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Welcome from our CEO

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**Thinking of returning or
moving to Ireland?**

Get in touch

Welcome to the January edition of our Newsletter! Regrettably, 2021 has not started off as we had hoped for with Covid-19 continuing to negatively impact our lives, bringing varying and rapid levels of lockdown and restrictions in most countries. Here in Ireland we find ourselves in the highest level of restrictions, which at this point we expect will stay in place until at least 5th March. We must all continue to observe Government and public health advice and guidance to save lives and protect those most vulnerable and at risk in our society.

2021 marks the **21st Anniversary of Safe Home Ireland** and we look forward with a renewed sense of hope and optimism for the year ahead. Starting out as a pilot project in Mulranny, Co. Mayo in early 2000, Safe Home is now a national organisation with a global remit. We are extremely proud of our achievements, the vision of our founders and in particular our current Chairperson, Dr. Jerry Cowley. Safe Home has directly supported over 2,000 people return home to secure housing, as well as assisting thousands of others via our information and outreach service. Our 2020 Annual Review (and previous editions) can be reviewed on our Website and highlight our work and our impact. You can contact our office if you would like us to post a hard copy to you.

With St. Patrick's Day parades cancelled again this year, we wanted to do our bit to keep the green flag flying, so we are pleased to announce we will be holding a further **Facebook Live concert on St. Patrick's Day**. We are currently finalising the programme and will be announcing full details of performances shortly as well as in our February Newsletter. This is the first event to mark our 21st Anniversary and we know you won't be disappointed with what we have in store!

On that note, we are delighted to welcome a **new staff member** to Safe Home this month. Niamh O' Sullivan joins our small team as Communications and Information Officer and she will be instrumental in bringing all the news and up-dates about our planned events for the coming year.

At a time when we must continue to remain together but apart, we continue to urge you to reach out and stay connected with people you trust. This might be a family member, a friend, a neighbour, a local community group, a professional service or maybe a pet? **Our service remains open** so please contact us any time too and we can also provide details of supports in your particular area. **'Remember you are not alone'**.

I think the incredible Amanda Gorman, The National Youth Poet Laureate at President Biden's inauguration this month, captured the sentiments of many in her poem **"The Hill We Climb,"**

"When day comes, we step out of the shade, aflame and unafraid, the new dawn blooms as we free it. For there is always light, if only we're brave enough to see it. If only we're brave enough to be it"

Take care, stay safe and stay connected from Karen, the Staff and Board of Safe Home Ireland.



Government of Ireland
Emigrant Support Programme
An Boinn Gúthál Eagraíochta agus Trádála
Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade

Safe Home Programme CLG trading as Safe Home Ireland
Charity No: 20049119; Company Reg No: 351678

Mother and Baby Homes - Commission of Investigation

Almost six years after the Mother and Baby Home Commission was established in February 2015, the Mother and Baby Homes report was published on the 12th January 2021. The Report investigated fourteen mother and baby homes and four county homes across Ireland. Between 1922 and 1998, 56,000 women were incarcerated; 5,616 being under the age of 18 with some as young as 12. Approximately 9,000 of the 57,000 babies born in these homes died. During the 1930's and 1940's 40% of babies born in institutions died before they reached the age of one. At the time, Ireland had the world's highest proportion of women sent to mother and baby homes worldwide.

The Government has said that the four pillars of recognition, remembrance, records, and restorative recognition are at the centre of its response to the findings of the Report. In terms of records, the Government is committed to introducing information and tracing legislation as a priority followed by actions to support access to personal information and archives of institutional records.

In relation to restorative recognition, an enhanced medical card will be given to former residents of a mother-and-baby home or county home as well as counselling support and patient liaison support services to all former residents who spent at least 6 months in an institution. In addition, a broad suite of memorialisation, educational and research commitments will support national reflection and enduring remembrance led by the views and wishes of former residents the restorative recognition scheme will provide financial recognition: The details of this scheme are now being worked with proposals expected by end of April 2021.

For more information and for access to the report – see www.gov.ie/en/publications or contact the Mother and Baby Home Commission of Investigation via Tel: + 353 1 644 5088; Email: info@mbhcoi.ie

The Health Service Executive's (HSE) National Counselling Service is available Monday to Friday between 9.30am and 5pm. Former residents of mother-and-baby homes **who are resident in Ireland** can contact the HSE for details of the referrals process and regional contact information. Tel: 1800 234 110 or Email: ReferNCS.DNCC@hse.ie. Outside of office hours, **Connect Counselling** provides telephone support. This service is available between 6pm and 10pm each day every day: Tel 1800 477 477.

For people living abroad, there are a number of Irish welfare and advice agencies that provide support for survivors. Please contact the Safe Home office for information and contact details of support services for your area.

An **online support meeting from Barnardos** will take place on 17th February. This is for **birthmothers** who may come forward as a result of the Commission's report. For further information and registration details contact Barnardos helpline via Tel: + 353 1 454 6388 or Email; adoption@barnardos.ie

Covid-19 Travel Up-date

Ireland entered its highest level of Covid-19 restrictions on 30th December 2020 and **will** remain at this level until 5th March 2021. **The Irish Government strongly advises against all non-essential travel to and from Ireland at this time.**

- Since 16th January 2021, all passengers arriving into Ireland are required to have a **negative/'not detected' result** from a pre-departure Covid-19 PCR test taken within 72 hours prior to arrival in Ireland.
- Passengers are required to complete a **Passenger Locator Form** online, **before** arrival for contact tracing and is available on the **Travel section of the gov.ie website**. Children aged six and under are exempt from this requirement

On 26th January the Irish Government announced the introduction of a range of new **travel related restrictions**. These will include mandatory quarantine measures applying to **all international** arrivals and the suspension of visa-free travel to Ireland for nationals of South Africa and all countries in South America. For further details on inward travel to Ireland, including current Covid-19-related requirements and the limited exemptions in place, see the Travel Section of the Department of Foreign Affairs website - www.dfa.ie and www.gov.ie and www.hse.ie websites for specific information.

Note! In the event of an urgent need to travel to Ireland passengers should contact their nearest Embassy or Consulate **before** commencing the journey. The Department of Foreign Affairs Emergency Travel Advice Line is - **Tel: +353 1 613 1700.**

Home is where the Heart is

William Oakey who left Ireland in his early 20's returned home in January 2020 just before the pandemic. Now in his late 50's. He kindly shared his thoughts on some of the obstacles in making his decision to return, how he overcame these and how it's been for him since.

Why did you leave Ireland? I left Ireland for work originally and as younger person enjoyed the freedom of being away, being able to support myself and meeting new people. I have worked all over the world ending up in New York.

What informed your decision to return to Ireland? I have worked in a few different places including London, Bristol, Edinburgh, New York and San Francisco. After my last stint in New York, I became increasingly concerned about my health and not having any health insurance especially in America is real problem. Also, the pace and difficulty in making a living was getting harder. Cost of living was skyrocketing but earnings were going backwards I felt it was time to be back among my own.

What hindered or helped you make a decision to return to Ireland? Making the final decision, being single and all my family and friends back in Ireland helped me make the choice. Just trying to sort out all my belongings, finding a home for all my books as I am avid reader was a huge challenge. Finding somewhere to take my 500 plus books where they would be appreciated and cared for was a huge obstacle. Libraries, community centres and charity shops did not want them. It was very sad for me to see that. A friend who was a returned Irish herself helped me greatly. Apart from offering suggestions as to what to do with my books, she directed me to **Safe Home Ireland** website to make myself aware of services.

What supports did you access in order to help with your decision to return? I didn't know of any programmes or supports that would help getting me back to Ireland. Only for my friend, it would have been a nightmare. Even though I worked in bars, I wouldn't have shared my thoughts with my fellow workers. In America, you keep your thoughts to yourself, it kind of felt like you had failed if you said you were going back to Ireland to your fellow expats even though the large majority still regard Ireland as home.

How has Covid and travel restrictions impacted your friends that are still in New York? Most of my friends are working in the hospitality or building industries. Covid has impacted them greatly. All the restrictions have led to a fear of getting sick especially those who do not have medical insurance. Less work with places closed, restricted hours means less pay. A lot are under pressure to pay rent as well. I really feel for them. The Irish community are always good to each other so there are supports amongst each other, Covid or no Covid.

How are you settling back to living in Ireland again having been away for so long? Settling back in okay. It's been a strange year with what is going on with Covid-19. It feels like I can't settle properly due to all the restrictions and worry your friends in New York. On the plus side it is great to be back and walk in the silence in the countryside. I feel fortunate to have come home when I did and as far as supports like medical cards etc., I feel so grateful to have been able to access these things that caused me so much worry when I was away. I am looking into learning a new skill and have reconnected with family and friends. Definitely home is where the heart is.

US President Biden's Immigration Plan

President Joe Biden is set to announce a bold and sweeping Immigration Reform Bill to create a roadmap to citizenship for the 11 million undocumented living in the US, whom he said "have been strengthening the US for years and preserve the longstanding directive of our immigration system to reunite families and enhance our diversity". Ciaran Staunton, co-founder of the Irish Lobby for Immigration Reform, stated President Biden's plan is what the Irish community, and all undocumented, has been waiting for decades. According to estimates the number of Irish undocumented living in the United States range between 15,000 and 20,000 "it would be remarkable if our Irish American president was to succeed in passing legislation that would secure the future for so many Irish undocumented and indeed, all undocumented. Now is the time for all ethnic groups to pull together".

The Irish Community Services in Chicago will host a number of legal clinics on February 3rd, February 17th, March 3rd, and March 24th. If you have any immigration or US citizenship questions or if you would like to register for one of the clinics contact; Tel: **773-282-8445** or Email: mcollins@irishchicago.org

Paws for Thought

The Covid-19 pandemic has forced many of us to spend more time indoors, which means we have had to re-imagine our relationships with friends, family and significant others. Being in quarantine or lockdown can mean going weeks without face-to-face social interaction, leading to feelings of isolation and loneliness. The good news is that pet owners can take this time to reimagine their relationship with their furry friend and turn them into one of their closest companions for life. Pets come with some powerful health benefits, such as helping to relieve depression and anxiety, lower stress levels and even improve your heart health. Pets, especially dogs and cats, can reduce stress, anxiety, and depression, ease loneliness and encourage exercise. Caring for an animal can help children grow up more secure and active and pets also provide valuable companionship for older adults.

If you travel from Britain with a pet (cat or dog) **after the 1st January 2021, non-EU rules apply** you must follow new regulations, even if your pet is returning to Ireland from Britain and was born and raised in Ireland. In summary, if bringing your pet to Ireland from UK, you must;

- Ensure your pet is microchipped.
- Have a **valid** EU pet passport OR a health certificate issued by a UK official vet. A health certificate is required before each entry into the EU. (Pet owners are advised to retain any GB-issued EU pet passport, as it may contain important information about vaccinations, treatments, etc.)
- Ensure that the pet is vaccinated against rabies – pets must be at least 12 weeks old before they can be vaccinated. Wait 21 days after the primary vaccination before travel
- Have a tapeworm treatment (for dogs). Dogs travelling from, or returning from, Britain to Ireland will require treatment against tapeworm by a veterinarian 24 to 120 hours (1 to 5 days) before arrival in Ireland. If travelling with a passport issued in Ireland, this treatment may be entered into the pet passport by a UK vet.

Note! The rules for travelling from Northern Ireland have not changed.

For more guidance on bringing a pet into Ireland from the UK, EU or any other country, people should seek advice from their own vet before making travel plans. Full information can also be found via <https://www.gov.ie/en/service/28ae66-pet-travel/> or by contacting the **Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine** via Tel: + 353 1 607 2827 or Email: livetrade@agriculture.gov.ie

Minding yourself

As we face into a new year of challenges and rethink new ways of being in the world, minding your well-being, practicing mindfulness, gratitude, kindness and self-care are now more important than ever before.

Have you ever noticed how you breathe when you feel relaxed? The next time you are relaxed, take a moment to notice how your body feels. Or think about how you breathe when you first wake up in the morning or just before you fall asleep. Breathing exercises can help you relax, because they make your body feel like it does when you are already relaxed. Exploring relaxation techniques and mindfulness can help you look after yourself when you are feeling stressed or worried especially during this very challenging time - see www.mentalhealthireland.com and www.sanctuary.ie for some useful tips and FREE resources.

The distance felt from home, uncertainty of travel and increase sense of loneliness and isolation can be a contributing factor to anxiety and stress felt by the Irish at home and the diaspora. With this in mind the Minister for Overseas Development and the Diaspora, Colm Brophy TD, with the **Samaritans launched access to free support resources**. The pilot project was launched in 2018 and on 18th January 2021, Canada and Australia were added to the list of countries that will receive these resources, see www.samaritans.org/ireland for further details or contact Samaritans via Tel: + 353 116 123; Email: jo@samaritans.ie.

Helplink is an Irish based service providing free **online counselling** to any Irish people living abroad or returning Irish emigrants. For more information, please contact Helplink directly via Tel: + 353 818 99 88 80; Email: HelplinkSupport@helplink.ie Web: www.helplink.ie