

DOWN SYNDROME KERRY

NEWSLETTER



2026



CHAIRPERSON'S ADDRESS

Hi Everyone

You're all very welcome to our first Newsletter of 2026. We hope you enjoy reading it, hopefully there is something there for all of you.

Christmas does seem an age away now, but we were delighted to see so many of our younger members and their families enjoying our Christmas party at the Rose Hotel Tralee. Our older members and their families also had a great night at the Rose Hotel, as well as a great bop to the sounds of DJ Supreme, Brendan Fuller.

Our 321 shop in Tralee continues to offer a great range of pre-loved clothes as well as work and training opportunities for our members ably supported by a wonderful team of volunteers and staff under the guidance and management of the highly committed Rachel Fitzgerald.

Nationwide's coverage of our Kookability programme on April 24 provided a wonderful opportunity for our young people to show off their cooking skills ably honed by a superb team at MTU under the guidance and great care of TJ O Connor and Mark Murphy – more inside.

Our Job Ready programme at MTU under the care and tutelage of Michelle Burke ensures that the way is well paved for our members to find employment - more inside.

Easter heralded the opening of Deenagh Lodge where 22 of our members are employed presently again ably supported by a great cohort of staff and volunteers guided by the indefatigable Norma Doherty – more inside.

Our programme at Kerry ETB's Tech Amergin in Waterville is going great guns much to the joy of our members, their families and local community groups, Marian O Neill and her wonderful team ensuring the delivery of a high-quality programme - more inside.

We hope to open our café at Blennerville in the next couple of months giving our members even greater opportunities – see inside.

We are delighted to have a great collaborative relationship with Kerry SLT and to see delivery of this key service countywide also this summer sees the return of the SLT Summer Camps.

We are delighted to have the goodwill, support and collaboration of the National Parks and Wildlife service, Kerry Educational and Training Board & Kerry County Council, across a range of our programmes and ventures.

The Glór funding announced by Ms Norma Foley TD, Minister for Children, Disability and Equality on World Down Syndrome Day will hugely benefit lives of members and their families Nationwide. The Minister is an open ear and great help to Down Syndrome Kerry.

Down Syndrome Ireland, our governing body, played a major role in attaining Glór, they are a key support network for us. Please follow their monthly Digest which you receive by email and access the many valuable webinars they provide.

Without the funds raised through Tour de Munster, Ring of Kerry Charity Cycle, Saddle up for Down Syndrome, Honey Days, Church gate collections, fashion show and the Killarney Duck Race, we could not offer the range of services & subsidies that we have.

DS Kerry subsidises a whole range of services from gym to therapies to training to employment and employment supports and we will continue to do so if you and your families support, volunteer and fundraise for us. We receive no state funding and even with Glór funding have running costs of 350K yearly. Please be mindful of this the next time we ask you to volunteer or help out.

Our Employment Support Specialists Clive and Sandra play a huge role in all of our above ventures as well as seeking out employment for our members and providing the really important support on the job, a huge thank you to you both for this great work.

We are fortunate to have such a committed, caring and member focused staff at Balloonagh who ensure the wheels keep turning and who work so hard to make the lives of our members and their families better. Our Operations Manager, Siobhán Walsh, is unstinting in her commitment to Down Syndrome Kerry playing a key role in so many of our ventures both old and new and tireless in her pursuit of opportunities for our members. Our sincere thanks Siobhán.

We are fortunate to have a wonderful group of volunteers who bring kindness, care and good humour to so many of our workplaces, thank you so much for your wonderful support to our members and their families.

We meet regularly as a committee sometimes in person and more frequently online and are fortunate that we can really talk things through and that everyone's voice counts, it keeps us on the straight and narrow and I am most thankful for the input. We continue to work hard for you all, but we really need more support; our AGM will take place on August 27th venue to be confirmed, where we will be looking for new committee members so hope to see you there.

A huge and sincere thank you to you all for your kindness, instruction and care in helping our members to thrive.

John O Connor
Chairperson
Down Syndrome Kerry

FROM THE ENGINE ROOM AT DOWN SYNDROME KERRY



Building Opportunities. Creating Futures.

The first half of 2026 has been an exciting and productive period for Down Syndrome Kerry. While much of our Operational work takes place behind the scenes, its impact is visible every day through the opportunities being created for our members and their families. Every project, partnership and programme is driven by one shared vision—to create opportunities that promote independence, inclusion, lifelong learning and meaningful participation in community life.

Visitors to our Tralee offices will also notice a fresh new look. New external signage together with a complete repaint of our offices has created a bright, welcoming and professional environment that reflects the continued growth and ambition of Down Syndrome Kerry.

Some Highlights to Date:

We are delighted to have successfully secured the Deenagh Lodge Licence for a further three years following a competitive public tender process. This reflects the confidence placed in Down Syndrome Kerry's vision of inclusive employment, quality hospitality and community partnership within Killarney National Park.

Employment remains one of our proudest achievements. This season, 35 people are employed at Deenagh Lodge, including 25 members with Down syndrome, working from April through to 1st October. Every working day provides opportunities to build confidence, develop practical skills, gain meaningful work experience and demonstrate the abilities and talents of our members in a real workplace environment.

Looking ahead, another exciting milestone is the development of The Mill Café, Blennerville, and our newest social enterprise in partnership with Kerry County Council. This inclusive café will create additional supported employment opportunities for people with Down syndrome while providing another progression pathway for graduates of our education and employment programmes. More than a café, it will be a welcoming community space where great food, sustainability, creativity and inclusion come together, demonstrating what is possible when social enterprise is driven by purpose.

We are especially proud to launch the Bernard Brosnan Work Experience Programme, made possible through a generous €5,000 corporate donation. Five young people, aged between 16 and 23, have been selected to participate in this exciting initiative. Delivered through Deenagh Lodge, the programme combines practical hospitality experience with customer service, teamwork, field trips, confidence building, personal development and employability skills, creating another important pathway towards education and future employment.

One of our most significant achievements has been securing €60,000 in funding for the Down Syndrome Kerry Inclusive Cycling Hub, with Down Syndrome Kerry proudly leading this landmark project. The Hub will provide accessible cycling opportunities for people of all abilities while promoting health, wellbeing, inclusion and greater access to the outdoors. This exciting initiative will position Kerry as a leader in inclusive recreation while creating opportunities for our members to enjoy active, healthy lifestyles.

The Ring of Kerry Charity Cycle Tier 1 Charity partner - We submitted a significant application and were awarded Tier 1 status. This will give us maximum visibility for the cycle and greater access to the upper layer of the charity fund allocation.

Education & Lifelong Learning

Education continues to flourish across the organisation. Our Kookability Programme, delivered in partnership with Munster Technological University (MTU), received national recognition through RTÉ Nationwide, highlighting the remarkable achievements of our students and the value of inclusive higher education. We look forward to continuing to build this successful partnership with MTU and hope to secure ongoing support for the programme into the future.

September will mark another important milestone as our Job Ready students graduate before progressing to a new block-release learning programme with MTU, ensuring their learning journey continues while further preparing them for meaningful employment.

Also commencing this September is the See, Learn, Grow Together literacy initiative in partnership with Kerry ETB. Following comprehensive literacy assessments with six MTU/DSK students, they are delighted to participate in this innovative CIF programme, which combines literacy development with assistive technology through the CPEN Digital Learning Initiative. The programme will also provide literacy training and practical supports for families, recognising that confidence and independence grow when learning is supported both at home and in the community.

FROM THE ENGINE ROOM AT DOWN SYNDROME KERRY

Early Years & Family Supports

Supporting children and families from the earliest years remains a key priority for Down Syndrome Kerry.

In February, we hosted a two-day Early Intervention Workshop for families of young children with Down syndrome. The first workshop focused on Teaching Reading to Children with Down syndrome, equipping parents with practical strategies to develop pre-reading and early reading skills while demonstrating how early reading can support speech and language development through the principles of the See and Learn Programme.

The second day featured a Developmental Clinic for children aged 0–5 years, giving families the opportunity to discuss their child's developmental progress, ask questions and receive personalised guidance on appropriate next steps.

Our Parent & Toddler Group continues to meet once each month, providing families with a welcoming and supportive environment to connect, share experiences, build friendships and access peer support while their children enjoy play-based activities in an inclusive setting. These early connections help build confidence, reduce isolation and strengthen our Down Syndrome Kerry community.

During the summer months, our Speech and Language Therapy Summer Camps once again provided fun, engaging and age-appropriate learning experiences for members across a range of age groups. Through play, communication activities and social interaction, members developed speech, language and communication skills while building confidence, friendships and independence in a supportive environment.

Partnerships & Collaboration

Collaboration remains one of Down Syndrome Kerry's greatest strengths. We are currently developing a Memorandum of Understanding with the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) to strengthen collaboration in environmental education, biodiversity, conservation, heritage interpretation and inclusive community engagement.

At the same time, we are developing separate Memoranda of Understanding with Inspired and RehabCare. These strategic partnerships will enable us to explore areas of mutual interest including education, employment, independent living, respite, housing, health and wellbeing, lifelong learning, community participation and service innovation. By sharing knowledge, expertise and models of best practice, we will create reciprocal opportunities for members across all organisations while strengthening collaboration throughout the disability sector.

Member Engagement – Connecting Families

Supporting our members also means supporting the families and carers who walk alongside them every day.

In April, we were delighted to launch Cuppa & Connect, a monthly gathering for parents and caregivers of members aged 18 years and over. The initiative provides a relaxed and welcoming space to meet, share experiences, exchange ideas and build supportive connections with others who understand the journey of caring for an adult with Down syndrome.

A huge thank you to Jill O'Brien for coordinating this wonderful initiative. Her commitment and enthusiasm have created a warm and welcoming environment where friendships and peer support continue to grow.

If you are a parent or caregiver of a member aged 18 years or over and would like to join us, we would love to welcome you.

Volunteering – Every Hour Makes a Difference

At the heart of Down Syndrome Kerry is an incredible community of volunteers whose generosity, kindness and commitment make so much of our work possible.

Whether helping at fundraising events, supporting programmes, assisting in our social enterprises, sharing professional skills or simply giving a little of their time, our volunteers are an invaluable part of the Down Syndrome Kerry family.

You don't need to have lots of spare time to make a meaningful contribution. Just one hour of your time can make a huge difference. Every hour volunteered helps create opportunities, support families, strengthen inclusion and enrich the lives of our members. If you have a skill to share, an idea to develop or simply a willingness to lend a hand, we would be delighted to welcome you to our volunteer team.



FROM THE ENGINE ROOM AT DOWN SYNDROME KERRY

Fundraising News – Together We Are Making a Difference

The continued generosity of our members, volunteers, supporters, corporate partners, community organisations and grant providers enables Down Syndrome Kerry to invest in innovative programmes and create life-changing opportunities for our members.

Fundraising 2025

- Tour de Munster Bucket Shaking with the SUDS Cycle – €24,440
- Honey Days 2025 – €13,732.61

Fundraising 2026 (to date)

- Tour de Munster Corporate Sponsorship – €20,000
- Church Gate Collection – €17,503.37
- Fashion Show – €5,550
- Killarney Duck Race – €5,000
- Ice Cream Fun Days – €760

Grants & Community Support

We are delighted to have secured:

- Inclusive Cycling Hub Funding – €60,000
- Kerry County Council Placemakers Grant – €6,000
- NEWKD Social Enterprise Grant – €2,000
- Community Enhancement fund - €1000



We also extend our sincere thanks to Munster Technological University for the generous donation of commercial kitchen equipment valued at approximately €8,000. This outstanding contribution will significantly enhance our education, hospitality training and inclusive employment programmes by providing our members with access to professional, industry-standard facilities.

Every fundraiser, grant, donation and partnership strengthens our ability to provide high-quality services and create meaningful opportunities for people with Down syndrome throughout Kerry.

As always, our heartfelt thanks go to our members, families, volunteers, staff, committee members, funders, local businesses and partner organisations. Your belief in our work enables us to continue growing, innovating and creating opportunities that empower people with Down syndrome to learn, work, belong and thrive.

Whether you need assistance, have an idea for a new initiative, would like to volunteer, establish or participate in a working group, or simply want to discuss how we can continue improving services for our members, I would be delighted to hear from you.

Siobhan Walsh
Operations Manager
Down Syndrome Kerry

 086 197 5419

 siobhanwalsh@downsyndrome.ie

For information on national programmes, advocacy, resources and supports, please visit www.downsyndromeireland.ie

Together, we are building opportunities, creating futures and strengthening a more inclusive Kerry—one opportunity at a time.

Every day, we are creating opportunities that empower people with Down syndrome to **learn, work, belong** and **thrive**.

OPERATIONS

From the

ENGINE ROOM

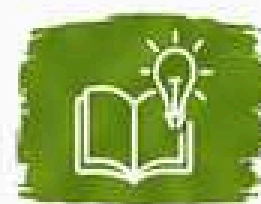
All working together in the engine room to
BUILD OPPORTUNITIES AND CREATE FUTURES

BUILDING OPPORTUNITIES. CREATING FUTURES.



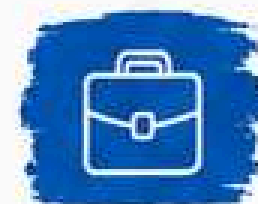
OUR MEMBERS

At the heart of everything we do. Creating opportunities that build confidence, independence and lifelong connections.



EDUCATION

Innovative programmes and partnerships that inspire learning and open the door to brighter futures.



EMPLOYMENT

Real work. Real skills. Real impact. Supporting our members into meaningful employment and career pathways.



COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Stronger together. Building connections, supporting families and celebrating inclusion across Kerry.



PARTNERSHIPS

Collaborating with organisations who share our vision to create greater opportunities.



WELLBEING

Promoting health, wellbeing and active living for our members and their families.



FUNDRAISING

The generosity of our supporters powers everything we do. Thank you for being part of our journey.



OUR FUTURE

Ambitious. Inclusive. Sustainable. Continuing to innovate and grow for the benefit of our members.



VOLUNTEERS

Every hour makes a difference. Thank you to our amazing volunteers who give their time, skills and hearts to support our mission.



IMPACT

Changing lives today and building a more inclusive Kerry for tomorrow.



INCLUSIVE CYCLING HUB

€60,000 in funding secured for the Down Syndrome Kerry Inclusive Cycling Hub – creating accessible cycling opportunities for all abilities and promoting health, wellbeing and inclusion across Kerry.



DEENAGH LODGE

Licence secured for a further 3 years. This season 35 people are employed, including 25 members with Down syndrome, working from April to 1st October.



THE MILL CAFÉ, BLENNEVILLE

Our new social enterprise in partnership with Kerry County Council. Creating more supported employment opportunities for our members and a welcoming community space where great food, sustainability and inclusion come together.



BERNARD BROSNAN

WORK EXPERIENCE PROGRAMME

Thanks to a €5,000 donation, five young people (16-23) are gaining practical experience, building confidence and developing employability skills through Deenagh Lodge.



EDUCATION HIGHLIGHTS

- Koolability Programme with MTU featured on RTÉ Nationwide
- Job Ready students progress to new block-release learning with MTU in September
- See, Learn, Grow Together literacy programme with Kerry ETB & CPE Digital Learning Initiative.



EARLY YEARS & FAMILY SUPPORTS

- Early Intervention Workshop in February – teaching reading strategies and developmental clinic for children aged 0-5.
- Parent & Toddler Group meets once a month for connection, play and peer support.
- SLT Summer Camps for all ages – fun, engaging and building communication skills with confidence.



MEMBER ENGAGEMENT

Monthly Cuppa & Connect for parents and caregivers of members aged 18+ to meet, share and support one another. Huge thanks to Jill O'Brien for coordinating this wonderful initiative.

Cuppa & Connect

VOLUNTEERING – EVERY HOUR MAKES A DIFFERENCE



Our volunteers are the heartbeat of Down Syndrome Kerry.

Whether helping at events, supporting programmes, assisting in our social enterprises or sharing your skills, just one hour of your time can make a huge difference.

If you would like to volunteer or find out more, we would love to hear from you.

FUNDRAISING NEWS – TOGETHER WE ARE MAKING A DIFFERENCE

FUNDRAISING 2025

- Tour de Munster Bucket Shaking with the SUOS Cycle – €24,640
- Honey Days 2025 – €13,732.61

FUNDRAISING 2026 (TO DATE)

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- Fashion Show – €5,550
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- Ice Cream Fun Days – €380

GRANTS & COMMUNITY SUPPORT

- Inclusive Cycling Hub Funding – €60,000
- Kerry County Council Placemaker Grant – €6,000
- NEWMD Social Enterprise Grant – €2,000



SPECIAL THANKS TO MTU

Thanks to MTU for the generous donation of commercial kitchen equipment valued at approximately €8,000. This will significantly enhance our education, hospitality training and inclusive employment programmes.



As always, our heartfelt thanks go to our members, families, volunteers, staff, Committee members, funders, local businesses and partner organisations. Your belief in our work enables us to continue creating, strengthening and opportunities that empower people with Down syndrome to learn, work, belong and thrive.



Contact Siobhan Walsh

086 197 5419



siobhanwalsh@downsyndrome.ie

Operations Manager, Down Syndrome Kerry



Want to get involved?

Whether you need assistance, have an idea for a new initiative, would like to volunteer, establish or participate in a working group, or simply want to discuss how we can continue improving services for our members, I would be delighted to hear from you.



For information on national programmes, advocacy, resources and supports, please visit www.downsyndrome.ie

Together, we are building opportunities, creating futures and strengthening a more inclusive Kerry – one opportunity at a time.



Hello MEMBERS /NEW MEMBERS



Down
Syndrome
Ireland
Kerry

YOUR MEMBERSHIP IS NOW DUE



In order to avail of subsidies and services in **Down Syndrome Kerry** your membership is essential for this



Being a member is being part of our **Down Syndrome Kerry Community** and the opportunity to meet other parents, children, access events and therapies



To join **Down Syndrome Kerry** please use the link in this post and if you have any difficulty please call into the Down Syndrome Kerry office from 9.30 AM to 5 PM, we will be happy to help you with accessing the link to join



Thank you for being part of our community!



SERVICES WE OFFER





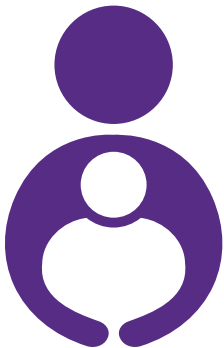
ParentLink for new Parents



Lamh training for parents and teachers







Parent and Toddler mornings



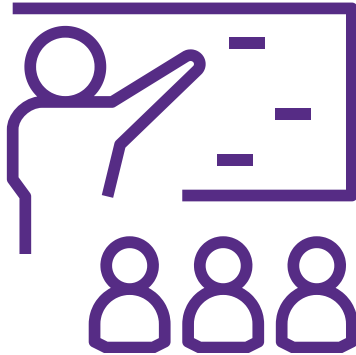
Employment support







Individual & Group Speech & Language Therapy



Education - MTU and Tech Amergin Programmes

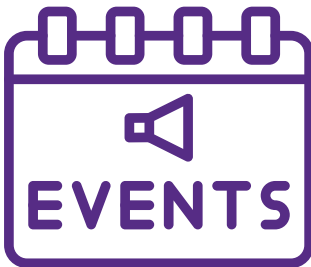






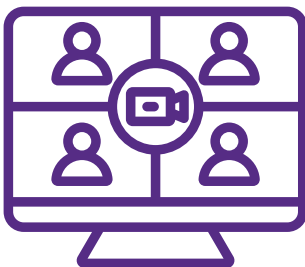
Education Support





Social activities





Online webinars



WHAT'S THE NEWS?



Celebrating World Down Syndrome Day

Observed annually on March 21, World Down Syndrome Day highlights the importance of promoting the rights and wellbeing of people with Down syndrome.

The event in Tralee offered a warm, family-friendly atmosphere, featuring creative arts activities and opportunities for attendees to connect with members of the Down syndrome community.

What an amazing day it was, with huge thanks extended to Boyles of Ballyseedy for hosting the event and to all members and families who came out to celebrate. A special word of gratitude was given to Norma Foley, whose kindness and warmth helped make the occasion even more memorable.



Community Spirit Shines at DSK Fashion Show Afternoon Tea



WHAT'S THE NEWS?



Down Syndrome Kerry celebrated a hugely successful Fashion Show Afternoon Tea at Ballyseede Castle, raising over €5,000 to support its members and services.

The stylish event brought together guests for an afternoon of fashion, entertainment, and connection, filled with warmth and generosity. Hosted by Orlagh Winters, the show featured highlights such as the Most Elegant Lady competition, won by Marie O'Connor, alongside prize winners Mary Collins and Carmel Roche. Judges Claire Murphy and renowned designer Don O'Neill added glamour to the occasion, while a moving speech from Simone Leahy highlighted the impact of community support. DSK praised the incredible generosity and volunteer spirit that made the day possible, with the celebration ending on a high as guests enjoyed music and dancing. The event showcased the strong sense of community in Kerry and vital support for Down Syndrome Kerry's work.

**A huge thank you to Grace O'Donnell
for coordinating this really successful event!**



Kookability Shines on National Television



We were thrilled to see our Kookability Course featured on RTÉ Nationwide — a proud moment for everyone involved! Kookability is a unique programme designed to build confidence, develop practical life skills, and bring joy through cooking. Each session empowers participants to explore the kitchen in a supportive and engaging environment, fostering independence while having plenty of fun along the way.

This special feature on national television highlighted not only the impact of the programme, but also the dedication and enthusiasm of our incredible members. Their energy and commitment are at the heart of what makes Kookability such a success.

We extend our sincere thanks to RTÉ Nationwide, along with Brian Hurley and Clint Fitzgerald, for visiting Down Syndrome Kerry and showcasing the meaningful work being done through Kookability.

[Watch now on RTÉ Player](#)



WHAT’S THE NEWS?



DSK Benefits From Showjumping Charity Event



Sandra Burke, Eibhlin Burke, Carmel Roche, Rachel Moloney Holmoak Stables, Elsa Weissbrich Event Organiser, Anthony O'Regan Holmoak Stables and Naoise Dooley

A big thank you to Elsa and all at Holmoak Stables, Tralee for organising such a wonderful show jumping event in aid of Down Syndrome Kerry. It was a fantastic day that brought people together for a great cause — your effort and generosity are truly appreciated. Well done to everyone involved!



DEENAGH LODGE CAFE ARE OPEN AGAIN NOW FOR SUMMER MONTHS

Whether you’re meeting friends for a catch-up, enjoying a quiet coffee, or treating yourself to something sweet, every visit helps support our work and the community we serve.

From freshly baked treats to a warm and welcoming atmosphere, there’s always a good reason to stop by.

Most importantly, every guest support makes a real difference and helps us continue providing opportunities and services that matter.

Presentation of Kookability DSK/MTU Participation Certificates



One of the highlights of the year was the presentation of Kookabilities DSK/MTU participation certificates by Minister Norma Foley & Chairperson John O'Connor. These celebrated the hard work, commitment and achievements of our students throughout the programme. The ceremony was attended by and from, whose expertise and dedication have been instrumental in the success of Kookabilities. A heartfelt thank you also goes to Michelle Burke tutor and Employment Support Specialists Sandra O'Donoghue and Clive Stocker for their commitment, encouragement and support. Kookabilities is far more than a culinary programme—it builds confidence, independence, communication, teamwork and employability skills, creating meaningful pathways to further education, training and inclusive employment while empowering participants to reach their full potential.

WHAT'S THE NEWS?



Paul Scanlon Appointed as Down Syndrome International Ambassador for Ireland



Meet Our Ambassador



Congratulations to Paul Scanlon, who has been elected by his peers as the new Down Syndrome International (DSI) Ambassador representing Ireland.

Nine candidates stood for election: Una Coates, Ellen O'Donoghue, Paul Scanlon, Sinéad Friel, Niamh Gorey, Eleanor Murray, Dúalta Callan, Amy Richardson, and Fionn Crombie Angus. Members of the National Advisory Council (NAC), Regional Advisory Councils (RACs), and former members of both councils were eligible to stand for election.

The election took place in December, with voting by current and former NAC and RAC members. It was a highly competitive election, with Paul receiving the most votes to become Ireland's newest DSI Ambassador.

Paul officially began his role on 14 January, attending his first meeting with Down Syndrome International. During the meeting, he met fellow ambassadors from around the world, all of whom are also beginning their new roles.

Paul succeeds Eileen Dunne from Cavan, who has proudly represented Ireland at Down Syndrome International over the past few years. Eileen has been an outstanding ambassador, representing both Down Syndrome Ireland and its members with great dedication.

Paul is an active member of the Kerry Regional Advisory Council. He is currently completing the Kookability cookery course with MTU in Tralee and also works at Lizzy's Little Kitchen in Listowel.

We congratulate Paul on his appointment and wish him every success in his new role as Ireland's Down Syndrome International Ambassador.



AN EXCITING NEW CHAPTER FOR DSK

The Keys to The Mill Café Are Officially Handed Over

Something special is brewing in Blennerville.

A significant milestone as Kerry County Council officially handed over the keys to Down Syndrome Kerry for The Mill Café, marking the beginning of an exciting new chapter in a partnership built on inclusion, community, sustainability and opportunity.

For Down Syndrome Kerry, these keys represent far more than access to a building. They unlock futures.

The Mill Café will create meaningful employment for people with Down syndrome while offering the wider community and visitors a welcoming new destination in one of Kerry's most iconic heritage locations.

Nestled beneath the sails of the historic Blennerville Windmill and framed by the breath-taking Tralee Mountains, The Mill Café has been imagined as a place where people come together to enjoy quality food, and genuine hospitality. Whether meeting friends, enjoying lunch after a walk, exploring the Windmill or discovering the beauty of Blennerville, visitors can expect a café experience that is warm, vibrant and memorable.

People with Down syndrome will be at the heart of the café's daily operations. Through the collaborative DSK/MTU Kookability for Employment & Independence programme, members will transition from learning into meaningful employment, building confidence, developing hospitality and customer service skills and demonstrating their talents in a real working environment.

The project also represents the continued revitalisation of Blennerville as a destination where heritage, sustainable tourism, community and enterprise come together. It is a place designed not only to serve great food, but to create connections between people, organisations and the wider community.



Down Syndrome Kerry extends its sincere gratitude to Mr Feargal Reidy, Chief Executive of Kerry County Council, whose belief in this vision has been instrumental from the outset. The organisation also wishes to acknowledge the invaluable support of the Tralee Municipal District Office, the Economic Development Team and the Senior Leadership Team of Kerry County Council, whose collaboration and commitment have helped bring this ambitious project to life.

The café's interior concept, created by Mr John Morris, blends sustainability with creativity through the imaginative use of reclaimed materials, vibrant colour and thoughtful storytelling, creating a space that is welcoming, contemporary and reflective of the unique character of Blennerville.

The menu will celebrate fresh, seasonal produce homemade baking, delicious breakfasts and wholesome lunches, featuring organic ingredients supplied through partnerships with Inspired and Rehab Care. Every visit will celebrate quality local food while supporting inclusive employment and community collaboration.

More than simply a café, The Mill Café is a destination where visitors can experience the very best of Kerry hospitality while supporting a project that creates lasting social impact.

Opening Early Autumn 2026

Preparations are now underway as Down Syndrome Kerry begins the final phase of bringing The Mill Café to life.

Over the coming months, the team will complete the fit-out, welcome its first employees, perfect a menu celebrating the very best of local produce and prepare to open the doors to what promises to become one of Kerry's most welcoming café experiences.

Watch this space.

This autumn, a new story begins in Blennerville - a story of community, opportunity and belonging.



*Unlocking
Futures*

Reflections on a Milestone

John O'Connor, Chairperson, Down Syndrome Kerry:

"The Mill Café represents everything we value as an organisation - inclusion partnership, community & opportunity. We are immensely proud to work alongside Kerry County Council on a project that creates lasting opportunities for our members while providing a beautiful new destination for local people and visitors alike. This partnership demonstrates what can be achieved when organisations work together with a shared vision."

Siobhan Walsh, Operations Manager, Down Syndrome Kerry:

"Receiving the keys is a powerful reminder of what can be achieved when people believe in possibility. The Mill Café has always been about more than creating a beautiful place to enjoy great coffee and locally produced food. It is about creating opportunities where people with Down syndrome can develop skills, build confidence, secure meaningful employment and be recognised for their talents every single day. My hope is that every visitor leaves not only having enjoyed a wonderful experience, but also inspired by what inclusive communities can achieve when we invest in people's abilities."

Cathaoirleach of Kerry County Council, Cllr Mikey Sheehy, said:

"I am thrilled that Down Syndrome Ireland (Kerry) will open the doors to a new chapter at the Mill Café. Blennerville Windmill is one of our premier tourism attractions in Kerry and the café is a key part of that offering. I have no doubt that the staff and management of the café will enhance the visitor experience and I wish Down Syndrome Ireland (Kerry) every success in this exciting venture."

AN EXCITING NEW CHAPTER FOR DSK



CAFE PROPOSAL for DOWN SYNDROME KERRY by JDM Furniture • Design • Studio Caherhayes Abbeyfeale Co Limerick

October 2025



CAFE PROPOSAL for DOWN SYNDROME KERRY by JDM Furniture • Design • Studio Caherhayes Abbeyfeale Co Limerick

October 2025



RING OF KERRY CHARITY CYCLE 2026



Down
Syndrome
Ireland
Kerry



Thank You!

To all the cyclists who chose to ride for Down Syndrome Kerry, our incredible volunteers, dedicated staff, supporters, sponsors and everyone who cheered us on – thank you. **We are deeply grateful** for your kindness, generosity and belief in our members.



To our amazing cyclists – your spirit, determination and support make all the difference.



To our wonderful volunteers – your time, energy and compassion power every mile.



To our dedicated staff – your hard work and passion drive our mission every day.



To everyone who supported, donated and cheered us on – thank you for being part of our journey.



Ring of Kerry Charity Cycle –
thank you for choosing
Down Syndrome Kerry. 

Follow us to see the difference you have made! 



RING OF KERRY CHARITY CYCLE 2026

PHOTO CORNER



Thank you to Evelyn from Deenagh Lodge for cycling in support of Down Syndrome Kerry

Thank you to Ben Quinlan along with team Blennerhassett who cycled to remember baby Noah 💜



321 SHOP



Thanks to the continued support from our membership and the community 321 continues to thrive.

Our current opening hours are Tuesday to Saturday from 9.30-5.00. We are hoping to open on Mondays also in the next few months so keep an eye on our socials for any updates.

Our socials are gaining great traction due to a designated person creating interesting content. If you haven't followed us yet, please do Facebook and Instagram are 'Down Syndrome Kerry Shop'.

Donations continue to play a vital role in what we do, and we're always grateful for your generosity. We especially welcome:

- Books (even those in poor condition — we can recycle them for funds!)
- Fashion items for women, men, and children
- Bric-a-brac, handbags, shoes, and accessories

Donations can be dropped off at our shop from Tuesday to Saturday, 9.30 am – 5 pm.

321 Shop currently provide work experience for 6 members. If you have any adult member who would like some work experience, please reach out and we can explore what would work for you. We are also looking to employ a member for 15 hours a week so if you know anyone interested, please reach out to the shop by email: info321@downsyndrome.ie

If you know anyone who would be interested in volunteering, please send them our way. We have a great team and they would be very welcome to join it.

Contact us:

Email: rachelfitzgerald@downsyndrome.ie

Phone: 086 819 0224



We were delighted to begin the season back at Deenagh Lodge Café with a beautiful new thatched roof — a wonderful milestone. A sincere thank you to the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) for their continued support with maintenance and equipment.

DEENAGH LODGE



If you would like to volunteer in Deenagh please contact Norma on 087 998 3044

It has already been a rewarding season, welcoming both new and returning young adults to the team, celebrating volunteers week and all in between! Our young adults have been busy preparing coffees, serving cakes, stocking shelves, and welcoming customers. We are especially proud to see some move on to new employment opportunities, bringing with them the skills gained here. Sustainability continues to be a key focus, alongside the 2go cup scheme, it has been fantastic to see NPWS staff recycling our used coffee grounds for their plants. Maintaining our commitment to the environment. Norma, Alice, Catherine and all the team are looking forward to the rest of the season and warmly welcome all customers, visitors, and friends. If you are in Killarney, please call in.



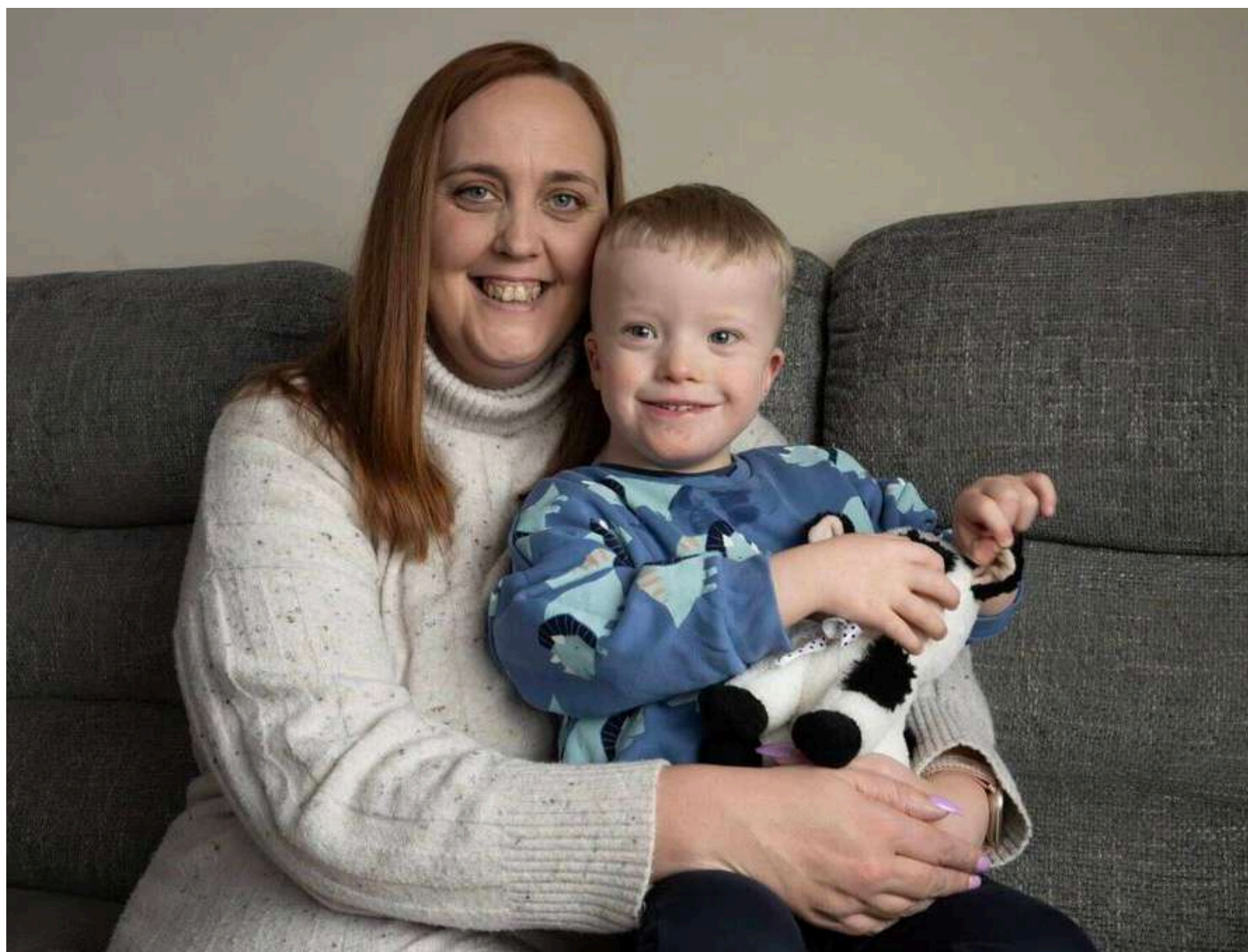
Member Spotlight



Hello, Niamh Cronin here. I work in Deenagh Lodge every Saturday from 12–2 and really enjoy being part of the team. I love bringing out sandwiches, scooping ice cream, and meeting all our lovely customers. I am now also working in Lidl, which I am really proud of, and I have brought many of the skills I learned in Deenagh with me. If you are in Killarney, please call in and enjoy a delicious treat!



PARENT & TODDLER GROUP



Hello I am Joanne and a mom to a wonderful little boy Joseph who's 4. I run the toddler group for 0 to 6.

We meet the last Saturday of every month from 12 to 2. We currently have 15 members ranging from newborns up to 6. I am also a parent liaison for UHK for all those new parents who are lucky enough to join our wonderful community.

I travel within Kerry to meet new parents who are looking to become members of Down Syndrome Kerry or those who are looking for advice in navigating life with a child with down syndrome.

For any of those wishing to Join DSK and our incredible toddler group. Please contact Joanne 0874330090

For more information, please contact
Joanne Cunningham
at 0874330090



SPEECH & LANGUAGE THERAPY TEAM

Speech and Language Therapy (SLT) plays a vital role at every stage of life for people with Down syndrome, supporting communication, learning, and participation. In the early years (0–6), SLT focuses on building strong foundations for understanding, early communication, and speech through play and everyday interactions with families. SLT can help with any oro-motor problems (such as drooling) and difficulties with eating, drinking and swallowing. During primary school, therapy supports language development, literacy, and social communication, helping children access the curriculum and build friendships. In adolescence and young adulthood, the focus often shifts to functional communication, social skills, and independence, including preparing for further education, work, and community life. In later years, SLT can support ongoing communication, self-advocacy, and, where needed, changes in speech, language, or swallowing. At every stage, working in partnership with families, schools, and services ensures that individuals are supported to communicate effectively and reach their full potential.

Kerry SLT Clinic has been proudly supporting members of DSK for over a decade. It is never too early - or too late - to benefit from speech and language therapy services. The team at Kerry SLT Clinic has had a busy and rewarding start to 2026, continuing to grow, learn, and support children and families across County Kerry.

Professional development remains a key focus for our team. Michelle recently delivered specialist training for childcare and preschool settings, with a focus on supporting children with additional needs, including children with Down syndrome. Sinead completed training on Developmental Language Disorders assessment and treatment in clinical practice. Sophie is attending a Speech Sound Disorder in May. In mid-April, Dominika and David represented the clinic at the 26th International Conference on Integrated Care in Birmingham, UK. Their work - highlighting collaboration with families, schools, and public organisations, as well as the clinic's flexible and person-centred approach to service delivery - was selected as part of the main conference programme following international peer review. This was a wonderful recognition of the work being done locally and its relevance on an international stage.

The team is also attending the Irish SLT Association Conference in May in Dublin with five presentations!

In March, the team also took part in AbleFest in Killarney, where we hosted a stand promoting Lámh. It was fantastic to see so many children and adults engaging, using

signs, and showing interest in learning more. We are looking forward to continuing our involvement in this event in the coming years.

Our services continue across Cahirsiveen, Dingle, Listowel, Tralee, and Killarney, as well as in schools throughout the county. We remain committed to providing accessible, high-quality, and family-centred support close to home.

We are always striving to develop and improve our services, and we truly value working in partnership with you. Your feedback is always welcome.

Families currently attending the clinic are encouraged to contact their therapist directly with any queries. For any clinical queries you can also email info@kerryslt.ie. operational queries please contact Siobhan in DSK.

Thank you for your continued trust and support.

Warm regards, The Kerry Speech and Language Therapy Clinic Team



Down
Syndrome
Ireland

New Parents Guide

Support and information as
you welcome your new baby





Anthony, James, Eunice and Anthony Trindle electoral commission

Case Study with Electoral Commission and Down Syndrome Ireland



Maurice Flavin and Stephen Faley



Sinead Flynn DSI, Yann O Carroll and Eunice Delaney



Dale O Carroll

Our Job ready group were delighted to be invited to take part in a case study conducted by Down Syndrome Ireland and An Coimisiún Toghcháin, the Electoral Commission.

On the day of the Presidential election, Eunice and Anthony from the Electoral Commission visited our members at four polling stations in Co. Kerry: Yann at C.B.S. Primary School, Tralee; Maurice and Stephen at St. Oliver's N.S., Ballylongford; Dale at Presentation National School, Listowel; and James and Anthony at Cullina N.S., Beaufort. Sinéad Flynn, Head of Education and Training at D.S.I., travelled from Dublin to oversee the study and meet our members at their polling stations. Eunice and Anthony travelled to each polling station to observe our members' voting experience. Once members had voted independently, Eunice and Anthony had an opportunity to speak with them and their families. They were very impressed by our adults and their knowledge of the election process.



MTU



Meet the committee Co-Chair Ellen O Donoghue, Stephen Faley with P.R.O. Paul Scanlon and Sinéad Flynn DSI



The Secretaries Amy Lynch and Fiona O Neill



Sean Kelly M.E.P and Honor Hughes are welcomed by Paul Scanlon D.S.I. International Ambassador on behalf of the R.A.C. committee and members

Regional Advisory Committee

The Kerry Regional Advisory Council is a self-advocacy group for adults with Down syndrome. They meet online with other R.A.C. and liase with National Advisory Council.

At the moment they hold monthly meetings at M.T.U North Campus Tralee, However they would like to hold their meeting in different venues throughout the year. They have been busy training and learning to facilitate meeting, the roles and responsibilities of a committee. The committee encourage their members to volunteer whenever needed by the branch.

One of their goals is to start a social group for members over 18 and to organise nights out. If you know anyone interested, please contact the R.A.C. committee. Thank you to all who signed up at Boyles Garden Centre on World Down Syndrome Day. We will be in contact shortly.



The R.A.C. was delighted to welcome Sean Kelly, M.E.P., to its meeting at Munster Technological University in January. Members had the opportunity to interview him, and he was very impressed by the questions they asked.



WORLD DOWN SYNDROME DAY at M.T.U. 2026

MTU



Our Job Ready group were proud to celebrate World Down Syndrome Day at M.T.U. The day highlighted the inclusion, respect, and opportunity for people with Down syndrome at M.T.U. North Campus. It was special for us as we included the Islam community who were marking the end of Ramadan also gave us a chance to reflect on friendship, connection, and the importance of addressing loneliness in our communities.



MTU KOOKABILITY



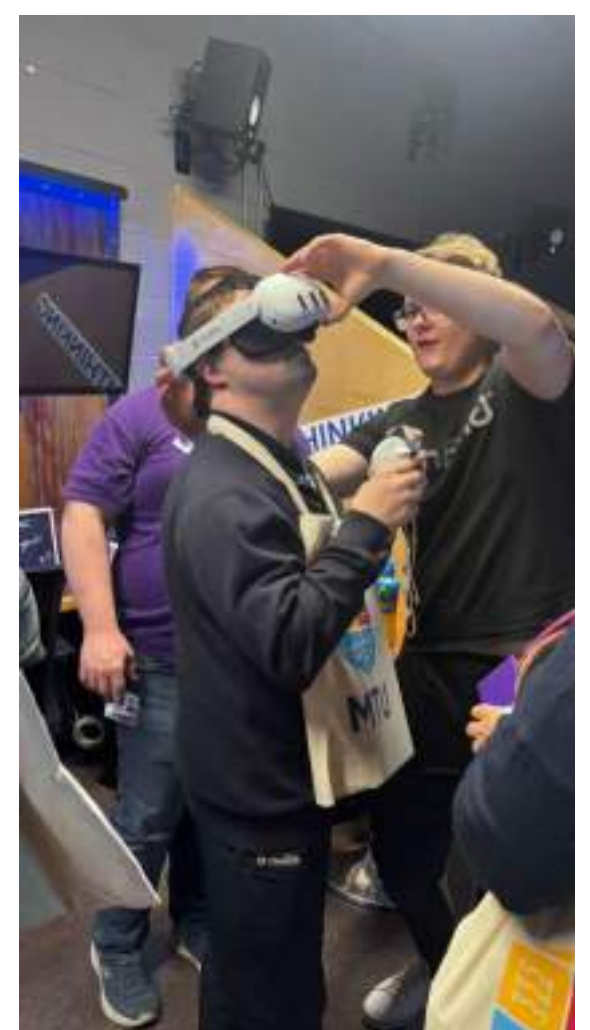
Kookabilities group celebrating after their Nationwide appearance.



Dr. Pat Mc Garty retires from M.T.U. and we were happy to invite him to a special breakfast cooked by our group. Pat has been a great advocate for our group and together with Gerard O Carroll welcomed the Latch on Post graduate course to M.T.U. back in 2012 which was the beginning of our collaboration with M.T.U.

We are grateful for the opportunity this has given our members over the years.

MTU OPEN DAYS





PATH 4



Personal and Professional Development for Employability and Further Studies

Path 4 phase 2 is a government funded initiative, run by HEA to provide opportunities for people with intellectual disabilities to experience higher education. Eleven universities in Ireland offer the programme including MTU. The pilot programme in MTU Kerry is called “Personal and Professional Development for Employability and Further Studies” and was at level 6 on the National Framework of Qualifications. The aim of the programme is to enhance possibilities for further education, training and employment.

In January 2025, ten students started the programme. They have successfully completed it and will graduate in the autumn. The programme ran for 1.5 years, three days per week, 9 am to 3 pm in MTU Tralee (North campus). Subjects include: Introduction to University Life, Personal Development, Human Rights & Advocacy, Culture Health & Wellbeing, Food Beverage & Retail Service, Employment Readiness & Placement. Students were provided with academic and social supports and had an opportunity to engage with life on campus and shared classes with other students. They did work shadowing and work experience. They went on trips, made a film and participated in events on and off campus. Student feedback was very positive.

The plan is to offer the pilot programme again in autumn 2026 at level 5 (leaving cert level).

Practical Information

Entry Criteria: over 18, intellectual disability, experience of second level education.

Students are invited to an interview to demonstrate their interest and commitment, to ascertain literacy levels and ability to work with certain independence in a campus environment.

Students work on portfolios throughout the programme and this is used for assessment.

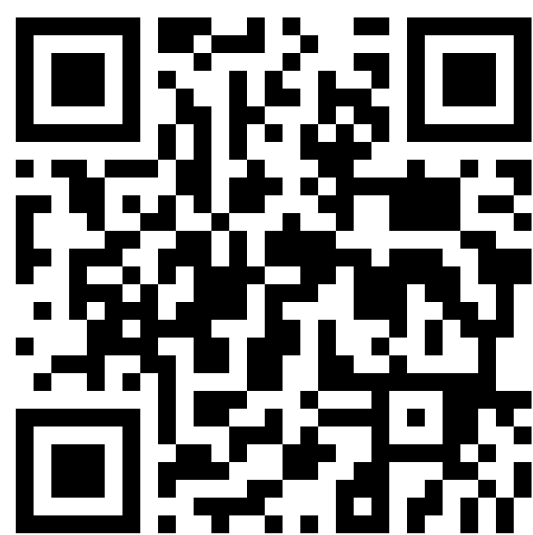
Programme follows MTU regular calendar and lasts two academic years.

Fees are covered by the government.

Application is online via MTU website (application for September 2026 is not yet open, people interested will be informed of opening date).

You will find more information on the level 6 programme by scanning QR code, but the plan is to offer the same programme at level 5 in the autumn once funding is approved.

To express interest or find out more, please contact
Gerard O Carroll, 086 3916600 or gerard.ocarroll@mtu.ie





Learners on the Life Skills class 2026 -Tech Amergin presented the Hedgehog boxes that they have been making to the local Tidy Towns groups.

TECH AMERGIN



Tech Amergin Community Arts & Education Centre





As Employment and Education Specialists, our role is to support members throughout their employment journey, from exploring career interests and preparing for interviews to securing and sustaining meaningful employment. We work closely with members to develop the skills, confidence, and experience needed to succeed in the workplace, while also collaborating with employers to create positive, inclusive, and sustainable employment opportunities.

A key part of our work involves supporting members as they transition into new roles. This may include interview preparation, workplace skills development, on-site job coaching, and ongoing support during the early stages of employment. Building strong relationships with both the employee and employer is an important part of the process and helps to ensure successful long-term outcomes for everyone involved.

We currently support members in a variety of paid employment roles across Kerry, including positions with Penneys, Lidl, and Deenagh Lodge. Through this work, we help individuals build confidence, strengthen workplace skills, increase their independence, and continue progressing towards their personal and professional goals.

We are also involved in the development and delivery of employment initiatives such as the Bernard Brosnan Scholarship Programme, which provides valuable work experience opportunities for young members aged 16–22. The programme offers participants the opportunity to explore different career pathways, gain practical workplace experience and begin planning for their future employment journey.

Another important aspect of the role is working with employers to promote inclusive workplaces. This includes delivering Down Syndrome Awareness Training and providing ongoing guidance and support to employers and their teams. Building understanding and fostering positive workplace relationships helps to create environments where members can thrive.

One of the most rewarding aspects of the role is supporting members to recognise their strengths, overcome challenges, and achieve their goals. Through our Close the Loop programme, we use feedback from employers and workplace observations to inform ongoing development and support. This person-centered approach enables members to identify areas for growth, celebrate achievements, and continue building the skills needed to progress in employment and beyond.

Looking ahead, we are excited about our goals for the role which include expanding and strengthening the Bernard Brosnan Scholarship Programme, while also exploring new opportunities to support our older adult members in accessing meaningful employment, learning, and community participation opportunities.

We are also looking forward to the opening of our new café in Blennerville, which will create exciting opportunities for training, work experience, and employment for our members. The café will provide a valuable platform for collaboration with local organisations and businesses, helping us to further increase employment opportunities and support more members to develop skills, gain experience and achieve their goals.

We look forward to continuing to support our members and their families as they pursue their employment and learning goals and create meaningful opportunities for the future.

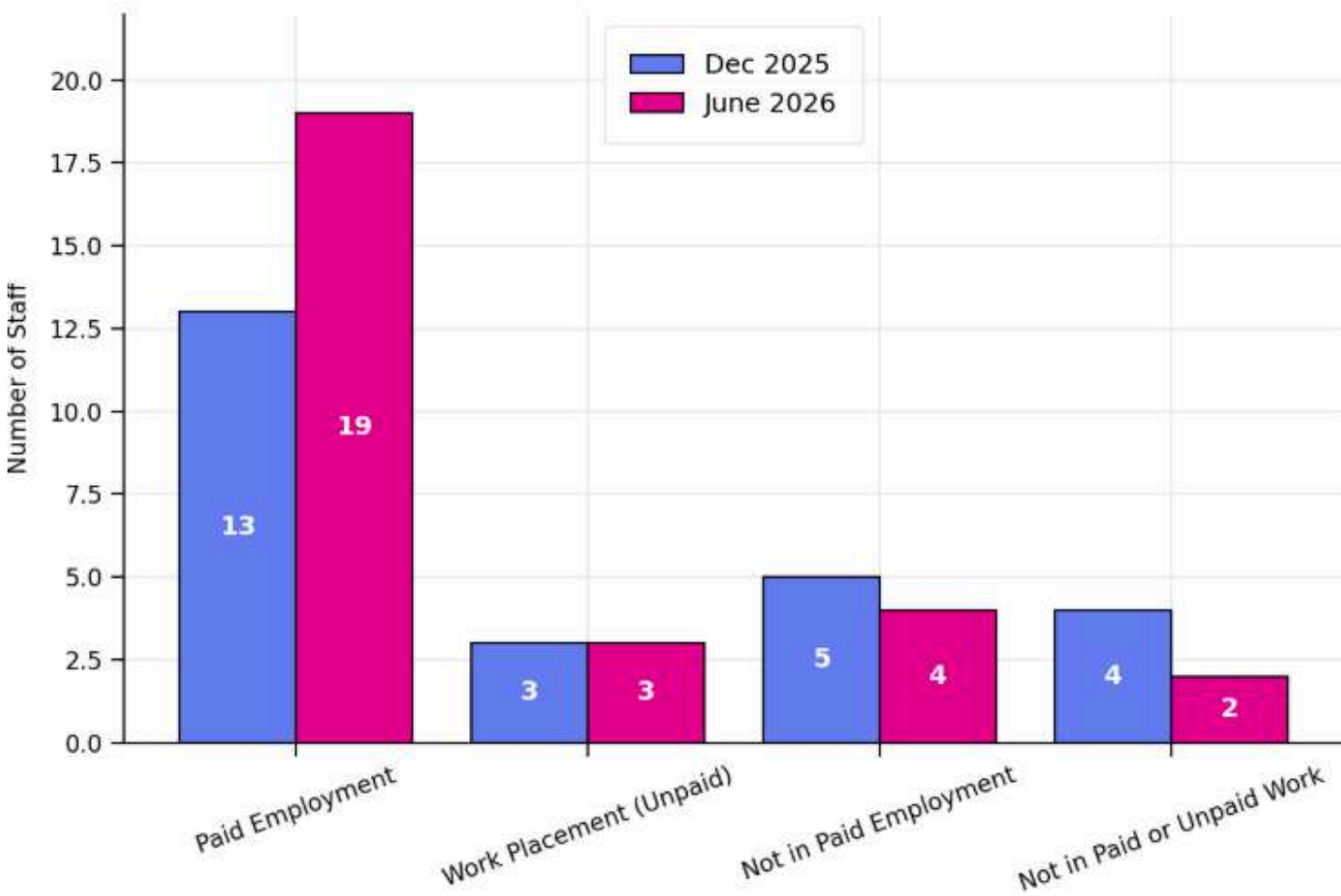
EMPLOYMENT SUPPORT TEAM



Progress since December 2025

Sandra and Clive came into role in December 2025 and we have been working hard to make sure as many of our members have work and or placements as possible. You can see from our graph below, the progress we have made in the 6-month period. Please note that this data does not include data from Deenagh Lodge Seasonal Work.

Progress Overview DEC 25 VS June 2026



Programme Progress Update:

- Paid Employment: 13 → 19 has increased since December 2025, reflecting our continued focus on developing opportunities and building strong links with both local and national employers.
- Work Placements: 3 → 3 has remained the same number, however, these are different people reflecting the opportunities created for the three people and changing situations of some members and an additional member added at end of December.
- Not in Paid Employment: 5 → 4 has also decreased, showing improved overall engagement; while small fluctuations can occur due to our member's changing circumstances, the overall trend is very positive and highlights strong progression and outcomes for our members.
- Not in paid or unpaid work 4 → 3 – this has decreased slightly but as with not in employment, these are different people in June than back in December, representing fluctuation in member situations.
- Please note that some of our members have multiple places of work and the total number of members supported is 22.
- Members whose only work is working in Deenagh Lodge are NOT counted in the data above. These are included in the Deenagh Lodge Data.

EMPLOYMENT SUPPORT TEAM



Clive Stocker

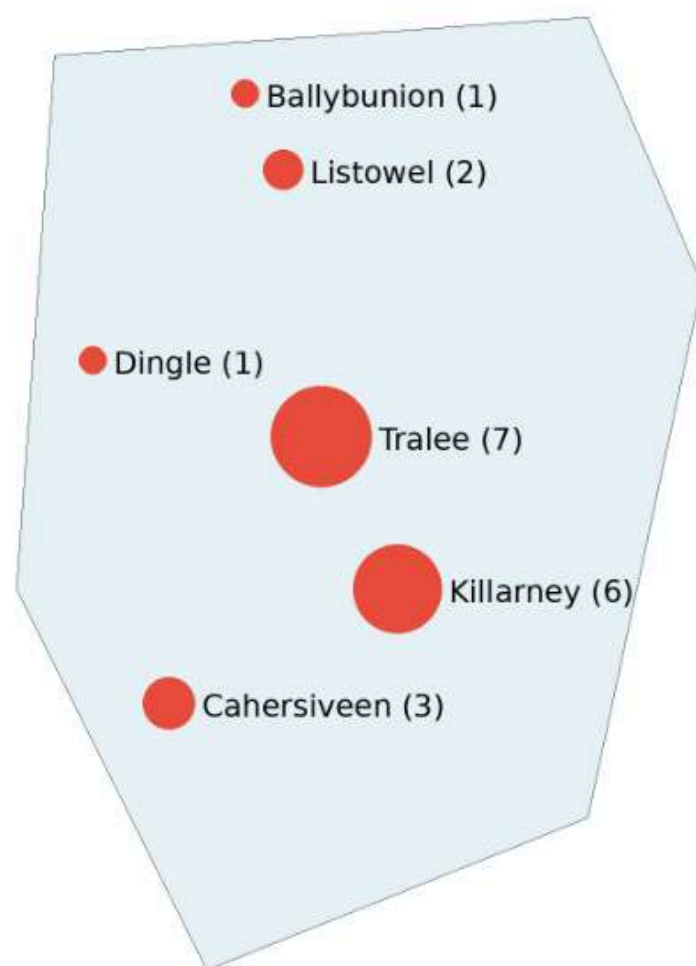
Hi, I'm Clive Stocker, Employment and Education Specialist with Down Syndrome Kerry. I joined the organisation in December 2025 and bring over 25 years of experience in education, training, and employment support.

Across my career, I have developed traineeship and apprenticeship programmes, trained teachers and teaching assistants, and supported people to build confidence and skills through learning and work. I also have strong experience in quality assuring assessment within education, which I now apply to better meet the needs of our members.

I have written and delivered a wide range of education programmes and enjoy creating engaging opportunities that motivate and inspire learners. As a qualified teacher across secondary, further, and higher education, I focus on making learning accessible and practical so our members can move towards greater independence in their working lives.

I take a hands-on approach in our Close the Loop sessions, using role play, visual supports, and discussion to bring learning to life, helping build confidence and develop skills that we are now seeing reflected in positive outcomes in the workplace.

Members Paid roles/Placement Locations in Kerry



Deenagh Lodge

Sandra and Clive also support our excellent Cafe in Deenagh Lodge by working directly with some of our members 2 days a week. We focus on making each member more independent in their roles and developing key areas of practice. We are proud that 25 of our members are currently working at Deenagh Lodge.

The Bernard Brosnan Scholarship Work Experience Programme

The Bernard Brosnan Scholarship Work Experience Programme will run for five weeks for two hours per week, combining hands-on workplace experience with classroom input, including learning on Killarney tourism supported by Killarney National Park staff. It will begin in early July. We are starting with a taster session for people who have expressed an interest in the programme. This starts W/C 22nd June for 45 minutes to see if this is the programme for them.



Sandra O Donoghue

Hey I'm Sandra, I joined Down Syndrome Kerry in November 2025 as the Employment and Education Specialist and have thoroughly enjoyed getting to know our members, their families and the employers we work with.

I bring over 20 years of experience in the disability sector, having worked as a Youth Worker, Keyworker, Event Coordinator and Sports Development Officer. Throughout my career, I have supported individuals to develop their skills, confidence, independence, and participation within their communities. I strongly believe that employment is one of the most important ways for people to be active and valued members of their community.

I also have a strong interest in adult literacy and lifelong learning. I have completed training with Kerry ETB as a Family Learning Tutor and Plain English Specialist. Since joining Down Syndrome Kerry, we have been fortunate to secure funding to deliver a new literacy programme in collaboration with Kerry ETB, which will begin in September. I am excited about the opportunities this programme will provide for our members to further develop their literacy skills and confidence.

If you are an employer and would like to hear more about Down Syndrome Ireland National Employment Programme please contact either Clive or Sandra
clivestocker@downsyndrome.ie
sandraodonoghue@downsyndrome.ie

If you or a family member with Down Syndrome would like to join the programme please enquire at the email addresses above .

BUILDING INCLUSIVE WORKPLACES: DOWN SYNDROME KERRY AND LIDL IRELAND CELEBRATE EMPLOYMENT SUCCESS

Two members of Down Syndrome Kerry have started new roles at Lidl in Listowel, marking another important milestone in creating meaningful employment opportunities for people with Down syndrome in County Kerry.

The positions were made possible through the National Employment Partnership between Lidl Ireland and Down Syndrome Ireland, a programme designed to help adults with Down syndrome access sustainable, rewarding employment while supporting employers in building more inclusive workplaces.

“This collaboration is another positive step forward in creating meaningful employment opportunities for adults with Down syndrome in Kerry,” said Siobhan Walsh, Operations Manager at Down Syndrome Kerry. “It is an important pathway for advocacy and inclusion through Down Syndrome Ireland and our National Employment Programme.”

Down Syndrome Kerry thanked Lidl Listowel and Store Manager Stephen O’Connell for their commitment throughout the recruitment process, highlighting the encouragement and support shown to both new employees from the very beginning.

Tara O’Connor, Regional Managing Director at Lidl Ireland, said: “We are incredibly proud of our partnership with Down Syndrome Ireland and thrilled to welcome our two newest colleagues to the Lidl Listowel team. At Lidl, we are committed to building an inclusive workplace where everyone feels valued and respected. This collaboration reflects our belief that a diverse team makes our business stronger and brings essential new perspectives and collaboration to our workforce.”

A key part of the programme is the ongoing support provided to both employees and employers. Sandra O’Donoghue, Employment and Learning Specialist with Down Syndrome Kerry, works with job seekers through every stage of their employment journey—from pre-employment training and interview preparation to workplace onboarding and long-term support. She also provides guidance and training for employers to help create inclusive, supportive working environments.

“Employment is about much more than having a job,” Sandra said. “It provides opportunities for independence, confidence, social connections and personal growth. We are incredibly proud of our two members who have secured these positions and grateful to Lidl Ireland and the team in Listowel for recognising the valuable contribution people with Down syndrome can make in the workplace.”

Down Syndrome Kerry’s Employment Programme continues to work with businesses across the county to promote inclusive hiring and workplace diversity. The organisation encourages employers interested in creating more inclusive teams to learn more about the supports available through the programme.

Inclusive employment benefits everyone. It strengthens businesses, enriches workplace culture and creates opportunities for talented individuals to contribute, grow and thrive. The success of this partnership demonstrates what is possible when employers embrace diversity and invest in creating workplaces where everyone has the opportunity to succeed.





Joe Buckley's achievements (Athletics):

- Gold – 100m run
- 4th – Mini javelin
- 4th – Relay race

Favourite memory: "Getting a gold medal that gives me a chance to make the world games in Chile, and the support of my coaches and volunteers at Kerry Stars Special Olympics."



A very special way to begin my term as Mayor of Kerry

My first official engagement was attending the homecoming for **Adam Maher** following his fantastic success at the Special Olympics Ireland Summer Games. Adam won a silver medal in the 100m, along with bronze medals in the shot put and the 4x100m relay, an incredible achievement and a credit to all the hard work he has put in. The welcome home in Tralee, followed by the Garda escort through the town, was something really special. It was brilliant to see so many people out celebrating one of our own and recognising everything Adam has achieved. Congratulations, Adam and all the hard working Special Olympics volunteers. You did your family, your club, Tralee and all of Kerry proud. It was an honour to be there to mark such a memorable occasion.

Mikey Sheehy, Mayor of Kerry



Special Olympics Summer Games



Caoimhe Brosnan's achievements (Swimming):

- Gold – 25m freestyle
- Gold – Freestyle swim
- Silver – 25m backstroke
- Bronze – 25m relay

Favourite memory: "Swimming in the big pool and getting to share a room with my friend and fellow DSK branch member Sophie! We got to watch Mamma Mia! together."

Sophie Twiss's achievements (Swimming):

- Gold – 25m relay
- Silver – 25m freestyle
- Silver – 25m backstroke

Favourite memory: "Taking part in the relay and the evening entertainment."



My name is Oisin Doyle and I am a third year student at St Brendan's college. I study music at school and recently did my music practical for the Junior Certificate. I am a member of the School Choir and the School Trad group. We practice at lunch times on Tuesdays and Thursdays.

I love singing and playing music. I sang solo for Minister Norma Foley when she visited the school as Minister for Education in 2024. I also sang with the School Choir for the Taoiseach when he visited the school in November 2025.

The choir sings at a Carol service each Christmas in the School Chapel and I sang a solo part in the 2023 Carol service. The choir also sings at the beginning of Year School Mass.

I play Bodhran with the School Trad group. I really enjoy being part of this group. Liam O Connor comes to the school each year to prepare the group for the Liam O Connor Concert in the School Chapel. This year the invited guests were the actor Patrick Bergin and the former Irish Soccer goalkeeper Shay Given. Liam O Connor and his family preformed along with the School Choir and Trad group.

It was an amazing concert. I sang Moonriver as a solo part and then sang it again with the School Choir. I love singing this song. I prepared it for my music practical and my singing exam. The audience seemed to enjoy it and gave me a standing ovation!!!

I got a lovely review in an article about the concert written by Breda Joy in the Kerry eye newspaper! My family were proud!

I love music and playing and singing with others. I am also a member of a local Trad group and sing with my local church choir.

I have wonderful singing and piano teachers outside of school and wonderful teachers in the music department at school.

My Mom and I have recently began learning how to play the tin whistle at home!!!

I look forward to more music during the holidays and when back at school in September.

Written by Oisin and his Mom, Maire



Meet our Talents



Rachel Poff Horgan competing in Galway on Saturday 21st March World Down Syndrome Day. She is the only competitor with Special Needs that Competes.
Last year Rachel won Junior Athlete of the Year 2025 Cheersport Ireland. A fantastic National Achievement!

The journey together

Watching my nieces and nephew argue and fight, I would often say in amazement and exasperation, “We never fought like this when we were your age” and My niece would throw me a side-eye and reply, “Well, you had a nice brother.” In recent years, she changed her response to “Philip was the exception to the rule” and she is right, as she usually is. Philip has always been the exception in our family.

Philip, my brother was born with Down Syndrome (Trisomy 21) 7 weeks premature on the Feast of Corpus Christi in 1986. Born 19 months after me, I know no life without Philip in it.

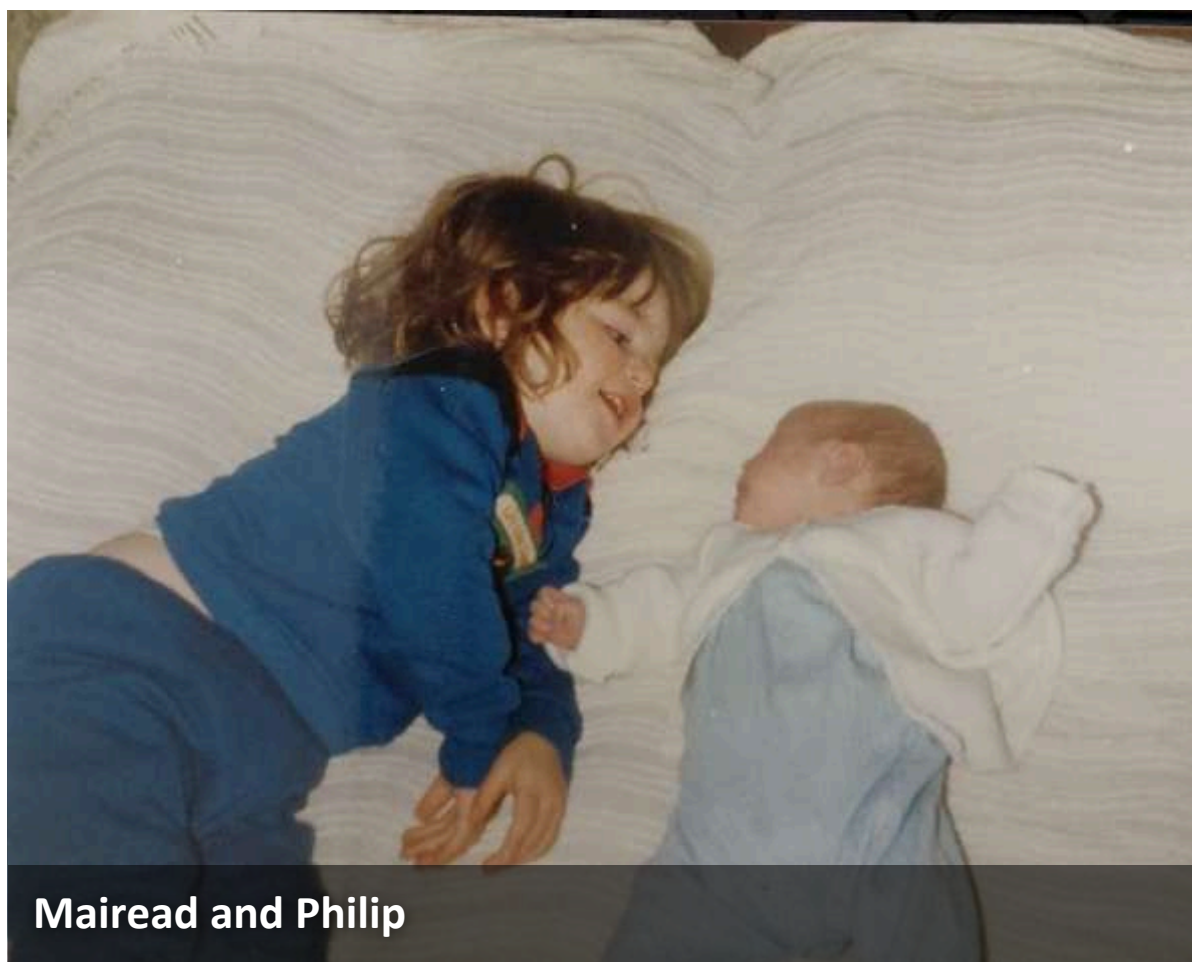
I cannot tell you of the stress my parents went through when he was born so small, or worry my family felt in those first few weeks, months and years. You would have to ask my mother about the fact that they were so worried that he was baptised the night he was born, that congratulations and commiserations came in equal measures or old women would move out of the pew near us at Mass.

What I can tell you, along with my parents, he has been the constant anchor in my life. We also have an older sister and brother, but there is more than a decade between the older two and the younger two. For most of childhood, it was just me and Philip growing up together, forming an unbreakable bond. I’m not sure when I realised Philip was different because my parents didn’t treat either of us differently. If Philip had speech therapy, I had speech therapy. We came as a pair, like two peas in a pod. Bar the odd time, where I was abandoned by parents running after Philip who used to run off like an Olympic Sprinter at the drop of a hat, I don’t think I developed any long-term psychological issues as a result.

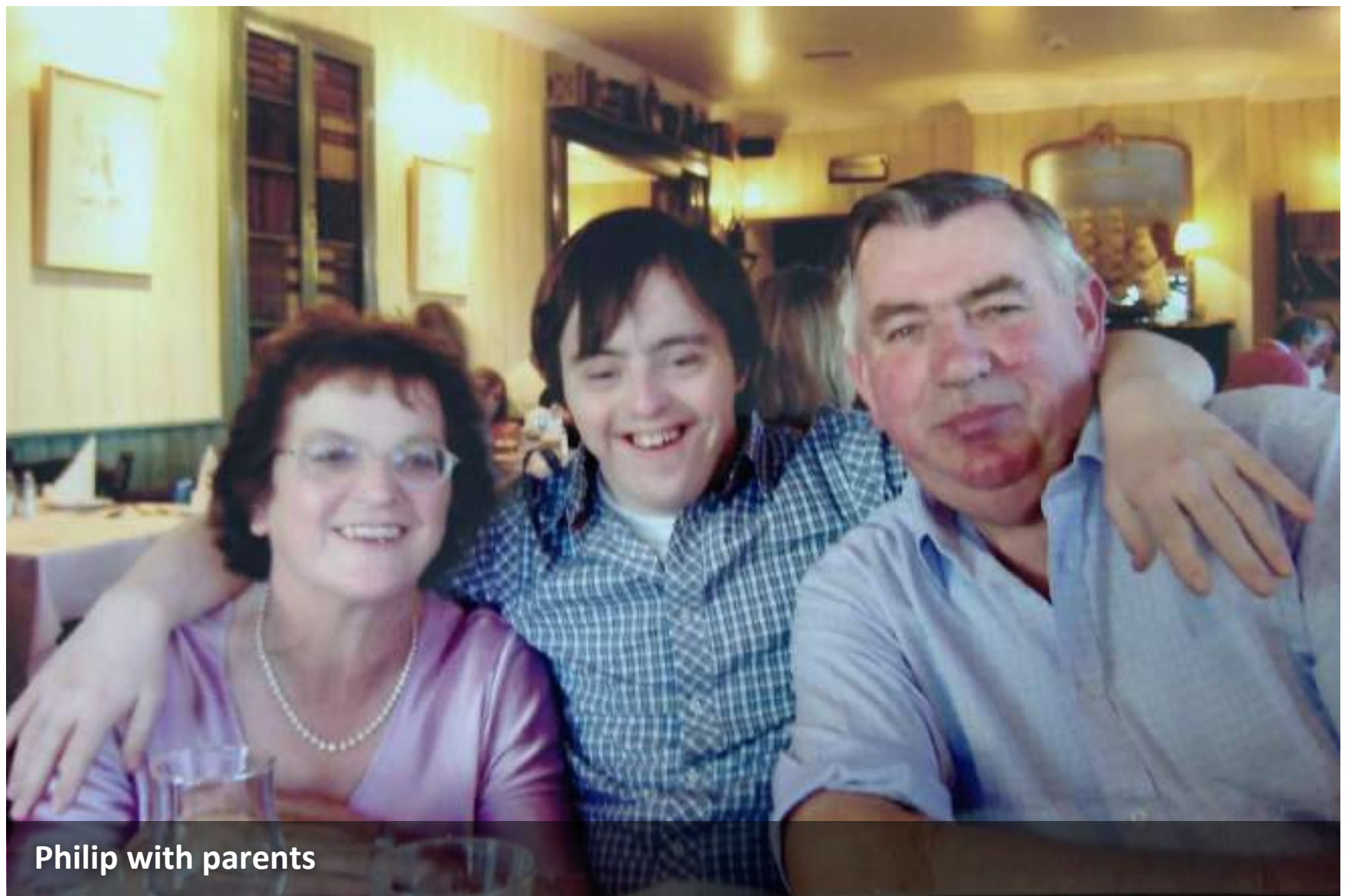
Sibling support groups would refer to people like me as the “forgotten sibling” as a parents attention is focused on the special needs child. My family, before online support groups and Instagram channels, knew that I could be forgotten and made huge efforts in making sure I was not forgotten. My older siblings might say I was spoilt - who am I to disagree them.

It probably was when Philip went to Nano Nagle Special School in Listowel that I realised that he needed more support than I did. Having grown up seeing my gentle and caring mother, turning into a protective Tiger mom when it came to accessing supports for Philip, this rubbed off on me, and I was like a “mini-mom”. Despite separate schools, summers were spent playing “school” teaching Philip writing, a skill he maintains to this day. I was fiercely loyal about Philip, and if anyone mocked him in any way, they were no longer a friend.

While schooling is important to a child, having a sibling with special needs teaches you far more than you can read in books. It teaches you loyalty, empathy and patience, to a certain extent. It teaches you there is beauty in the unconventional and that all paths in life are not all straight forward. When life knocks you down, you gather yourself and try again. In the words of Yoda from Star Wars, one of Philip’s favourite films, “Do or do not. There is no try.”



Mairéad and Philip



Philip with parents

Growing up in the 1990s, Philip did not have access to the opportunities and supports available to children today. All additional therapy, my parents sourced privately, as the public health system provided minimal assistance, if any. There were years of Speech therapy by therapists who spoke with American accents. As a teenager, the health service diagnosed Philip with mild hearing loss and issued hearing aids that caused him pain and discomfort. It was only when Philip was in his twenties that we discovered, again privately, that he had profound hearing loss. Years of speech therapy had taken place while he could barely hear the words being spoken to him. Looking back, we realised how hard he had worked simply to understand the people around him. He had been navigating a silent world, and we never realised how quiet it truly was.

As Philip reaches the milestone of his 40th Birthday, I can’t help but look back in all that he has achieved in life. He has attended St John of God’s day services in Tralee since he graduated Nano Nagle Special School. He has completed Latch On programmes though Down Syndrome Kerry in Listowel and Tralee. He has an interest in cooking and has had work experience in several commercial premises in Tralee area.

However, his longest employment has been in the Down Syndrome Deenagh Lodge Tea Rooms in Killarney, and he is now in his 18th summer working there. He has worked many years in the 321 Charity Shop in Tralee and has been regularly volunteering there since it first opened. He also swims with the Kerry Stars Special Olympics team and has drawers full of medals. He has been dragged by me on holidays abroad, all over Europe, without complaint as he loves going on a plane and a nice hotel.

Thankfully, he seems perfectly content and happy with life, and that’s what any parent wants for their child in life.

While I do worry for the future, our parents growing older, potential health complications Philip might experience in the future, I know Philip and myself will handle it together. For most of my life, I thought I was helping Philip navigate the world. The truth is, he has always been my anchor.

Mairéad Fitzmaurice

DOWN SYNDROME IRELAND

GLÓR FUNDING

Glór is a groundbreaking new partnership that will significantly expand speech and language therapy services for people with Down syndrome across Ireland. Launching on July 1st 2026, this national partnership will bring together Down Syndrome Ireland, the Department of Children, Disability and Equality, The Down Syndrome Centre Dublin, the Down Syndrome Centre Cork, Hub 21, Down Syndrome Centre Midlands and the HSE.

For the first time in Ireland, this initiative formally recognises that people with Down syndrome have distinctive developmental and therapeutic needs. It is designed to deliver expanded, specialist supports from early childhood all the way through adulthood, including early Intervention and speech and language therapy. Services will be rolled out on a phased national basis, ensuring increased access to vital therapeutic supports across Ireland.

Please find a referral form below where you can register your interest in accessing Speech and Language Therapy Support, if you are not already attending speech and language therapy.



Glór Referral Form

Frequently Asked Questions for Parents

- [When will the Glór service begin?](#) The Glór service will commence on 1 July 2026.
- [Will I have to pay for Speech and Language Therapy \(SLT\) services?](#) No. From 1 July 2026, SLT services provided through Down Syndrome Ireland will be fully funded for our members, and there will be no charge to parents or families.
- [Who provides the SLT service?](#) Speech and Language Therapists (SLTs) will deliver services through Down Syndrome Ireland funded by the HSE under the Glór incentive.
- [What types of support will my child or family member receive?](#) SLT support is designed to meet individual needs across the lifespan. This may include one-to-one sessions, group therapy, parent training, workshops, and support in educational, employment, and community settings.
- [How do we access SLT services?](#) To access SLT services, your child or family member must be a registered member of Down Syndrome Ireland and have an active membership number.

For new referrals, there will be a central online referral system, where a referral can be easily made through the website.

Once a referral is submitted, it will be reviewed by administration in the National Office. You will receive a letter confirming that we have received your referral, along with a case history form and consent forms to complete.

Our administration team will then let the Speech and Language Therapist in your local branch know about the referral and will add your child's name to our system (Cliniko).

If you are already availing speech and language therapy through Down Syndrome Ireland, there is no need to re-refer.

- [Where will therapy sessions take place?](#) Sessions will take place in Down Syndrome Ireland centres where suitable facilities are available. In some instances, alternative locations may be arranged in partnership with local providers or the HSE.
- [What happens if there is no therapist available in our area?](#) Every effort will be made to recruit SLTs to all areas. Where there are vacancies, interim supports such as outreach clinics or telehealth services may be provided.
- [Who plans and schedules appointments?](#) Your SLT will manage their own schedule and arrange appointments directly with you. All scheduling is managed through the Cliniko system.
- [How are therapy records and information stored?](#) All records and clinical notes are securely stored using the Cliniko system. Where paper records exist, these will be transitioned to digital formats where possible.
- [Will my child lose access to HSE services if they attend Down Syndrome Ireland SLT sessions?](#) No. Down Syndrome Ireland services are designed to work alongside and collaboratively with Children's Disability Network Teams (CDNTs) and Primary Care services.
- [Can my child attend more than one service at the same time?](#) Members who are currently receiving speech and language therapy through another Down syndrome specific community-based service (e.g., Down Syndrome Centre or Hub 21) are unable to avail of concurrent services from Down Syndrome Ireland. However, services may be coordinated between Down Syndrome Ireland and other providers where appropriate to ensure the best outcome.
- [What happens if we need to cancel an appointment?](#) If you need to cancel an appointment, you should notify your SLT as early as possible. Repeated cancellations or non-attendance may affect ongoing access to the service and could result in discharge, with re-referral required.
- [Will more staff like Speech and Language Therapist Assistants \(SLTAs\) be recruited in the future?](#) The priority is to establish a strong and sustainable SLT service nationwide. As services develop, additional staff, including SLTAs, may be recruited where appropriate and where adequate supervision can be provided.

COMMUNITY CORNER



Thank you to everyone who joined us for Ice Cream Fun Days at the 321 Shop and helped make the event such a wonderful success.
We loved sharing the day with you!

COMMUNITY CORNER

My name is Amy Lynch.

I live in Tralee, Co. Kerry.

In 2017, I was one of the contestants in the Rose of Tralee. I also had my own TV series, Frock Finders, and featured on Radio Kerry. I love performing on stage with my friends. When I was younger, I loved going to ballet classes.

I am in M.T.U. every Friday at my Job ready course which is run by Down syndrome Kerry.

I am the secretary on the Regional Advisory Committee and secretary at my other college at the K.Y.D.S.

We made a film called Believe in MTU, which was nominated for an award in Dublin. I also enjoy writing songs and have a strong passion for beauty, design, fashion, and modelling. I am currently working in CH Chemist, which I love. Last year, I also worked in Urban Sanctuary on Wednesdays.



My name is Siobhan Looney. I am a member of Special Olympics Ireland. My Club is Called the Kerry Stars. I am out at training 5 evenings a week. I take part in a lot of competitions and events with Kerry Stars like soccer, basketball. I also do swimming on Friday nights. I won a bronze medal last weekend playing soccer with special Olympics. I love coming to Kookabilities at M.T.U. every Monday to meet my friends and learn to cook for my independence.



Alex, Daniel and Ryan working out at Spórtlann na Sceilge.

COMMUNITY CORNER



Hello, my name is Caoimhe, and I have just started working at Deenagh Lodge for the summer. My favourite job here is emptying the dishwasher because I really enjoy helping out. When I'm not busy working, I love taking part in Kerry Stars Special Olympics. Recently, I competed at the Ireland Summer Games, where I won three swimming medals. I am very proud of my achievements and enjoy being part of the Special Olympics.



Hi, we are Hannah, James and Sofia.

Hannah loves music, dancing and playing on the swings.

Being part of Down Syndrome Kerry has helped us feel supported and connected.

We're so grateful to be part of such a wonderful community.



Hi, I'm Antoinette O'Leary. I like all types of music and love serving the customers their food and drinks in Deenagh.



Hi, I'm Grace Murray. I love music, particularly Michael Buble. I like cleaning and preparing tables, and also working in the kitchen.



My name is Mary. I love listening to music, especially Bob Marley! I love working on the till at Deenagh Lodge.

PHOTO CORNER



Killarney Duck Dash

was held in support of Down Syndrome Kerry, bringing the community together for a fun event and a great cause. A huge thank you to St Patrick's Committee Killarney in particular to Jonathan & Debra Aber!



Gearoid Linnane CEO Lee Strand visits Deenagh



The 2026 Annual Chain Gang Cycling Club Ring of Kerry and Caragh Lake Cycle in aid of Down Syndrome Kerry

20th June 2026



A MESSAGE FROM OUR NEIGHBOURS



My name is Hugh Herlihy, and I'm delighted to have recently taken over Balloonagh Pharmacy (formerly Burns Pharmacy).

My wife is also a pharmacist, and we have two young children, so community and family are very important to us. I'm really looking forward to getting to know the staff, families, and everyone involved with Down Syndrome Ireland. We are very pleased to offer a 10% discount to all staff and families attending Down Syndrome Ireland on all over-the-counter products and private prescriptions.

Please feel free to call in anytime — we're always happy to help.

I have attached our new Pharmacy logo.

Hugh Herlihy

Down Syndrome Ireland

Parents support Groups online activities

Online Support Groups



Zoom session

August 18th
August 19th
September 1st
September 2nd
September 3rd
September 21st

Join us for our online support groups across several areas, where you can connect with others and navigate challenges together in a safe and supportive environment.

- Parents of All Ages: September 3rd
- Parents of Adults with Down Syndrome: September 1st
- Dual Diagnosis of Down Syndrome and Autism: September 2nd
- Down Syndrome and Arthritis: September 21st
- Regression Support: August 18th
- Sibling Support: August 19th
- Grieving Parents of Children with Down Syndrome: August 19th

While some groups will take a short break until September, Gina Grant, Branch Advocacy Co-ordinator, Down Syndrome Ireland, will still be available to support members and families.

If you would like to get in touch, please contact Gina on 086 197 5416 or ginagrants@downsyndrome.ie.

To access the Zoom sessions,
please scan the QR Code



Monthly Branch Connection Group



Zoom session

June 30th.
and on the last
Tuesday of every
month

Join our Monthly Branch Connection Group, held on the last Tuesday of every month at 10.30am. This is a relaxed, open space where Admins, Coordinators and committee members from your branch can come together to share ideas and discuss important topics.

To access the next meeting on
June 30th, please contact Gina
Grant, Branch Advocacy Co-
ordinator, Down Syndrome
Ireland on 086 197 5416 or
ginagrants@downsyndrome.ie

Down Syndrome Regression Disorder Webinar



Zoom session

July 28th.
at 8 pm

We will be hosting a webinar with Dr. Jonathon Santoro and Professor Colin Doherty on July 28th at 8pm.

Down Syndrome Regression Disorder is an emerging area of clinical importance, affecting some individuals with Down syndrome through sudden or gradual changes in skills, behaviour, communication, movement, and mental health. This webinar will provide valuable insights for families, healthcare professionals, researchers, and anyone seeking to better understand regression in Down syndrome and the importance of coordinated, compassionate support.

For more information and to
register, please scan the QR
Code





Rise & Shine invites you to a fun-filled Easter week away in Lourdes, France

Rise & Shine is a national, volunteer-led Irish charity that provides supported holidays and pilgrimage experiences for children and young people between the ages of 11- 30, with additional needs, while also offering valuable respite for their families.

Through its **Easter pilgrimage to Lourdes** and **Friendship Week holidays in Galway**, **Rise & Shine** creates opportunities for fun, friendship, independence, and personal growth in a safe and inclusive environment.



Who can apply?

Young people, from 11 – 30 years old, with additional needs, who will travel **without** a parent or guardian.

Children, up to 10 years old, having a serious or life-threatening illness, accompanied by a parent or guardian.



How much does it cost?

This trip is free for our guests as our volunteers fundraise for it. Volunteers pay for their own trip.



What you need to travel

- Valid passport
- European or General Health Insurance Card (EHIC / GHIC)



How to apply?

Please scan the QR code or visit our website and fill in the guest application form.



Closing date:
October 15th

Please note:

- We welcome all faith's and none, gender, ethnic or racial origin.
- Submission of application does not guarantee selection.

Members of Down Syndrome Kerry who would like to learn more about these wonderful opportunities are encouraged to contact Rise & Shine directly for further information and application details.



Email: info@riseandshine.ie



www.riseandshine.ie



STAY CONNECTED



VISIT OUR WEBSITE FOR THE
LATEST UPDATES
WWW.DOWNSYNDROMEKERRY.IE/

FOLLOW US ON FACEBOOK:
DOWN SYNDROME KERRY

CONTACT US

DSK Office

- Down Syndrome Kerry, Balloonagh Estate, Tralee, Co. Kerry, V92 YK79
- info@kerry.downsyndrome.ie
- 066 7103804

321 Shop

- 11 Strand St, Tralee, Co.Kerry, V92 XVX0
- Rachel Fitzgerald Manager of 321**
- rachelfitzgerald@downsyndrome.ie
- 086 819 0224



Thank you for donation to DSK

Siobhan Walsh Operations Manager

- siobhanwalsh@downsyndrome.ie
- 0861975419

Sandra O'Donoghue Employment & Education Specialist

- sandraodonoghue@downsyndrome.ie
- 0876824313

Clive Stocker Employment & Education Specialist

- clivestocker@downsyndrome.ie
- 0868132848

SERVICE PROVIDERS

KERRY PARENTS & FRIENDS ASSOCIATION

-  info@kpfa.ie
-  +353646632742
-  <https://kpfa.ie/>
-  Central Administration, The Old Monastery, Port Road, Killarney, Co. Kerry, Ireland, V93WK68

NATIONAL LEARNING NETWORK

-  info@nln.ie / tralee@nln.ie
-  +353667122533
-  <https://rehab.ie/national-learning-network/>
-  Clash Industrial Estate, Tralee, Co. Kerry, V92 H427

RESILIENCE HEALTHCARE

-  jmcauliffe@resilience.ie
-  +353656722875
-  <https://resilience.ie/>
-  Block 3, Ballymaley Business Park, Ballymaley, Ennis, Co Clare, V95 XD79

REHABCARE

-  info@rehab.ie
-  +353667190559
-  <https://rehab.ie/rehabcare/>
-  Blennerville Resource Centre, Blennerville, Tralee, Co. Kerry

INSPIRED

-  info@inspired.ie
-  +353667117315
-  <https://inspired.ie/>
-  Brandon Court, Basin Road, Tralee, Co. Kerry, V92PDE2

STUDIO 3

-  info@kerry.studio3.org
-  +353667128872
-  <https://www.studio3.org/>
-  3F DavCon Business Centre, Monavalley, Tralee, Co. Kerry, V92PP8

SAINT JOHN OF GOD KERRY SERVICES. DAY SERVICES

-  <https://www.flipsnack.com/875C6ABBDC9/sjog-day-services-information-booklet.html>
-  +353667199721
-  <https://sjogkerryservices.ie/our-services/day-services/>
-  Cork Kerry Community Healthcare, Health Service Executive, Community Services Building, Rathass, Tralee, Co. Kerry, V92 YA25

RISE AND SHINE TRUST

Rise and Shine is an independent, self-funding, national, inclusive, and volunteer-led charity that provides supported pilgrimage holidays to guests with additional needs and respite to their families.

-  info@riseandshine.ie
-  +353 (0) 91 796622
-  www.riseandshine.ie
-  Rise & Shine Trust, Kilcuan, Clarinbridge, Galway, H91 W596, Ireland