

The Laois/Offaly Leader



*A monthly publication issued by Offaly Centre for Independent Living
Ltd/*

Offaly Personal Assistant Services Ltd

This newsletter is available online and in large font

May 2013



Offaly Leader Forum Coffee Morning A Success!

On Friday 17th May last, a coffee morning took place in the OCIL Ltd offices for Leaders. The purpose of the coffee morning was to provide an opportunity for Leaders to meet with each other in an informal setting and to generate interest in the upcoming activities of OCIL and OPAS Ltd.

The coffee morning was organised by members of the Offaly Leader Forum, with many bringing in delicious buns, biscuits and cakes. Invitations were sent out by Sharon Tracey, an active Leader Forum member. There was a good turnout overall, and many Leaders who missed this month's event have expressed interest in attending coffee mornings in the future.





The coffee morning proved very popular with all Leaders present, so much so, that members of the Leader Forum agreed that coffee mornings should be organised on a regular basis, perhaps in locations outside the offices such as in accessible cafes and hotels.



While enjoying their beverages and cakes, the Leaders were given the opportunity to ask questions about the day-to-day running of their service and to voice their concerns about the future of the service. All present were in agreement that the Personal Assistant Service has made a difference both to their own lives and to the lives of their families and friends.

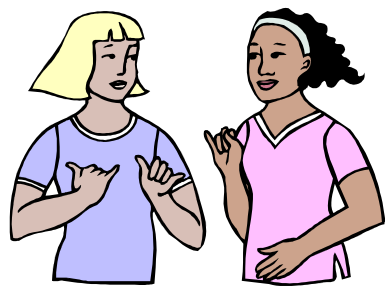


The Offaly Leader Forum's first coffee morning was a resounding success and hopefully it will be the start of many successful gatherings of Leaders. If you are interested in finding out more about the Leader Forum, please email sarah@ocil.ie or contact us via Facebook



Interested in Becoming A Member of the Offaly Leader Forum?

The Offaly Leader Forum is a group of Leaders who get together once a month to discuss issues which affect their everyday lives, such as their Personal Assistant Service, accessibility and employment. At present the Forum members are only expected to offer a maximum of four hours of their time a month to help Leaders become more involved in the Laois/Offaly Independent Living Movement. If you would like to become a member of the Leader Forum, please email sarah@ocil.ie. We would love to hear from you.



A note from the Editor:

Welcome to the May Edition of the 'Laois/Offaly Leader'. Whether you are one of our Leaders, Personal Assistants or a friend of our organisation, we hope you enjoy it and find the information useful.

As you can see, the Leader Forum has been very busy organising coffee mornings for fellow Leaders. The dedication of our Leaders to the Offaly Leader Forum has been particularly impressive and despite only being formed in April, the Leader Forum is going from strength to strength. This is owing to each and every Forum member bringing something unique to the Forum, as well as their willingness to advance the Independent Living Movement in Laois and Offaly.

I hope you enjoy this newsletter. If you have any comments or contributions to make to the June newsletter, please email me at sarah@ocil.ie.

Sarah Fitzgerald,
Researcher/PRO OCIL Ltd



In the Driving Seat

There is no doubt that people with disabilities are becoming increasingly independent. For example, it would have been unheard of fifty years ago for a person with a physical disability to drive their own accessible vehicle. However, thanks to the advances in technology, it is now possible for people with disabilities to drive independently. Garrett Culliton and Ger Scully, who both have spinal injuries, have had their cars adapted, and both of them wholeheartedly agree that the ability to drive enhances the quality of their everyday lives.



An adapted vehicle with steering ball and hand controls

Garrett Culliton works for the Laois Sports Partnership and has been a wheelchair user since acquiring a spinal injury playing rugby in 1992. Ger Scully entered the disability world more recently in 2009. In order to be able to drive, they both have had their cars adapted. Ger purchased an estate automatic car from the UK and got hand controls fitted in Ireland (Murtagh's in Athlone). Garrett has good triceps and biceps which enable him to use hand controls.

Both Garrett and Ger live active lives, which means that being able to drive is very important. In their view, accessible public transport is almost non-existent, especially outside the main urban centres. Owning a car has enabled Garrett to take up employment and to become involved in wheelchair sports. 'Many of the events that I have participated in have been scattered in every corner of Ireland, from Cork to Belfast and Sligo down to Wexford. If I hadn't transport of my own, attending most of these would have been next to impossible.'

However, even though a car offers greater independence, certain accessibility issues still exist. 'Footpaths in my area are a complete disaster,' says Ger. 'A lot of the ramps have a gradient that slopes into the road which can be dangerous'. Ger also has criticised the elimination of the motorisation grant, the payment of which was found to be contrary to EU policies, and is concerned that its elimination will deter people with disabilities from driving. The elimination of the rebate on fuel is also an issue for disabled drivers, who will be facing higher fuel costs along with the costs of adaptations.

Nonetheless, there is no doubt that being able to drive has enhanced Ger and Garrett's lives, and both Leaders would strongly recommend that other people with disabilities investigate whether they, too, would be able to drive. If this is something that you, too, would be interested in pursuing, please visit <http://iwa.ie/services/motoring> for more information.

Update on Petrol Refund Scheme:

The refunding of petrol for qualifying disabled drivers will be henceforth discontinued, owing to a failure on Ireland's part to notify Europe about the scheme, and a consequent failure to phase out the scheme within an agreed time period. According to the European Commission, the levels of taxation applied by Member States to energy products and electricity may not be less than the amounts set out by Article 4 of Directive 2003/96, and therefore the refunding of petrol is illegal. For further information, email Sarah Fitzgerald at sarah@ocil.ie.



Personal Employment Pathways:

The Personal Employment Pathways (PEP) programme is a free job skills programme designed to support the client in developing a progression plan and exploring new opportunities. The programme is delivered by National Learning Network's Career experts from centres in Athlone, Mullingar, Portlaoise and Tullamore.

The main role of the PEP programme is to enable the client to map his/her progress and to achieve his/her career goals. The first step is to undertake an assessment of the client's needs, and to identify strengths and weaknesses, as well as any gaps in training that need to be addressed. From there, a plan will be drawn up, and services which may help the client in achieving their goals will be identified.

The PEP is aimed at people between 16 and 65 years of age who are in receipt of a social welfare payment such as disability allowance, invalidity pension, blind pension, etc. Participating in the scheme does not affect your social welfare payments. To find out more about the PEP, please contact Aoife Horan on 057 9320499 or email aoife.horan@nlm.ie or pep@nlm.ie.



Strasbourg Freedom Drive:

2013 marks the tenth anniversary of the Strasbourg Freedom Drive, which has been taking place every two years since 2003.

For those of you who are unfamiliar with the concept of the Strasbourg Freedom Drive, it is a unique event where people with disabilities from across Europe come together to campaign for equal opportunities and in particular for the closure of residential institutions, where

thousands of people with disabilities across Europe are denied the right to make basic choices about their everyday lives, such as when to eat, what to wear and even when to get into and out of bed. Members of the Freedom Drive strongly believe that the provision of a Personal Assistant Service to those who need it should be regarded as a basic human right.



John Evans

During the Freedom Drive, Leaders will have the opportunity to raise concerns with their MEPs and to create awareness of the importance of the Personal Assistant Service in their everyday lives. This year, some of the most inspirational leaders in the Independent Living Movement will be speaking at 'The Future of Independent Living, Active Citizenship and Europe 2020' Conference. Some of the speakers include Judith Heumann, Special Advisor for the International Disability Rights at the US State Department, John Evans, EDF Board member and Adolf Ratzka, Independent Living Institute Sweden.

For more information on the Strasbourg Freedom Drive, please visit www.enil.eu or www.dublincil.org.



Judith Heumann



Adolf Ratzka

As long as we regard our disabilities as tragedies, we will be pitied.

As long as we feel ashamed of who we are, our lives will be regarded as useless.

As long as we remain silent, we will be told by others what to do.

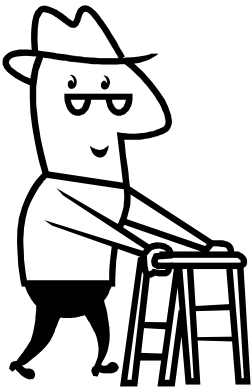
- Adolf Ratzka

Person Centred Plans:

At present, Deirdre Martin is in the process of helping Leaders to complete Person Centred Plans (previously known as care plans) . The purpose of the Person Centred plan is to ensure that Leaders are receiving a service that meet their needs. Completion of the Person Centred Journals on a weekly basis is compulsory, and must be submitted to Sean Rickard, Leader Coordinator, at the end of each month.



A Person Centred journal is simply a one page form where Leaders are invited to identify exactly what they need from the service, whether they need help with light household duties or assistance with activities outside the home, such as education, training or employment. On the form, the Leaders have the option of requesting a meeting with Sean or Deirdre to discuss any changes to their care plans or any training needs their Personal Assistant might have. A number of Leaders have already been assessed by Sean and Deirdre and Care Plans have been implemented accordingly. It is expected that more Leaders will be assessed over the coming months. For more information please email Sean at sean@ocil.ie.



We are currently updating our website!

A new website committee has recently been formed, with a view to updating the information on our website and making the page more appealing to those who use it. The website committee consists of Emmet Grogan, Paul Hickey, Tom Milne, Sarah Fitzgerald, Noeleen O'Rourke, Mick Nestor and Sean Rickard.

If you have any ideas on how our website could be improved, please send all comments and suggestions to sarah@ocil.ie.



Upcoming Coffee Morning

Offaly Leader Forum is holding a "Coffee Morning" on
Thursday 20th June 2013 at 11.30a.m.
at OCIL Ltd/OPAS Ltd Offices, Clonminch
Road , Tullamore

All are welcome, however
numbers are limited

**RSVP – Before Monday 17th June
2013**

**Sarah or Sean , OCIL LTD, Clonminch
Road, Tullamore**

Ph 057 93 22832/24144



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