

Ageing matters

Celebrating age in 2015

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■ Cover photo: Paul O'Reilly of Bluebird Care with Sophia Bridgeman, Christine Ryan and Age Action's Eamon Timmins at the launch of Positive Ageing Week 2015

Photo: Maxwells

Silver Surfers are all winners

Can you imagine the furore that would follow if you organised a national awards ceremony, invited hundreds of guests to a glitzy prize-giving event and generated national media coverage, but the real winners on the day did not get a mention? Imagine the scandal if the real winners were not even invited!

But Age Action has been doing that for the last number of years by organising our Silver Surfer Awards. Of course, we have honoured some incredible people — from those who have mastered new technology to stay connected with their families abroad to those who have built up an audience of thousands with their blog.

But while these, and all our wonderful past recipients, richly deserved their accolades, they were not the real winners. Certainly their use of the internet and new technologies has greatly enriched their lives.

The real winners

But the real winners were older people who, having learned how technology had changed the lives of our Silver Surfers, had the courage to sign up for one of our Getting Started computer training courses. That has always been one of the core aims of the awards.

Nominations for this year's awards have closed. This year Dublin City University is supporting the awards and the prize-giving ceremony will take place in the Helix later this month.

It is clear from past winners just how significant a difference technology can play in enriching older people's lives. For many, the first step was the hardest – having the courage to sign up for a class or to ask for help. After that, they never looked back.

Fear can be a crippling emotion – fear of the unknown, fear of failure, fear of what others may think of us. It can seriously compromise our quality of life. Having the courage to learn a new skill (such as using a computer) can present major new opportunities.

Using the internet, it has never been easier to communicate with family and friends around the world, to reach out and connect with people who share common interests, to remain connected with our communities. The downside is that, for those who are not online, it may add to their isolation.

Sometimes we need heroes to inspire us to overcome our fears. We are lucky to have so many Silver Surfer heroes who can highlight the benefits of new technology for older people.

— Eamon Timmins



■ Age Action members highlighted their priorities for the budget over the summer.

Age Action members demand fair budget

While Age Action welcomed last month's commitment from Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection Joan Burton TD to partially restore the Christmas bonus, the organisation warned that it falls far short of what is needed.

Justin Moran, Head of Advocacy and Communications at Age Action, said: "Any restoration of income is welcome and will help hard-pressed pensioners.

"But the reality is that older people have lost more than €13 a week from their limited incomes since 2009. The State Pension has stagnated. Prescription charges have

increased by 500 per cent. Home help and home care supports have been cut.

"Stacked against this, a partial restoration of the Christmas bonus will not, by itself, make a significant difference for older people.

"We need to see more in next month's budget, a genuine attempt to restore the incomes of pensioners that will help to stimulate the economy and funding for home supports to enable older people to stay at home as long as possible."

Noonan and Howlin

This was the point stressed in a meeting with Minister for Finance Michael Noonan TD and Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform Brendan Howlin TD in mid-September.

"We left the ministers in no doubt," Justin contin-

ued, "that we needed to see action on the State Pension and on income supports like the Telephone Allowance.

"We also stressed the point that investing in home help supports wasn't just good for older people themselves; it was economically smart."

The Government has reiterated that it expects to spend €1.5 billion in this month's budget, split evenly between tax cuts and additional spending.

"Part of the problem is this 50/50 split," warned Justin. "This only leaves €750 million for services and income supports, and a lot of that is going to be allocated to the Lansdowne Agreement.

"Rather than handing out tax cuts, the Government should have been prioritising spending on essential public services."



■ The Global AgeWatch Index analyses the situation for older people in 96 countries. Photo: HelpAge International

Ireland rises in age index as score falls

Ireland rose two places to 15th in this year's Global AgeWatch Index, published by HelpAge International, despite the country's overall score dropping slightly.

Lianne Murphy, Age and Development Officer at Age Action, said: "On the face of it, rising two places in the global rankings is to be welcomed.

"However, the detailed county-by-county analysis from HelpAge International shows a slight drop in Ireland's score. Our rise in the global index is not a result of improved conditions for older people in Ireland, but of poorer results for other countries."

The report card on Ireland highlights that "rising costs coupled with reductions in

secondary income supports and the introduction of a number of stealth charges for property tax and water, have meant that many older people find it increasingly difficult to make ends meet".

It is also critical of the impact of cuts to the health budget on the ability of older people to access services and the Government's focus on long-term nursing home care over supporting older people to stay at home.

Global situation

The Global AgeWatch Index analyses the situation for older people in 96 countries across four different categories: income security, health status, capability and an enabling environment.

Overall, it identifies Switzerland as the best place for older people to live, but highlights that inequality among older people is

increasing as conditions worsen in many countries outside Western Europe and North America.

The difference in life expectancy at age 60 between countries at the top and bottom of the Index has widened from 5.7 years in 1990 to 7.3 years 2012.

Lianne added: "It is worrying that there is a serious lack of data on older people in many poorer countries, which means that 98 countries could not be included in the index.

"The Irish Government should ensure that the Sustainable Development Goals, launched at the end of last month, must be implemented to improve the collection of data on age. This will help us to fully understand how men and women around the world experience ageing.

Richard raises thousands for older people

It was two in the morning, writes **Richard Dunne**. My tent had been flooded. My gear was soaking. I was sitting on a bench wrapped in a survival bag cursing my luck. I was alone in the middle of nowhere on the Welsh coast.

Yet I was still smiling because this night would give way to morning, my clothes would dry and my journey would continue.

Many older people struggle with loneliness or being vulnerable. Some can go days without talking with another human being or are almost trapped in their homes due to physical problems.

I did this fundraising cycle for them and any temporary hardship I endured was a blessing that only increased my empathy for Age Action's crusade to make life better for older people in Ireland.

Dad unwell

A couple of years ago my Dad got unwell. His vascular system packed in. The stents put in have not had the desired effect. He no longer plays his beloved pitch 'n putt. He can no longer walk even 10 yards without aching pain.

Luckily, the Dunne family is blessed with a good support system but what if we didn't have that? This is what makes Age Action's work so important. It stands up and helps those who need a little support.

I cycled over 700 miles and raised more than €2,000 for Age Action and Alone. I passed through Wales, Cheshire, Derbyshire, the Peak District, Yorkshire, Durham, Northumbria, Scotland and Northern Ireland along the way.

Highlights included dramatic Snowdonia, epic Ben Nevis, the Northumbrian coast full of castles and unspoilt beaches, the gorgeous and incredible



Richard outside Walworth Castle in the north of England

Photo: Private

Lindisfarne and numerous encounters with welcoming local people.

Bear Grylls

I was camping most nights and cooking hearty meals like beans on toast and scrambled eggs on my trusty stove. I enjoyed a Bear Grylls-like existence. Every day I grew more stiff from the exertion but also more determined to finish the challenge.

Seeing the donations come in to my charity page and the online votes of encouragement from friends, family and strangers also really helped.

I felt blessed to have undertaken such a challenge for such a great charity. I'd do it again in a heartbeat and I'd sincerely encourage other people to do whatever they can to help raise funds to support positive ageing charities in Ireland.



■ Blanchardstown
Postmaster Geoff
Boyle

Post offices sustain communities

Post offices are often regarded as the hub business in a community. Yet postmasters claim that Government policy is closing them down. Blanchardstown postmaster **Geoff Boyle** explains the challenges they face.

Postmasters and postmistresses are deeply embedded in the life of their communities – particularly

with older people who remain core users of the post office.

As a postmaster, I understand that our engagement with the public is different from other businesses. Post offices provide core public and commercial services and play a social role that goes far beyond a normal business function.

We know our pensioners personally and are there to advise them and keep an eye out for their welfare. Older people know and

trust us.

Post offices also bring a positive influence for other private commercial businesses in the community as customers who collect their social protection entitlements by extension spend this money in their local economy – the pharmacy, hairdresser or local shop.

Threat to businesses

There is clear evidence across Ireland that when a post office closes its doors, the survival of other small

businesses is seriously tested as the cash distributed through the post office no longer gets spent locally.

In rural communities the post office often coexists with the only shop in the area and each business supports the other.

The post office also facilitates people's personal financial management allowing them to pay bills when they collect their cash, as well as to make savings and investments.

Social protection payments account for more than 30 per cent of all post office business or more than 50 per cent including spin-offs.

If the Government continues to move these payments to direct debit via the private banking sector, post offices will close en masse and a central pillar of our communities will be lost. Also gone will be the social interaction and engagement which the post office facilitates.

Not employees

Many people do not realise that postmasters are not employees of An Post or the Government; we are self-employed, paying rents, rates, salaries, insurance and taxes before taking any income for ourselves. Postmasters cannot deliver services as we choose; we are contracted to provide only those services which An Post and before

Government sanction.

Our income is generated per transaction at the counter. Unfortunately, as the amount of transactions fall due to migration of social protection payments to private commercial banks, in a short number of years postmasters will not be able to continue in business.

To sustain the future of the network, a post office based electronic transaction account needs to be developed which would provide people with the option of receiving and transacting social protection payments via the post office, either through traditional cash transactions or by electronic transfer.

Work with post offices

While this is being established, the Department of Social Protection should stop encouraging people to receive their entitlements through the private banks and work with post offices

as the provider of choice.

Postmasters would also enthusiastically embrace the opportunity to provide additional services such as motor tax, driving licence renewal, payment of hospital charges, payment of State examination fees and many other good ideas as set out in the Bobby Kerr led Post Office Business Development Group interim report announced last June.

This is why postmasters like me are now going political. The future of post offices is a political decision – and I will be one of several postmasters contesting the next general election in a number of constituencies around the country.

What I hear from customers is that they want to live in vibrant communities and to work, shop and interact with real people in real communities. And that is precisely what postmasters and postmistresses remain committed to.



■ Postmasters delivering their message to the Government



■ Artist Olive Sheeran, Rizalyn Silacan (Director of Nursing) and Mika Nowakawska-Bartosik (Art Therapist)

Art with emotions in Dublin nursing home

A fantastic new art exhibition opened in Ferndene Nursing Home in Dublin last month celebrating the work of residents.

The Painting with Emotions exhibition showcases some truly captivating artwork that demonstrates the latent depth of self-expression among residents, many of whom have dementia, inspired by memories from the past and emotions of the present.

Supported by their family and friends, members of the local and wider community and onsite specialist staff, Ferndene's residents

have shown that they can still celebrate their passion, fun and creativity through art with a little bit of help from the nursing home's staff.

The Director of Nursing, Rizalyn Silacan, and art therapist Mika Nowakawska-Bartosik have run a specialised art-therapy programme in Ferndene Nursing Home over the last year.

Positive impact

"In a time where there are often misguided perceptions regarding life in nursing homes, it's really important for us to draw attention to the positive impact they are often having within the community," said Rizalyn.

"It has been fascinating



■ Artist Rose Hempenstall

observing the depth of self-expression among our residents throughout this project, finding ways to communicate emotions in ways they were unable to before.

"It has also been energising to see the impact this has had on staff and the wider community involved in the project with everyone gaining a greater understanding of the people they care for and love".



■ From a bottle of poitín, a tin of orange pulp and a newly mastered email account, Betty Smith fashioned a business.

Photo: West Cork People

Getting started and getting going

After learning to use email through Getting Started only three years ago, **Betty Smith** has since launched her own business.

I began learning how to email and use the computer in January of 2012 in Bandon with the lovely Julie Oates. It's a really great service from Age Action and, as it turned out, was very beneficial for me.

Later that year, my husband Jim and I were faced with a large bill from the local vet that we simply couldn't meet.

With little time to think about it, I negotiated a loan from the credit union to pay the vet but then of course we were faced with

making the repayments.

We'd swapped one problem for another and we needed to earn money fast.

I came up with the idea of using what was to hand – namely a bottle of poitín bought in Killarney some time before and a large tin of orange pulp – and out of that came Poitín Marmalade.

Needed finance

I introduced it to an interested public in local shops and stalls at markets. Demand was growing but we needed finance if we were going to produce more.

We raided the attic for things to sell at car boot sales and fairs. I used my new-found skills with the internet to find people who would supply us with jars, boxes and large tins

of orange pulp at a good price.

I really could not have done all this without the Getting Started course with Julie.

In next to no time the loan was repaid but by then I had been bitten by the business bug! I took several courses with the local Enterprise office and last year Musgraves (SuperValu) took up the marmalade.

We branded it as *A Taste of Irish Spirit* and it is now selling in more than 35 outlets in Cork and beyond.

This year we won two awards in the Cork and Kerry Food Forum – one in the Ambient Food Category and then the Overall award.

But it all started when I sat down in a room in Bandon and switched on the computer!



■ John Fitzsimons and Marie O’Gorman of Age Action join Tommy McAnairey at the launch of his new single.

‘Carbon Monoxide is Lethal as Hell’

Tommy McAnairey, the famous bright yellow canary balladeer, has urged the people of Ireland to take action on carbon monoxide, the lethal gas which claims the lives of six people across the country each year.

The singing canary has released a single, “Carbon Monoxide is Lethal as Hell”, to mark Carbon Monoxide Awareness Week. All profits from the single will go to Age Action.

New research has shown that 1.2 million adults are at risk of carbon monoxide poisoning because they don’t have a carbon monoxide alarm in their homes, including 100,000 people over the age of 65 who are living alone.

Carbon monoxide (also known as CO) can be released by any fuel that burns, including coal, turf, oil, gas and wood. It is particularly dangerous because it is colourless and odourless. Exposure to CO can cause illness and, at high levels, even death.

Safeguards

There are two simple steps which people can take to safeguard against it. Householders should get fuel-burning appliances serviced and chimneys swept every year and they should install a carbon monoxide alarm.

Speaking at the release of his single, Tommy told us: “I’m attemptin’ to spread the word as much as I possibly can for Carbon Monoxide Awareness Week this year. So I’m releasin’ a single, “Carbon Monoxide is Lethal as Hell”, to breathe fresh air

into the Irish charts and get my tune to number 1.

“So if you could find your way to downloadin’ me single and tell friends and family where they can get it, it would make this canary very, very happy. More importantly, it would spread awareness of the perils of carbon monoxide and hopefully even save lives.”

Carbon Monoxide Awareness Week is a public safety initiative supported by the Commission for Energy Regulation, Gas Networks Ireland, Register of Gas Installers of Ireland, Oil Firing Technical Association, National Standards Authority of Ireland and major Irish energy retailers.

For further information on Carbon Monoxide Awareness Week 2015 or to download the song, please visit www.carbon-monoxide.ie.



■ An Taoiseach Enda Kenny TD at the launch of the Western Meals on Wheels Network in June with Irish Rural Link's Seamus Boland on the left

Meals-on-wheels groups coming together

A new national network of meals-on-wheels groups is being brought together by Irish Rural Link – the national network representing the interest of rural communities.

An Taoiseach Enda Kenny TD officially launched the Western Meals on Wheels Network in Castlebar in June and this currently covers the counties Clare, Donegal, Galway, Kerry, Mayo and Roscommon.

Irish Rural Link plans to expand the network nationwide over the next 12 months and says the aim is to provide a local, community-led, professional facility to assist people who require services to maintain their

health and independence.

Meals-on-wheels is a critical part of the care services that enable older people to remain living in the community or to return to their own homes after hospitalisation.

Home based caring

Research indicates that home based caring is the preferred option for many families, the most cost effective and the one supported by Government policy such as the National Positive Ageing Strategy.

“Irish Rural Link are delighted to represent the views of the meals-on-wheels groups all over the country,” said Seamus Boland CEO. “These groups and the volunteers who work with them provide a valuable service to those

that are most isolated.”

In many parts of rural Ireland the local meals-on-wheels service is a vital lifeline for older people who might be housebound.

Daily contact from volunteers helps to tackle loneliness and an effective meals-on-wheels programme supports independent living, enabling older people to stay at home, reducing the need for nursing home care.

The National Meals on Wheels Network is now preparing to launch on 6 October in Dublin.

If any meals-on-wheels providers wish to become network members or to find out more, please contact James at (090) 648-2744 or james@irishrurallink.ie.



■ Excitement in the penalty area!

Photo: Maxwells

Launching Positive Ageing Week with Bohemians FC

Three generations came together to launch Positive Ageing Week 2015 at Bohemians FC under the watchful eye of retired referee Noel Nutley, who had to wave more than one yellow card!

More than 500 events are planned right across Ireland for Positive Ageing Week 2015, which takes place from 1 to 9 October and is sponsored by Bluebird Care.

Eamon Timmins, CEO of Age Action, said: "Positive Ageing Week is a celebration of the contribution older people make to our lives, our families and our communities.

"We're particularly urging local sports clubs to get involved and encourage

older people to pick up a hurley, join a line-out, shoot for goal or practise their solo runs.

Events planned

"There are already hundreds of events planned with everything from the more leisurely pursuits like creative writing workshops, lectures and basket-weaving to football blitzes, dance classes and aerobics for those with energy to burn.

"Get together in your local community, show your appreciation for your older

neighbours and, above all, celebrate living longer!"

Log onto www.ageaction.ie for details of Positive Ageing Week events in your area.



Please donate for our next event

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We would like to thank all of our wonderful donors and shoppers for your very generous support.

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■ Claire Bellis is returning to west Yorkshire.

A blow-in about to become a blow-back!

After 17 years in Ireland, and four years managing the Care and Repair programme, I'm leaving Age Action for pastures old and returning to west Yorkshire, writes **Claire Bellis**.

It has been a complete pleasure to work at Age Action. The Knitting Circle ladies at Camden Street didn't laugh at my dropped stitches and the Care and Repair volunteers I've trained were always very kind when I got my partition walls confused with my load bearing joists.

I have been so happy to develop the Care and Repair programme in communities far and wide, tak-

ing it from Belmullet to Wexford and back!

Together we've been providing practical help to thousands of clients nationwide and ultimately that help can be a lifeline.

I've had the pleasure of managing the Dublin team and we've worked hard to keep the capital's lawns cut, curtains up and light bulbs on.

Inspiring older people

I've met some inspiring older people at Age Action. I've swapped recipes and learned about feeding a family of 16 in a two-bedroomed cottage.

And I've just sat and held hands with a lady at her wits' end about jobs that were just getting her down, before explaining that we could help her get things back on track.

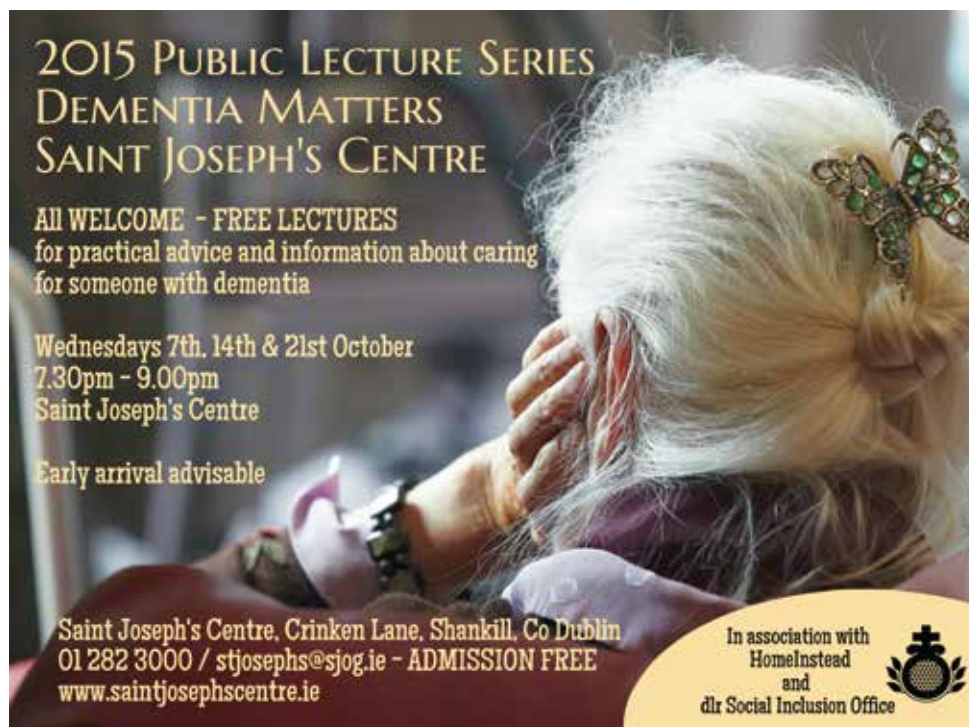
But there have been challenges. How to explain to a client in desperate need that there is simply no service available in his area? How to persuade funders in a time of constant cutbacks that their support provides a lifeline to some of our most vulnerable people?

I can't single each and every colleague out but I must thank John O'Mahony, Regional Manager for Age Action South, for his practical help, good humour and patience.

I am also so happy to be handing over to Jennifer Connolly, who has returned to take on this role. Jennifer was the original programme administrator back in the day, so I'd just like to say: "Welcome home, Jen. I hope I've looked after your baby well!"

Reaching out to families of people living with dementia

Saint Joseph's Centre is committed to the compassionate care of people with dementia and their families, providing a home from home for people living with dementia, writes **Siobhan Grant**.



**2015 PUBLIC LECTURE SERIES
DEMENTIA MATTERS
SAINT JOSEPH'S CENTRE**

ALL WELCOME - FREE LECTURES
for practical advice and information about caring for someone with dementia

Wednesdays 7th, 14th & 21st October
7.30pm - 9.00pm
Saint Joseph's Centre

Early arrival advisable

Saint Joseph's Centre, Crinken Lane, Shankill, Co Dublin
01 282 3000 / stjosephs@sjog.ie - **ADMISSION FREE**
www.saintjosephscentre.ie

In association with
Homestead
and
dlr Social Inclusion Office

Our vision is to lead the way in best practice and excellence in dementia care in Ireland.

Dementia is indiscriminate. It affects people from all walks of life and from every neighbourhood.

Each person with dementia may be a parent, a husband or wife, an aunt or uncle, a sister or brother. Many are grandparents. They may have been doctors, joiners, lawyers, shopkeepers, dressmakers or architects.

Identities cherished

At Saint Joseph's Centre we make sure these identities are cherished, respected and remembered.

We recognise that the effects of dementia on families can often be devastating and overwhelming. It can also be difficult to navigate through what services and supports are available.

Sharing knowledge

We want to share our knowledge with those living in the community on the best ways to care for people with dementia and to access information and support services.

Our public lecture series reaches out to the loved ones and carers of people living with dementia in the community.

Lectures one and two

(on Wednesdays 7 and 14 October) will provide practical advice and information about the supports available and guidance on how best to care for someone with dementia in their own home.

The third and final lecture on Wednesday 21 October will explain the roles of the community multidisciplinary team specialising in dementia care and also give people the chance to meet each specialist and understand more about how they can help.

For enquiries, call Elaine Byrne on (01) 282-3000 or email Elaine.byrne@sjog.ie

Generous grant from IBM

Age Action was delighted to receive a very generous grant of €1,800 from IBM under the company's On Demand Community grant scheme.

Under this scheme, grants are based on requests from employees or retirees. IBM works closely with Age Action as part of the Getting Started programme and their employees have run a number of computer classes for older people.

"We rely on the generosity of support-

ers to keep going," said Age Action's Pauline Power. "We're delighted at this contribution from IBM."



■ IBM tutors and Getting Started learners celebrate graduation

U3A GROUPS



© Active Virginians U3A
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For more information, email Sam O'Brien-Olinger, U3A Development Officer, at u3a@ageaction.ie or phone (01) 475-6989.

Reminder – we rely on you

Our Care and Repair service is a vital support for thousands of older people every year but unfortunately it is not available in some parts of the country.

We recently wrote to all of our members to tell you Pauline's story. She and her husband rely on Care and Repair to do things they can't manage like fitting a lock or handrail, changing a light bulb, tacking down carpets or hanging curtains.

As Pauline put it: "Without Age Action, life for Joe and me would be a complete nightmare."

If you haven't already made a gift to Age Action to support Care and Repair and to train more volunteers so we can expand across Ireland, please do think about it.

We know times are tough for many, but if you can spare a gift to us, we will ensure it makes a difference.

You can return the form included with Pauline's letter or phone us on (01) 475-6989.

Annual membership application

I wish to join Age Action and enclose
€..... membership fee, plus €.....
voluntary donation payable to Age Action
Ireland Ltd.

If you are already an existing Age Action
member and wish to renew your membership
please write your membership number here ...
.....

Full name:.....
(Block capitals please)

Address:

Tel:

Email:

Date:

FEES

- €20 Individual – retired/unwaged
- €40 Individual – employed
- €60 Voluntary Body
- €200 Statutory Agency
- €500 Commercial

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IBAN: IE82 IPBS 9906 2587 7790 21
the following amount €.....

until further notice. Starting on: 1st Day of
January 20

Name:

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Please return to:

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Tel: (01) 475 6989

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