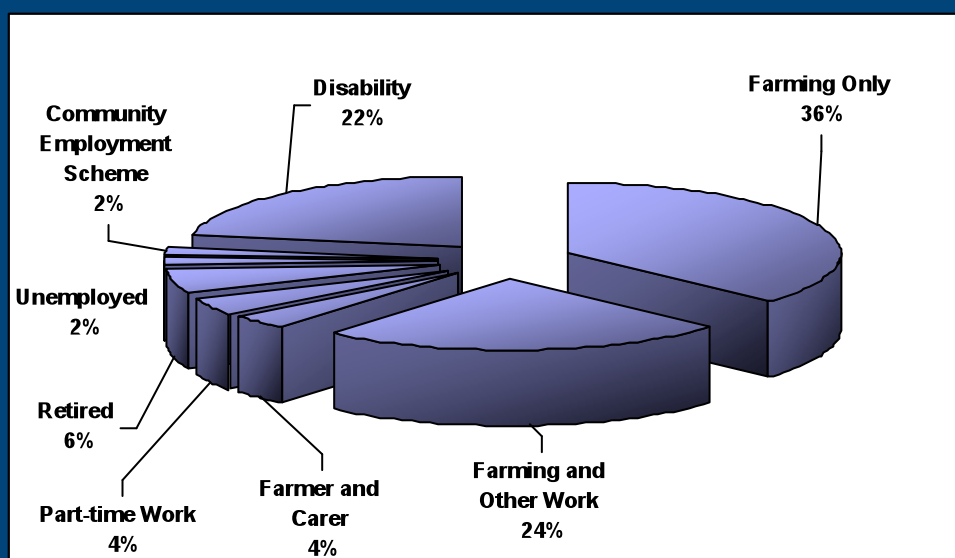
**Table 11: Use of Modes of Transportation**



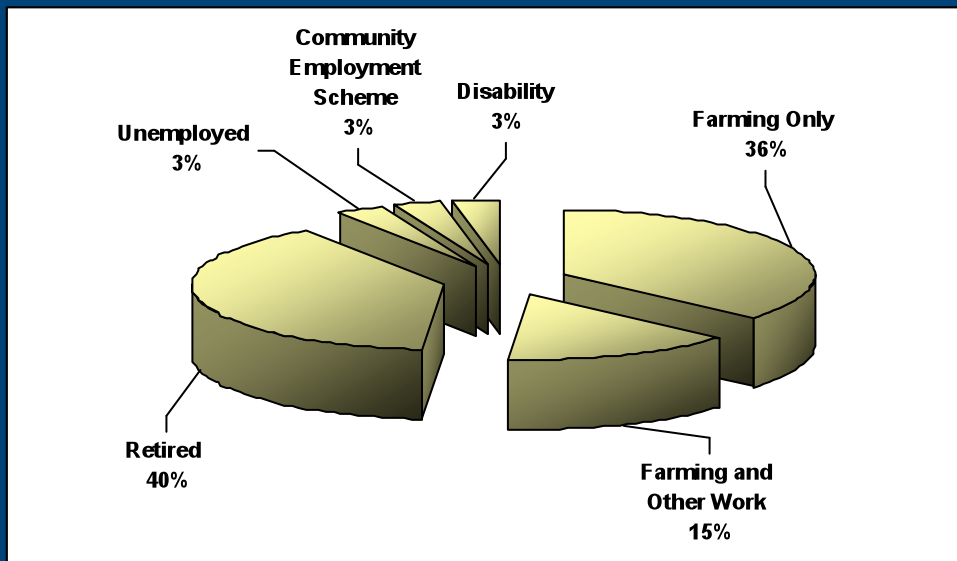
**Table 12: Occupation of All Respondents**



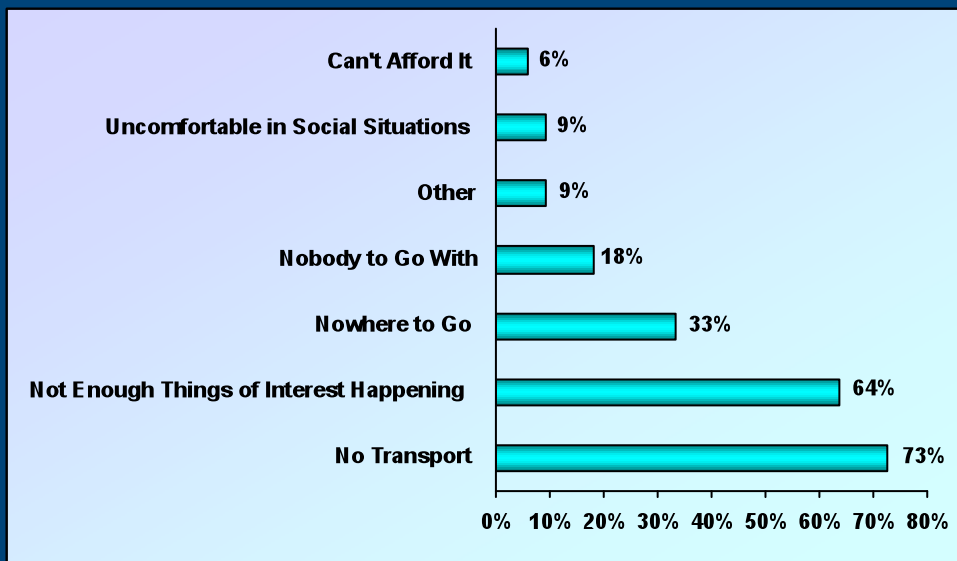
**Table 13: Occupation of Respondents Aged under 65**



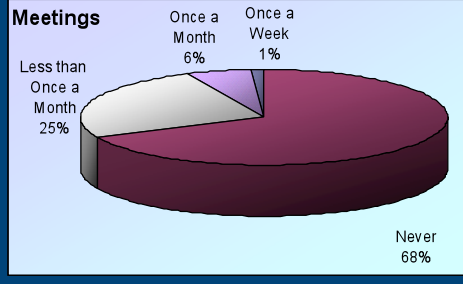
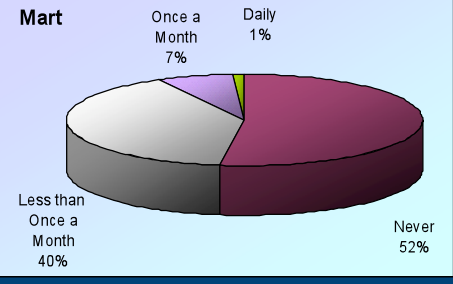
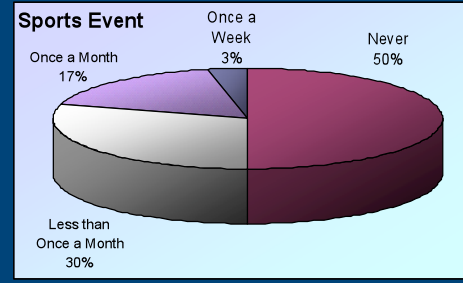
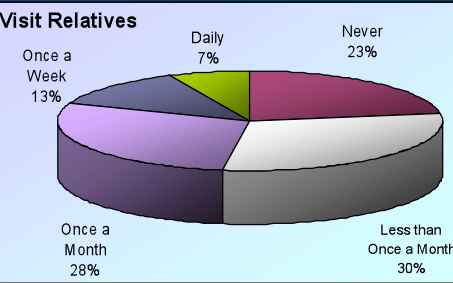
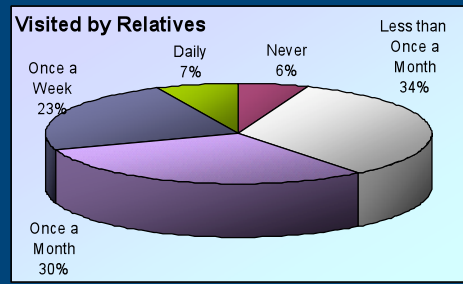
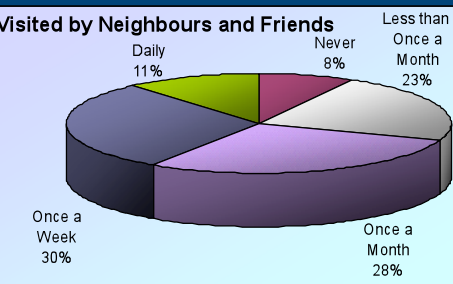
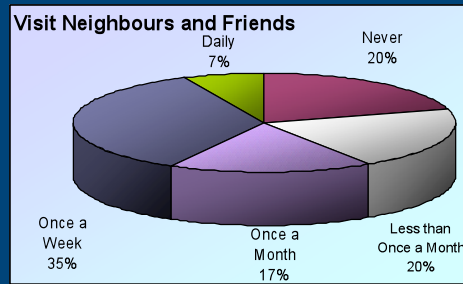
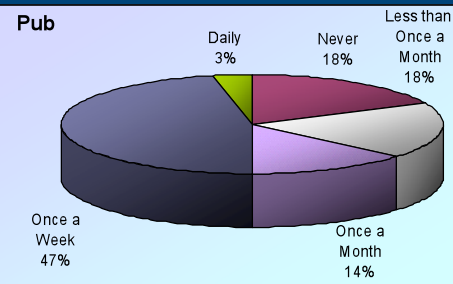
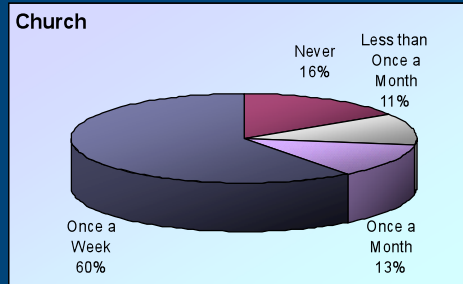
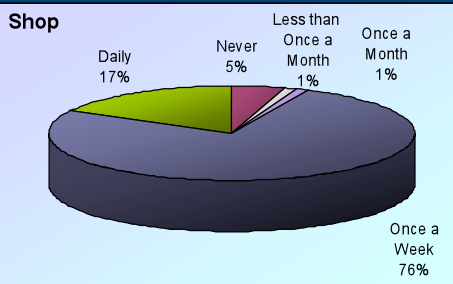
**Table 14: Occupation of Respondents aged 65 and Older**



**Table 15: Reasons for Not Socialising More**



**Table 16: Avenues and Frequency of Social Contact**



<b>Table 17: Social Outings/Events</b>	
<b>Event</b>	<b>Number of Attendees</b>
Day out to Muckross House, Killarney	9
Day out to Blennerville Windmill	8
3 Visits to A Day in the Bog Museum	18
Day out to the 2007 Ploughing Championships	15
Cinema	7
Concert	11
Evening out at the greyhound races, Tralee	11
Play in Siamsa Tire	3
Christmas Party	12

<b>Table 18: Information or Help Given on Social Transfers/Entitlements</b>			
	<b>All Respondents</b>	<b>Respondents aged under 65</b>	<b>Respondents aged 65 and older</b>
House Repair Grants (KCC)	16%	8%	31%
Meals on Wheels/Food Hamper	13%	8%	21%
Unemployment Assistance/Farm Assistance/ household Pack	13%	16%	7%
Area Aid (Dept AFF)	11%	6%	21%
Local Improvement Scheme/Roads (KCC)	8%	4%	14%
Local Authority Housing (KCC)	6%	6%	7%
Pension Information (CIB)	6%	4%	10%
House Repair Grants (HSE)	5%	4%	7%
Rural Social Scheme (Dept RCG)	5%	8%	0%
Referrals to Health or Social Care Professionals	4%	4%	3%
Medical Card	4%	6%	0%
Early Retirement (Teagasc)	3%	4%	0%

## 4: Discussion and Conclusion

### *Discussion*

The evaluation of this outreach programme represents 88 rural men in one specific region within South Kerry. The majority of men were between 40 and 65 years of age. Most of the respondents lived alone and most felt their health was ok or good. Eighty nine percent of them lived in their own house and several concerns regarding accommodation and housing were identified. There appeared to be a correlation between poor housing and poor health among the population. Rural transport issues were evident where car ownership was not a feature. For these men, the modes of transport used depended mostly on other peoples generosity, as public forms of transport such as taxi and community transport were less accessible for economic and availability reasons. The majority of respondents (61%) were either full time or part time farmers and those who were not engaged in farming had some form of employment on a part time basis. An interesting observation was that a majority of those in the retired age group classified themselves in some form of occupation.

The outreach programme had enabled participants to partake in learning activities such as computer courses and had advanced their social inclusion through outings and organised events. Twenty nine percent of respondents reported that they felt socially isolated and there was no difference between age groups. Sixty seven percent of respondents stated that they did not want to socialise more. However, the data also illustrated that one of the major reasons for not socialising more was lack of transport. As one would expect, trips to the shops and attendance at church, along with visiting neighbours, friends and the pub were the most frequent social contacts. Attendance at more formal events such as meetings and sport events was less frequent.

The outreach programme had facilitated rural men in coping with many different agencies, enabling them to gain access to their social entitlements. The programme was evaluated positively by the large majority of men who were randomly selected for this evaluation. Although isolation was not identified as an issue for most of these men, 53% of all respondents found the programme gave them someone to talk to. This percentage increased for respondents over 65.

### *Conclusion*

The objectives of the outreach programme as outlined in the programme funding application to the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs were to identify rural men who were disadvantaged in some respect and respond to their needs where possible. These needs materialised as mostly economic and social. The programme provided a client centred support and outreach service to rural men, identified pathways for inclusion by providing social opportunities, and responded to individual issues identified. There is still a need for a network to interlink stakeholders for outreach work for rural men both locally and nationally and to disseminate the evaluation of outreach programmes.

This positive evaluation from the respondents gives a clear indication that the two outreach workers provided individual support and made every effort to encourage social participation. The outreach workers own perceptions indicated that there is a clear need for a continuation and expansion of the programme. Several of the comments

from the participants within the programme support this need. In particular, comments identified the value of the social outings, having someone to talk to, up-skilling, and encouragement to act on health matters. Moreover, the moral and practical support afforded by the outreach workers was evident. In some instances this was regarded as “life-saving”. Concern was expressed should the programme not continue and in many instances this concern related to not having assistance and advice in how to access and apply for social entitlements, not having the personal contact, and having the confidentiality of a one to one outreach relationship.

The questionnaire respondents’ comments suggest that several had improvements in their quality of their life as a result of this programme. This in itself indicates the need to continue with the programme whilst considering the evaluation already submitted in the interim report. This first phase of evaluation recommended a stronger focus on strategic direction and decision making both locally and within the national arena. It was also recommended that in developing a team of outreach workers, a competency framework should be developed. This competency framework should include training and role definition. A continuation of the current high level of support and feedback systems was recommended. The outcomes of the final evaluation note the importance of identifying the individual needs of rural men and having a system to offer immediate help in dealing with these needs. Undoubtedly the demographic profile of this group is likely to reflect a wider population of rural men who as yet have not been reached by this programme. In light of the time span of the outreach programme i.e. it has been drawn to conclusion, the evaluators strongly recommend that funding be made available to pursue the work already begun.