



March 2020 - Special Edition

LUTON IRISH FORUM

Providing social opportunities and welfare advice to everyone

We will get through this together

This special newsletter, which we're posting out to members in addition to publishing online, is to keep you up to date with what's happening at the Forum and to let you know that the Luton Irish Forum is here to help at this time of Covid-19/ Coronavirus. Although the Forum's building is closed, our telephone line are open, and we are still here to help.

If you have issues with your pension or benefits, do contact our telephone advice service via our usual telephone number or contact us via email. The team can work over the phone and online to assist you. The DWP has suspended face-to-face assessments for all sickness and disability benefits, so this may be one less thing to worry about at the moment. See details of the changes to our services on the back page of this newsletter.

As I write, we're all being asked to stay at home and go out for essential supplies only, and to keep to social distancing guidelines when we are out. The situation could change at any time but whatever we're asked to do next, it will be tough, whether you have family or are on your own.

Volunteers are telephone befriending people they are no longer able to visit, and we're extending this to include more members. Please make a point of staying in touch or even reconnecting with people you know who may be on their own or more isolated because of the current situation. If you have a friend who you know comes/used to come to the Forum, but with whom you've lost contact, we might be able to help you reconnect.

If you are stuck for help, please get in touch – we will help wherever we can and are working with other local organisations to help everyone locally.



Noelette Hanley who is co-ordinating LIF's support for members and the wider community: "We need each other now more than ever."

Please follow carefully all the guidance from Government and the health service – it's designed to protect all of us.

From Monday 23 March, daily text messages are being sent to more than a million people who have been identified by the NHS in England as needing to protect themselves by self-isolating for at least 12 weeks because they are extremely vulnerable to Covid-19/Coronavirus. This group includes people who have had organ transplants, have certain types of cancers, or have significant respiratory conditions.

If you have trouble finding the latest Government or NHS advice because you're not online, please get in touch.

I hope you try some of the ideas we have in this newsletter for keeping your body and mind well and happy.

Please look after yourselves and others. Stay in touch!

Noelette

Chief Officer, Luton Irish Forum

A celebration of sporting greats

Before Covid-19/Coronavirus hit us, Lá Fhéile Bríde 2020 (St Brigid's Day) was celebrated with our fourth annual Afternoon Tea event on the feast day, 1st February, highlighting the many achievements of women in sport.

Some 75 guests enjoyed chatting with friends old and new at the beautiful Putteridge Bury House just outside Luton. The 2020 Afternoon Tea programme showcased the stories of two women from the local Irish community; Sandra Hayes and Ann "Tiger" Woods, and the Luton based Claddagh Gaels - the only Ladies Gaelic Football Club in Britain not affiliated to any men's club. The event also featured stories of the Lutonian women who defied an FA ban in the 1930s and played illegal football matches at Luton Town Football Club. Guests were also treated to stories of legendary Irish sportswomen such as Maeve Kyle – Ireland's first female Olympian and Katie Taylor – the highly-acclaimed two-weight world champion boxer.

The afternoon included presentations, a display of trophies and medals from local sportswomen, and traditional music played by talented local duo, Sinead and Callum Turner.

Attendee Elizabeth Lea commented "It was absolutely fabulous, I had a fantastic time and feel proud to have Irish ancestry." Elaine Lister said "Fantastic, engaging and educational event. It makes me feel part of my Luton community."



Remember large crowds? We're looking forward to being able to celebrate together again like we did at St Brigid's Afternoon Tea.

Students add value and enthusiasm



Students Angaleen (left) and Najiyah with just some of the food donated by kind LIF members and visitors for the Christmas food appeal.

Our student placements this year, Anjaleen Rehman and Najiyah Ali, have been really great in helping us meet the ever-increasing need for our welfare advice service.

Prior to the Covid-19/Coronavirus shutdown they were assisting clients to make claims relating to benefits such as PIP (Personal Independence Payment) and Housing. Among their many other achievements they also surveyed members, entertained and informed Tea & Chat attendees, and joined in with the fun at members' socials.

We are very grateful to both students for their hard work and positive attitude and wish them all the very best in their future careers.

Please note: Luton Foodbank does not have the people, vehicles, or food to offer deliveries to people who are self-isolating but not in immediate financial hardship. If you are self-isolating but not in financial hardship, please email emergencysupport@crisisaid.org.uk or phone 01582 211066 for assistance.

Keep your mind and body healthy

Being compelled to stay at home can be difficult for anyone so we've gathered some ideas for you to try. While there are lots more online we're including some for those of us who don't have internet access. Please send us more ideas!

♣ **Keep some structure to your day.** If you usually potter at home in the morning and go out in the afternoon, use the afternoon to stay in contact with people by phoning or writing.

♣ **Don't watch/listen continuously to programmes about Coronavirus.** Catch up with the news and latest advice and then take a break and focus on something else.

♣ **Switch to music and sing along!** Or get up and dance, wave your arms if you can't get up. Feel silly? Laugh out loud - no one's watching!

♣ **Do get fresh air every day.** If you have a garden or any private outdoor space, try to walk around it or sit outside for at least 20 minutes a day. If you don't have any outdoor space, open the window wide (wrap up if you need to) and take several really big breaths of fresh air!

♣ **Get up and move about,** or lift and stretch arms and legs in turn, in the adverts/at the end of a programme.

♣ Dig out those old Christmas cards and **catch up properly with people** you've been meaning to for years! They'd probably be especially pleased to hear from you while they're stuck at home

♣ **Don't feel guilty** for watching TV shows or reading books/magazines that you'd usually scoff at. We all need to escape sometimes!

♣ **Form a mini reading/music circle.** Find a book or music album/CD you and one or more friends have got (or can circulate or download), agree to read/listen to it by a certain date, then get together and start a conversation about it.

♣ **Do at least a small amount of exercise** or if you're not mobile, stretching, at least three times a week. For variety, you can focus on your legs one day, arms the next and the rest of your body another day.

♣ **Check out TV & radio listings** and share interesting items with friends. Remember the Green Goddess? She's back and is giving some great tips for keeping us mobile at around 6:55am and 8:55am on BBC Breakfast on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays.

♣ **Join new groups** online. Eg LIF's art group where you can enjoy paint-a-long sessions with the LIF artists and others.

♣ **Set up your own events online.** Arrange a time when you and one or more others can eat a meal together and FaceTime/Skype while you do. Not online - try doing it over the phone.

♣ **Talk out loud.** Especially important if you live on your own. If you're not going out and saying 'good morning' or whatever, use your voice - get in the habit of phoning a friend to say 'good morning' to. And don't be shy about talking out loud to yourself!

♣ Be part of **LIF's intergenerational pen pal project** we're setting up. Phone 01582 297030 or check online for details.

♣ **Ask for help.** Ask family, friends and LIF for help. Most people don't like to ask but if someone asks us, we're usually only too happy to be of use. We have staff, volunteers and wonderful members willing and able to help where we can.

Music & books loan service

We have a small stock of books and CDs that we've amassed which we're happy to share with members who may be isolated at the moment. Please phone us on 01582 297030 if you'd like to borrow any. While we can't guarantee items will be sterile, we will wipe with antiseptic before we post and we recommend you do the same on receipt.

Keep mobile - even seated

The NHS has a how-to sheet of exercises that can be done sitting down, see www.nhs.uk/live-well/exercise/sitting-exercises/ or we can post if you don't have internet access.

Luton Irish Forum - change to services

Due to the spread of Covid-19/Coronavirus we have made some changes to our services.

These are in line with the latest Government and NHS advice and are to protect the health and wellbeing of not only our staff, volunteers and service users but the whole community.

Opening hours

Luton Irish Forum building is closed until further notice.

Room hire is not available until further notice.

Welfare

The welfare service remains open via a telephone advice line and email.

Social Groups & Activities

Closed until further notice.

Ticket holders for the Celtic Club event on 17 March will be fully reimbursed on presentation of their ticket when services resume.

Befrienders

All visiting has been curtailed and people have been offered a telephone befriending service. We are extending our telephone befriending service to more members.

Passport Witnessing

Closed until further notice.

Trips

The Dublin Trip is postponed.

Coach trips are postponed until further notice.

IF YOU NEED HELP OR ADVICE, PLEASE GET IN TOUCH.

LIF Volunteers highly praised

We're delighted to announce that two groups of volunteers and one individual were recognised in the recent High Sheriff of Bedfordshire's Awards.

Volunteer club leaders were awarded Runner Up in the Group category for South Bedfordshire (Luton); our Befrienders achieved Highly

Commended in the Group category and Keith, art class leader, was also Highly Commended in the Individual section. Well done to all of you - the judges were quite rightly very impressed!



An Awards Evening had been planned but has been cancelled due to Covid-19/Coronavirus.



It's official! Our Welfare service is up to standard

We were delighted to achieve the Advice Quality Standard for our Welfare Case Work once again.

To hold the standard organisations must undergo an independent audit where it's demonstrated that they are easily accessible, effectively managed, and employ staff with the right skills and knowledge to meet the needs of their clients.

The report highlighted many areas of good practice and the assessor summarised 'LIF is a warm friendly and welcoming organisation with strong leadership and a comprehensive set of robust policies and procedures in place'.

Last year LIF's welfare service enabled local people to receive £1.6 million of financial gain that they were entitled to.

LUTON IRISH FORUM

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