

COVID-19 Age Friendly Ireland Weekly Newsletter

18 December 2020

National Updates

A Special Christmas Message for everyone from Minister Mary Butler Minister for Mental Health and Older People

2020 has been a really difficult year for us all and we have faced many, many challenges in the last months so I'm reaching out today and I would like to speak to our older generation who have been absolutely fantastic.

You have been so resilient in doing everything the government has asked of you and I would like to wish each and every one of you a happy, peaceful and holy Christmas and looking forward to a 2021 when we can all hope to meet our friends and our loved ones again.



Mary Butler TD.
Minister of State, Department of
Health with responsibility for Mental
Health and Older People.

Thank you and Happy Christmas to all.

Link to Minister Butler's recorded message



Today marks our final newsletter edition for 2020 and what a year it has been!

The Covid19 pandemic has changed our way of living, working and socialising. In many ways it has highlighted the need to plan for the ageing population all over the world and how when the chips are down our communities here in Ireland are some of the best in the world at coming together to support one another in times of crisis.

We are very proud of all the progress made this year and the hard work and dedication of all the staff involved in each of the 31 Age Friendly Programmes around the country. Many fabulous initiatives have been rolled out from care packs for older people, befriending services, digital training and support, online classes for fitness, crafts and cooking and not to forget all the wonderful dedicated radio programmes around the country run by our very own Older People's Council members.

We really hope that 2021 is a positive year for everyone and that we will once again be able to meet face to face in a safe way. Until then we would like to wish everyone a safe and happy Christmas and we will be back with our first edition of 2021 on Friday the 8th of January.









Public Health Measures

Ireland is currently at Level 3.

You can see the <u>measures in place from 18th December here</u>. You can see the <u>quick guide to the Christmas changes here</u>.

Keeping well this winter campaign

The Keeping well this winter campaign is running across many media channels including TV, digital and social, radio and local press. This Keeping well this winter guide with lots of tips and advice has been distributed to two million households in Ireland. This year people are encouraged, particularly our older population and those caring for them, to prepare for their winter health needs as best they can and to know that the health service is available when they need it.

New Visitation Guidance for Nursing Homes

On the 30th November 2020, the Health Protection Surveillance Centre (HPSC) published <u>new COVID-19 Guidance on Visitations to Long Term Residential Care Facilities</u>. The new guidance aims to further support long-term residential care services (including nursing homes) and residents in planning visits across all levels of the framework for restrictive measures in the Government's Resilience and Recovery 2020-2021: Plan for Living with COVID-19. The new guidance also includes further advice recognising that major cultural or religious festivals, such as Christmas, are of significance for residents and their families.

COVID-19 Guidance for Religious Services

This HPSC guidance is available here.

The COVID19 World Service: <u>TranslateIreland.ie</u> from COVID19 World Service, provides updated multilingual COVID-19 video messages. All scripts have been approved by the Irish College for General Practitioners. Please also see the <u>HSE's National Social Inclusion Office Migrant Resource page</u> and all <u>HSE COVID-19 translated resources</u>.

Public Health Information

For the most up to date information and advice on Coronavirus, please go to: https://www.gov.ie/en/campaigns/c36c85-covid-19-coronavirus/





Consultation on new Adult Literacy, Numeracy and Digital Literacy Strategy

SOLAS, the Further Education and Training Authority would like to tell you about an important announcement that was made recently by the Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science, Mr Simon Harris TD. The Minister has announced a public consultation on a new 10-year Adult Literacy, Numeracy and Digital Literacy (ALND) Strategy, and SOLAS have been tasked with developing this strategy.

SOLAS hope you will be able to take a few minutes to have your say in the development of the ALND Strategy. This will help to create an environment where all adults in Ireland have the necessary literacy, numeracy and digital literacy to fully participate in society.





Full details of the various ways in which you can have your say are available on the SOLAS website by clicking this link. A consultation paper, which includes detailed information on this online consultation process, has been developed to assist you in providing your views. The consultation paper can be found by clicking this link. You may also wish to view a short video which provides an overview of why a 10-year Strategy for Literacy, Numeracy and Digital Literacy is needed and why we want your views. This video can be viewed by clicking this link.

SOLAS are aiming for this consultation to be as wide as possible. Please note that this consultation closes at **6pm on Thursday 31st December 2020.** If you have any queries, please email roisin.doherty@solas.ie

Specsavers | Music legends Paddy Cole and George Hunter don't want it to be a blue Christmas



Showband icons **Paddy Cole** and **George Hunter** have teamed up with Specsavers Audiologists this Christmas to raise awareness of the impact of untreated hearing loss. (See full press release here) With two thirds (64%) of people actively avoiding social situations because they struggle to hear, the music legends hope that sharing their own stories of hearing loss, will inspire others to move to a different beat this Christmas when it comes to their hearing.



Staying connected to one another – especially with our loved ones - is more important than ever in helping us to stave off loneliness and maintain good mental health. This has been

highlighted in the <u>Irish Longitudinal Study of Ageing (Tilda)2</u>, which says that hearing loss can lead to lower social participation, more loneliness and depressive symptoms – particularly in older men.

George and Paddy are encouraging others to seek the help they need if they have any concerns with their hearing this Christmas and ensure they can join in the fun around the Christmas table. Paddy and George have had an illustrious showband career, playing at some of the top venues in Ireland and across the world, including the several performances at the London Palladium.

For more information on hearing loss and mental health visit www.specsavers.ie/hearing/hearing-loss/understanding/mental-health-hearing-loss.











Creative Ireland's 2020 Highlights

The Creative Ireland Programme team have always understood the value of creativity. Our programme is built around providing everyone in Ireland will opportunities to express and develop their creative potential. This year has been extraordinary for everyone. It has demonstrated clearly how culture and creative expression for all has helped sustain us.

Working with our partners in local authorities and national organisations we developed thousands of projects around the country. This year as well as doing a lot of work online we brought projects to people's front doors, outside

nursing homes and created many bespoke local projects. We strived wherever possible to make a personal connection.



Thanks to all of you for your

support in delivering these wonderful creative projects. They rebuilt connections within communities, supported our creative artists and brought joy to the people of Ireland. Thank you, without your help none of this would have been possible.

Find out more about these wonderful projects





Singing for Health and Wellbeing Survey

The University of Limerick is launching this first-ever, nationwide survey of singing for health and wellbeing groups! They would love if you would complete their survey by 31 December, 2020 if you run such a choir & help spread the word.

https://unioflimerick.eu.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV 3eiPcwJ7ch3zaOV

Their aim is to compile a resource of singing for health and wellbeing groups in Ireland and get more people singing!

To help us learn:

- Where in Ireland singing for health and wellbeing is happening,
- When these groups ordinarily meet,
- Who is singing with you,
- And how to support singers' health and wellbeing!

They know the power of group singing – how it energises, lifts and unites, and also know how much everyone is missing that experience right now because of Covid. They're interested to learn how things have been going during Covid and are also optimistically looking to the future – when we'll be able to gather once again, and joyfully make music.











Let's stay safe this Christmas!

Christmas this year will be a little different. But when you keep your distance, You're protecting yourself and those around you, From the spread of COVID-19.

But when you drop your guard, When groups get together, When you don't give others space, You could become exposed to the virus.

So keep doing the right thing. Not just for yourself, But for those who matter most to you.

Watch the ad on YouTube

Stay safe this Christmas.

hse.ie







Shine Your Light – Solstice #SHINEYOURLIGHT #LONRAIGHDOSHOLAS

RTÉ in association with the Creative Ireland Programme is calling on Ireland to shine a light on Sunday, 20 December at 8.30pm to create an important, national moment of solidarity, on the eve of the 2020 winter solstice.

important milestones for the nation.

This is the third in a series of national moments of togetherness organised by RTÉ, with millions of people participating by shining a light in their windows, at their doorsteps or within their communities using a candle, lantern, torch or Christmas lights to mark

This time, #SHINEYOURLIGHT #LONRAIGHDOSHOLAS takes place at the darkest point in a strange and difficult year, on the eve of the 2020 solstice. Shine Your Light will bring people together safely to mark the rebirth of light and new beginnings. A multi-platform event will culminate in a live TV broadcast on RTÉ







One, a radio special on RTÉ Radio 1 and six spectacular projection installations in memorable locations around the country.

Shine Your Light – Solstice is a half-hour television special on RTÉ One, 8.30—9pm. Opening with a powerful, evocative sequence, the TV special will go on to feature music from Damien Dempsey, Erica Cody, Sharon Shannon, the RTÉ National Symphony Orchestra and more, and new writing by Marina Carr and Manchán Magan, as well as a live finale performance with images from around the country of people shining a light



Voyage Around My Brain Special Memory Makers Radio Programme by Karen Meenan Near FM 90.3 14 December 2020.

A very special programme featuring three contributors to the Fingal Memory Makers Publication. Poet Peter Owens from Malahide, Trinity Drama student Maureen Penrose from Blanchardstown and artist Nancy Dempsey from Portrane talk about their life experiences, creative pursuits and share poems and favourite songs with listeners. Fingal County Council Community Officer Veronica Forsgren who coordinated and managed the Memory Makers project also appears. Janis Joplin, Jonie Mitchell, Edith Piaf and Elizabeth Schwartzkopf provide the soundtrack to this trip down memory lane.





'Voyage Around My Brain' is a new series on NearFM Community Radio researched, presented and produced by Karen Meenan which features experts from the Global Brain Health Institute GBHI meeting with community experts to discuss different aspects of brain health. The programme won a Gold Award in the Social Benefit category of the CRAOL Community Radio National Awards.

Listen to the podcast: http://nearfm.ie/podcast/?p=38327



Charity begins in your community...make your donation count locally this Christmas!

The Local Sports Partnerships (LSP's) in Louth & Meath have combined forces to host the inaugural virtual 2k Turkey Trot in aid of the Society of St Vincent de Paul (SVP). This worthy charity does tremendous work with those who need it and has branches in most local communities across the counties of Louth and Meath.

2020 has brought many challenges to our lives but has had huge impact on local charities and those who they work with, none more so than SVP. Christmas will be different for everyone this year but for some it will be a lot harder. Poverty is never easy to confront and yet, every Christmas it is impossible to ignore.

Louth & Meath LSP's are encouraging everyone to do their part in tackling the issue of poverty in your local area, to ensure that the contribution you make to a charity benefits those in your local community.

You are encouraged to take part in the inaugural virtual 2k Turkey Trot on Saturday 2nd January. All proceeds will benefit the local SVP areas in Louth & Meath. Registration cost is €5 per person. You can do your 2k around your house, in your local park, at your local pitch, wherever you choose! Get your family & friends involved. Get out, get active, you'll not only feel great for being out and about but also feel good about giving something to a great local cause.







Prizes for the most creatively dressed on the day. Capture your participation, use the hashtag #2kturkeytrot and tag us on social media:

Louth LSP - facebook @louthlsp

Meath LSP – facebook @meathsportspartnership or on Instagram @meathlocalsportspartnership

Register at https://eventmaster.ie/event/DpOztmAcJr



Welcome 2021 by being active, feeling good and helping those most in need in your local community!



Bord na Móna staff to help upgrade social housing

Around €5m of Just Transition funding is to be used to retrain former Bord na Móna employees in Laois to carry out energy upgrades across Laois County Council social housing. The fund is being used to support retraining due to the end of peat production over environmental concerns.





National Advocacy Service Annual Report 2019

The National Advocacy Service for People with Disabilities (NAS) today launched their Annual Report. This report presents their key activities, statistics and achievements in a landmark year of development and growth for NAS, which included the launch of their new, independent Patient Advocacy Service.



The number of people using the NAS service in 2019 continued to increase and they provided free, independent and confidential representative advocacy support to people with disabilities in nearly 4,500 pieces of work, representing an increase of 12% on advocacy work carried out in 2018.

During the year, NAS worked on a range of complex cases, demonstrating the importance of advocacy across many sectors, from housing to healthcare, to personal finance, justice and family issues.

You can download The full Annual Report HERE

You can also watch a short video to launch the report **HERE**



Meath Gardaí thrilled by Christmas Card appeal response

Gardaí in Co Meath say they have been overwhelmed by the response to an appeal for Christmas cards for older people. Over 6,000 handmade Christmas cards have been sent to Garda stations in the county which will now be delivered to older people in the community.









Garda Stacey Looby from the Community Policing Unit in Navan came up with the idea and she revealed stations in Trim, Ashbourne and Navan had been inundated with cards in recent weeks. "I was hoping for a couple of hundred cards but in the end I got over 6,000 cards and it means that 6,000 people will get a Christmas card with a special message this year," she said. "Many older people have not had too much face to face contact this year. They might just see me, the postman or the delivery man so to get this card means a lot to them."

Hundreds of children sent in cards for the appeal. The students at Scoil Naofa Eoin in Navan were among those who contributed. "You can't see your grandparents and maybe haven't seen them in about six months so we thought it would bring joy to send a card to someone else's grandparents," explained fifth class pupil Tommy Hayden.

Amy Kennedy, who is in sixth class, said she hasn't seen her grandparents in months and thought "sending a card would be a nice thing to do".



Alice Kellett is among those to receive a card this Christmas. In it, the young person wished Alice a very happy Christmas and urged her to stay safe. "I thought it was a wonderful thing to get. There was a lot of work put into the card. It made my Christmas," she smiled.

Local Updates



I JUST CALLED TO SAY ...

As part of the KEEP WELL Government Resilience Campaign, MONAGHAN AGE FRIENDLY programme are asking people to check in on their older neighbours, in particular those who live alone. If there are older people living in your community we are asking you to check in with them.

YOU CAN JUST CALL TO SAY...

- Hell
- I can go to the shops for you
- I baked these goodies for you
- I picked theses flowers for you
- I can take out/in your bin
- I can walk your dog
- I can help you with your garden

IF YOU NEED ANYTHING AT ALL YOU CAN CALL ME...

















Cavan Nursing Homes host Festival In A Van

Festival In A Van, a new mobile outdoor venue bringing live performance to community and care settings visited Cavan Nursing Homes this week. Supported by the Creative Ireland Programme, it offers local audiences and event organisers a mobile and flexible solution to the current restrictions of live performance in a Covid safe environment. It is a mini pop up venue with a professional technical team.

Festival In A Van visited Castlemanor, Esker Lodge and College View Nursing Homes in Cavan town, Oak View, Belturbet, St Joseph's Nursing Home and Virginia Health Care Centre performing for the residents and staff in the grounds. Two of Cavan's finest performers Claire Crehan on piano and the soprano Niamh McCormack delighted with a selection of light opera, folk, Christmas hymns and classics. The tunes were joyful and uplifting despite the still, freezing air.

Gráinne Boyle, from Cavan County Council's social inclusion unit who scheduled the Nursing Home visits said "the music performed by Niamh and Claire is just the toe-tapping, heart-warming experience that we all need in these dark days of December".

Cllr Sarah O'Reilly, Cathaoirleach of Cavan County Council who attended performances in Virginia said "Cavan County Council is pleased to be able to offer this visit of the Van with Claire and Niamh performing for those living and working in the Nursing Homes. Covid 19 has challenged us all, particularly the elderly, their families and carers. I am pleased that Creative Ireland Cavan supported by social inclusion and the arts office enabled these concerts in the open air to take place. I am really looking forward to the time we can all go back to the theatres and live music venues for the magic it brings to our lives."













Jumping on the Bandwagon!



The residents and staff of St.
Vincent's Community Hospital,
Mountmellick, were treated to a
visit from the mobile performing
unit, The Bandwagon, last Friday
11th December as part of the
Musical Memories InterGenerational Singing Project.
Initiated by Music Generation Laois
and funded by Creative Ireland
Laois, Musical Memories has been

running since September under the leadership of Music Generation Laois musician Nuala Kelly. The project aims to bring music into community hospitals, in a safe way, during the Covid-19 pandemic. With restrictions in place in all residential care settings, the rehearsal sessions for this project have been taking place virtually via Zoom.

The Bandwagon is an initiative of Laois School of Music, partner organisation of Music Generation Laois.

Musical Memories is supported by the Positive Ageing and Well-being Fund as

part of the Creative Ireland Programme 2017-2022, in collaboration with the Laois Age-Friendly Alliance and Healthy Ireland.





400 Support Packs delivered to Older People in Wexford!

Under the Keep Well campaign,
Healthy Wexford has delivered Older
People's Support Packs. In total 400
Keep Well Older People's Support
Packs were distributed in early
December. The packs contain
information and resources on all five
aspects of the Keep Well Community
Resilience campaign: Keeping Active,
Staying Connected, Switching Off,
Eating Well and Minding Your Mood.



Not everyone is online and so the pack aimed to provide resources and supports in a different way.

Wexford Civil Defence packed and distributed the packs to participating Meals on Wheels providers across the county. The Meals on Wheel providers then distributed to clients highlighting further the great collaborative effort for this project.







Chistmas Memories from the Chair of our National Network of Older People's Councils – Kitty Hughes

Thankyou Kitty for sharing these beautiful memories with us.

'The velvety voice of Perry Como wafts through the air as I enter the store, fully masked and sanitised. It's beginning to look a lot like Christmas', he sings 'everywhere we go'. Well, I don't go these days except to the supermarket for necessities. Yes, it is looking a lot like Christmas. But, we all ask, what kind of Christmas will it be?

Thoughts wander back to my days in the classroom as, like the excited children we planned and prepared for the traditional Nativity play. I remember frantic learning off of lines and preparing 'Angels' for their first stage experience, tea -towelled shepherds and suitably stoic Wise Men layered in purple robes 'borrowed' from unsuspecting wardrobes. All miraculously came together beautifully on the night. Though, one or two had minor slippages. Once a very nervous Mary- when asked by a friendly Shepherd who was admiring the 'baby' *And what are you going to call him*? She announced *We're going to call him Joseph'*! a quick nudge from Joseph soon brought clarification from Mary and all was well.

In a small school multi-tasking took on a whole new dimension for events like the Christmas play. Once we had the bright idea of having lights off while the children sang Silent Night with special effects through use of tiny torches on their happy faces. The lights however had just been fitted with new Eco-friendly bulbs and we forgot to factor in that these bulbs need to 'cool down' before they will switch on again. A few unscripted words were heard off stage as darkness descended on all.

Ah yes, you remember it well! Long may children remind us in their own enchanting way of why we celebrate Christmas day.

As I browse the pages of magazines and marvel at TV messages that offer advice on the gifts to buy, food to serve, decorations for the house and what to do with left-overs, I find it difficult to find any mention of the religious meaning of Christmas. The four weeks leading up to 25th December were Advent a time of preparation and looking forward. But here we are on 'Level 5' fighting a plague and the churches are closed for Sunday mass. Who would have envisaged such a scenario this time last year?

This is peak-time for choirs, carol singing and rehearsing for midnight Mass. Experts tell us that singing makes us happy, belting out a tune relieves stress and being in a choir gives you a sense of community. Silent Night will have a whole new meaning this year. Since this time last year, a new way of life has emerged; we self-isolate and social distance. I now know precisely how far away two metres is. I have lived in a cocoon all spring and now it's a 'bubble'. Several adjectives have been attached to people my age; vulnerable, frail, elderly, while a mesmerising army of medical experts, epidemiologists and statisticians warn us of the consequences of breaking the 'lockdown'.

But there is a beam of hope. Like long ago a Star has appeared. A beam of light. There is a vaccine almost ready. Praise the Lord for wise men and women in medical research.

Back to my Nativity play memories. I once heard that a small boy chosen to be one of the Three Wise Men became ill on the night and a substitute was hastily robed and handed an ornate gift and drilled in his one line script 'I bring Frankincense' as he presented his gift to Mary.

But overcome with the solemnity of his role when the time came he stood in silence. Mary on cue held out her hand, whereupon he beamed, bestowed the gift and at the top of his voice announced 'Frank sent this!'

It will be a quiet Christmas this year, no gatherings for school plays or with old friends, but one that will go down in history as quite unlike any other in our lifetime. Don't forget to leave sanitiser beside the chimney for Santa. Happy memories. Nollaig shona and God bless us everyone!







Your Voice



We've heard about so much good work going on all around the country, please let us know what's happening in your area so we can share those innovative ideas with everyone. Please email us your news to Rachel at rleavy@meathcoco.ie Information is one thing we can share right now!

International Updates



The International Federation on Ageing held a Town Hall event called 'COVID-19 and Older People: Overcoming Challenges in Adult Influenza Immunizations, earlier today. A recording of this event will be available on the Federation's website https://ifa.ngo/



Important Tips

Always have your **Eircode** close by in case of emergency. You can find your Eircode here

Perhaps keep a **daily diary** to record the people you are in contact with every day, so if you develop symptoms it will be easier to trace them



Useful Contacts

Age Friendly Ireland Shared Service Office Telephone: 046 9097413

Or Email: rleavy@meathcoco.ie

HSE Advice Line: Callsave 1850 24 1850

Call from 8am – 8pm Monday to Friday and 10am to 5pm Saturday and Sunday

The following is the list of each Local Authority's Helpline phone numbers







Local Authority	Community Response Number
Carlow County Council	1800 814 300
Cavan County Council	1800 300 404
Clare County Council	1800 203 600
Cork City Council	1800 222 226
Cork County Council	1800 805 819
Donegal County Council	1800 928 982
Dublin City Council	01 222 8555
DLR County Council	1800 804 535
Fingal County Council	1800 459 059
Galway City Council	1800 400 150
Galway County Council	1800 928 894
Kerry County Council	1800 807 009
Kildare County Council	1800 300 174
Kilkenny County Council	1800 500 000
Laois County Council	1800 832 010
Leitrim County Council	1800 852 389
Limerick City and County Council	1800 832 005
Longford County Council	1800 300 122
Louth County Council	1800 805 817
Mayo County Council	094 906 4660
Meath County Council	1800 808 809
Monaghan County Council	1800 804 158
Offaly County Council	1800 818 181
Roscommon County Council	1800 200 727
Sligo County Council	1800 292 765
South Dublin County Council	1800 240519
Tipperary County Council	076 106 5000
Waterford City and County Council	1800 250 185
Westmeath County Council	1800 805 816
Wexford County Council	053 919 6000
Wicklow County Council	1800 868 399





