

# ALONE

there when you need us

# NEWSLETTER

## Autumn 2012

## TOGETHER WE MAKE A DIFFERENCE

In celebrating our 35th anniversary, we honour the energy and hard work of past volunteers and staff, and remember friends who are no longer with us. In this newsletter, you can see how ALONE today continues to depend on the extraordinary dedication of our volunteers, as calls for our services increase dramatically by 23% in the first six months of this year.



Senator David Norris enjoyed the company at the ALONE 35 Year Commemoration (page 2)

As the evenings close in, it's time to prepare for winter and thanks to a generous donation from Electric Ireland, ALONE residents will enjoy warmer homes due to an insulation refit and benefit from lower energy usage. Electric Ireland have also provided resources for our continued campaign to combat fuel poverty this winter so older people who cannot pay their heating bills can contact us, as always, for assistance (page 3).

The Government recently announced further cuts to older person services. We continue to advocate for the 10% of older people most in need who suffer isolation and poor health. We support a high-value, low-cost service which entails providing care in the community for older people. Provision in people's own homes is the preferred option for the majority of people rather than nursing homes; it is also the most efficient and economical. Proposed cuts in home help hours have exactly the opposite effect as it inevitably leads to increased hospital admissions which is totally counter-productive if the purpose of these cuts is to save costs (page 3).

In July we remembered the selflessness of the ALONE volunteers in the past. When we gathered in Glasnevin we also called to mind so many older people who have been befriended and helped by ALONE over the last 35 years (page 2). The greatest challenge of all remains loneliness and isolation. Inside we have news on the digital TV switchover, our Befriending Service and social programme, which is better than

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ever this year, offering a range of events to suit all interests and levels of mobility (page 3).

We are very happy to be able to share our positive news with you, even as we continue to highlight the challenges faced by the 1 in 10 older people who suffer poverty and isolation. As we remember our history and look to the future, we also pause to celebrate our work today. Together we know we make a difference.

# ALONE 35 YEAR COMMEMORATION



Everyone buried in the plot was remembered with a flower



Pictured: Molly Berger, Maura Pettifer and Betty Kelleher enjoying the celebration at Glasnevin

In our last newsletter we shared the story of the Millennium Plot in Glasnevin Cemetery, where ALONE provides graves for people who die without family or friends. ALONE has maintained the plot, and included the names of everyone buried there on headstones, since 1981. Prior to this these people were buried at twilight, in unmarked graves, in what was known as 'poor ground'.

On Wednesday July 25th over 70 people assembled at the redesigned and renovated Millennium Plot. The gathering included ALONE volunteers, residents of ALONE Supportive Housing, older people visited by the Befriending Service and staff and friends of ALONE.

We came together to celebrate the service of volunteers, and all who have worked for and supported ALONE and to remember our friends and the older people we serve, who have passed away since our foundation 35 years ago.

Speeches by ALONE CEO Seán Moynihan, Chairman Pat Morgan, long-serving volunteer Aidan Bowers and Philip Ryan of the Glasnevin Trust were followed by the unveiling of a plaque by Senator David Norris.

Senator Norris – who said he was happier than ever as he approaches 70 – spoke of his horror at being reminded, of a “shameful period when, just for the crime of being poor and alone, people were buried like criminals at the dead of night, in cheap coffins,

anonymously”. He celebrated the fact that “many of them are anonymous no more, thanks to Willie Bermingham”. He went on to say that the homes that ALONE provides for more than 100 people who would otherwise face homelessness, including our purpose-built homes at Willie Bermingham Place in Kilmainham, is the greatest memorial that anyone could wish for.

All present were invited to lay a pink carnation on the grave – symbolising our commitment never to forget those who have gone before us – each poignantly labelled with the name of someone buried in the plot.

*(A video of the ceremony and speeches, photo galleries and back issues of the newsletter can be viewed on-line at [www.alone.ie](http://www.alone.ie).)*



I answered the phone one afternoon to hear a lovely old Irish voice saying, “Hello, I am 80 years old, my husband died 5 months ago and I would like someone to talk to. I would love it if someone would come to talk to me every week; it gets very lonely. Sometimes I walk around the block just to get out. I just feel so alone.” I took down her information and thanked her for calling. At first I was sad but solace came when I realised that because she had called ALONE, she would no longer be lonely.

*Gabriela Schaps is a student from Florida who spent six weeks as an intern with ALONE as part of the Global Exchange Programme.*

## ALONE CINEMA CLUB

The ALONE Cinema Club made a presentation to volunteer Joan McAdam who has been running the club for more than 10 years. Thanks to Joan's dedication every month a group of older people gather to enjoy a classic film, specially screened by the IFI Cinema, followed by a light lunch at Cassidy's Hotel.



Joan is a real star

## REVERSE HOME HELP CUTS

Responding to the announcement of proposed home care cuts by the HSE, ALONE called for the government to immediately reverse the proposals and to outline how they intend to protect the welfare of older people in need of home care services. These cuts would affect the most vulnerable in society – older people in need of support – who are being more and more marginalised as a result of on-going austerity measures.

We need to see Minister for Health, James Reilly making good on his commitment to provide care in the community for older people most in need. He has repeatedly stated that care provision in people's own homes is the preferred option. However, these proposals will have exactly the opposite effect. They will lead inevitably to increased hospital admissions which is totally counterproductive if the purpose is to save costs.

These cuts affect the basic needs of the 1-in-10 older people who are in dire need of support which includes daily activities such as washing and cleaning. This is totally unacceptable. Home care services are low-cost and high value. The cost of home care provision is significantly less than that of nursing home care provision, or long-term hospital stays: To propose cuts in this area is short-sighted in the extreme.

We recognise that the HSE needs to make cuts, but cutbacks in this area will clearly lead to increased costs in long term hospital stay and nursing homes. The fact that we have an ageing population, and there will be increased demand for these exact services in the short-term, has not been taken into consideration by the Minister.

All parties involved need to begin discussing reform of the health system to ensure that future needs are taken into consideration. All service providers in the sector, including ALONE, must be willing to acknowledge that change in the system is necessary, while ensuring that service levels do not suffer.

## SOCIAL LIFE

This year we extended our social programme to include a smaller event every month along with our ever popular quarterly dinner dances.

In May, Jennette Donnelly joined ALONE as Events Coordinator through JobBridge, the national internship scheme. Jennette told us, "I was brought up with the importance of looking after neighbours and older relatives. I was looking for a position offering experience in event management and I leapt at the opportunity with ALONE." Jennette works with staff and the Volunteer Project Leaders for Small and Large Events and the Volunteer Transport team, to ensure there is a choice of accessible activities to suit a range of interests.

*This month 150 people attended the ALONE Summer Dinner Dance in the Louis Fitzgerald Hotel. The 'Hawaiian' theme made for lots of colourful outfits. The night also included Fire dancers, a Polynesian dancer and music from The Brendan Brophy Band! Photographer Jason Clarke was taking portraits on the night. Thank you to Jason for all the time he has given to ALONE this year. We have a growing collection of Jason's work with the older people in ALONE which we will be sharing soon.*

Carrie Flynn (aged 95) won the prize for best lady's costume at the ALONE Summer Dinner Dance

## WARMER HOMES FOR ALONE RESIDENTS THANKS TO ELECTRIC IRELAND

*"It will make a huge difference to me, particularly with cost of energy bills always being a worry. The house is already starting to feel more comfortable and warm, so I'm sure it will be great when the winter sets in.*

*The work was done really quickly and was no trouble to me at all."* Margaret, who lives in an ALONE home in Drumcondra.

We're delighted to have been able to retrofit 30 of our homes with up-to-date insulation. The work was carried out by our partners Electric Ireland, as part of a major donation announced last December. The retrofits include internal wall insulation; flat roof and ceiling insulation, draft-proofing, reducing extra vents and the provision of energy saving light bulbs.

Our retrofit programme will provide immediate and long-term benefits for our residents. Electric Ireland also gave a financial donation to assist our annual campaign to combat fuel poverty.

Many thanks to Brian Dowd, Energy Services Manager, and his Electric Ireland team.



Pictured: Kevin White from ALONE Community Response Service with Electric Ireland staff

If you or an older person you know is affected by cuts to services or are worried about how to cope at home, please contact the ALONE Information Service at 01 6791032.



## VOLUNTEERS WORKING IN ALL SERVICES

In the first six months of this year our volunteers gave an incredible 2,826 hours of service to ALONE. That is 15 hours a day, seven days a week, visiting, supporting and advocating for older people in need. ALONE volunteers work in all areas of the

organisation, including reception, housing maintenance, school talks, the social programme and befriending. This figure is even more remarkable when you consider that it does not include the hours spent on weekly visits by the Befriending Service to more than 200 older people. This year we will reach our target of 150 volunteers, making a 15:1 ratio of volunteers to staff.

## TV DIGITAL SWITCHOVER

Next month Irish TV is moving from analogue to digital. This is the biggest change since the introduction of colour TV.

RTÉ will switch off the old analogue signals on the 24th October leaving their new digital TV service, SAORVIEW, the only place viewers will be able to watch the Irish TV channels (RTÉ1, RTÉ 2, TG4 and TV3) without paying a subscription.

If you watch your TV using an aerial, 24th October is an important date to remember because you will have to take action before this date to ensure you continue to receive the national TV stations. Pay TV services are unaffected by the closure of the old TV network.

While most people will make the switch themselves, some people may need a helping hand from those who understand their needs. We are helping our residents and the older people we visit to make the switch. We encourage our readers to ask your older friends, neighbours and family members if they are informed of their options.

National Digital Switchover Week from 17th – 23rd September will see many community-based events, to encourage those who have not yet switched to digital TV to do so. For more information phone 1890 940 980 or visit [www.goingdigital.ie](http://www.goingdigital.ie)

## CHARITY PARTNERSHIP – BROWN BROTHERS HARRIMAN

We are delighted to be chosen as charity partners for 2012-2013 by Brown Brothers Harriman. The staff at BBH have a host of activities planned over the next 12 months which will help raise awareness as well as much-needed funds for ALONE. We rely on the support of the public and companies for the day-to-day running of our services so partnerships like this are vital to continuing our work. A big thank you to everyone involved!



Robert Mountford, BBH, AVP Investor Services with Seán Moynihan ALONE CEO and Suzanne O'Reilly, ALONE Fundraising

## CONTACTS TO ALONE UP 23%

The average number of contacts to the ALONE front-desk per month this year is 516, a rise of 23% on last year. In March we had 631 calls for support and assistance. This was a real surprise, as the only month last year with more calls than that was December, obviously our busiest time because of the cold, our Christmas campaign, Christmas hampers and social events etc.

## SCHOOL TALKS

We have launched our annual school talk programme and our team of volunteers are available to give talks to secondary school pupils throughout the year. If you would like one of our volunteer speakers to come into your school to talk about the issues affecting older people today, as well as the work carried out by ALONE, please get in touch and we can arrange a time to call out and visit.

For more information, please contact Suzanne O'Reilly on 01 679 1032 or email [fundraising@alone.ie](mailto:fundraising@alone.ie)

### Senior Helpline

Third Age is a national voluntary organisation that demonstrates the value of older people contributing in their own community for as long as possible. They run Senior Help Line, a confidential listening service for older people provided by over 350 trained older volunteers. This peer-to-peer dimension – older people listening to older callers – is an important aspect of the service.

The LoCall number is 1850 440 444 - Lines are open from 10am and 10pm daily.