



The Laois/Offaly Leader

*A quarterly newsletter published by Offaly Centre for
Independent Living Ltd/
Offaly Personal Assistant Services Ltd.*

This Newsletter is available online and in large font

A Welcome Note From Mary Grogan, Chairperson OCIL Ltd.

I am delighted to welcome you to 'The Laois/Offaly Leader'.

Welcome back to all Leaders, PAs, Management Team, Office staff and Board of Directors after the Summer period. Whether you holidayed at home or abroad I hope you all enjoyed some 'down time'.

OCIL has enjoyed many accomplishments and success stories since the last newsletter – whether it involved, from a business perspective, the take-over of Clochán House our respite centre or the success of one of our Leaders Ailish Dunne in being chosen to compete in the paralympics.

Our Orientation Day too was a great success and rest assured we are attempting to address many of the worthwhile suggestions raised by Leaders and PAs on the day. Our Training programme too under the excellent tutelage of Deirdre Martin means that our PAs are receiving Fetac Level 5 training in 'Care Skills'.

As Chairperson I wish to thank everyone for their contribution in delivering on the mission and vision of OCIL and to remind you that each and every one of us has a role to play in working together to ensure the continued success of OCIL Ltd as an organisation.

Mary Grogan, Chairperson OCIL Ltd



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Orientation Day Held in Tullamore Court Hotel

AN orientation day was held for Leaders and Personal Assistants on 14th May 2012 in the Tullamore Court Hotel. The purpose of the day was to discuss changes within the organisation, as well as collecting valuable feedback from Leaders and P.As on improvements that could be made to the service.



It had been three years since Leaders had attended an orientation meeting, and many changes had occurred within the organisation, the most notable change being the takeover of the Clochan House Respite Centre. Many Leaders expressed interest in staying in Clochan House, and suggested that short term and weekend breaks, as well as therapy services, should be introduced.

Another issue which was discussed on the day was the accessibility of information. Technology is constantly evolving, which enables people with a visual impairment to access information. Therefore, it was suggested that the OCIL Ltd website should contain more information about services such as accessible holiday destinations and accessible transport.

Leaders also expressed an interest in meeting up with each other more regularly in a social capacity, for example by organising day trips and nights out.

Overall, the orientation day was a resounding success and we look forward to meeting with Leaders again in the coming months.

Paralympics London 2012:

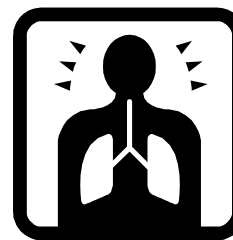
OCIL Ltd and OPAS Ltd would like to extend their congratulations to Leader Ailish Dunne from Mountmellick, who participated in the Discus and Shot Put events in the 2012 Paralympics in London. This was Ailish's first time to compete in the Paralympics and she competed in the Women's Discus throw F11/F12 Final and in the Shotput F11/F12 final. Well done Ailish!



Well done also to Mark Rohan who won two gold medals in the handcycling event.

Love Your Lungs!

REGULAR 'Woman's Way' readers may have noticed a familiar face in the August 20th, 2012 edition of the magazine.



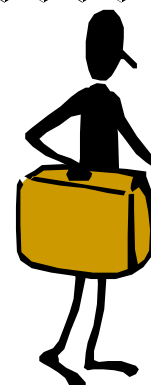
Leader and Researcher for OCIL Ltd, Dee Martin, completed a tag team triathlon recently with the help of her Personal Assistant Gillian Corcoran-Mangan. In doing so, Dee was hoping to raise awareness of Sarcoidosis, an incurable lung disease that can attack all of your other organs.

In an article entitled 'Living with Lung Disease,' Dee opens up about the frustrations that result of living with Sarcoidosis, and how she has worked hard to regain her quality of life after being diagnosed in 2006.

Congrats to Dee on her achievement.

Holidaying at home and abroad:

ORGANISING a holiday can be very stressful for any of us, but when one has a disability, a number of factors need to be considered, such as the accessibility of our accommodation, availability of transport and, most importantly, the range of activities on offer to us.



In Ireland, the largest and most accessible holiday destination is Cuisle, which is located on the beautiful grounds of Donamon Castle in Co. Roscommon. The centre itself has 34 accessible ensuite rooms, a bar area which offers evening entertainment, a dining hall and a sauna/Jacuzzi room. Nursing and personal care is also available to those who need it. For further information, please contact 090 6662277, email cuisle@iwa.ie or visit www.cuisle.com.

In addition, there is a holiday centre in Kilkenny called Claddagh Court. Four guests can stay there at any one time, and the guests choose their activities which can range from visiting historical places of interest to going to the cinema and to restaurants. For further information, contact Catherine O'Sullivan on 056 776 2775. **[Continued overleaf]**

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Information about accessible holidays has become more abundant, especially online. If you would like to check for accessible accommodation in a certain area, visit www.tridentholidayhomes.ie, which has a list of accessible self-catering holiday homes in Ireland. For ideas for day trips or information about accessible venues in Ireland and particularly Dublin, visit www.accessibleireland.com.

Information about where is accessible to eat and drink in Ireland can be found on www.smallerworld.ie. Comments and contributions are always welcome.

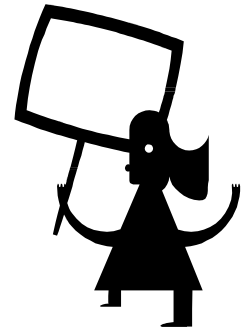
For those who would like to travel further afield, there is accessible accommodation available. The website www.accessibletravel.co.uk has extensive information about wheelchair accessible accommodation abroad and covers destinations such as Spain, Mallorca and Tenerife. Information includes grab rails and the availability of nursing care facilities.

OCIL Ltd hopes to have all of this information on the website shortly, so watch out for further developments.

NEWS IN BRIEF:

Demand for better services

According to an article published in the Irish Independent on Monday, 3 September last, people with disabilities are struggling to live independently because of 'barriers in the external environment'. Some areas that people with disabilities struggle with include gaining employment and accessing services such as physiotherapy, speech therapy and Personal Assistance. (Source: www.independent.ie, Accessed Monday 3 September, 2012).



Leaders protest against cuts in Dublin:

A protest against cuts to disability services, and particularly Personal Assistant Services, took place on Wednesday 5 September last in Dublin. Prior to the protest, a number of protesters sat outside Dail Eireann, vowing not to move until the cutbacks were reversed. This action proved very successful as Minister James Reilly backtracked on the decision. Well done to everyone who was involved in the protest. We have a voice, and we deserve to be heard!

Standard Bank Accounts To Be Made Available in Tullamore:

A pilot “Standard Bank Account” scheme, part of a Government-backed strategy to address financial exclusion in Ireland, is underway in Tullamore. The ‘Standard Bank Account’, being offered by AIB, Bank of Ireland and Permanent TSB, is aimed at people without a current bank account, and is designed to assist people to use banking services and manage their finances.

Under the scheme, a Standard Bank Account (SBA) will be available from branches of the three banks to those over 18 years of age who have no existing current account or who have not had an active current account in the last three years.

The account will make banking more accessible to those who have traditionally not opened bank accounts. An SBA shares many of the features of a regular current bank account, including withdrawals, lodgements, internet and telephone banking, provision of an ATM/debit card, and standing orders. It does not offer a direct debit facility, overdraft, or cheque book.

There are no transaction fees for basic banking transactions on the account. However there are some charges on the account for transactions such as international ATM withdrawals and point of sale (POS) usage and international payments.

Non-social welfare payments into a SBA cannot exceed €4,500 per quarter for two consecutive quarters. If this occurs, the customer will be notified and their account will be transferred.

The pilot scheme will run in Tullamore until the end of the year, but for those who open Standard Bank Accounts during this period in the three locations, their accounts will continue to operate beyond the end of this year.

Interested applicants can receive full details of the SBA by contacting any Allied Irish Banks, Bank of Ireland, and permanent tsb branches in Tullamore or from the Financial Inclusion Working Group (email David Byrne on sbamedia@finance.gov.ie). Alternatively, if you have opened a Standard Bank Account or are thinking of opening one, and you would like to share your experience with other Leaders, please contact us in the OCIL Ltd office, as your experience could prove helpful to other Leaders.



Bringing Home Baby

By Sarah Fitzgerald

If somebody had asked me a year and a half ago what independent living meant to me, I might have said something like, 'making my own choices and exercising control over such choices.' But in truth, I didn't know what Independent Living was about, not really. It is only in the last year that I have come to appreciate the true value of the service and witness the manifestation of the philosophy.

In August 2011, it was confirmed that I was going to have a baby in February 2012. Although I was delighted, I was also apprehensive. I had medical professionals asking me how I was going to manage to care for a small baby and was under immense pressure to prove that I could do so before she was even born! I was asked how I was going to handle her, feed her, carry her, change her, and yet these professionals often had no solutions to offer me either.

The big moment arrived on the 9th February 2012, when Alison Mary Fitzgerald was delivered via planned C-section, weighing a hefty 8lbs 4oz. As I held my beautiful daughter in my arms, I knew there and then that I would die for her. I stayed in the hospital for five days. In truth, I was lucky to bring Alison home with me, as the head nurse had concerns about my physical ability to care for her. I reassured her that OCIL Ltd was going to provide me with Personal Assistant hours to help me take care of Alison.

In the weeks following the section, the Personal Assistant Service was invaluable to me. With the help of my P.A., I learned how to change nappies, do popper buttons and feed Alison. I could focus on learning how to do these tasks while my P.A. was in the background doing tasks such as washing, cooking or cleaning bottles. As time went on I became a pro and today I can change Alison unaided.

Six months on, I am back at work in OCIL Ltd, with a renewed appreciation of how invaluable this service is to Leaders. Without my Personal Assistant I would be too exhausted to return to work. I would like to sincerely thank my Personal Assistants and colleagues here at OCIL Ltd for everything they have done and for making my transition to motherhood significantly easier.



Clochan House:

Clochan House is a respite centre for people with disabilities. Although it is annexed to the main hospital in Tullamore, it has its own separate entrance and sensory garden. The HSE were responsible for the day-to-day running of the centre from 1993 until 2011, when Offaly Centre for Independent Living Ltd successfully tendered for the service.



Clochan House is an invaluable resource for both Leaders and their families. Leaders can enjoy a break away from family life in a 'home away from home' environment, while family members, who are often responsible for tending to needs such as Personal Care, can also use the respite break to focus on other activities. There are five respite attendants on hand to cater for the needs of the clients, one of whom stays overnight to assist clients with toileting and turning in bed, should they require such assistance.

The clients who avail of this service often look forward to their stay there, not least because they are given the opportunity to interact with other clients.

Clochan House is very much a part of the community here in Tullamore. Clients often go for lunch, go shopping, go to the cinema or go bowling. In addition, Clochan House is establishing relationships with services such as Speech and Language, Occupational Therapy and Public Health Nurses, which will ultimately benefit the clients.

If you have suggestions on how improvements can be made to Clochan house, or if you are interested in staying in Clochan House, please contact Angela Feery on 057 9359607.

Rest in Peace:

We would like to extend our deepest sympathies to the families of our Leaders, Pat Gleeson, Mary Larkin, Seamus Morris, Margaret O'Connor, Mary Fitzpatrick, Patricia Hall, Colin Gladwin, Brid Conlon, Gerard Kenny, Ger Maher and Emily Scully-Berut who passed away since our last newsletter. May they rest in peace.

About Us:

Offaly Centre for Independent Living (OCIL) Ltd and Offaly Personal Assistant Services (OPAS) Ltd provide Personal Assistant Services to people with disabilities across Laois and Offaly. Our clients are known as 'Leaders' because they 'lead' their own service and decide how their hours are used.



OCIL Ltd and OPAS Ltd believe in delivering a high quality service to our Leaders. Leaders are encouraged to complete monthly 'care plans', which details each Leader's individual needs, thus enabling us to provide a service that caters for these needs. We also provide training for our Personal Assistants in Manual Handling, First Aid and Health and Safety, as well as FETAC Level 5 in Care Skills (having this qualification is now a requirement in order for PAs to be able to work with Leaders).

OCIL Ltd and OPAS Ltd are also undergoing a continually self-assessed quality audit called PQASSO (Practical Quality Assurance System for Small Organisations) to ensure that high standards are being met.

OCIL Ltd is funded by the HSE and OPAS Ltd is funded by FAS. Without this funding, many Leaders would not be able to live independently. For further information, please contact the numbers below, email us or visit our website.

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