

AGE CONCERN ESPAÑA

Helping people to help themselves

FAMILIES TODAY SEEM TO BE INCREASINGLY DIVIDED.

It may be that the older members of the family feel fit enough to care for themselves and don't want to be, what they think of as a burden, on their younger members, or it may be that the younger members themselves, already busy with full time jobs and children are unable to dedicate all the time necessary to hands-on care of their elderly relatives.

Many of those relatives choose to emigrate to the sun for health reasons, or to improve their quality of life and continue to enjoy regular visits from family and friends. Sadly however, at some time in their lives some of them may be left alone and have problems they are unable to solve without help.

We received this story from Age Concern España, a registered charity which works to promote the well-being of all older people. The name has been changed to protect the lady's privacy.

Milly's story

Milly's story is one which is all too common amongst older people in Spain today. Milly, like many people was looking forward to a long and happy retirement with her husband of many years. They had moved to Spain and were excited about their new life together. Tragically, shortly after relocating, Milly's husband died.

Struggling with her loss and sense of emptiness, Milly found it increasingly difficult to gain any meaning out of what remained of her life. She would spend days and nights alone, often going for weeks without any contact with another human being. Having only recently moved to the area she did not know anybody. With no family here and not being able to speak Spanish she became more and more housebound. Then she phoned the British Consulate in a very distressed state because she had no money as she was unable to sort out her pension.

A caseworker from Age Concern visited Milly at home and undertook a detailed assessment of her needs. By working with the Pensions Benefits and Healthcare team, they managed to sort things out and she is now in receipt of both her UK and Spanish pension. Her sister in England rang them to thank everyone for all their efforts.

Each week casework support volunteers from the local Age Concern still visit Milly, do some shopping for her, take her to the hospital and translate for her when necessary. With assistance from Age Concern, the Red Cross provided her with a tele-alarm, which she now carries at all times. She is too scared to go out on her own but she attends Age Concern social events, including the monthly luncheon club.



Many elderly relatives choose to emigrate to the sun

This has made a tremendous difference to Milly's life. Her weekly visits from Age Concern España casework support volunteers has given Milly some hope back in her life whereas before she felt she was merely existing.

Age Concern España works to help to make later life a fulfilling and enjoyable experience for everyone. It started in the Balearic islands and now has bases in Mallorca, Menorca, Ibiza, Costa Blanca Sur and Estepona. Through a network of English speaking volunteers they are able to provide direct services for residents and tourists who are over 50 years of age and in need. They are also committed to integration in Spain, are developing stronger links with Spanish organisations and work closely with Age UK/Help the Aged, the

British Consulate and the Department for Work and Pensions.

They concentrate on working with people aged 50+ and provide services designed to assist with all of the typical difficulties associated with ageing such as failing health and mobility, financial constraints and often isolation and loneliness.

Furthermore, the Spanish social welfare system is not as comprehensive as in the UK which means that often family units are relied upon to provide care for elderly relatives. Many British nationals living in Spain do not have families here or are estranged from their families in the UK and so this essential element of support is missing. This combined with a lack of knowledge of the Spanish language means

that people often find it difficult to access Spanish public services and get the help that they so desperately need. A. C. España have designed services (such as the casework service/lifeline volunteers/hospital visiting/various clubs/transport/social event/food parcels etc.) to help alleviate many of these problems.

Nationally, Age Concern provides a casework and an Infoline service: 902 00 38 38 (local call rate) between the hours of 10am and 2pm. Infoline is a gateway into the casework service and also provides a basic advice and signposting service. The service currently only operates on a restricted basis due to lack of funding.

Their caseworkers within the casework service can identify which benefits older

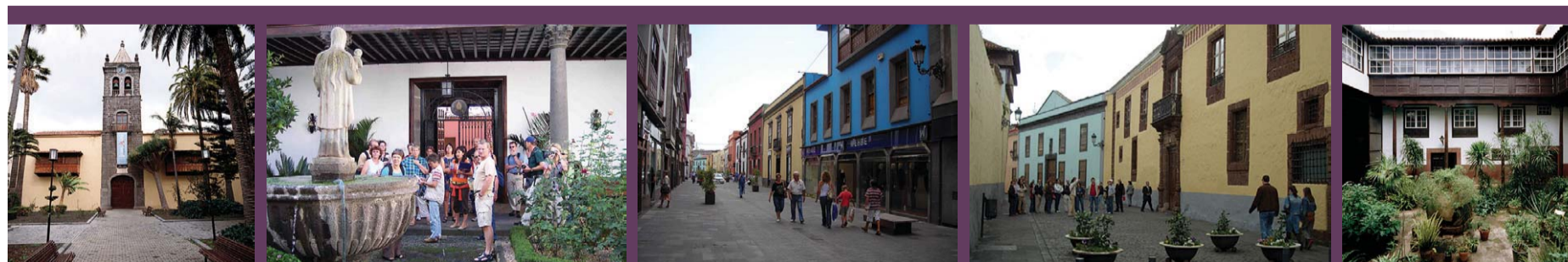
people may be entitled to and how to claim them, they provide support and advice, and liaise with other organisations and charities to assist those in need. Locally, Age Concern also provides a range of direct services for older people. Through their Lifeline service, they make home and hospital visits, liaise with social services, lease care equipment, and arrange various social activities.

Although fronted by A.C. España, this project is about bringing many other local organisations (both expat and Spanish), local councils, and other agencies together to provide a more coherent and comprehensive service for older people in need.

Sadly in the Canaries there is only one Age Concern España volunteer and a great deal of very useful work that could be done. They are actively looking to recruit new volunteers to assist with their objectives and even if you are only in the country for a few months a year, your help could be vital. As they are a charity organisation, they are also looking for potential sponsors or donors to help with the cost of training the casework volunteers and to provide funding for the Infoline service.

Age Concern España needs dedicated volunteers like you to help deliver important services for older people. There are lots of different ways you can get involved and they have volunteering activities to suit everyone, whatever their age, skill or background. As well as helping older people, volunteering can give you a great personal award as you can make new friends, gain new skills, give something back to the community and have fun.

If you are able to help in any way, please call (+34) 606 522 915 or contact Age Concern España by email at ccm@ageconcern-espana.org. More information on their website at www.acespana.org.



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