



Emigrant Support Service

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CONTACT US:

Safe Home Ireland
St Brendan's Village
Mulranny, Westport
Co. Mayo, Ireland.

Tel: 098 36036

(from Ireland)

00 353 98 36036 (UK)

011 353 98 36036 (USA)

Website:

www.safehomeireland.com

Email:

info@safehomeireland.com



Safe Home office hours:

Monday–Thursday:
9am–5pm

Friday: 9am–4pm

**Thinking of returning
or moving to Ireland?**

Get in touch



ADVICE &
INFORMATION



OUTREACH
VISITS



HOUSING
ASSISTANCE



CONNECT

From the Chairman's Desk

Greetings,

Spare a thought for those of our emigrants who will not be home with their families in Ireland this Christmas. The work of Safe Home is about rectifying this situation so our emigrants can be supported wherever they are and even repatriated if that is their wish. It's not just the Emerald Isle that can boast of a diaspora populating the four corners of the world. Countries such as Poland, Latvia, Lithuania and Croatia have exported vast numbers of their populations far and wide. I have long felt that countries with dispersed populations across the globe such as the aforementioned would do well to adopt a programme such as Safe Home to support and repatriate those who wish to return to their native shore.

On the premise that there's no point whatsoever in trying to reinvent the wheel I believe that Safe Home is worthy of replication so that other countries can assist their emigrants to return home if that is their wish. It's no surprise to me then that the Lithuania Embassy have approached Safe Home to learn more about our success in supporting and repatriating our emigrants. More about this later.

The wonder of Christmas is almost upon us. Once again we are lucky to be alive and well as we celebrate yet another Christmas. Happy are those whose family are gathered around them at this happy time. Many have family far away and our sincere wish is that the future will facilitate many more of our emigrants to return to the bosom of their family and community.

Wherever you are, have a great Christmas and new year and don't forget to look in on that elderly neighbour to make sure they are ok.

So long for now, Dr Jerry Cowley



Nollaig Shona agus athbhliain faoi mhaise daoibh go léir

From

The Safe Home Ireland Board Members and Staff

Safe Home Christmas Holiday Arrangements

The Safe Home office will be closed from 5pm on **Thursday 21st of December**. We will be back to work, totally refreshed, on **Tuesday 2nd January 2018** at 9am sharp!

Vacancy for a live-in Caretaker in Waterford City

Cathedral Close Apartments, an apartment complex for independent retired persons have a live-in caretaker position available. This role would suit a mature person who would like a comfortable home and an occupation in an established and welcoming community.

The ideal candidate for this position will be security and safety conscious and will have property maintenance skills. They will have an ability to communicate with residents in a patient, caring and respectful manner while maintaining professionalism at all times.

Successful candidates will be required to undergo reference checks and Garda/Police vetting before being formally appointed. Applications are welcome from individuals and couples.

For more information, please contact the manager at Cathedral Close by email:

hugore@eircom.net or **phone: 00 353 51 853152** if you are interested in applying.

Refunds of Irish Water Charges

The amount you paid to Irish Water in domestic billing charges will be refunded to you.

Refunds of almost one million payments will start as soon as the necessary legislation has passed and government funding has been put in place. This process will take a number of months.

The refunds will be made via cheque to the Irish Water account holder at your registered address.

If your address or other details have changed and you have not already informed Irish Water, you should contact them immediately to update your account.

Call, within Ireland, **1850 448 448** or, from abroad, **Tel: +353 1 707 2824** (Monday to Friday 9am to 5:30pm). Contact online via: www.irishwater.ie

Garda vetting in Ireland

We had a query recently to check if Garda vetting can be done in advance from abroad. **The answer is NO**, this must be carried out by the organisation/employer here in Ireland.

People working with vulnerable adults and children abroad who have an equivalent clearance should take copy of this home with them. While it will not be accepted instead of Irish clearance, it may be helpful to show your good character while living abroad until the Irish Garda vetting comes through.

Budget 2018 – A summary

If you are or know someone who likes a cigarette while lying on a sun bed, sipping sugary drinks, then October 10th 2017 was not a good day for you!

Outlined below are some of the Budget 2018 measures announced on that day by the Irish Finance Minister for the year ahead;

Tobacco Products: The excise duty on a packet of 20 cigarettes was increased by 50 cents (including VAT), bring the average cost of a pack of 20 up to €12. A pro-rata increase on other tobacco products and an additional 25c on 'roll your own' tobacco (effective from midnight on 10th October 2017).

Sugar Tax: A tax on sugar sweetened drinks will be introduced on 1 April 2018. The tax will apply to sugar sweetened drinks with a sugar content between 5 grams and 8 grams per 100ml at a rate of 20c per litre. A second rate will apply for drinks with a sugar content of 8 grams or above at 30c per litre.

'Tanning Tax': An increase in the VAT on sunbed services was announced, this will go up from 13.5% to 23%

Welfare payments: most working age related social welfare payments (including pensions) will increase by €5 per week – these changes are not due to come into effect until the end of March 2018. We will report further on these changes over the coming months.

The **Fuel Allowance** season will be extended by 1 week, from 26 to 27 weeks, into the first week of April 2018.

A new **Telephone Support Allowance** at a weekly rate of €2.50 will be introduced for those getting the Living Alone Allowance and who are eligible for the Fuel Allowance (effective from June 2018)

Prescription Charges for people under 70 years; From 1st January 2018, this will be reduced from €2.50 per item prescribed to €2 per item. The monthly household 'cap' will also be reduced from €25 per month to €20 per month

Drugs Payment Scheme: From 1st January 2018, the monthly threshold will be reduced, from €144 per month to €134 per month

National Minimum Wage Increase: From 1st January 2018, the minimum wage will increase from €9.25 per hour to €9.55 per hour

Keeping in touch/Staying connected

The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade have further developed their online Global Irish Hub.

The aim is to help Irish people and people of Irish descent maintain their connections to Ireland and each other, through information and support. Have a look at their website;

<https://www.dfa.ie/global-irish/staying-in-touch/>

On the site, you will find sections on 'coming home', business and education, sports and culture and heritage You can also sign up to the Global Irish Newsletter and download the second edition of the Global Irish Diaspora Directory. With 769 Irish organisations listed, including Safe Home Ireland, this Directory can help you find the organisations you want to connect within your area.

Treatment Benefit Scheme (TBS)

This is a scheme run by the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (DEASP) that provides dental, optical and aural services to qualified people. The scheme is available to insured workers and retired people who have the required number of PRSI contributions. Some enhancements to the TBS came into effect in October 2017, including it being expanded to include qualifying self-employed people.

Optical: The TBS entitles you to a free eyesight test, once every second calendar year. **However, sight tests for VDUs, driving licences, etc., are not covered under the scheme.** You can get a payment, once every second calendar year, towards either one pair each of reading and distance spectacles **or** one pair of bifocal or varifocals. Cost will vary depending on the frames you choose. Basic frames are free. If you choose more expensive frames, the Department will pay €42 towards them and you pay the balance. If you need contact lenses on medical grounds, the Department will pay half the cost up to a maximum of €500 provided you have a doctor's recommendation. This applies to a small number of eye conditions that make wearing glasses impossible.

Dental: As of 28th of October 2018, this covers a payment of €42 towards either a scale and polish or - if clinically necessary - periodontal treatment, is also available once a calendar year. If the cost of either cleaning or periodontal treatment is more than €42, you must pay the balance - capped at €15 for a scale and polish. There is no cap on the balance charged for periodontal treatment.

Hearing Aids: These can be provided by suppliers who have a contract with the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection. The Department pays half the cost of a hearing aid subject to a fixed maximum of €500 for each hearing aid once every fourth calendar year. It also pays half the cost of repairs to aids, up to a maximum of €100, once every four years.

Treatment Benefit Scheme and EU Regulations:

If you were previously insurably employed in a country covered by EU Regulations and you do not qualify on your Irish PRSI record, your social insurance record in the other EU country may be used to help you qualify for this scheme. However, you must have paid at least one reckonable PRSI contribution (Classes A, E, H, P and S) since your return to Ireland.

How to apply: Check in advance to see if your provider (dentist, optician or audiologist) is registered for this scheme. If yes, they will help you to check out your entitlement before treatment begins. If you qualify, the provider will then normally only charge you the agreed rates as outlined above.

For more information, contact: The Treatment Benefit Section - Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection, St. Oliver Plunkett Road, Letterkenny, Donegal, Ireland

Tel: (074) 916 4480. If calling from outside the Republic of Ireland please call +353 74 916 4480-OR find out more via: www.welfare.ie

Note!

In Ireland, Medical card holders are legally entitled to more extensive dental, ophthalmic and aural services from the Health Service Executive (HSE) but, in practice, the availability of these services may vary from area to area.

Q. I am currently living in the USA and nearing pension age. I worked in Ireland for a number of years before I left and need to get a statement of my contributions history from there. **I have been advised that all enquires in relation to PRSI records have now moved online and that I will need a Public Service Card to access this. Can you tell me (a) if this is true and (b) what happens to people who do not/cannot register online?**

(a)The PRSI records section (details below) have confirmed that in the main enquires in relation contributions history should in the main be made online. People are advised to register online at: www.mywelfare.ie. Once registered, they can then request a copy of their contributions history to be posted out to them.

A Public Services Card is only required IF you wish to view the records online.

(b)If anyone has difficulties setting up the online account, the advice is to write/call the office below outlining their difficulties and the records can then be sent out by post.

Write to: PRSI Records, Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection, McCarter's Road, Ardaravan, Buncrana, Donegal, Ireland **Tel:** (from outside of Ireland): 00 353 1 471 5898

Q. I am living in Spain and will be turning 66 in a few months. I have social insurance contributions from working in Ireland and in Spain. **When and how should I apply for my Contributory Irish Pension?**

A. The advice given for people applying for a Contributory Irish State Pension is that they should apply 3 months before the age of 66. **However,** as you have paid social insurance contributions in more than one country, you should apply **6 months** before reaching 66. Late claims for contributory pensions can be backdated for a maximum of 6 months. This applies to State Pension (Contributory) and Widow's, Widower's or Surviving Civil Partner's (Contributory) Pension.

For more information, please contact: Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection, Social Welfare Services, College Road, Sligo, Ireland

Tel(from outside of Ireland): 353 71 915 7100 or **send an email** via the secure enquiry option, at: www.welfare.ie

Note! If you are living abroad and in receipt of any Irish Contributory Pension and your circumstances change, don't forget to notify the Irish Pension services; Example: if you become a widow/widower, you may be entitled to claim an additional weekly payment via the Living Alone Allowance.

NALA (National Adult Literacy Agency) – Ireland:

For anyone who has recently returned/moved to Ireland or if planning a move back and struggling with literacy problems, NALA offers a free confidential nationwide service that may be helpful. The primary aim of the NALA service is to make sure people with literacy and numeracy difficulties can fully take part in society and have access to learning opportunities that meet their individual needs. They achieve this by working to enhance each person's personal development and building their confidence as well as technical skills. For more information on NALA and the services that they provide, **please contact;** NALA, Sandford Lodge, Sandford Close, Ranelagh, Dublin 6, Ireland

Tel: 00353(0) 141 27900 **Email:** literacy@nala.ie **Website:** www.nala.ie

Ireland Reaching Out - a unique programme connecting Irish Diaspora with their place of origin.

Ireland XO focuses on connecting with people of Irish descent all over the world and enabling them to engage with their ancestors' community of origin today. Local communities all over Ireland can grow their own local Diaspora network through the IrelandXO.com website, which has a variety of features that enable direct engagement with anyone who might be connected to, or descended from the area.

Every local community in Ireland has a voice on IrelandXO.com and our local volunteer networks have been connecting with their global diaspora since 2009, when the programme began as a pilot in County Galway. It has been operating successfully at a national level since 2012. There are over 95,000 registered members on the website and we are proud to have volunteers in every county in Ireland.

Through its volunteer network worldwide, Ireland XO is uniquely positioned to develop the definitive database of those of Irish heritage worldwide - opening up economic, social and cultural opportunity to Ireland and her people, wherever they are worldwide.

A way back home: Ireland Reaching Out connects people – across space, across time. It extends the hand of friendship to people of Irish descent all over the world, many of which no longer have a tangible relationship with their land of origin. Each year, Ireland Reaching Out volunteers, many who are actively retired, “meet and greet” returning diaspora, welcoming them to their place of origin and demonstrating that no matter how distant, Ireland always has a place for those who share or have an affinity for the country’s heritage.

A way for the Diaspora to continue to be involved locally: Of the thousands of overseas visitors to Irelandxo.com every week, over half know their Parish (or parishes) of origin, and many still have strong connections there, having left more recently. Through its growing expertise, Ireland Reaching Out offers these people a way to connect back home. Volunteers don’t have to be living in Ireland to share and engage in a local Irish community. Many of Ireland Reaching Out’s busiest volunteers live abroad, from the outback of Australia to large US cities. This expertise from abroad is a prime example of how the Irish Diaspora can so positively enrich Ireland and the lives of people of Irish heritage, wherever they live.

A way to reach out and engage your Parish at a Global level: One of the surprising outcomes of Ireland Reaching Out is the number of people living in Ireland who connect with the website every day. Irish people have an extraordinary attachment and affiliation with their Parish and County, and even when they move to a neighbouring province, that connection is still strong.

Partnerships: As a non-profit and community-led programme, Ireland Reaching Out values its relationships with local, national and international Irish heritage and genealogy interest groups. A collective and creative approach is essential in harnessing all the resources available to us in order to ultimately deliver on the promise of growth both at Diaspora and community level.

Information provided courtesy of Ireland Reaching Out

To find our more visit their website: www.Irelandxo.com or email them directly via: info@irelandxo.com

Safe Home Ireland Outreach and Advocacy Service

Safe Home Ireland has two Outreach and Advocacy Officers, Noreen Mulrine and Brenda Fleming. In their day to day work, they offer support to our clients before, during and after the returning to Ireland process. Noreen is based in Co. Galway and Brenda is based in Co. Kerry. They are a small team but between them, they can offer support to returned emigrants regardless of age or circumstances across the entire country. Where it is more appropriate, they will refer returnees to existing welfare/advice and support services in their local areas.

Here in Ireland, our outreach team explores housing options available to Safe Home housing applicants throughout the twenty-six counties. We meet with housing providers in order to highlight the needs of our clients and to secure housing for them.

As part of the outreach work, Noreen and Brenda carry out home visits to UK based housing applicants to ensure they are familiar with the process of returning home and all that this involves; i.e. the transfer of benefits and eligibility for benefits and healthcare in Ireland. The visit also gives people the chance to have a chat 'face to face', to discuss their concerns or other queries that they may have about returning to Ireland. It is at this stage that some applicants may decide that moving home is not the right choice for them. In those cases, the outreach officers will try to organise on-going support by linking them in with welfare and support organisations in the local area.

When our housing applicants have firm plans in place to return to Ireland, Noreen and/or Brenda will maintain contact throughout the process, advising them of the necessary documents to bring home and addressing other concerns they may have.

On their return, one of our outreach officers will meet the returnee at their new home to ensure that they are supported in transferring/applying for, rights and entitlements getting signed up with a doctor, local services etc. They will liaise and advocate on behalf of clients with government and welfare department staff or any other agency as appropriate to the needs of the returnee.

Finally, it is very important to mention that our outreach and advocacy service is not only available to Safe Home housing applicants. **It is a broader service that is available to people of all ages and circumstances who are considering moving home. Our outreach team can also link in with people who have already returned to Ireland and will assist and support people in the broader transition and integration back home.**

We take referrals from other agencies at home and abroad as well as individual clients who contact us. **If you or anyone you may know who could benefit from our outreach and advocacy service, please do get in touch with us.**



A big thank you to **Seán Ó Coistealbha**, from Connemara for sending us some background and the lovely poem below, about his uncle, Jimmy (RIP)

"My uncle Jimmy left An Spidéal in 1927 heading for relatives in Norwood Mass. America was closed to emigrants at the time so he landed in St. Johns Newfoundland and after 9 months made his way down to Boston. He spent all his life in Norwood Mass and died in 1997 at the age of 94. He had still a perfect knowledge of the Irish language as the day he left Connemara. He used to come home fairly regular after he retired in 1967 and we were always happy to see him because of his over generous spirit. As a young child we keenly awaited the Christmas parcels from Norwood Mass".

Uncle 1997

Midges in the month of December Séamus

And the western sky ablaze.
The white foam from the waves
Sprayed onto 'Caladh na Leice'
That now rests lonely without you.
I walked along the pathway
On the edge of the great ocean
In search of your footsteps,
Imprinted.
In a life and time gone by.
The wind blew from the west
My little Uncle
And I clung to my thoughts
That they might transport
You across the ocean
Back among your people
Like the annual big parcel.

Safe Home Ireland is supported by the Emigrant Support Programme via:



AN ROINN GNÓTHAÍ EACHTRACHA AGUS TRÁDÁLA NA HÉIREANN
DEPARTMENT OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND TRADE OF IRELAND