

Dear Member

Merry Christmas and a happy New Year to all our members and their families and friends. As 2021 draws to a close, we wish to write to you to let you know what has been going on in the Branch over the year and how we have adapted to the COVID-19 Pandemic. We are now almost two years into the Pandemic, and it is hard to believe that we are still going through it but we are learning to adapt and are getting back to living somewhat normal lives.



Figure 1 Regional Advisory Council meeting on 24th November

• **Regional Advisory Council:** RAC is an independent self-advocacy group for adults with Down syndrome in the Northeast area. The 14-member council, consisting primarily of people from Meath and Louth but also some from Westmeath and Cavan is the first of its kind within DSI's 25 branches. Based on the successful National Advisory Council model, the RAC offers an opportunity for the branch members to have a structured input into the plans and activities of the Louth Meath and other local branches. Our 14 adult members on the Regional Advisory Council have had a very active year, meeting every month, on Zoom, except for July and August. At the last meeting held on the 24th of November. Fintan Bray was elected on to Down Syndrome Ireland's National Council. Congratulations to Fintan who is the first person with Down Syndrome to be elected to the National Council.

- **Latch On Adult Literacy & Work Skills Programme:** The students and teaching staff of our Athboy class were delighted to get back to the classroom in September to finish off the work skills programme. This group of students have been together since 2016 and have now completed all the modules of DSI's Ability programme. We look forward to their graduation in 2022.

DSI has designed a Personal Development Course which is currently being piloted by the Athboy class. Feedback so far is positive and hopefully this programme will become a valuable resource for our teenagers and adults with DS.



Figure 3 Athboy Work Skills Class who Graduated the Latch On Module in 2018

- **Funding Scheme:** The funding scheme is available again in 2021. The Funding Scheme will cover therapies, and sports / recreational activities that will benefit members with Down syndrome. Application Forms have been emailed to members and more details can be found on our Webpage <https://dsilmb.ie/more/funding-scheme/>. There are some Terms and Conditions that apply.
- **Early Intervention Programme:** The early Intervention Programme Home Teacher Programme continued in 2021. The Louth/Meath Branch of Down Syndrome Ireland manages an "Early Intervention Home Teacher Programme" for preschool children (aged from 1 year to 6 years) with Down syndrome in the counties of Louth and Meath. This Programme was set up by the Branch in 1982. There are no administrative costs associated with the Programme, as it is managed on a completely voluntarily basis by members of the Branch who are parents of children with Down syndrome. The Programme consists of Early Intervention Home Teachers visiting the home of the child with Down syndrome for one to two hours every fortnight throughout the school year (approximately 20 visits per year). A big thank you to our parent volunteer coordinators Andrea McArdle and Ann Fallon who run the programme for the Branch. We would also like to thank our Early Intervention Home Teachers who are doing a fantastic Job.
- **Speech & Drama/Social Skills Club:** The Speech and Drama Club in Drogheda continues to go ahead for weekly sessions online. We would like to thank Audrey Jackson for her fab work in keeping the Club going as well as Zoe Finegan O'Toole our Drama teacher.

- **Saturday Club:** The Saturday club has resumed in November 2021. This club was set up in 2016 by parents to provide a fun social activity for our children aged from 11 to 16 approx. giving them a break from therapies and education etc. The group go Bowling or to the Cinema etc. and usually go for food afterwards. A big thank you to Sandra Allen for organising the Club.
- **Social Events:** We held successful Virtual parties this year for World Down Syndrome Day, Valentine's Day and for Halloween. We also plan to have a virtual Christmas party on Wednesday 22nd of December. A big thank you to Liz Murray for organizing all our Disco's etc. and to Shay Casserley, Linda Farrell for hosting our Virtual Parties and to their assistants on the night Philip Connolly and Stephen Farrell. We are not holding a Children's Christmas Party this year, but we are hosting a Zoom Call with Santa.

A big thank you to the Magician Simon Ryan who hosted a virtual Magic Show for our members on World Down Syndrome Day.

Thank you also to the Kelly Family and WORKRATE who organised "Room on The Broom" which was performed by Rainbow Phil on Zoom for our younger members.

- **Family Fun Day:** Our annual Family Fun Day & BBQ went ahead this year in Newgrange Farm, Slane, on Sunday the 5th of September. We were very fortunate that the Sun was shining, and a very pleasant day was had by all. It was a great opportunity for our members to meet up after so long being denied the chance. A big thank you to our Chairman, Paul Radford who organised the event.
- **Sibling Workshops Sibshops:** We had held four virtual Sibshops this year, two in January and two in May. We were also able to get back to in person Sibshops in November when we held two, one of which was in Drogheda and one in Athboy. A big thank you to Liz and Linda from Sibshop Ireland for facilitating these Sibshops.



Figure 4 Siblings having fun at the Sibshop run in Athboy during November

- **Parent Link:** Down Syndrome Ireland LouthMeath run Parent link a support network for new parents giving advice and relevant information to new parents. Parent Link is a voluntary support and information service for new parents of babies with Down Syndrome in Louth and Meath and the surrounding areas. We are parents of children with Down Syndrome and trained in Parent Link by Down Syndrome Ireland. As parents we are familiar with the feelings and reactions of having a child with Down Syndrome in the family. New parents living in County Meath or Louth should contact Sirpa Makinen on 086 8614970 or Eleanor Cosgrove on 087-667 1393.
- **Numicon:** We held a Numicon Workshop for both Professionals and Parents on Saturday November 6th in the Conyngham Arms Hotel Slane.
- **Blossom Ireland Assertiveness Course:** Down Syndrome Louth Meath Branch in conjunction with Blossom Ireland Assertiveness Course. Six Members of our branch thoroughly enjoyed a six week Zoom Course in the Summer of 2021. Learning to speak up about their likes and dislikes, supporting each other during live presentations and having lots of fun. Down Syndrome Louth Meath Branch were happy to subsidise this course and happy to hear that all the group members went on to meet up physically to continue the fun.



Figure 5 • Blossom Ireland Assertiveness Course



Figure 6 • Enjoying lunch after Blossom Ireland Assertiveness Course

- **Branch AGM:** We held our branch AGM in September both virtually and in Person as a Hybrid meeting so that we could facilitate more of our members. We elected our Branch Officers and our Committee for the coming year. The branch is run by a committee of parent volunteers who meet once a month to discuss the running and organisation of our branch. We would like to pay a big thank you to our Branch Officers and Branch Committee for volunteering to help run the branch and thank them for all their hard work.
- **Members volunteering with DSI:** Our Chairman Paul Radford, was reelected to the Board of DSI as one of the Leinster Reps. Paula McDonagh was also elected as the Branch Rep on the National Council. A big thank you to Paul and Paula for volunteering again this year.
- **Regional Resource Officer:** Our Regional Resource Officer, Mike Egan is here to help people with Down syndrome and their family's access support locally. Regional Resource Officers provide vital support and a point of contact for new parents as well as families who need help and support at local level at every life stage. Mike can be contacted at 085 8618866 or mike@downsyndrome.ie.

We were very fortunate to receive funding support from the Mitigating Against Educational Disadvantage fund, through LMETB, which is providing a number of laptops for a loan scheme open to our adult members. We also received funding support from Rethink Ireland for our Connected project. This is an initiative to increase our branch supports in the three areas of securing employment, second-level education support and improving independent living opportunities. These initiatives are being led by Mike.

There has been a significant increase in the numbers of requests for supports for students with Down syndrome at both primary and secondary level. We have worked closely with the DSI National Education Officer, Fidelma Brady, to provide additional school support for students, their families and school staff in the area.

Mike has organised Community Education Courses from the LMETB for our Adult members in Arts & Crafts, Cooking and Computers.

- **Fun with Numbers:** Fun with Numbers has continued in 2021 during school term. We run 2 workshops a week online. FWN is a fun way of working with numbers through games and creative learning aids was organised in November for 2 Groups. It is a light-hearted way of learning basic number skills like counting, adding, and subtraction, incorporating concepts of division and multiplication. Fun with Numbers presents opportunities for using life skills like following a recipe using measurements and time, along with planning journeys and using money. We have set 2 age groupings of 8 to 11 years and 12 and older, however if your child's age falls outside these categories we will still try to accommodate. A big thank you to Deirdre Myler for providing the Workshops. If you are interested in joining FWN, please email secretarydslm.com for more details.
- **Down Syndrome Awareness Campaign:** We ran a Down Syndrome awareness campaign again this year during the month of October on our Social Media Channels to celebrate Down Syndrome Awareness Month. We featured at least one of our members each day to celebrate our members for being themselves.
- **Fundraising:** Our main Fundraising event this year was Pound the Pavements. Pound the Pavements ran from 10 – 30 June 2021. We invited all our family, friends – at home and overseas – as well as members of our local



Figure 7 Poppy Stephenson Pounding the Pavements

communities across Louth and Meath to take part in this virtual event. We asked everyone to dress up in purple and green and help us create a sea of walkers and runners across every town, village and road in Louth and Meath to Pound the Pavements over 21 km for the local Louth Meath Branch. The goal was simply to have fun and reach 21km over 21 days and to raise as much money as we could for the Branch. We would like to thank LMFM who promoted and sponsored Pound the Pavements and our members who were interviewed on



radio to support the event. We would also like to thank our Branch Sub Committee who worked so hard to organise Pound the Pavements as well as all our members who took part and contributed to the event. We also want to say a special thanks to Shay Casserley who produced and our adult members who made some fantastic promotional short videos which we ran during the year on social media. Pound the Pavements captured the public imagination and helped us to raise in excess of €35,000 for the Branch.

We also had great buy in from our members for the National Raffle as part of DSI's 50th Anniversary celebrations. A big thank you to all who took part. The Third Prize Ticket of €500 Dunnes Stores Gift Card was sold in the Branch to Rebecca Finnegan

We would also like to thank all who organised fundraisers for the Branch especially around events such as the Mini Marathon, Dublin City Marathon, Birthdays etc. and all those who made donations.

We have a Branch Fundraising page on iDonate which can be used by members to set up events to raise money for the Branch

- **Membership:** The 2022 Branch membership falls due for our members on 1st January 2022. The membership fee for 2022 is €20 for all members. Membership forms can be downloaded from <https://dsilmb.ie/becomeamember/> or can be got from Brendan on secretarydslm@gmail.com.

In conclusion we would like to take this opportunity to thank our Branch Committee who work tirelessly for our Branch and its Members. We would also like to thank all our members and their families for all their support during this particularly challenging year and to wish you all a very Safe, Healthy and Happy Christmas and a very Happy and Safe New Year.