



December 2022 – Issue 246

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## Safe Home office hours:

**Monday to Thursday:**  
**9.00am to 5.00pm**  
**Friday:**  
**9.00am to 4.00pm**

**Thinking of returning or  
moving to Ireland?  
Get in touch!**

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

## Christmas Holiday Arrangements

The Safe Home office will be closed  
from 5pm on Wednesday 21<sup>st</sup>  
December and will re-open on  
Tuesday 3<sup>rd</sup> January 2023, at 9am

## Welcome from our CEO

Welcome to our December Newsletter! As we approach the end of 2022, I would like to take the opportunity to reflect on the year that was and to share some of our highlights and achievements during the year. While 2022 started out as a difficult year with ongoing Covid restrictions, it ended with celebrations, albeit one year later than planned, of 21 years of Safe Home Ireland.

In January, **Friends of Safe Home Ireland** was launched, comprising of supporters from across the island. The group led its first fundraising event in [The Ardhowen Theatre, Enniskillen](#) in May, with our Ambassador, [Seán Keane](#) supported by a harmony folk group, [Tully](#). The sold-out event raised much needed funds for our work and advanced our profile with a wider audience.

We are proud of our Mayo roots and we were pleased to partner with Mayo County Council to hold an event in [Mulranny Park Hotel](#) as part of the [Home to Mayo Day 2022](#) festival in May. This event included a guided walk on the Greenway, a lecture with Ultan Cowley, author of [The Men Who Built Britain](#) and a concert with our Ambassador, [Seán Keane](#).

In June we partnered with US based [Coalition of Immigration Centres](#) to host a virtual **Returning to Ireland Information clinic** for its members across the US. This was a great opportunity to connect with our partners at Irish welfare and cultural centres who support our diaspora across the US.

We were pleased to be able to resume our **outreach visits and information clinics in England** in June, after a gap of over two years. Since then, we visited 45 Safe Home housing applicants across England. We held two in-person Returning to Ireland Information Clinics, one in July in partnership with [Luton Irish Forum](#) and a second in September, in partnership with [Birmingham Irish Forum](#). We also presented at [The Irish Elderly Advice Network](#) AGM in September and [Ashford Place](#) Health Information Day in November. In November, we held an online information session with staff at the [London Irish Centre](#) and are planning a number of in-person information clinics in early 2023.

Following a **Governance Review and Skills Audit** we were delighted to welcome three new Directors to our Board this year, Patricia Codyre based in Galway, Joan O Flynn in Kildare and Niall Foley in Edinburgh. We said goodbye to three Directors Oragh McHugh, Denis Joyce and Patricia Liddy. We would like to take this opportunity to thank them for their contributions and ongoing support of Safe Home Ireland.

We continue to **meet quarterly** with our partners here in Ireland, [Irish Diaspora Support Project](#) (formerly Crosscare Migrant Project), [Citizens Information](#) and [Irish Council for Prisoners Overseas \(ICPO\)](#) to ensure we work together to offer a co-ordinated and seamless service to Irish abroad and those who are considering or have returned to Ireland.

Finally, I would like to take this opportunity to convey our heartfelt appreciation to everyone who supported our work and donated to Safe Home Ireland in 2022 - to all our new supporters, our planned givers as well those who have supported our work over the years. We are indebted for your kindness. This enables us to continue to reach out to those abroad who need our support and to assist people who have made the journey back home. We wish you all a safe, healthy and peaceful holiday season; look out for each other and check in on those who are alone, lonely and vulnerable at this time.

**Le gach dea-ghuí, Karen and all the Staff, Board and Friends of Safe Home Ireland**

## Social Housing in Ireland – The Housing Application Form

In order to qualify for long-term social housing supports in Ireland (e.g. council housing, housing association properties, and help with rent if renting in the private sector), applicants must be registered and approved on the relevant Local Authority housing waiting list.

For Safe Home housing applicants, approval by the council is very important, specifically so that they can be considered and nominated by the Council for vacancies in Housing Association schemes. We are fortunate that the vast majority of Councils throughout the country do facilitate the processing of housing applications from qualifying non-resident applicants, under the scheme for the provision of housing for returning Irish emigrants.

Below are some key areas of the social housing application that may be of interest to those seeking social housing support in Ireland in the future.

### Income Limits

Before applying, prospective applicants should first check if they meet the income criteria. Councils around the country set varying allowable net income levels. If income is above the 'cap' for the area, it is **highly unlikely** that the housing application will be accepted. Some Councils have just increased their allowable income levels, with others due to implement increases in January 2023.

For a guide to allowable social housing income limits, contact the relevant Council or see [HERE](#)

### Financial interest in property or land

As part of the council application process applicants are asked if they currently own or have any financial interest in property or land. If they answer yes, clarification must be provided. E.G. official/documentary evidence of recent valuations. Regardless of the response to the question, some councils require applicants to provide proof in the form of an affidavit to confirm they do not own property/land **in Ireland or any other country.**

Costs around the whole area of affidavits can vary from country to country. In the UK for example, the cost for witnessing the signing of an affidavit is **fixed at £5**. However, it should be noted that additional charges will be incurred if a solicitor has to draw up, rather than just witness the signature. If you have been asked by the council to provide an affidavit, please contact the Safe Home office or nearest Irish welfare & advice centre abroad.

### Local Connection

Anyone who is not already resident (e.g. staying with family/renting privately) in the catchment area of the council they are applying to must be able to demonstrate that they have a 'local connection' to the area.

Councils provide a listing of what is deemed as acceptable 'local connection' on the housing form itself. For Safe Home applicants, the most relevant are that they;

(a) have lived or worked in the area for a period of 5 years or more  
OR (b) that they have **close** family living in the area for a period of 2 years or more. **Note!** re (b), strange as it may seem, some councils require applicants to provide proof of this!

### Council Assessments

It can take the Council up to **12 weeks** to complete the housing assessment process **IF** the applicant has provided all of the necessary documents. Unless there are exceptional circumstances, applicants will not generally qualify for any form of social housing support until their application is fully assessed and approved.

### Areas of Choice

Applicants can select **3 areas** where they would like to be housed. It is important for applicants to think carefully when selecting areas of choice as these cannot be changed for 12 months.



## Irish Social Welfare Payments Increases

From the beginning of January 2023, many of the welfare increases announced in the budget will 'kick in'. The main one being a €12 weekly increase in all core social welfare payments.

Pensioners living abroad who are in receipt of the full Irish State Pension Contributory will receive the €12 increase. Those in receipt of reduced/part-Irish Pensions will receive proportionate increases.

### Help with energy costs – Ireland

As part of the measures announced in Budget 2023, all **domestic electricity customers** in Ireland are to get €600 credit to help reduce electricity bills. The credit will be paid in 3 instalments of €200.

The first instalment of €200 has already been allocated to customer's electricity accounts (November). The second credit is due in January 2023 and the third in March 2023.

#### Note!

Some of the bigger electricity providers in Ireland have a **vulnerable customers section** that may be relevant to some of readers or to people with elderly relatives living here in Ireland.

Linking in with these services may be of benefit, particularly where a person has sensory difficulties or is not computer literate or where they need to be prioritised on medical grounds if there is a power cut in their area.

### Fuel Allowance Ireland

From January 2023- the following new income limits & qualifying conditions will come into effect;

-People aged 70 and over can have a weekly means (which includes their State Pension) up to €500 per week for a single person and €1,000 per week for a couple. Those aged 70yrs+ **do not need** to be in receipt of a qualifying social welfare payment.

**Note!** In the case of a couple, only the person applying for the allowance needs to be aged 70 or over.

- For people aged under 70, weekly allowable means above the applicable State Pension (Contributory) rate will increase by €80 from €120 to €200.

- Disablement Benefit and half-rate Carer's Allowance will be disregarded in the means test

## Ireland's Local Link Bus Services

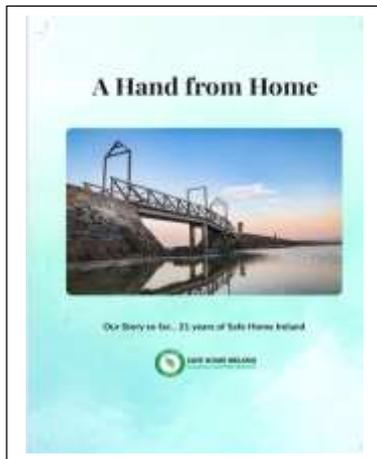
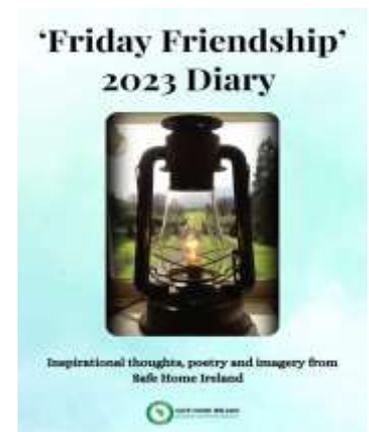
Transport For Ireland (TFI) Local Link bus services connect communities throughout rural Ireland as part of the TFI Public Transport Network. They form a network of affordable bus services for everyone who wants to travel to or from local towns and villages. Local Link offers passengers 2 different services;

1. **The Regular Route Service** operates on a fixed route between towns and villages and runs on a scheduled timetable, just like any other public transport bus service. The timetables are designed to make it easy to connect with Bus Éireann, commercial bus services and Iarnród Éireann train networks so that passengers can make their onward journeys with ease.
2. **The Door-to-Door Bus Service** works along fixed routes but where possible, it can divert to collect & drop off passengers at /close to their homes. This service **must be booked** in advance through the nearest local link office, ideally at least the day before travelling. Door-to-door bus services timetables can be subject to change so always make enquiries in advance.

**Notes!** The local link service is available to everyone, 'locals' and tourists alike. Those without a Free Travel Pass will be charged, those with Free Travel Passes travel for free. For more information on timetables, charges, routes etc., contact the nearest Local Link office [HERE](#)

## Friday Friendship 2023 Diary & Poetry Book

In February 2021, during the Covid pandemic, we commenced our 'Friday Friendship' inspirational messages on social media as a way of connecting with our friends and followers in Ireland & abroad. We decided to collate these in a **Friday Friendship 2023 Diary** with original poetry, a first for Safe Home Ireland. This work was made possible by so many sponsors to whom we are most thankful. Each Friday has its own sponsor. The Diary is now available to buy via our website [HERE](#) and from various outlets across Ireland. You can also contact our office for more information or to order you signed copy.



### Our Impact - 'A Hand from Home'

With the support of The Community Foundation for Ireland, we collated a report to document our impact over our 21-year history. This report, '**A Hand from Home**' was launched on 1<sup>st</sup> December at our 21<sup>st</sup> Anniversary Celebration Concert with our Ambassador, Seán Keane in Tullamore. The report includes first-hand experiences from people who Safe Home Ireland assisted during this time. We are pleased that the **Minister of State with responsibility for Overseas Development Aid and Diaspora**, Colm Brophy, TD, wrote the Foreword. The report with accompanying videos is also available on our website [HERE](#). Contact our office if you wish to receive a hard copy by post.

### Friends of Safe Home Ireland

Established in January 2022, Friends of Safe Home Ireland is a core group of people who are interested and passionate about Safe Home Ireland and who are willing to give their time and commitment to assist the organisation.

Its objectives are to enhance and advance the profile of Safe Home Ireland through different networks and events at home and abroad and to identify and support fundraising events and activities to support the organisations mission.

Friends of Safe Home Ireland prefers to work quietly in the background and seeks no public recognition except in circumstances where that proves evidently beneficial to the organisation.

We are most thankful for their support in 2022 and look forward in anticipation to 2023 already!

### Christmas Apart

The Covid lockdowns forced us to do things differently in many aspects of our lives. The Tech world found solutions for our isolation with wider use of Zoom and similar Apps. Face to face conversations by computer became the norm in the last three years. Three thousand miles apart a mother and daughter will be having Christmas dinner together by Zoom. At 6pm in a village in County Galway, a mother and her family will have Christmas dinner late so that she can be joined by her daughter and her family in New Jersey at 1pm local time. The Irish mother places the computer on the place setting of the vacant chair, where her daughter would be sitting if she was home. It's not ideal but it helps to bring the family together for a few hours on a day full of emotions.

Why not invite someone to share Christmas dinner with you if you are alone and feel isolated. They may also be alone and lonely. A modern solution to an age-old problem, loneliness at Christmas.

*Nollaig Shona agus athbhliain faoi mhaise daoibh go léir  
From the Board, Staff and Friends of Safe Home Ireland*

