

DSILMB Christmas Newsletter 2023



Dear Member

Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year to all our members and their families and friends. As 2023 draws to a close, we reflect on a year filled with growth, connection, and achievement within our close-knit community. The Down Syndrome Ireland Louth Meath Branch has been steadfast in its commitment to support, empower, and advocate for individuals with Down syndrome and their families. We are thrilled to share with you the highlights and accomplishments of the past year, which have been made possible by the dedication of our members, volunteers, and supporters.

Adult Education, Latch On: Down Syndrome Ireland has collaborated with ETBs to develop Further Education Programmes to empower school leavers and adults with Down syndrome to achieve their full potential. They aim to develop a broad range of social, life, literacy, and numeracy skills. Developing independence and enhancing employability are integral to our programmes. LMETB and Down Syndrome Ireland through our branch have developed 2 Latch On courses in Navan & Dundalk which started in September 2023. Latch On Classes commenced courtesy of LMETB in Navan & Dundalk in September. Down Syndrome Ireland Louth Meath Branch was happy to liaise closely with Navan LMETB and 7 Adult Members of our branch and Dundalk LMETB where 2 members enrolled, and we continue to provide support to ensure this Latch on Course is successful and will run again in a year.



Figure 1 Latch On Navan

Early Intervention Programme: A cornerstone of our child support is the "Early Intervention Home Teacher" Programme. Addressing the needs of preschool children, aged 1 to 6, with Down syndrome in the counties of Louth and Meath, this program is a lifeline for families facing unique challenges. The structured framework involves Early Intervention Home Teachers visiting the homes of each child bi-weekly throughout the school year, totalling approximately 20 visits annually. We acknowledge the departure of a dedicated educator, Bernadette Belton, who recently retired from the EI programme at the close of June. We extend our sincerest gratitude to Bernadette for her enduring commitment and invaluable contributions to the growth and preparation of countless young minds as they step into the next phase of their educational journey. The EI Programme, the most resource-intensive service within the Branch, has stood as a beacon of unwavering support for nearly four decades. Offered free of charge to members, it remains a distinctive and unparalleled initiative in the country, a testament to our commitment to those we serve. We extend profound appreciation to our steadfast parent volunteer coordinator, Ann Fallon, for her dedicated stewardship of the program on behalf of the Branch. A heartfelt acknowledgement is also reserved for our Early Intervention Home Teachers, whose exemplary efforts contribute significantly to the program's success.

Regional Advisory Council: The RAC is a 13-member independent self-advocacy group for adults with Down syndrome



Figure 3 In-person and Online RAC Meeting

in the Northeast area. It was a very busy year again for the Louth Meath Regional Advisory Council (RAC). The Council agreed its operating guidelines in February and met seven times over the year. The Council was invited to provide representation on the branch committee and nominated the Council Chairperson, Michelle, and Secretary, Eleanor, to be those members. As far as we are aware, Michelle and Eleanor are the first two adults with Down syndrome to be full members of a branch committee within Down Syndrome Ireland. With the much-appreciated support of branch committee member Ellie Cosgrove, the council had several

social events during the year, including discos, a bowling night in Drogheda, and a Trip to the Dogs in Dundalk. The council were involved in reviewing and approving an Easy Read notice for the national DSI AGM, and memorandum & articles change. Representatives from the RAC also attended a meeting of the National Advisory Council in Dublin as invited guests. A member of the RAC gave a presentation to a group from the Kildare DSI branch who were interested in organising an RAC as well. The first meeting of the new Kildare RAC took place in November. This is the second one in Ireland after Louth Meath and more councils are being proposed in other branches.

Funding Scheme: The funding scheme is available again in 2023. 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 for weekly sessions in the Barbican in Drogheda every Saturday morning. It is a great club where our members continue to build friendships, build confidence, and improve social and communication skills. The Speech & Drama Group performed Cinderella on the 16th of December in the Barbican in Drogheda for their family and friends. We would like to thank Audrey Jackson for her fab work in keeping the Club going as well as Ali McLoughlin our Drama teacher.



Figure 4 The Cast of Cinderella

Warrior Wolves: The Warrior Wolves are our branch's own multi-sport Team. As a community, we are aware of the



Figure 5 David O'Hare out ahead at Warrior Wolves Come & Try Day

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. Hoping to add Basketball in 2024. 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 sport 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 2024. 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! Contacts: tessa.tsenya@gmail.com & Sanet.tsenya@gmail.com



Figure 6 Jinny Bradley trying the Javelin.

Numicon: This year, on October 21st, we organised a workshop tailored for both Professionals and Parents/Carers. Geared towards children ranging from infants to the end of the Second class in Math proficiency, the workshop was divided into two sessions. The morning session catered to professionals, while the afternoon session was dedicated to Parents/Carers. It provided a valuable platform for both groups to enhance their understanding and support for children in the specified math levels. The dual workshop format allowed for a comprehensive and inclusive approach, fostering collaboration and knowledge-sharing among professionals and parents alike.

Artistic Swimming: 2023 has been a hugely busy and successful year for our group. Last Feb we ran a residential camp in Clongowes Wood College. We were there for 3 days and were joined by a member of Team GB who took part in the training also. We put on a display for invited guests on the last day and received great praise. We were visited early in the summer by the GB team Coach Pauline Walker and by an Italian International Artistic Swimmer. Then Team Ireland Combo was formed with two male and two female swimmers. The whole summer saw this Team of Dúalta, Fintan, Katie and Eleanor engage in intensive training for their combo routine under the professional guidance of Aoife Drumm. This was the first time a combo would be entered into the Suds International European championships which were held in Padova near Venice in Italy. We all had a tremendously pleasurable and unbelievable week as the team were awarded a gold medal. Such a tribute to Aoife and her hard-working and diligent team. Great friends were made that week, and all will treasure those memories for many years. In Sept our group had the whole pool available to us which was invaluable. Our group has now expanded to eleven enthusiastic swimmers. We are a very inclusive group. Eight of our swimmers have Down Syndrome and three have additional needs. We are the first and only group like us in the entire country. TV Virgin Media 3 visited our training early one morning in late Sept and we received super feedback. Aoife has done a Halloween and a Christmas video for our branch to monitor the progress of our swimmers. Not all activity takes place in the water as we engage in a hectic social calendar too. Events such as celebrating birthdays, going to musical shows, breakfast and meals in local hotels and restaurants and best of all being entertained royally by Dúalta and his parents at their sumptuous home. We all agree that this group are unique with their friendship, supportiveness and thoughtfulness to each and every member. Our coach Aoife Drumm is the most amazing lady, and we treasure her with gratitude and fondness. Thank you to Louth Meath for backing this initiative two years ago. Without your support, we would be unable to survive.



Figure 7 Artistic Swimming Team Dúalta, Katie, Eleanor and Fintan,

SUDS European Championship: What a year! In 2023 we were excited to announce that, for the first time ever, an Ireland Down Syndrome National team would compete in the SUDS Open European Championship for athletes with Down syndrome in Padova, Italy from 3 – 10 September 2023. 15 athletes took part in 3 sports, representing 6 Down Syndrome Ireland branches. Our Louth Meath branch had 8 of our members in the team, a fantastic



Figure 8 The Irish Team for the SUDS European Championship



Figure 9 Liam Foley after receiving a Gold Medal

achievement! The team did their parents, communities and Down Syndrome Ireland branches proud. The sense of achievement and camaraderie the international participation created was amazing to see. Fergus Cosgrove, from

Walterstown, competed in his second international event. Fergus ran the 100m T21 Men in 15.37sec and the 200m



Figure 10 Jamie Linden receiving his Ireland Futsal Cap

T21 Men in 33.08 both for 5th place. In the Triathlon, Fergus excelled, winning his first bronze medal at the European Championships. For Liam Foley, a seasoned road runner from Trim, running his first track event at this level. Liam ran a very clever 1500m, beating the Italian athlete at the finish in 6:32.98. Winning Ireland's first-ever gold medal! Liam went on and won the 800m T21 Men in 2:55.63, setting a new European Record! a fantastic achievement. The Ireland Down Syndrome Futsal squad had a busy time, playing 5 games during the event. Jamie Linden, named the HULK in Italy for his excellent defensive skills and



Figure 11 Fergus Cosgrove receiving his Ireland Futsal Cap

Micheál McCloy who scored no less than 2 goals, couldn't have done our branch prouder! Ireland finished 4th, with



Figure 12 The Irish Team in the SUDS European Championship Parade of Nations

a great sense of what these events are about and looking forward to bringing the knowledge back to Ireland and developing the sport locally. Our Artistic swimming team, all from our branch, being the first combined female and male team representing Ireland, walked away as European Champions in the Combo event. Achieving a score of 39.700. On behalf of the athlete members in the team, we would like to extend our deepest gratitude for the Louth Meath branch's generous support. A

special mention to the committee members who worked tirelessly to get the team to Italy. Communities have rallied behind the Irish athletes in support of their efforts, this dissolved many barriers athletes would have previously faced. Thank you for enabling Irish athletes with Down syndrome to take their rightful place on the European stage! On to Barrier-Free sport in 2024!

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.

Sibling Workshops Sibshops: Our Sibling Workshops recently convened at Drogheda Presbyterian Church and Athboy Convent Community Centre, where we extend our gratitude to Liz Fitzpatrick and Linda Foley. Both accomplished nurses specializing in children with intellectual disabilities expertly facilitated the group as qualified Sibshop Facilitators. These workshops, designed for siblings aged 7 to 13 of children with special needs, offer delightful afternoons of enjoyment. Beyond the fun, they serve as a meaningful platform for siblings to connect, discussing both the challenges and positives of having a brother or sister with special needs. It's a unique opportunity for our members' siblings to build bonds, share experiences, and foster understanding in a supportive environment.

Saturday Club: The Saturday Club, thriving since its inception in 2016, continues to flourish in 2023 as a vital social outlet for our members aged approximately 15 to 18. Initiated by families, the club aims to offer a respite from therapies and education, providing a fun and engaging environment. Activities such as bowling and post-event meals create memorable experiences. A special acknowledgement to Sandra Allen for her dedicated efforts in organizing and sustaining the club, ensuring that our members enjoy valuable moments of leisure, camaraderie, and relaxation.



Figure 13 The Saturday Club at a recent Bowling Outing

Family Fun Day: This year's annual Family Fun Day & BBQ, held at Newgrange Farm in Slane on September 3rd, was a delightful success. Basking in the fortunate glow of sunshine, attendees enjoyed a pleasant day of camaraderie. The event provided a wonderful opportunity for our members to reunite, offering a welcome respite at the end of the Summer as the Children were going back to school. Gratitude is extended to our Chairman, Paul Radford, whose meticulous organization ensured the success of the day, fostering a sense of community and shared joy among our members.

Christmas Party: A triumphant Children's Christmas Party, catering to ages 0-13, unfolded on December 3rd at Trim Castle Hotel. Santa distributed presents, bringing joy to the young attendees. Heartfelt appreciation goes to our dedicated volunteers who served as Santa's helpers, contributing to the day's magic. Special thanks to Adam Morgan for his efforts in Christmas card sales. DJ Philip Connolly (DJPhilmeister) ensured a lively atmosphere on the dance floor, and Jass Foley skilfully captured memorable moments as the event photographer. Gratitude extends to the families whose presence made the day truly special. Your participation added to the festive spirit, making it a heartwarming celebration for all.

Members volunteering with DSI: Our Chairman Paul Radford, was reelected to the Board of DSI as one of the Leinster Reps. A big thank you to Paul for volunteering again this year.

Regional Resource Officer: Our Regional Resource Officer, Mike Egan, is here to help people with Down syndrome and their families access support locally. While much of the work of the Regional Resource Officer this year was focused on getting grants for new initiatives in the branch, as well as individual advocacy support cases (many in the education area) and facilitating the RAC, there will be a renewed emphasis on broader advocacy issues for members in 2024. The DSI National Office has recently recruited a new Advocacy Manager, Turlough Kelly, and a Branch Advocacy Coordinator, Gina Grant. This will enable us, as a DSI branch, to target more areas where there is insufficient support in place both for our younger and adult members. A primary issue for our younger members is the lack of therapeutic support available through the Community Disability Network Teams with many members being on therapy waiting lists for long periods. An example of a developing issue regarding support for our adult members is the introduction of the recent Assisted Decision-making (Capacity) Act with the availability of the new Decision Support Service. While being a welcome development overall, this has had the effect of introducing a steep learning curve and additional complexity in situations where capacity and decision-making affect our adult members. The new DSI advocacy support staff will enable us to target some of these very significant issues in a more coherent and networked manner, hopefully involving active collaboration with other DSI branches in our region on issues of shared concern. Regional Resource Officers provide vital support and a point of contact for new parents as well as families who need help and support at a local level at every life stage. Mike can be contacted at 085 8618866 or mike@downsyndrome.ie.

Employment Support Specialist: 2023 saw 7 members entering the world of paid employment, sourced through Down Syndrome Ireland's Employment programme and family support. Hospitality and retail are the main areas of



Figure 14 Employment Support

employment, and it is a huge achievement for the members. With the opportunity of paid employment has come other meaningful opportunities and these include the chance to upskill professionally and to broaden their social circle. The support of the branch's employment officer has been paramount in ensuring the success of the employment, offering support to both the member and the employer. Monthly check-ins with the employer and member to ensure all is going well is such an important aspect of the programme, honouring the promise of continued support when engaging with the programme for all businesses involved. The employment officer has supported members to engage in work-related training to ensure workplace equality among the general working population and this has been a real confidence boost for the members. Monthly check-in meetings with the members in employment with the employment officer has created a safe space for everyone to talk about any issues they may be having and to find a resolution. With the support of the National Employment Team, 2024 hopes to create more

employment opportunities for our branch members and an information morning will be held in the new year to educate and inform those who wish to take the next step into the world of work. Our Employment Specialist Officer for the Louth Meath Branch is Gemma McMahon. Gemma can be contacted at (087) 4059606 or gemmamcmahon@downsyndrome.ie

Fun with Numbers: This year we continued Fun with Numbers (FVN). FVN 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 try to accommodate. A big thank you to Deirdre Myler for providing the Workshops. If you are interested in joining FVN, please email secretarydslm@gmail.com for more details.



Figure 15 Cormac Adam and Luke enjoying Deirdre's Fun with Numbers

Coffee Morning Get-Togethers: We now run two Coffee Morning Get-Togethers per month These meetups aim to create an opportunity for parents and their children to meet up regularly in a fun environment. They are usually held at the Ark Play Centre in Pudding Hill and at Huckleberry's Den, Navan, on a Sunday from 10 am to 12:30 pm. Thank you to Avril Rickard, Insil Byrne & Gillian O'Malley for organising the coffee mornings. Email secretarydslm@gmail.com or check out our social media for more details for more details.

Book Club: The inaugural "Stay Up All Night Book Club" in Navan kicked off in June, bringing together our adult members on the first Tuesday of each month. Participants delve into carefully selected book excerpts, fostering a shared literary experience. Beyond reading, the club engages in movie nights, eagerly anticipating upcoming interactions with esteemed authors and illustrators in the New Year. An open invitation is extended to all adult members interested in joining this vibrant literary community. The group not only enjoys spirited discussions and laughter but also indulges in snacks while keeping abreast of the latest bestsellers. It's a captivating blend of literary exploration, cinematic enjoyment, and camaraderie that continues to thrive each month.



Figure 16 Stay Up All Night Book Club

Aqua Boot Camps: Over the year, we've been delighted to bring Aqua Boot Camp classes to Aura Trim—an invigorating blend of fitness, music, and pure enjoyment. Guided by the dynamic instruction of Eleanor Murray, one of our dedicated adult members, these classes have provided a unique and lively fitness experience. Participants not only relish the energetic workout but also wind down with a soothing session in the Jacuzzi, adding a touch of relaxation to the mix. As the year draws to a close, the final Aqua Boot Camp is scheduled for December 28th, promising a memorable end to this fitness journey. For further details, please refer to our Facebook page. A special appreciation goes to Cara Morgan for orchestrating these fantastic camps, ensuring they've been a highlight for all involved.



Figure 17 Eleanor Murray instructing the Aqua Boot Camp

Fun with Fitness: In a thrilling development, September marked the initiation of an innovative Fun Fitness Programme at Kilmainham GAA Club House. The program greeted with enthusiasm and welcomed 12 Super members who not only enrolled but also received complimentary Fitbit Versa to kickstart their fitness journey. The commencement involved thorough fitness testing and personalized program design. Each week, participants engage in invigorating circuit



Figure 19 Fun with Fitness Group



Figure 18 Signing up for Fun with Fitness

training and delve into a dedicated segment on healthy living. Tuesdays bring an extra dose of excitement with a lively Zoom Music Fitness Class. As we eagerly look ahead, the success of the program prompts the continuation into the New Year, with plans for a second instalment scheduled for the upcoming Spring. A big Thanks to Kelly Tormey and Paul our Fitness instructors, Meta Clonee for all your support and encouragement. Meta funded Fun with Fitness to develop a pilot tech and fitness initiative combining the use of technology, specifically tailored fitness regimes and, community engagement to create a 26-week motivational Fun Fitness programme for the Louth Meath branch members aged between 16 and right into adulthood.

Down Syndrome Awareness Campaign: Once again, in the spirit of acknowledging Down Syndrome Awareness Month throughout October, we proudly conducted a vibrant campaign across our social media platforms. The initiative aimed not only to raise awareness but also to celebrate the uniqueness of each member in our community. Throughout the month, we dedicated each day to showcasing at least one of our remarkable members, shining a spotlight on their individuality, achievements, and the joy they bring to our community. This campaign served as a platform for fostering understanding, promoting inclusion, and breaking down stereotypes surrounding Down

Syndrome. We are grateful for the opportunity to share the stories and personalities that make our community truly special.

Smart and Assistive Technology Training SATT: The Down Syndrome Ireland Louth Meath Branch achieved a significant milestone by securing a Meta Data Center Community Action Grant to launch a groundbreaking Smart and Assistive Technology Training program for teens with Down syndrome in Meath throughout 2022. The intensive 10-week course, which concluded in early 2023, witnessed the successful participation of 12 of our members. Each participant not only completed this transformative program but also received complimentary tablets, enhancing their accessibility to modern technology. The course delved into diverse topics, including the practical use of WhatsApp, Email, Google Maps, E-Shopping, and more. The journey culminated in a vibrant Silent Disco, showcasing the newfound skills and confidence of our remarkable participants.



Figure 20 Smart and Assistive Technology Training SATT

Branch AGM: In the picturesque setting of the Conyngham Arms Hotel in Slane, we convened our Branch Annual General Meeting (AGM) in May, a pivotal occasion where the course for the upcoming year was charted. The gathering marked the election of our dedicated Branch Officers and Committee members, a dynamic team steering the course of Down Syndrome Ireland Louth Meath Branch. Comprising passionate parent volunteers, the committee convenes monthly, engaging in thoughtful discussions to optimize the branch's operations and organization. This is a moment to extend our heartfelt gratitude to the Branch Officers and Committee for their selfless dedication and hard work in propelling the branch forward. Their invaluable contributions and commitment form the bedrock of our thriving community.

World Down Syndrome Day: In commemoration of World Down Syndrome Day, the Louth/Meath branch orchestrated a heartwarming coffee morning on March 20th at the Conyngham Arms from 11 am to 1.30 pm, welcoming all our cherished members. The celebration embraced a call for shared moments, as parents/guardians generously shared photos of their loved ones, creating a touching montage displayed on a projector during the event. Encouraging a vibrant display of support, participants adorned their feet in the most colourful socks, symbolizing unity and solidarity with individuals with Down Syndrome. This year's poignant theme, "With Us Not For Us," resonated as a rallying cry, inviting global participation to foster a world where understanding and inclusion flourish on World Down Syndrome Day 2023.

Fundraising: Our main Fundraising event this year again was Pound the Pavements. Pound the Pavements ran from 1st – 21st June 2023. We invited all friends, family, and members of the local communities across Louth and Meath to join us in our third annual "Pound the Pavements" to help raise much-needed funds for DSI's Louth Meath Branch. On Sunday 18th June, we asked people to join us at Wilkinstown Community Centre to "Pound the Pavements" by using the purpose-built walking trail on a wonderful family day. 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.

As we wrap up 2023, we extend our deepest gratitude to each member, volunteer, supporter, and partner who contributed to the success of the Down Syndrome Ireland Louth Meath Branch. Your passion and dedication have made this year truly remarkable, and we look forward to achieving even greater heights together in 2024. We would like to take this opportunity to thank our Branch Committee who work tirelessly for our Branch and its Members.



Wishing you all a joyous Christmas and a Happy New Year!