

DSILMB Christmas Newsletter 2022

Dear Member

Merry Christmas and a happy New Year to all our members and their families and friends. As 2022 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.

- **Adult Education, Latch On, Adult Literacy & Work Skills Programme:** The students and teaching staff of our



Figure 1. Athboy Class Graduating from their Latch On, Adult Literacy & Work Skills Programme

Athboy class were delighted to get back to the classroom in September 2021 to finish off the work skills programme. This group of students have been together since 2016 and has now completed all the modules of DSI's Ability programme. This Fantastic group graduated in 2022.

DSI has designed a Personal Development Course and this course was piloted by the Athboy class. Feedback was positive and hopefully, this programme will become a valuable resource for our teenagers and adults with DS.

- **Early Intervention Programme:** The Early Intervention Programme Home Teacher Programme continued in 2022. 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. 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). One of our teachers, Maria McDonald retired from the EI programme at the end of June. We would like to take this opportunity to thank Maria for her many years of service to the EI programme. She has helped many young children to realise their potential and helped prepare them for the next stage of their journey into primary school. We have undertaken a recruitment process over the Autumn and have recruited 2 new Teachers who will begin with the service in January 2023. Some members have not been able to access the service since September during the recruitment process and we hope to offer those members an enhanced service to make up for the missed visits in the new year. The EI Programme is the costliest service offered in the Branch. It has been offered for close to 40 years, has always been free to members, and is unique in the country. There are not many other Branches in a position to offer this service. 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.

- **Regional Advisory Council:** The RAC is a 13-member independent self-advocacy group for adults with Down syndrome in the Northeast area. The Council, with members from Meath, Louth, Westmeath and Cavan had a very busy year. While most of its monthly meetings took place on Zoom, the members were delighted to be back meeting in person from September onwards. The council elected its first officers this year; Chairperson Michelle Whelehan, Secretary Eleanor Murray and Treasurer Conor O'Dowd. The officers took charge for the November Council meeting. Thanks are due to DSI national officers, Sinéad Flynn and Helena Connors for their facilitation support this year. Congratulations also to RAC member, Fintan Bray, who became the first person with Down syndrome to be elected



Figure 2. Regional Advisory Council

to the National Executive of an Irish political party earlier this year. Congratulations to Fintan who is the first person with Down Syndrome to be elected to the National Council."

- **Funding Scheme:** The funding scheme is available again in 2022. 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.
- **Speech & Drama/Social Skills Club:** The Speech and Drama Club in Drogheda continues to go ahead for weekly sessions online. The Club will resume as an in-person club in January. 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 gone from strength to strength and has continued in 2022. This club was set up in 2016 by parents to provide a fun social activity for our children aged from 15 to 1 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:** Of course, with Covid, we were very restricted in what we could organise last year, but our Adult Social events have returned with a bang this year with Discos, Parties, Céili's and Country nights throughout the year.



Figure 3. Saturday Club

Figure 4. Valentines Disco



Figure 5. Ceili Night



Figure 6. Ceili Night 2



Figure 7. Country Night



- **Family Fun Day:** Our annual Family Fun Day & BBQ went ahead this year in Newgrange Farm, Slane, on Sunday the 4th 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.

- **Christmas Party:** On the 27th of November we had a very successful children's Christmas party for ages 0-13. It was held in Trim Castle Hotel. The Children were given presents from Santa. A big thank you to our volunteers who worked as Santa's helpers and made the day special. A special Thank you also to Adam Morgan who collected memberships and sold Christmas cards. We would also like to thank our DJ Philip Connolly, DJPhilmeister who kept everyone on the dance floor and our event photographer Jass Foley. Thank you to all the families that made it a special day by coming.
- **Numicon:** We hosted a workshop for Professionals & Parents/Carers on October 22nd of this year. The workshop would suit children whose maths level was from infants up to the end of second class, The Professional workshop took place in the morning and the Parents/Carers workshop happened in the afternoon.
- **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.
- **Parent Link:** Down Syndrome Ireland, Louth Meath runs 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.
- **Warrior Wolves:** The Warrior Wolves are our branch's own multi-sport Team. As an Irish community, we are aware of the health benefits sport brings, and if there is a bit of craic involved, well that's a bonus. Currently, the Warrior Wolves have been participating, both recreational and competitive, in three sports – Athletics, Futsal and Artistic Swimming. Athletics and Artistic Swimming lends to individual and team participation while Futsal is a five-a-side indoor football game played in teams. Most members train at their local sports clubs, whether it is a mixed disability, mainstream or Special Olympics club. We facilitate the joining of sports clubs in any sport, if you need assistance with this, please contact us. During the year events in all 3 sports have been hosted by the Warrior Wolves, with a few more events and one additional sport planned for 2023. If you are aged 12 & over and you would like to get involved in sport, please get in touch. The Louth/Meath Warrior Wolves wish you a wonderful Christmas and an active New Year!

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- **A Midsummer Night's Splash:** What a wonderful night we had at A Midsummer Night's Splash on Tuesday 21st June and what a wonderful display of Artistic Swimming from our Artistic Swimming team. We are very proud of our Artistic Swimming trainees; Dúalta, Liam, Eileen, Katie, Emma, Eleanor and Fintan. The Team performing were Dúalta, Liam, Eileen, Katie, and Emma. We would like to thank Aoife Drumm for her dedication and enthusiasm to coaching our members. We also wish to thank our committee member Liz Murray who initially had the idea of approaching Aoife with this challenge. We also wish to thank Clontarf Baths and everyone involved in organising, hosting and supporting the event. Well done to all the swimmers involved. Thank you all very much.



Figure 8. Futsal



Figure 9. Artistic Swimming

<https://www.rte.ie/news/2022/0610/1304057-synchronised-swim-charity-show/?fbclid=IwAR3rVtbCMhN39daLPFYlfUdXn9foiLZUKHp2txPKWjIKzKKXMcQ7pOlmpwg>

- **Athletics World Championships for athletes with Down syndrome:** David O'Hare and Fergus Cosgrove flew to the Czech Republic, both Louth/Meath branch members and part of the Warrior Wolves went to the Athletics World Championships for athletes with Down syndrome, where they competed in the Triathlon. The event welcomed athletes from 14 countries. There were teams of 10/15 athletes from Italy, Poland & other countries, with a lot of athletes only travelling with coaches - not a parent in sight! Our Irish athletes were well received at this international event & the hope is to have a bigger team going to the next event in Sept 2023. Our athletes, our children, both male & female, are more than capable of competing at this level at national & international events but it doesn't happen overnight. There needs to be a plan in place & the start of that plan is the Warrior Wolves!
- **Sibling Workshops Sibshops:** The Sibshop Workshops have all returned to in-person Workshops. Our Sibshops were held both in Drogheda Presbyterian church and Athboy Convent Community Centre. We must say thank you to Liz Fitzpatrick & Linda Foley who are both Nurses working with children with Intellectual disabilities for facilitating the group. They are qualified Sibshop Facilitators and run Sibshop workshops which are afternoons of fun for siblings of children with special needs. As well as having lots of fun it provides a great opportunity for siblings to get together and chat about some of the difficulties and the positives of having a sibling with Special Needs. The workshops are for our member's Siblings aged between 7 and 13
- **Branch AGM:** We held our branch AGM in May in the Conyngham Arms Hotel Slane. 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.
- **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.
- **Employment Support Specialist:** For a number of years, the branch has identified supporting our adult members to get meaningful, paid jobs as a priority. This year, thanks to support from the Rethink Ireland Innovate Together fund, we have been able to recruit a part-time support person to specifically work with our adult members, their families, the DSI national employment support initiative and local employers to help make this goal a reality. In post just a short while, Gemma McMahon has already been in contact with member families and employers to get this exciting initiative up and running. Keep an eye out for more information, including a branch Open Day on Employment Opportunities in early 2023.
- **Fun with Numbers:** This year we continued Fun with Numbers (FWN). FWN is an online workshop, which is a fun way of working with numbers through games and creative learning aids. It is a useful tool to teach basic number skills like counting, adding and subtraction, and incorporating concepts of division and multiplication in a fun way. There are 2 classes per week on Monday and Thursday. Fun with Numbers presents opportunities for using life skills like following a recipe, using measurements and time, 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



Figure 10. Athletics World Championships for athletes with Down syndrome



Figure 11. Sibling Workshop

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.

- **Follow the Rainbow:** Special Needs Fun, Play and Fitness. We have organised a Special Needs Fun, Play and Fitness session in Kells called Follow the Rainbow – Special Needs Fun, Play and Fitness for our children aged 5-8-year-olds (However if your child's age falls outside these categories we will still try to accommodate.) in the Dance Mania Studios, Kells, Co Meath on Saturday morning at 11.30 for a 45 min class. If you are interested in booking a spot, please Text or WhatsApp Gillian on 0868759025 or email gillian_omalley24@yahoo.ie.
- **Movie Club:** Sunday Movie with popcorn and drink/pizza Club for children aged 5-10-year-olds (However if your child's age falls outside these categories we will still try to accommodate.) Siblings are welcome but will not be covered by the branch in The Arc Cinema Navan. If you are interested in booking a spot, please Text or WhatsApp Gillian on 086 8759025 or email gillian_omalley24@yahoo.ie.
- **Coffee Morning Get-Togethers:** Our Monthly Coffee Mornings have resumed. These monthly meetups aim to create an opportunity for parents and their children to meet up regularly in a fun environment. They are usually held at Ark play centre in Pudding Hill, on a Sunday from 10 am to 12:30 pm. Thank you to Avril Rickard and Insil Byrne for organising the coffee mornings. Email secretarydslm@gmail.com for more details.
- **Aqua Boot Camps:** We have had a number of Aqua boot camp sessions throughout the year which have proved popular using Aura Trim Leisure centre and the Aura in Navan. Thanks to all who participated. The Aquafit sessions, some of which have been facilitated by Eleanor Murray, one of our amazing branch members and Aura Trim Leisure Centre, are a great success. The combination of loud pop music, water and peers together was very successful. Thank you to Cara Morgan for organising the Camps.
- **Smart and Assistive Technology Training SATT:** Down Syndrome Ireland Louth Meath Branch was awarded a Meta Data Center Community Action Grant to pilot a Smart and Assistive Technology Training programme for teens with Down syndrome in Meath. The 10-week course started in Trim Library this October and provided students with devices and training on how to use their new devices and lots of useful apps and programmes. Each student will be given a tablet to keep, as long as they committed to attending and graduating from the full SATT Course. Our aim was for the students to learn as much as possible for them, how to be familiar with and independent in the use of technology such as Laptops, Smart Phones, Tablets, Earbuds or Speakers. Thank you to Cara Morgan who led the way in organising the Course and applying for the Grant.

Figure 12. Smart and Assistive Technology Training SATT
- **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.
- **Membership:** The 2023 Branch membership falls due for our members on 1st January 2023. The membership fee for 2023 is €20 for all members. Membership forms can be downloaded from <https://dsilmie.ie/becomeamember/> or can be got from Brendan on secretarydslm@gmail.com.
- **World Down Syndrome Day:** To celebrate World Down Syndrome Day, the Louth/Meath branch hosted a coffee morning on the 20th of March in the Conyngham Arms from 11 am – 1.30 pm for all our members. As part of the celebration, we asked parents/guardians to send us photos of their baby, child, teen, young adult, or adult to show on a projector on the day. The theme was 'I Can' as in I can sit up, cycle, run, do gardening, work etc. We also asked people to pick out their most colourful socks.

- **Fundraising:** Our main Fundraising event this year was Pound the Pavements. Pound the Pavements ran from 1st



Figure 14. Adam Morgan & Ann Fallon

– 21st June 2022. We invited all our family, and friends – at home and overseas – as well as members of our local 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,



Figure 13. Pound the Pavements

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 our Sponsors Indaver, Coco Cola and LMFM who promoted and sponsored Pound the Pavements and our members who were interviewed on the 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 and Seanie Vaughan who allowed us to use his fabulous Song "I Can and I Will" as our theme for the event. Pound the Pavements captured the public imagination and helped us to raise more than €14,000 for the Branch. This year the Louth Meath branch took part in the national raffle. The raffle was used to get support for the DSI community at a local level as well as help to further support on a national level, ensuring continued support to people with Down syndrome. 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

- **Condolences:** During 2022 we sadly lost some of our great supporters, volunteers, and friends.

In April We lost our great friend Tom Murray. Tom is the Husband of our Vice Chair Liz and the father of our Member Eleanor. Tom has been a member of the Branch and a member of our Branch Committee for many years. Tom has volunteered in all the officer positions in the Branch over the years as well as serving nationally as President of DSI. May Tom Rest in Peace

In May we lost one of our EI Home Teachers Fidelma O'Brien. Fidelma worked as an Early Intervention Home Teacher for our Branch and was much loved by all the Children and families she visited and taught for our Branch. Fidelma was much loved and will be missed. May Fidelma Rest in Peace

In November we lost Seán Belton. Seán Belton is the father of our Early Intervention Home Teacher Bernadette. Seán was also our Santa at our Children's Christmas Party for many years. May Seán Rest in Peace. We want to express our sincere sympathy to all the Families and all who lost someone throughout the year. May they Rest in Peace.

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 the year and to wish you all a very Safe, Healthy and Happy Christmas and a very Happy and Safe New Year.