



ISA NEWS AND EVENTS

September 2021

PRESIDENT'S WELCOME

Welcome everyone to our September newsletter. What a couple of months it has been!

We are experiencing the ongoing lockdown situation and some of us have harsher restrictions than others. It is a difficult time for everyone, but here at the Irish Support Agency we have made a conscious effort to keep in touch with as many of you as possible with telephone calls and our online events.

I have had the pleasure of chatting to many of you over the past 2 months. Whilst I ring to have a chat with you and see how you are all doing, I am the one at the end of our conversations whose spirits have been lifted!! Your resilience, patience and general upbeat attitude during this lockdown inspires me to no end and I always feel better for calling and chatting to you. If any of you know of others who would like a phone call for a chat, please let us know. We have Irish volunteers in our community who would love to help. We cannot meet in person, but you are in our thoughts, and I can't wait for the day where we can sit in person together.

Take care and stay safe,

Marian Schaffer

ISA President



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SENIORS OUTREACH

The Irish Support Agency is committed to providing support to the Irish Australian Senior community.

Since the beginning of lockdown, we have been providing a welfare check telephone service. It is a way that we can keep in touch and make sure everyone has what they need to manage through lockdown.

If you, or anyone you know, would like to avail of the service, we would love to hear from you.

We are expanding our volunteer base to assist with the service, so we have good capacity for new clients.

If in the course of your work on the frontline, you regularly come across Irish people, we would welcome the opportunity to display/distribute resource material to let people know we are here and what we do.

Please call Paula or Katerina on 02 9300 8019 or email admin@irishsupportagency.org.au



SOLAS

SOLAS is a new mental health support service developed by the Irish Support Agency to facilitate access to essential Mental Health supports for our community.



We have been working to expand our network of supports and have now linked in with several Irish-born qualified mental health practitioners to increase the options available to our clients.

SOLAS is a subsidised counselling service open to all members of the Irish Australian community living in NSW. A fully subsidised service is available to those experiencing financial hardship.

The Irish Support Agency acknowledges a foundation grant from **The Light Ball** in support of the SOLAS service as well as generous donations from both **The Ireland Funds** and **The Lansdowne Club** to facilitate the expansion of the service to as broad a base as possible within NSW. If you would like more information on accessing the service, call 02 9300 8019.

Since launching, we have seen high uptake for the service, but we want to ensure we are reaching those most vulnerable, so please share with your friends, family, neighbours and colleagues.

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Reflections on belonging, connection, and mental and emotional wellbeing.

Sorcha Conlan, SOLAS practitioner

The Irish poet John O'Donohue writes:

'We live in a world that responds to our longing, it is a place where the echoes always return, even if sometimes slowly...the hunger to belong is at the heart of our nature...the sense of belonging is the natural balance of our lives...'

Belonging, connection, and wellbeing

For most of us, feelings of belonging and connection, are the heartbeat of our humanity. We come to know ourselves through our relationship to others, and our belonging helps us make meaning of our lives. The social and relational context of our life helps us form our identity, reinforce our beliefs, flesh out our interpretations, and nurture our values.

When we feel we belong to something or someone, we are likely to have more feelings of fulfilment, and the sense that things are 'right' in the world. We come to know ourselves more, in the reflections offered by others. We feel safe and 'seen'. We feel more like ourselves.

Honouring the feelings

In the exploration of how we are impacted by belonging and connection, we can discover a level of resilience that can enhance mental and emotional wellness. Through taking small actions that invite belonging and connection to visit us, we also invite feelings of wellbeing. When we feel powerless or unable to speak these feelings of disconnect, we tend to feel more alone. And less in balance.

So, what does this mean when we are struggling to find the known ways of connecting with our normal lives, ourselves, our people, and our places? When our interconnectedness is interrupted and seemingly impassable. How can we make meaning of the hard things we endure in life?

What we do know is, whilst connected, we can share in experiences of heartbreak, confusion, and loss. We can navigate the world of disconnection and find small ways to enhance the presence of belonging. With each other. Even in the seemingly hardest of times.

What can we do to enhance wellbeing?

When we acknowledge that disconnection is present; and belonging seems far off, we can throw a beacon of light on the ordinary actions of our days, making them feel extraordinary. Little actions can have a big impact. Through this action, we start to see our humanity, in shared experience with others.

- When you notice the ache of disconnection, is there something it needs you to do?
- How can you enhance the feelings of connection to the people and places that you hold dear in a small way?
- Could you take a photo, tell a story to another, sing a song, practice your language, spend time in nature, perform an act of kindness?
- Is there a way you can support someone around you to feel more connected? Could sharing your story of disconnection, actually help both of you feel more connected?
- What are small ways you can enhance your feelings of connection to the things you value?

Tell us a story

We would love people to contact the ISA and let us know how you have enhanced feelings of belonging and connection in your day.

Send us a photo, story, poem, or picture of what belonging and connection has looked like to you in the past few weeks. Tell us what it means to you. Why is it important? How has it impacted your emotional and mental wellbeing? Email Una at project@irishsupportagency.org.au or send to us via post PO Box K774, Haymarket, NSW 1240.

COMMITTEE UPDATES

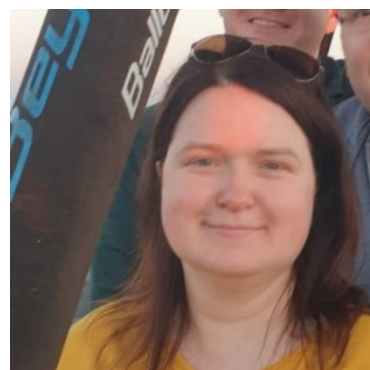
Farewell



Roisin Trainor has been involved with the Irish Support Agency since 2015 initially she employed as the Outreach Worker and then as our Coordinator. Roisin then took up a new role at UNSW as Health Promotions Coordinator, whilst occupying a seat on the ISA committee. She has a passion for Mental Health and Wellbeing and has spearheaded several initiatives in this field. Roisin will be sorely missed from the committee, but we are delighted she is staying on as a key contributor to our Mental Health and Wellbeing working group. Thank you, Roisin.

Welcome

Brigid Maher is originally from Co. Tipperary. Brigid moved to Sydney in 2008 for a 6-month holiday. She currently works as a Project Management Analyst in Clinical Research. Brigid is actively involved in the Irish Community, where she manages the Sydney Social Irish networking group. We are delighted to welcome you onto the committee Brigid!



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VOLUNTEER APPRECIATION

We would like to take this opportunity to say thank you to all the wonderful volunteers who make all of the work that we do a possibility.

Recently, we have seen an increase in volunteers offering their time and expertise. Despite the lockdown situation, our volunteers have rallied and adapted well to meeting online.

We have formed 2 new working groups - Outreach Events and Fundraising, to assist the ISA in progressing initiatives to benefit the community. We have also expanded the volunteer input into our Mental Health and Well-being Group. Our volunteers bring enthusiasm and determination to the working groups, and it is wonderful to see the collaborative process at work.

Volunteers assist us across the entire organisation. From the ISA committee itself, to offering professional advice and guidance on legal, immigration, recruitment, and other matters, to IT skills, our befriending service, and support for the Cara Club, there is so much great work being done and we are extremely grateful. Thank you.

BAILE AS BAILE (*Home away from home*)

baile as baile is an initiative of the Irish Support Agency being run in partnership with members of the Irish Australian community of NSW. The phrase, meaning 'home away from home', aims to support and strengthen the Irish community by offering a range of activities where people can safely connect with others.



We know it is important to stay connected and find enjoyable things to participate in through this time.

We have held a number of online events since lockdown began, including a Stretch and Move Class with Outright Change Fitness, a Baby Massage workshop with Anam Chara Wellness and a Journaling Workshop with Inffinite You. We are always on the lookout for new ideas and collaborations with the community. If you have your own

business, or maybe a skill or hobby that you would like to share, we would love to hear from

The success of *baile as baile* relies on the engagement of the community and the willingness to offer your time and expertise. **We would like to invite all members, clubs, organisations, groups to work together with us on the initiative, in particular, across December and January.**

Examples of past events that we have held can be found here – www.baileasbaile.com.au

Email Una at project@irishsupportagency.org.au to express your interest.

FUNDRAISING HEROES

The Irish Support Agency relies heavily on the generosity of the community to continue to offer the wide range of services and crisis support.

When someone decides to run a fundraising event on our behalf, it is a true honour for us and reminds us of how special the Irish Australian community is over here.

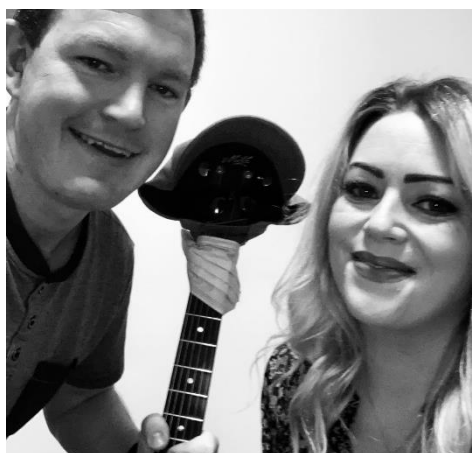
The Lost Backpackers

The Lost Backpackers are an Irish duo who play a blend of traditional Irish music, ballads, folk and modern hits with an Irish twist.

The band includes Aisling on the tin-whistle, fiddle and vocals with Dave on guitar, bodhran, percussion and vocals.

On Saturday 24th July, Aisling and Dave generously hosted an online gig with all donations going directly to the Irish Support Agency.

Not only do they provide authentic Irish entertainment, they have been keeping the community's spirits high during the lockdown. Thank you both for a tremendous effort, with \$2,250 being raised on the night! Thank you to all who contributed.



Aisling and Dave

The Beauty Closet and Aisling Walsh



On Friday 6th August, The Beauty Closet and Aesthetics by Aisling hosted an online 'Feel Good Friday' event on all things skincare and aesthetic wellness.

The Beauty Closet was founded by Caroline Quinn, originally from Co. Derry, in 2020. Caroline provides a unique shopping experience for Irish and UK beauty brands.

Aisling is a registered nurse and works in the skincare and aesthetic medicine field.

The night was a huge success, with \$1320 being raised, with all funds being donated to the Irish Support Agency. Again, we are very grateful to all who contributed.

It's a pleasure to see your success grow here in Australia and we are appreciative of all your efforts.

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THE IRISH 30

3rd August – Torn: When home has never felt so far away.

For August's instalment of the Irish 30, we decided it was important to address the turmoil that many Irish expats are experiencing with the ongoing Covid 19 lockdown and border closures.

We were joined by Órlaith Sheill, a clinical counsellor who specialises in grief and we had contributions from Roisin Trainor and Aisling Byrne, who themselves have gone through difficult experiences over the 18 months.

Órlaith provided some powerful insights into the range of emotions that we are all feeling at the moment and some useful tools that we can integrate into our everyday life.



6th September Parenting in a Pandemic

For September's edition of the Irish 30, we were delighted to be joined by Michelle Bates and Nora Crotty of Child and Family Health NSW.

Both ladies are Child and Family Health community nurses who work with parents in the local health district. The services that are available to the community include:



- Baby health checks
- Feeding support
- Mothers' groups
- Postnatal & emotional checks with mum
- Mental health & domestic violence screening

We were also joined by some lovely new parents in the community, Amanda, Shauna, and Kevin & Vicky. Each parenting journey is different, and it was important to highlight the highs but also some lows that our parents have experienced over the past 18 months.

Thank you for sharing your story. There were some informative learnings from this webinar so make sure you take some time to watch it.

Our next Irish 30 session will be on Tuesday 5th October at 7pm and all of the recordings can be watched back on – www.irishsupportagency.org.au/the-irish-30

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BOOK CLUB

Our book club is held on the last Wednesday of each month in the Gaelic Club.

Each month, we choose one book to review, and seek to include all genres! It's a great way to meet like-minded people and everyone is welcome.

We are currently reading, **The Last Thing He Told Me**, by Laura Dave. If you would like to attend our next meeting on Zoom on Wednesday 29th September, please email Una at project@irishsupportagency.org.au or call 02 9300 8019.



A LITTLE COMIC RELIEF by Paddy McCarron

After living in the remote countryside of Ireland all his life, an old Irishman decided it was time to visit Dublin.

In one of the stores, he picks up a mirror and looks into it. Not ever having seen a mirror before, he remarked at the image staring back at him. "How bout that!" He exclaims, "Here's a picture of my Fadder".

He bought the mirror thinking it was a picture of his dad, but on the way home he remembered his wife didn't like his father, so he hung it the shed and every morning before leaving to go fishing, he would go there and look at it.

His wife began to get suspicious of his many trips to the shed. So, one day after her husband left she went to the shed and found the mirror. As she looked into the glass she fumed, "So that's the ugly wan he's been running around with!"

The Irish Support Agency NSW Inc is registered as a charity with the Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission ABN 70 880 566 535. We acknowledge the financial support provided to us by the Emigrant Support Program of the Department of Foreign Affairs & Trade of Ireland which enables us to make a significant difference to the Irish Community in New South Wales every year.



**Government of Ireland
Emigrant Support Programme**



An Roinn Gnóthai Eachtracha
Department of Foreign Affairs

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