



**Welcome from our CEO**

**December 2024 – Issue 267**

Welcome to our December Newsletter! As 2024 draws to a close, I'd like to take time to reflect on the incredible year we have had. It was a busy but impactful year and I am excited to share a few of the highlights and achievements that have helped shape our success this year.

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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!**

**January** marked the second anniversary of **Friends of Safe Home Ireland**, a group who have done so much to support and promote Safe Home Ireland and introduce us to many new partners, donors and supporters. We are grateful to all the members, who prefer to work quietly behind the scenes, but whose impact is felt far and wide. Their dedication and generosity enable us to continue our vital work, and we look forward to continued collaboration again in 2025.

In **March**, we were pleased to launch our new [Strategic Plan](#) and host a Social Inclusion Seminar in partnership with The Irish Centre for Social Gerontology and the Institute for Lifecourse and Society (ILAS) at the University of Galway. Our Strategic Plan sets out our vision and strategic direction for the next five years, reflecting the evolving nature of our work in responding to the needs of the Irish diaspora.

In **May** we walked The [National Famine Way](#) for our second year from [EPIC The Irish Emigration Museum](#), Dublin to [The National Famine Museum | Strokestown Park Co. Roscommon](#). We were also pleased to join the [National Famine Way Commemorative Walk](#) in May and walk with former The Irish Ambassador to Canada, Eammon McKee, members of [The Liverpool Irish Festival Famine Trail](#) and Caroilin Callery, of the National Famine Way. The partnerships highlight the significance of this trail and broadens the conversation about the ongoing impact of emigration on Ireland, both historically and in the present day. We look forward to doing this walk again in May 2025 (dates tbc).

A key highlight of the year was my **outreach trip to the US in September** and to visit the cities of New York, Boston and Philadelphia. This was a unique opportunity for me to connect with Irish diaspora, some of whom are making progress to return/move home to Ireland and to meet with so many incredible Irish organisations there. I was blown away by the welcome and hospitality and to witness first-hand the work that is been done to support and engage with our diaspora. Our last outreach to US was in 2005 so this was a long awaited visit!

In **October**, Seán Fleming, TD and Minister of State Department of Foreign Affairs launched our recently established Returned Emigrants Network (REN). The Network meets bi-monthly in Portlaoise, Co. Laois as well as virtually. It is intended to act as a social hub to promote wellbeing, a chance for returnees to meet and support each other, especially during the early days of resettlement. We hope to hold meetings in other areas of Ireland in 2025.

In **December**, we were excited to commence Safe Home first European (Erasmus+) project in partnership with not-for-profit organisations in Germany, Spain, Belgium and with our colleagues here in Ireland, [Crosscare Irish Diaspora Support Project](#). The project aims to empower organisations facilitate intra-European mobility and diaspora groups to enable learners to identify policies/resources, develop best practices, networking and to promote inclusion.

We continue to meet regularly with our partners here in Ireland, [Crosscare Irish Diaspora Support Project](#), [Citizens Information](#) and [Irish Council for Prisoners Overseas \(ICPO\)](#) to ensure we work together to offer a co-ordinated and seamless service to the Irish diaspora and those who are considering or have returned home to Ireland. This year we also worked in partnership with Irish [Embassies and Consular Services](#) to support, guide and directly assist those who required our support to return home.

**We wish you all a safe, healthy and peaceful holiday season; we know Christmas can be a challenging time for many people so look out for each other and check in on those who are alone or lonely at this time of the year.**





## A Heartfelt Thank You to Our Sponsors, Funders, and Donors

As we reflect on the year, we would like to take this opportunity to express our deepest appreciation to all those who supported Safe Home Ireland throughout 2024. We are particularly thankful to the Irish Abroad Unit at the [Irish Abroad Unit at The Department of Foreign Affairs](#) for selecting Safe Home Ireland to receive multi-annual funding in 2023. We are now in the second year of a three-year partnership, and their continued support has been invaluable to our work. Their contribution, alongside their ongoing backing since our inception, plays a crucial role in allowing us to support Irish citizens abroad and those seeking to return home.

In **February**, singer-songwriters , [Ger O'Donnell](#) and [Trevor Sexton](#) organized a fundraising concert at *The Forge at The Players Club* in Miltown Malbay, Co. Clare, in support of Safe Home Ireland. We were honored to have our Ambassador, Seán Keane, as a special guest at the event. We are deeply grateful to Ger, Trevor, Seán, and everyone who attended and supported this memorable occasion. Your kindness and generosity are instrumental in helping us continue our work.

In **October**, Seán Ballantyne, who moved back to Sligo with his family earlier this year from Luton, ran the Dublin Marathon in support of Safe Home Ireland. Seán, a member of Boyle Athletic Club, showed incredible dedication to our cause, and we thank him and the club for their support.


In **December**, we were delighted to host a special *Evening of Music & Song* with our Ambassador, [Seán Keane](#), at the [Church of the Immaculate Heart of Mary](#) in Dublin. A heartfelt thank you to Fr. Alan Hilliard of the Archdiocese of Dublin for his warm hospitality in hosting us. We also wish to extend our gratitude to everyone who attended and made the evening so special. During the event, we launched the Safe Home Ireland Calendar, which is now available for purchase through our website. We were deeply grateful to [UTS Technologies](#) for generously sponsoring the printing of this Calendar for a second consecutive year. We are most thankful for the support of [UTS Technologies](#) for sponsoring our National Famine Way Walk merchandise this year. Finally, we would also like to express our sincere thanks to those donors who wish to remain anonymous. Your support is invaluable, and we are deeply grateful for your ongoing contributions. Additionally, we extend our heartfelt appreciation to our regular planned givers and all other ad-hoc donors. Your collective generosity helps us reach out to Irish citizens abroad and to those seeking to return home, ensuring they have the support they need during this difficult transition.

### Exciting news! Safe Home Ireland receives support from Jim Callery's 90th birthday fundraising walk on National Famine Way

We are delighted and honoured to announce that Safe Home Ireland is one of the four charities selected to receive the proceeds from Jim Callery's extraordinary fundraising walk to celebrate his 90th birthday. In October 2024, Jim, the founder of [The National Famine Museum | Strokestown Park](#), Co. Roscommon, walked The National Famine Way (165km) from Strokestown Park, to [EPIC The Irish Emigration Museum](#) in Dublin.. Through his remarkable effort, Jim raised an impressive **€165,200**, which equated to just over €1,000 euro for every kilometre he walked.

We are deeply grateful and humbled to be standing alongside three other outstanding charities; The Capuchin Day Centre (Dublin); New Horizons Refugee & Asylum Seeker Support Group (Athlone); Schools of Sanctuary Ireland. Each of these organisations does vital work, and we are proud to be part of this group.

On **Wednesday, 11th December, Ann Roddy** (our Company Secretary) and **Johnny B. Broderick** (Information and Communications Officer) were honoured to attend a cheque presentation at Strokestown Park. Speaking at the cheque presentation event which took place at Strokestown Park House today (Wednesday 11<sup>th</sup> December), Jim Callery said, "My heartfelt thanks to those who donated and to those who came and walked a stretch with me. There were times when it was tough, wet and cold but I thought of our 1,490 famine emigrants and how much tougher it must have been on them and it gave me strength. I thought of current day emigrants and the difficulties of their journeys and focused on the fundraising. Our original target of € 25,000 was surpassed in less than a week and that I am most grateful. I am very happy to be



here today to hand over € 41,200 cheques to 4 very worthy registered Charities whose work I greatly admire. I am happy that the funds I have raised will be going deep to the roots – to those who need it most”.

A sincere thank you to Jim for choosing Safe Home Ireland, to Carolin Callery and the entire Callery family for their unwavering support. We also extend our thanks to Strokestown Park, the Westward Board, and everyone who generously donated to Jim’s walk. Donations came from all over Ireland and from the UK, the US, Europe and even Australia - from Jim’s friends, family and business associates.

As many of you may know, Safe Home Ireland walked The National Famine Way in **2023** and **2024** to raise awareness about the 1,490 famine emigrants, as well as the ongoing struggles many Irish people abroad face when they wish to return home. We look forward to continuing this important work and to walking the National Famine Way again in **2025** and we will provide more details about this in the new year.

**Thank you** to Jim and everyone else who has supported us this year. Together we can make a difference.



## Farewell Afternoon Tea with Brenda Fleming, Outreach & Advocacy Officer

In **December**, we also said a bittersweet farewell to **Brenda** Fleming, our Outreach & Advocacy Officer. Brenda joined Safe Home in 2002, and for 22 years, she dedicated herself to improving the lives of those we serve. Her unwavering commitment, deep compassion, and tireless work ethic have had a profound impact on countless individuals. Brenda was always willing to go the extra mile, ensuring that no one was left behind and that every person felt supported and heard. Her departure marks the end of an era for Safe Home, and she will be deeply missed by the entire team and all those whose lives she touched. On behalf of everyone at Safe Home Ireland, we want to express our heartfelt thanks to Brenda for her extraordinary service and wish her a happy, healthy, and fulfilling retirement.





## Safe Home Ireland: Saying Goodbye to Valued Board Members

As we approach the end of the year, we find ourselves saying goodbye to some long-standing and cherished members of the Safe Home Ireland family.

In **November**, we bid farewell to two of our founding Board members, **Teresa Cowley and Michael Joe Ginnelly**. Teresa and Michael Joe have been with Safe Home Ireland since its inception, offering invaluable support, guidance, and passion for our cause. Their leadership has been instrumental in shaping the charity into what it is today. While we will miss their presence on the Board, we are delighted that they will continue to support Safe Home as part of the *Friends of Safe Home Ireland*. We thank them wholeheartedly for their years of service and commitment to our mission.

In November, we also bid farewell to **Joan O'Flynn**, who stepped down from the Board of Safe Home Ireland after three years of dedicated service. We would like to express our sincere appreciation to Joan for her unwavering support and invaluable contributions to our work during her time with us. Joan's insights and commitment have been greatly appreciated by the Board and the entire Safe Home team. Although Joan will no longer be on the Board, we are pleased that she will continue to lend her expertise and support to Safe Home Ireland on smaller projects. We look forward to her ongoing involvement and are grateful that she will remain part of the Safe Home family.

## Welcome to New Directors of Safe Home Ireland

We were delighted to welcome three new Directors to the Board of Safe Home Ireland at our November Board Meeting – Edel Shovlin, Pauline Gallagher and Troy Gallagher.

**Edel** is a recent returnee to Ireland, having spent over 14 years abroad, primarily in Sydney, Australia. With a deep passion for improving the structures that can attract talented Irish citizens back home, Edel is particularly attuned to the complexities and challenges that many face when returning, both young and old. Her personal experience and expertise will bring valuable insights to our work.

**Pauline** brings over 20 years of experience in human resource management and development. Currently employed as the HR Manager at the Good Shepherd, an organization supporting sheltered housing, nursing homes, and vulnerable people, Pauline's wealth of knowledge in managing people and resources will greatly strengthen our Board's capacity to meet the needs of those we serve.

**Troy** has a strong background in working with the Irish diaspora in London, addressing issues of poverty, community engagement, and cultural heritage. Originally from Donegal, Troy served as the first Irish-born Mayor of Islington in 2021. His experience in fostering community connections and his commitment to linking Irish culture and heritage with education will be a tremendous asset to Safe Home Ireland.

We are excited to have Edel, Pauline, and Troy join us and look forward to the expertise, energy, and passion they will bring to our mission. Their diverse backgrounds and shared commitment to supporting the Irish community, both at home and abroad, will undoubtedly help shape the future of Safe Home Ireland.



## UK Winter Fuel Payment (WFP)

**The new eligibility criteria** for the Winter Fuel Payment (WFP) came into effect recently for the winter of 2024–2025. These changes include stricter means-testing requirements, which limit eligibility to individuals receiving certain income-related benefits such as Pension Credit, Universal Credit, or other similar benefits.

If you have questions or need further clarification regarding your on-going eligibility or the impact of these changes, you can contact the Winter Fuel Payment Centre at 0800 731 0160 (within the UK).

The changes primarily target recipients in England and Wales. However, previous recipients living abroad, **including in the ROI**, will likely be impacted, as they must meet the new qualifying criteria to continue receiving the payment. This marks a departure from the previous universal approach to the WFP where eligibility was primarily age-based and extended to eligible UK nationals abroad under certain conditions.

Recipients of the Winter Fuel Payment (WFP) resident in the Republic of Ireland (ROI) who previously received this benefit and wish to clarify their current position can contact: The Winter Fuel Payment Centre via:

## Fuel Allowance – Ireland

The Fuel Allowance season normally begins in late September of each year and ends in April. The 2024/2025 Fuel Allowance season started on Monday, 23 September 2024. It will be paid for 28 weeks (until 4 April 2025). The current rate of Fuel Allowance is €33 per week. You can choose to get the Fuel Allowance paid every week or paid in 2 instalments (lump sums). In summary, to qualify for Fuel Allowance, applicants must:

- Live alone (or only with certain qualifying people)
- Be getting a qualifying payment (unless you aged 70 or over)
- Satisfy a means test

## Changes announced in Budget 2025

- The Fuel Allowance means test disregard for people aged 66 and over will be €524 for a single person and €1,048 for a couple (January 2025).
- Carer's Allowance will become a qualifying payment for Fuel Allowance (January 2025).

If you previously turned down for Fuel Allowance on income grounds or if you meet the new conditions (re Carer's Allowance) to qualify, it would be a good idea to verify your situation by contacting, **The Pension Services Office in Sligo. Tel: (071) 915 7100 or 0818 200 400**

## Frequently Asked Question – Social Housing (Council) Applications

I am 66 years old and currently renting a Council flat in Manchester. Over 2 years ago, I applied for housing via the Safe Home Ireland scheme designated towards assisting qualifying Irish emigrants to secure housing back in their native areas. I am happy to say that I did eventually get approved on the Council housing waiting list so that I can be considered for a Housing Association tenancy down the line.

**Qu.** When I filled out the Council form I was allowed to select 3 locations/ areas of choice on my housing form. **Can I change those areas?**

**A** Applicants must stick to the 3 areas of choice that they initially selected for a period of 12 months. Once the 12 months have elapsed, they can amend their areas. They must notify the relevant Council **in writing** in order to have their housing file updated.

For more information on the qualifying criteria to apply for social housing in Ireland or any follow up queries with existing housing applications, **please contact our office.**

## Planning a return home / Moving to Ireland – come prepared!

If you are someone who may be making plans or keeping your fingers crossed for a move to Ireland in 2025, it's no harm to start gathering together some bits and pieces that should help to speed things up this side and thus make the transition and resettlement process go a little smoother for you! Please find below some examples of important documents to bring with you, depending on your circumstances.

**Important Note!** Having easy access to a good paper trail of documentary evidence will be particularly relevant to anyone who may need to seek welfare or social supports when they move here.

- Personal documentation – birth cert, marriage cert, divorce papers;
- Back up documentation regarding any medical conditions and take home 3-6 month's supply of medication if possible;
- Name and Address of last employer and social security number, latest P60/equivalent, and recent payslips
- If in receipt of a benefit or pension from abroad, the latest annual statement outlining your entitlement;
- Proof to show that any non-transferrable benefits have been stopped;
- Proof property abroad has been sold or a tenancy ended;
- Car insurance documents (that show 'no claims history');
- If taking car – drivers licence, documents to show ownership;
- 6 months' bank statements and, if possible, closing statements.

## Mother & Baby Institutions Payment Scheme – Enhanced Medical Card

**The enhanced medical card entitles the holder to the following services**, without charge, under the public health system in Ireland:

- GP services;
- prescribed drugs, medicines, aids and appliances;
- dental, ophthalmic (services to help with eye diseases) and aural (hearing) services;
- home nursing;
- home support;
- counselling;
- chiropody/podiatry (feet issues); and
- physiotherapy.

In addition, if you have a medical card you do not have to pay the €100 Emergency Department statutory charge.

### Important Notes!

- If you are already in possession of a means-tested medical card in Ireland, it may still be worthwhile to apply for the enhanced medical card under this Payment Scheme. This is because the enhanced medical card is not means-tested.
- For qualifying applicants who are currently permanently resident outside of Ireland, a health support payment valued at €3,000 is payable, instead of the enhanced medical card.
- In the event that a person in this situation returns to live permanently in Ireland in the future, they can still apply for the Medical Card here in the normal way (i.e via the means testing process).

## How does the Enhanced Medical Card application process work?

When applications are received under the Payment Scheme, processing staff check the application to assess eligibility for the Enhanced Medical Card. Once approval is determined, the following details are sent from the Payment Scheme office directly to the HSE to action the allocation of the card;

Name, Address, Date of Birth, PPS number

The processing of the Enhanced Card is then solely 'in the hands' of the HSE (Medical Card Section). The medical card contact line is 01 864 7100 / 0818 22 44 78 if you need to contact them.

**If you have any queries regarding any aspect of The Mother & Baby Institutions Payment Scheme: Tel: 00353 1 522 9992. The office is open Mnday - Friday 9am - 6pm**

**For anyone living abroad**, staff at your local Irish Welfare & Advice Centres can offer assistance and guidance with the application process.

## Safe Home Ireland 2025 Calendar – An ideal gift for the New Year!

This year one of our fundraising projects was to produce a Safe Home Ireland Calendar. Why not treat yourself or a loved one?

**Contact our office to place your order**

**OR**

**Calendars can be purchased online [HERE](#)**

**Note!** prices vary due to differing postal costs to various locations. If anyone wishes to order multiple copies, please contact our office directly and we will be happy to negotiate terms.



## Safe Home Office Christmas Holiday Arrangements

**The Safe Home office will be closed from 5pm Friday 20<sup>th</sup> December and will re-open on Thursday 2<sup>nd</sup> January 2025, at 9am**

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



