

# spokeout

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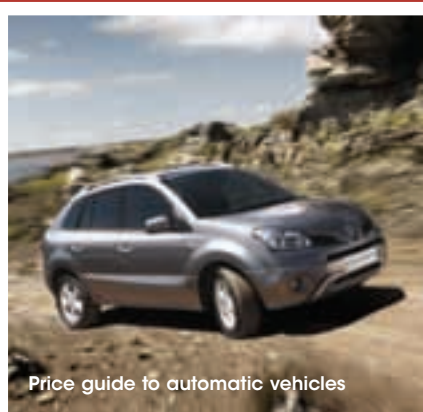


## Heaven-sent

ANGEL CAMPAIGN RAISES VITAL FUNDS



Dogs that make a difference



Price guide to automatic vehicles



The power of positive thinking

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# introduction

**T**his issue, we find out more about the difference that a dog can make to its



owner's quality of life. Isolde Carmody says she is so close to her guide dog, Quasi, that he feels like another part of her body. And Nora Alford says she looks on her two pet dogs, Samantha and Ruby, as her children, getting back ten times what she puts in.

We talk to Catherine Branch, an American flutist who has been in Dublin since the summer on a fellowship. She tells us how music can help change perceptions about disability and also gives an outsider's view on how Dublin fares in terms of accessibility.

Active campaigner, Ann Marie Healy, from Belmullet in Mayo, tells us about the issues that anger her most, and how her positive outlook enables her to deal with challenges while still enjoying life.

In keeping with the festive season, we also have coverage of IWA's Angel Campaign, gift ideas, book reviews and give-aways, and a bit of fun with our Christmas cartoons.

Wishing all our readers a Happy Christmas and New Year.

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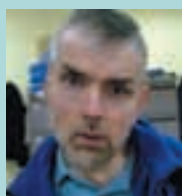
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## MEET SOME OF OUR CONTRIBUTORS...



### Kiara Lynch

Editorial assistant Kiara Lynch is most definitely an adventurer, and is looking forward to combining her two loves of travelling and sailing with a trip to the Canaries in spring. At Christmas, Kiara prefers to avoid the bustle of town by shopping online, or at least knowing exactly what she wants before she leaves the house – see our section on inspired giving for some of her original gift ideas.



### John Graham

John Graham lives in Dublin and works in the IWA Information Service. An active campaigner on access and transport issues, John is involved in many representative committees. In this issue, John marks the 150th anniversary of the Lourdes visions by talking to members who have visited the shrine.



### Robbie Cousins

Robbie Cousins is a freelance editor, journalist and blogger. He writes on a broad range of subjects from social issues to business comment. He is also a keen photographer and vegetarian cook and enjoys travelling when the opportunity arises. This issue, he interviews American flutist Catherine Branch.



### Garreth Greene

Garreth Greene, who has recently become a Meath resident, owns 'Creativenergy', a graphic and web design studio, and also works with IWA. In this issue, Garreth reviews three of his favourite places to eat and drink in Dublin and Meath, giving you the inside track on their level of access.



### Niall McDonnell

Niall McDonnell works in the Transport Department of IWA and has a keen interest in motoring. In this issue, he examines how prices on different vehicles have been affected by the introduction of the new CO<sub>2</sub> emissions. In his spare time, Niall is busy planning his wedding, as well as enjoying clay pigeon shooting, a sport which he is encouraging other wheelchair users to take up.

## SUBSCRIBE NOW

Please send your name, the name of your organisation (if applicable), address and telephone number, with a cheque or postal order for €15.00 (payable to IWA) to: Spokeout subscriptions, Irish Wheelchair Association, Blackheath Drive, Clontarf, Dublin 3.



When you have finished with this magazine please recycle it.



# Heaven-sent

**Angelic young members Caithlin Murphy and Shane Barker were on hand to help former Miss World, Rosanna Davison, launch Angel Day**

**S**tunning former Miss World, Rosanna Davison, was joined by IWA members, Caithlin Murphy, 7, and Shane Barker, 5, at the official launch of IWA's national fundraising Angel Campaign.

For Caithlin, it had been a long-standing ambition to launch Angel Day, and with her love of all things pink, she was a natural angel. Caithlin was joined on the day by a tuxedo-clad Shane Barker from Donabate in Co Dublin, who is pictured with Rosanna on our cover.

In her free time, Caithlin, who is from Carlow, loves

playing her Nintendo DS and watching the High School Musical films. Shane is a serious sports fan, and takes part in IWA's Sunday sports club. Both Shane and Caithlin were big hits with Rosanna, who kindly volunteered her time to support IWA.

Following the launch, the cute and collectable Angel Pins went on sale nationwide for €2 each, and were soon appearing on lapels across the country. Angel Pencils were also available for the first time this year, appealing to younger supporters.



## CHRISTMAS MESSAGE

### Kathleen Mc Loughlin, CEO, reflects on the year's achievements

Looking back over 2008, I reflect on what I believe has been another very positive year for IWA. We have continued to make steady progress as an organisation, both in terms of our capacity to provide quality services and also in terms of the scale and scope of those services and other supports.

There have been many happy occasions to celebrate around the counties with members, staff and volunteers. Great progress has been made – whether that be in the shape of new premises, qualifications attained, milestones passed and personal achievements by members in different areas. A particular memory of 2008 is the shared sense of pride we all felt as we watched so many of our athletes represent Ireland at the Paralympics in September. We look forward to continuing to support the athletes as they prepare for London in 2012.

Despite cut-backs in funding mid-year, we have managed to keep our essential services operating without affecting members. My objective is to keep this up, in the face of further likely cut-backs over the coming year. The spirit of our Association has always been to put members first and, in difficult times, we have to work together to ensure we do everything in our power to avoid cutting the services that our members rely on. This means that fundraising activities, especially our annual Angel Campaign, are becoming more important than ever.

At this stage, it is too early to tell whether we will reach our fundraising target for the 2008 Angel Campaign, but I feel optimistic that we will achieve our goal. I have been amazed by the lengths some people have gone to in order to get behind the campaign. I hear there has been a run on angel wings in 'discount stores' across Ireland and no wonder... everywhere I go I see staff, volunteers and members dressed as angels. These angels come in all different shapes and sizes, but all are out there with one objective in mind – to attract public attention and encourage people to support our work.

I'd like to say 'thank you' to everyone – members, staff, volunteers – for supporting our Angel Campaign, and indeed supporting the Association in every aspect of its work throughout the year.

Wishing you all a happy Christmas and peaceful New Year. *Nollaig faoi shéan agus ath-bhliain faoi mhaise daoibh go léir.*

The Angel Pins and Pencils were sold by a network of volunteers in towns and cities throughout the country and also through the Irish League of Credit Union offices and major supermarkets nationwide.

The monies raised through the Angel Campaign will help to fund services for IWA's 20,000 members throughout the country.

The pins were distributed courtesy of DPD Ireland, the national courier service, who generously support this important campaign.





Rosanna with Shane, Caithlin and their mums

# VOLUNTEERING FOR ANGEL DAY



Many volunteers give generously of their time to support IWA fundraising activities such as the Angel Campaign. **Kiara Lynch** finds out what motivates them

## **RICHIE NOLAN**



27-year-old Richie Nolan from Kilkenny, is an IWA service user. Richie has cerebral palsy, and has been receiving support from IWA all his life. A few years ago Richie decided he wanted to give back to IWA by volunteering. Richie believes more people with disabilities should get involved in volunteering. "I'm helping IWA because they help me so much. It gives me a great

sense of empowerment to know I'm not always taking help from IWA but I'm giving something back as well."

Richie enjoys fundraising for IWA, saying "Angel Day fundraising is fun because you're meeting people all the time, and I like that." Angel Day is IWA's biggest fundraiser, and, as such, Richie spends five to six hours collecting around Kilkenny. Richie finds people usually give generously because they know that the more money IWA has, the more essential services for people with disabilities they can provide.

## **KATHLEEN HENNESSY**

Kathleen Hennessey has been volunteering with IWA in Carlow for 25 years. She first started when she went to an IWA social with her cousin. Kathleen immediately felt comfortable and knew it was something she wanted further involvement in. She works fulltime for MABS (Money Advice and Budgeting Service). She finds a lot of her clients there are people with disabilities she has met through volunteering



with IWA. This is a big reason Kathleen strongly believes in fundraising, "Many people with disabilities are living in poverty – the services IWA offers are often a lifeline. That's why I'm happy to give up some of my free time to help fundraise."

Kathleen enjoys working with people with disabilities, finding they inspire her in her own life with their perseverance doing daily tasks.

"The Angel Campaign is our biggest fundraiser. I go out collecting in shopping centres with other volunteers in Carlow. As IWA have such an obvious presence in the community, I find the public's attitude towards us is very positive."

"As IWA has such an obvious presence in the community, I find the public's attitude towards us is very positive"

## **JOHN DOYLE**

John Doyle is living in IWA's Claddagh Court Independent Living Units in Kilkenny. As an IWA service user, John has found the services he has received from IWA have changed his life. "That's a huge reason why I wanted to get involved in fundraising. The services IWA provides can be the difference between living a life and just existing. It's so important they are funded." John strongly feels people with disabilities need to become involved in fundraising: "There is no one in a better position to tell people what a difference their money is making to people with disabilities."

For IWA's biggest fundraising campaign, Angel Day, John fundraised for several hours outside one of Kilkenny's many shopping centres. John takes pleasure in fundraising for IWA, saying he likes speaking to people and highlighting disability issues. John is realistic and thinks, "Things are getting tighter for everyone, and people are less willing to part with their money, but IWA has a large visible effect in the Kilkenny community so I'm hopeful we'll do well."



# Woman's **best friend**



After working with her guide dog, Quasi, for seven years, Isolde Carmody tells **Joanna Marsden** that she continues to be impressed by the ways in which dogs can help humans

Isolde Carmody was born with low vision but says that despite her disability she always thought of herself as very independent. “When you have a condition from birth, it is just the way you experience the world and you get on with it. I think it is a lot more difficult for people who experience sight loss later in life to adapt emotionally and practically.”

When Isolde, then in her early twenties, decided to get a guide dog, she recalls feeling like a bit of “a sham artist” because of her level of mobility and independence. “I went down to the Irish Guide Dogs for the Blind (IGDB) training centre in Cork and it seemed like the other people around me were a lot more disabled. I remember expressing this feeling to one of the trainers and he explained to me that getting around represents only about 10 percent of the working life of a guide dog. It’s also about personal security, companionship and confidence.”

Once Isolde began working with her black labrador/retriever cross, Quasi, she began to understand what the trainer had meant. “Getting around with a dog is much less stressful than using a cane. It’s a more natural and organic way of moving. With a cane, you are constantly aware of the obstacles in your path, whereas a dog will lead you around the obstacles so that you are not even aware they exist. After I got Quasi, my confidence was really boosted way up.”

Isolde says that her mother, who also has a visual impairment, was so inspired by the difference that Quasi made to Isolde’s life that she decided to get a guide dog herself. “About two and a half years after I got Quasi, my mum got Quasi’s half-sister, Wilma. The improvement in her quality of life was immediate. She had been suffering with dizzy spells and headaches for a long time, and just three weeks after getting Wilma, she realised she didn’t need painkillers anymore. The symptoms had obviously been caused by the fact that she was constantly looking down at her feet while walking.”

In 1999, Isolde made the huge step of leaving her family home in Rathmines, Dublin, and moving to a rural area of Leitrim. “My family have lived in the same house for over 150 years and after being brought up right in the middle of the city I never imagined that I would leave. I came to Leitrim to work with a friend of mine in community arts and education, then I just fell in love with the place.”

As well as living with a visual impairment, Isolde has over the years struggled with depression and, more recently, a connective tissue disorder causing chronic joint pain. Eighteen months ago she took a break from her work to focus on her health, and is currently attending a



Isolde with Quasi. Photograph by Sandra McLoughlin

pain clinic in Sligo and adjusting to becoming a wheelchair user.

Isolde's loss of mobility has also impacted on her ability to work Quasi. "It is impossible to work Quasi while pushing my manual wheelchair. I'm hoping that a powered wheelchair might be the solution – I tried one out earlier this week and it seemed to work well. The pace was much closer to walking so Quasi went straight into work mode."

Isolde says that Quasi is adapting well to her reducing mobility, "One of the reasons I was matched with her originally is that she is incredibly adaptable. Even when I can't work her because my hands are pushing the chair, she still knows she is guiding me."

Although Quasi is a highly intelligent dog, Isolde explains that it would be difficult to re-train her to assist with key mobility-related tasks, like opening doors or picking items up. "At age nine, she is reaching the final quarter of her working life, and it wouldn't be fair to put her under the stress of re-training so close to retirement."

Consequently, Isolde has begun a project with IGDB to train a new guide dog who can work with her as a wheelchair user and also assist with certain tasks. The new dog will take up to two years to select and train. "This is the first time IGDB has been involved in training an assistance dog, so I'm hoping it will open up further possibilities of training dogs for wheelchair users both with and without visual impairments. At the moment, people have to go to the UK if they want an assistance dog and that is such a pity. IGDB already broke new ground in 2004 when they introduced a scheme where dogs were trained to assist autistic children."

IGDB has also collaborated with a UK trainer involved in groundbreaking cancer detection studies, and recently placed a dog that was unsuitable for work as a guide or autism assistance dog in Ireland into the programme. "This trainer is currently training cancer detection dogs and the results so far have been incredible. Initially, it looked as if the dogs were detecting 'false positives', but it has since been shown that they were simply picking up the illness ahead of laboratory tests. This is just another of the extraordinary ways in which dogs and humans can interact and help each other."

When Isolde eventually gets her new dog, Quasi will be retiring. "When a guide dog retires, owners are given a choice of whether to keep the dog or not. There is a long queue of people who would love to have a retired guide dog as they are so good with children and in therapeutic scenarios. However, I've decided to hang on to Quasi. She was my first guide dog and is very special. As I live on my own, it has always been just the two of us and I think she would find it hard to be separated. She whines when I go to the bathroom! We are very attached. The bond between owner and guide dog is unique – she is almost like another part of my body."



Isolde Carmody with Quasi and fellow visually-impaired artist, Kimberly Cowley, at the launch of a joint exhibition, 'Living in the Light', at the Dock Arts Centre, Carrick-on-Shannon. Photograph by David Knight

"...getting around represents only about 10 percent of the working life of a guide dog. It's also about personal security, companionship and confidence"

### GETTING A GUIDE DOG

#### Isolde explains how the process works....

Training a guide dog is a very long and expensive process, although the client only pays a nominal fee for the 'lease' of the dog (in my case it was 50p). It usually takes about two years for a dog to be fully trained. For the first year, the puppy lives with one of several volunteer families, known as 'puppy walkers', where it gets used to socialisation and house obedience. If the dog gets on well, it will progress onto the IGDB training centre where it is trained by a guide dog mobility instructor. During this period, the dog gets used to the harness and various commands. IGDB assesses the dog's strengths and weaknesses and cross-references this with the list of prospective clients. When they think they have a match, they invite the client for a practice session. If everyone decides to go ahead, the client goes on a three-week residential course to learn how to work with the dog. Follow-up visits are then arranged.

Nora with Samantha and Ruby



## Life with **dogs**



**Nora Alford has had dogs all her life. She can't think of a fond childhood memory not including a dog, so when she got her own home, she couldn't imagine not having a dog. She tells **Kiara Lynch** about her dogs, Samantha and Ruby**

**S**amantha and Ruby are the loves of Nora's life. Samantha is an eight-year-old Tibetan spaniel. Nora bought Samantha as a young puppy from a registered dealer. "She's very gentle and loving, and has gotten calmer as she's aged." Ruby is a one-year-old Jack Russell terrier who Nora took her in after a friend told her she was being sent to a rescue home. "Ruby is a lot younger than Samantha. She's loving as well, but much more excitable."

Nora readily admits the dogs are a big responsibility. She has to consider the dogs in everything she does. "If I'm bringing the dogs for a walk and have to do some shopping, I have to go somewhere I know I can leave the dogs tied outside." When she first got Ruby, she was a tad appre-

hensive about leaving them alone in the house together. "They get on very well with one another though. Depending on the weather, they either have free run of my fenced-in garden, or the house. And I haven't come home to find my house being torn apart – yet!"

Both the dogs are house-trained, but of course there is still the odd mess for Nora to clean up. "I use a pick-up stick, which allows me to put down and pick up paper towels from the ground, and I also have a mop with removable machine-washable heads." Nora thinks the dogs are well worth the effort. "I look on my dogs as my children. I get back ten times the effort I put in, as well as love, affection, and perhaps most importantly, friendship and loyalty. I love being woken up on a Saturday morning by the dogs jumping on me."

*"I look on my dogs as my children. I get back ten times the effort I put in, as well as love, affection, and perhaps most importantly, friendship and loyalty. I love being woken up on a Saturday morning by the dogs jumping on me"*

## MORE ABOUT DOGS

**These organisations can help you find out more about the wonderful ways in which dogs, and other animals, can support humans**

**Peata** (the Irish word for pet) is a voluntary association that provides a pet therapy service to caring institutions, promotes awareness of the benefits people derive from pets and furthers the understanding of the relationship between people and pets.

Peata Ltd.

5 Kenilworth Square, Dublin 6

Email: [info@peata.com](mailto:info@peata.com) Web: [www.peata.org](http://www.peata.org)

**Irish Guide Dogs for the Blind (IGDB)** provides services which bring mobility and independence to blind and visually impaired people as well as people with other disabilities. Services include guide dog training, long cane training, courses in independent living skills and child mobility programmes.

Assistance dogs are also provided to families of children with autism.

Irish Guide Dogs for the Blind

National Headquarters & Training Centre,  
Model Farm Road, Cork. Tel: 021 487 8200

Email: [info@guidedogs.ie](mailto:info@guidedogs.ie)

Web: [www.guidedogs.ie](http://www.guidedogs.ie)

**The Irish Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ISPICA)** works locally and nationally rescuing, rehabilitating and re-homing animals. The organisation's website is also a great source of information for anyone considering getting a pet.

ISPICA

National Animal Centre, Derryglogher Lodge  
Keenagh, County Longford. Tel: 043 250 35

Email: [info@ispca.ie](mailto:info@ispca.ie)

Web: [www.ispca.ie](http://www.ispca.ie)

**Support Dogs** is a UK charity dedicated to improving the quality of life for people with epilepsy (seizure alert) and people with disabilities (disability assistance) by training dogs to act as efficient and safe assistants. Dogs are trained to assist and support their owners with their specific disability.

Support Dogs

21 Jessops Riverside

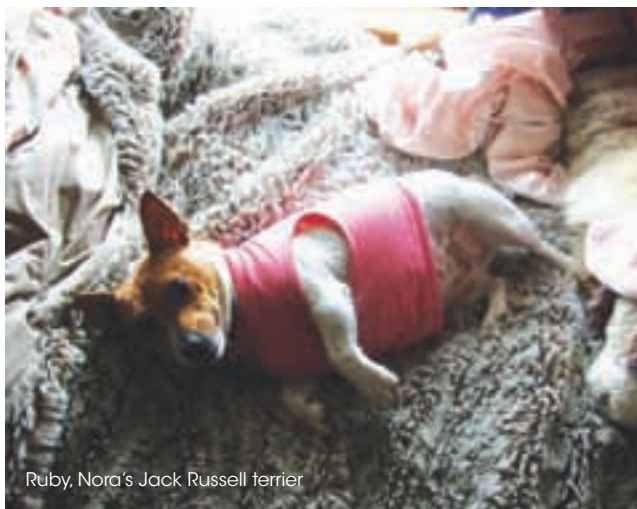
Brightside Lane, Sheffield S9 2RX

England

Tel: 0044 114 261 7800

Email: [supportdogs@btconnect.com](mailto:supportdogs@btconnect.com)

Web: [www.support-dogs.org.uk](http://www.support-dogs.org.uk)



Ruby, Nora's Jack Russell terrier

"Ever since I started living independently, I've had dogs. Over the years, I've had several dogs, including Suki the terrier, Judy the collie, Woolie the wirehaired fox terrier, and Jessie the King Charles spaniel. Each dog has been very special and brought me great joy."

This is part of the reason Nora can't understand why people give their dogs to a pound.

"A dog is for life, not just for Christmas – people don't seem to understand a dog is a huge commitment. They need time, care, love and attention." She has visited Ashton Dog Pound and DSPCA (Dublin Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals) in Rathfarnham. "It breaks my heart to see all those loving dogs with no homes – people who aren't willing to commit to a dog shouldn't be allowed to have them in the first place."

Nora says that both her dogs have got used to her power wheelchair. "I suppose they have never known me to be any other way so they are used to it. They never get caught up in my wheels and are always careful when they are jumping up that they don't scrape my legs – although I'm trying to teach Ruby not to jump up on me as much, as a simple cut on my skin can lead to serious infections."

"I'm very lucky because I've a few friends who live locally and if I need to bring one of the dogs to the vet, they bring them down for me." Nora takes the dogs' health very seriously, "I have a pet plan with Allianz which is like a VHI healthcare plan for pets. If one of the dogs gets ill, costs can spiral very quickly with various treatments, so I think it's well worth investing in a plan. "I've had dogs all my life and I've learnt that you have to think about their needs and ensure they always get the care they deserve."



Samantha, Nora's Tibetan spaniel

# INSPIRED giving



## EXERCISE YOUR IMAGINATION

No more boring physiotherapy! Instead, why not exercise your imagination along with your body while doing your daily stretches? When you swing your arm, why not be swinging a tennis racket in Wimbledon, or batting a home run in Yankee stadium? When you're bending and straightening your wrist, why not

paint the Taj Mahal? Or why not try boxing to improve your upper body strength?

Wii (pronounced 'we'), Nintendo's new home video game console, opens up a world of possibilities to people with limited mobility. The only requirement to play is your imagination. The Wii remote mimics your everyday motions and is the main Wii accessory. It is wireless and motion-sensitive – so no more, "Pause the game, the wire is stuck under my wheel!"

You can also play with anyone in the world, of any ability, at anytime of the day with Nintendo wi-fi. Nintendo also has a wide range of fun gaming accessories, such as Wii balance board, Wii speak, nunchuk, and virtual controller. Nintendo Wii is available in electrical stores nationwide including Smyths and Gamestop. Prices start at €260. For more information, visit [www.nintendo.co.uk](http://www.nintendo.co.uk)



**Make someone you care about smile by giving them a present with real thought behind it. Kiara Lynch suggests some novel gift ideas for every budget**

## PIMP YOUR WHEELCHAIR!

A set of 'flash wheels' will enable you to light up a room with your wheelchair as well as your personality! Flash wheels are wheelchair castor wheels with flashing light diodes. They are not only eye-catching but they also provide safety while mounting footpaths in the dark. They are priced at €24.90 with no batteries necessary. They are supplied as a pair, and are 100mm in diameter. *Rolli Specials, Comagh Business Park, Kilbeggan, Co Westmeath. Tel: 057 93 33111. Web: [www.rolli.ie](http://www.rolli.ie)*





## FASHION TAILORED FOR YOU

Since we profiled founder Louisa Summerfield in our autumn 2007 edition, we have been keeping an eye on the development of the 'Wheele Chix Chic' online shop, and the good news is that it just keeps getting better. From something casual like the 'Kora Dress' to something dressier such as the 'Midnight Suit', Wheelie Chix has a wide and varied range of clothes. All of the clothes have been designed with wheelchair users in mind, offering easy fastenings for those with coordination problems, and elasticised waists for comfort when sitting. Sizes range from 8-16 and they ship internationally using DHL. Prices for individual items range from £35-£170. Keep in mind all prices are in sterling.

Web: [www.wheelechix-chic.com](http://www.wheelechix-chic.com)



## KEEP YOUR TOES TOASTY ALL WINTER LONG

On those long, chilly, dark winter evenings why not keep the circulation going and your toes toasty with these heated 'Cosysole' slippers that provide comfort and warmth as you relax. Cosysole slippers come up to the ankle and are made of polar fleece and natural grain. Once heated in the microwave, they retain heat to keep the feet warm for hours. They are available in sizes small, medium, large, and X-large, and in burgundy and black. Prices vary, depending on size, from €99-€120.

*Murray's Medical Equipment,  
20-21 Talbot Street, Dublin 1. Tel: 01 866 3330.  
Email: [orders.homecare@murraysmedical.ie](mailto:orders.homecare@murraysmedical.ie)*



## NEW LIFE FOR OLD JEWELLERY

How often have you given up in frustration while trying to fasten a clasp on jewellery? Just because you haven't the eyesight of a hawk or excellent coordination, doesn't mean you don't want to wear necklaces or bracelets you can open and close yourself. I was delighted when a friend suggested that I adapt a favourite bracelet using a magnetic clasp. These clasps are visually unobtrusive and make it so much easier to wear your

favourite pieces. Depending on the type of jewellery it is, it may need to be restrung to be strong enough for the clasps. The clasps are available in silver or gold and come in three sizes – small, medium and large. Prices vary from €3-€15, depending on the size of clasp, and the amount of work needed to replace the existing clasp. The Yellow Brick Road, 8 Bachelors Walk, Dublin 1. Tel: 01 873 0177.

Web: [www.yellowbrickroad.ie](http://www.yellowbrickroad.ie)

**These are just ideas! Spokeout does not recommend any specific products or suppliers. We advise readers to shop around and, if appropriate, check with an OT to ensure a product is suitable for an individual's needs.**



Ann Marie and her partner, John Joe, with 'The Erris Person of the Year' award

# Positive **thinking**



**Ann Marie Healy believes that focusing on what she can do, and surrounding herself with positive people, enables her to achieve a great deal despite facing daily challenges as a result of her arthritis and chronic pain. **Joanna Marsden** reports**

**E**arlier this year, Ann Marie Healy from Belmullet in Co Mayo was awarded the title of 'The Erris Person of the Year', an honour which recognises an individual who has made an exceptional contribution to their local community. Ann Marie says she still hasn't found out who nominated her, but the award has meant a lot to her and her family. "I've had a disability most of my life but that hasn't stopped me from working with many voluntary organisations to improve society."

Ann Marie has been living with rheumatoid arthritis, a progressive inflammatory condition that causes damage to the joints, since she was five-years-old. "Over the years, I've had a lot of surgery – including hip, knee and elbow replacements. There is no cure for the condition but these days, if it is caught early, drugs can be quite preventative."

"When I was a child, arthritis was just a big word," recalls Ann Marie, "All I cared about was doing the same things that my school friends were doing, but it was hard. At school, I had difficulty writing and would get very tired."

Ann Marie says it helped immensely that her family were supportive without being over-protective. "My family knew if I needed assistance I would ask. I used to get up half an hour earlier because I wanted to be able to dress myself."

Ann Marie was one of an incredible fifteen children – nine boys and six girls. "When we were kids, we had great fun. There were only four bedrooms so we'd all be telling stories at night. I don't remember much fighting. No matter what we got at Christmas, we were happy!" The family remains very close, with many of her siblings still living near the family home.

Ann Marie says her family has always supported her in achieving her goals. "I think this is so important. I believe in consciously staying away from negative people who point out what you can't do. You benefit so much if you surround yourself with positive people and focus on what you can do."

Over the past fifteen years, Ann Marie has volunteered in many local organisations, including the Irish Wheelchair Association and the Mayo Centre for Independent Living.

"I wasn't in a position to work full time, so I made the decision to do part-time voluntary work."

She has also pursued several educational courses including eventually achieving her dream of going to college at Sligo Institute of Technology, where she studied

social science. "It was a big step because I had to live away from home but it felt right at the time. I loved the whole college scene, and the opportunity to meet new people. And I have to say the staff and lecturers there were very good at accommodating my requirements."

Ann Marie readily acknowledges that she has had several "bad patches", where she has found things particularly tough. For example, in her final year of college, she had to have extensive joint replacement surgery, which meant finishing her diploma from home. "Throughout my life, I've had to deal with chronic pain. I take morphine, and employ conscious strategies to keep my mind off the pain...listening to music, watching a video, generally keeping my mind active. If you don't keep busy, you become more aware of the pain and it takes over. You have to focus on the positive."

One of Ann Marie's favourite pastimes is "hassling politicians". "I lobby on issues such as access, transport, employment and healthcare. I have a few bees in my bonnet at present. I'm lobbying with Arthritis Ireland for the appointment of a rheumatologist in Mayo General Hospital, so that people like myself don't have to travel to Dublin all the time. I also believe that people with disabilities should be entitled to free transport to hospital if there is no accessible public transport available."

"Another issue is that the primary care model is not working at local level. For example, our local physiotherapist left a year and a half ago and still hasn't been replaced. It's so stupid because if a person with a disability or an elderly person ends up in hospital it costs the State much more."

Ann Marie is a passionate believer in the importance of personal assistance (PA) services. "I am able to live on my own with the support of a home help and a PA for 20 hours a week. Having a PA enabled me to get through college and to get involved in a lot more voluntary work. In 2005, myself and my colleague Pat from the Mayo Centre for Independent Living went to the European Parliament to try to encourage them to support greater funding for PA services to support independent living. But I find that if you bring an issue to their attention, some politicians are very slow to

act. At the end of the day, it all comes down to funding. And definitely things seem to be getting worse. I recently read about a student with a disability who had his PA hours cut. People just don't seem to get it – if you apply, you need the service."

"I do get angry sometimes but I channel my energy into writing letters to politicians. I constantly emphasise that people with disabilities want to live independently and to work – they don't want to be caught in a benefits trap! I

honestly think some of them are so daft that still think, 'Poor creature... she wouldn't be able to work.'"

Ann Marie strongly encourages other people with disabilities to get involved with voluntary work. "It might just be sitting on a committee where you can contribute on

access issues, or it may be volunteering in a day centre. It really is worthwhile. Sometimes all a person wants is someone to talk to. We all have problems to deal with and we don't like to burden our families."

It was while volunteering in IWA that Ann Marie met her partner, John Joe. "My older sister, Mary, taught arts and crafts classes in the IWA resource centre here and I went along to support her. She used to put me sitting beside John Joe. I wasn't really taking any notice. I thought 'he's just being friendly'. Then one day he offered to drop me home after the class, and we took it from there!"

A year and a half later, Ann Marie says she feels very lucky to have him. "He has a very kind and gentle personality. We can share things. The fact that he is here means a lot – you need someone to talk to."

Ann Marie says that John Joe, who has a mild form of MS, is an example of a really positive person. "He trusts me and believes I can do things. For example, he knows I'd love to learn how to drive so one day we went to the beach and he let me have a go in his car."

"I try to do what I can for him too. I believe he's a really good painter and always encourage him and give him as much emotional support as I can. It's so important to have dreams and goals in life. I may have a disability but I still have a house, a job and a fella. I believe one should never give up on one's goals; where there is a will, there is a way!"

**"I believe in consciously staying away from negative people who point out what you can't do"**



The entire Healy clan celebrate Ann Marie's award



# DON'T SAY THAT!



**Gary Allen says he has had enough of politically correct people telling him what he can or cannot say**

If I said 'pc' to you, what's the first thing that pops in to your head? Now some of you may have a picture of a computer in your heads, but, since I'm writing for a disability magazine, I'd wager that many of you would realise I was likely to be talking about 'political correctness'.

If we're to follow the widely accepted view, which these days means Wikipedia, then political correctness is about "language, ideas, policies, or behavior seen as seeking to minimise offense to gender, racial, cultural, disabled, aged or other identity groups".

Somewhere along the line, the concept has infiltrated every corner of society, to the point that when talking about disability, or even just talking to a person with a disability, the average person is afraid to open their mouth for fear of being 'un-pc'.

I'm not against the principle of political correctness from the perspective that no one likes to be offended. But to me it's just common sense and good manners not to use terms that have gone out of general use due to the fact that most of the known world realises they are offensive and/or out-dated. We all know some of these so they're not worth repeating.

My problem lies in people telling me what terms I should find offensive and what's okay to use. For example, in an email exchange among a group of people recently the term

'disabled sailing' was used. This was quickly pounced on as un-pc and it should be reworded 'sailing for the disabled'. I found it surprising to say the least that, as the disabled person in question here, my opinion wasn't sought. The term 'disabled sailing' was simply labeled as wrong, un-pc, end of story.

Of course, everyone is entitled to their opinion and I know some people are going to disagree utterly with me. Good, that's democracy at work!

I think the over-riding assumption here from the proponents of political correctness is that if something un-pc is used it will cause immediate and automatic offense.

Not so, I say!

Everyone has a choice of how to react to anything. If someone who hasn't been exposed to disability that much calls me 'handicapped' in a way that's obviously not designed to offend, then I'm not going to be offended.

I might not use the term myself but it's all about context. My dad might call my wheelchair a 'bike' from time to time but that doesn't mean I'll blow a fuse. He's my dad and that should speak for itself!

Also, I can't see the problem in using my disability as an identifier. For example, if I tell someone on the phone what my name is and they're struggling to put a face to the name, then I'll mention the wheelchair and more often than not, hey presto, they know exactly who they

are speaking to! I don't accept that it is un-pc to draw attention to my disability. That's just ignoring the 'elephant in the room' and nonsensical.

So, to summarise, political correctness will always be with us and that's a good thing, as long as we're sensible and understand that there are exceptions to every rule!

**"I don't accept that it is un-pc to draw attention to my disability. That's just ignoring the 'elephant in the room'"**



Catherine Branch

# An American in Dublin



**US flutist Catherine Branch talks to Robbie Cousins about a unique grant that has enabled her to travel the world exploring how music can change perceptions of disability, and also finds out what she thought of accessibility in Ireland**

**A**s I gain a wider perspective on the world, and see all the misunderstandings and obstacles that people with disabilities face, I feel a need to do what I can to raise awareness and create change. I believe that lack of access and understanding comes from a lack of exposure to disability rather than intentional neglect. With this in mind, I try to approach advocacy issues with respect and understanding rather than defensiveness.”

This is the attitude of young American flutist Catherine Branch, who spent time in Dublin between August and December as part of a year-long research fellowship during which she is investigating the use of the arts as a vehicle for increasing disability awareness.

“It is my belief that creative self-expression can play a significant role in re-defining perceptions of disability. I think it is key that disabled people find pride and strength in themselves, their bodies and their unique perspective. When that unique perspective is openly expressed through avenues like music, a sense of joy and empowerment is communicated. This can be a catalyst for positive change.”

Twenty-two-year-old Catherine grew up in a small town in Wisconsin, not far from Chicago. While growing up, her cerebral palsy made it difficult to participate in the sports

activities her peers enjoyed, and music soon became her outlet. “There was always music in my house. My father loved and played jazz, and while my mother never played an instrument, she nurtured my curiosity about music. My parents have always been very supportive of what grew into a true passion for music.” When she was seven-years-old Catherine began to study piano. A few years later she had a brief flirtation with the cello. “The cello turned out to be awkward for me to hold steady and difficult to carry to lessons. But when I was twelve my parents brought home a flute (much easier to carry!) and I fell in love.”

Catherine excelled at music and did very well academically. Four years ago, she began studying flute at Rice University’s Shepherd School of Music in Houston, Texas. “During my final year in high school, I visited and auditioned at universities and conservatories all around the US, but I found the atmosphere at Rice especially warm. My flute teacher has a colourful and brilliant teaching style that left me inspired from our first lesson. As the music school is part of a thriving university, I had the opportunity to study other subjects such as physics, philosophy and environmental science. I think this broad education is very important for a musician because if all you learn is

technique, where is the music going to come from and what will it all be about?”

Rice University has a disability coordinator whose job is to ensure that all students with a disability have what they need to function. “Before I got to campus the disability coordinator contacted me to make sure my room would have what I needed in terms of accessibility. When I arrived at my dormitory on the first day, the door had an automatic opener and the shower had been equipped with grab rails. I remember the first time I travelled to Houston to visit the campus; they even had a mobility scooter there for me to borrow during a campus tour! The university was so nurturing to all of us with access needs.”

Catherine’s passion for music and disability rights was stimulated during her studies. “While at Rice, I was always seeking ways to connect how I felt about music and how I felt about disability. I struggled with the societal perception of disability as negative. I don’t even like the word disability; it has such negative undertones. Disability has brought many beautiful things to my life, and yet there is such negative perception of it among the non-disabled population. I began to think about ways in which I could use my passion for music to raise awareness of what it is like to live with a disability.”

In her senior year, Catherine applied to The Thomas J Watson Fellowship and received a one-year grant for independent study and travel outside the USA. During the year, Catherine is looking at how different societies perceive disability and investigating how music can help overcome negative perceptions of disability. “I see music as a lens through which to view disability in a more positive light.”

When she first arrived in Dublin, Catherine, who uses a scooter, was shocked by the inaccessibility of the city centre. “I was shaken by the number of stores that had no wheelchair access. It is as if they don’t consider that people with disabilities could be part of their customer base. But worse was to come in the following weeks when she tried to come to grips with public transport. “Dublin Bus’s limited accessibility makes it impossible for those of us with limited mobility to plan our days. You just don’t know when the next bus, let alone accessible bus, will come along.”

Catherine is keen to point out that many bus drivers are aware of the problems with the service and do their best to support passengers with disabilities, “Several bus drivers have been very generous – one even left his route to take me home upon learning that the bus I’d hoped to connect to had a broken access ramp.”

Catherine plays at the graduation concert of Rice University



“Disability has brought many beautiful things to my life, and yet there is such negative perception of it among the non-disabled population”

Over the course of her stay in Ireland, Catherine has contacted Dublin Bus on several occasions to talk about her experiences. “I was told that all buses will be accessible in about three years. This seems a long time. In the States, accessibility is treated with greater urgency. You can’t take your time on these things. These fixable obstacles send a message of carelessness to people with disabilities that is painful and unacceptable. I don’t want to be perceived as a judgemental American looking for attention, or demanding things should be done in a particular way, but I do want to help raise awareness of the challenges facing people with disabilities in Ireland. Accessibility cannot be considered a luxury; it is a matter of civil rights.”

On the positive side, Catherine thinks Ireland is an incredible country. “Ireland is really beautiful. I’d never seen the sea until coming here! And I’ve felt such warmth from the people I’ve met. I’ve had the privilege of observing brilliant music classes taught in the CRC’s school, and have had some of my most wonderful days in Ireland teaching and playing music for students there. It has also been a great pleasure to become involved with a creative and forward-thinking organisation called Arts and Disability Ireland.”

After Dublin, Catherine plans to travel to London, where she’ll be meeting with the prominent disabled theatre company, Graeae. She’ll spend the latter half of her fellowship in Australia and New Zealand before heading to New York to begin her Master of Music degree. Eventually, she hopes to have a performing career and to teach music in a university setting. In the meantime, the young American looks forward to “getting her hands dirty” and contributing to a stronger awareness of disability and social equality. She concludes, “This year is teaching me to embrace my disability as something that has brought immeasurable joy to my life. It is my hope that through a life in music I’ll be able to communicate the beauty of life in an unconventional body.”

## CAREER PROFILE:

# PETER BEHAN



When 24-year-old Peter Behan left school, he had no idea what career path to follow and found it impossible to secure work. He tells **Kiara Lynch** how he slowly worked his way up, eventually becoming a Systems Administrator in IWA's IT Department

### Did you go straight into employment after completing your Leaving Certificate?

No, when I finished my Leaving Cert, I went on to do a secretarial course in my secondary school in Rathangan. But the course wasn't for me and I left after six months. Being an amputee, jobs that involved heavy labour were not an option. I tried to find a job in other sectors but found it impossible. I think this was mainly due to the fact that I lived in a small rural village, where there were very few jobs for anyone, able-bodied or disabled!

### Was IT always an area that interested you?

Not really – as a child, I had dreams of becoming a professional soccer player! I wasn't really into computers in school, I just kind of fell into the IT area. In 2001, my public health nurse told me about IWA and I joined as a member. At that stage, I was beginning to realise that a desk job was my best career option and, in 2002, I began an ECDL course at the IWA centre in Clane, Co Kildare.

### Describe your career path from then on?

While I was attending classes, I became very involved with IWA activities. In 2003, a Community Employment (CE) opening became available for a Programme Assistant in IWA Clane and I started working as an ECDL teacher there. This role gave me the hands-on experience that I needed and I realised I had a natural ability and interest in IT.

When my CE scheme came to an end in 2006, I found myself back on the job market. I had the same problems again – except this time some of the rejection letters stated I was over qualified! Then, in April 2007, Alan Grimes (IWA Systems Developer & Database Administrator) rang me and told me about an opening in IWA's IT department for a Systems Administrator working on the national database. I already had experience of the database from my time on the CE scheme, so I jumped at the chance. Two weeks later, I started work in Clane.

### Do you travel much for work?

It depends. Sometimes, I could be out of the office two days a week for a month, travelling to Sligo or Wexford to install new components or to train a new member of staff in

how to use the database. I enjoy the travel aspect of the job – I can't see myself going to Wexford Town on a whim, so it's nice to have a reason to go there. I'm dependent on public transport as I don't drive, and the poor inland rail network means I end up using buses most of the time.

### How do you commute to and from work?

I moved to Edenderry in Co Offaly shortly after I started in Clane, because the bus service to Clane is much better than from Rathangan. Although I don't have a problem physically accessing the bus, like everyone else depending on public transport, I find the service's inability to stick to timetables annoying.

### Any words of wisdom for job seekers out there?

Persist. Even though it's so easy to give up after letter upon letter of rejection, don't. Keep trying, and try to stay confident in yourself.



Peter Behan



# TAKING ACTION: GIVE ME LIGHT!

**When restaurant staff broke equality law by refusing to provide enough light for **Zehanne Kenny** to read the menu, she decided to take legal action**

## THE ISSUE

I am partially sighted and have always found it difficult to find restaurants with enough lighting for me to be able to read the menu. So I was delighted to find a place that seemed ideal, Sufi's Café, on St Stephen's Green in Dublin, and I soon became a regular customer. Sufi's had a dimmer switch arrangement which allowed a section of the seating area to be brightened up on request. Once I had explained to the management about my poor eyesight, they had been happy to oblige.

One night, all this changed. I went into Sufi's Café and asked for the lighting dimmer to be altered and was told, "No, other customers have been complaining". I responded: "Okay, that's fine, but could you just put a small lamp on the table for me please?" I was shocked by the response: "No we don't have lamps and we checked the legal position, we don't have to cater for your needs."

I explained that under the Equal Status Act, they did in fact have to do all that was reasonable to cater for my needs, or those of any disabled customer. The waiter responded with "Write to the owner", so I said, "I've a better idea – I'll bring the matter before the Equality Tribunal!"

## THE ACTION

I went to the Equality Tribunal website first, and that gave me information on the procedure I had to follow.

One month after setting the wheels in motion, Sufi's and I agreed to mediation. Although this mediation worked, Sufi's failed to keep to it, and this meant the case had to be assigned to an Equality Officer for judgement.

It takes up to three years before your case comes up. Finally, the date of the case arrived and I went to the Tribunal's offices, in Clonmel Street, accompanied by my advocate. No one from Sufi's turned up, but The Equality Officer decided to go ahead and hear my evidence. I then had to wait a few weeks for the judgement to arrive.

## THE OUTCOME

A few weeks later, a letter stating that the judgement was in my favour arrived – Sufi's were to pay me €250 and to ensure their staff received training in disability awareness.

However, many weeks passed (well over the 40 days allowed for the losing side to appeal the case) and nothing happened. I phoned the Tribunal and was told that they only make judgements, they don't enforce them.

It was never about money, it was the principle – Sufi's blatantly broke the law and thought nothing of it, so I felt I had to keep fighting.

I began the process of taking them to the circuit court. The day before I was due to meet a lawyer and make an affidavit, a letter arrived from the Equality Tribunal enclosing a cheque from Sufi's for €250.

## REFLECTIONS

I learnt that the Equality Tribunal is not fully effective. A body that cannot enforce judgements seems pretty limited. It's not enough to just take a case and let it run its course, you (we – the entire disabled community) need to be prepared to follow it through.

Rather than being discouraged, this entire episode has convinced me that work needs to be done by everyone who is dissatisfied with the 'inclusion in theory but exclusion in practice' ethos which prevails.

*Zehanne Kenny is a Research Assistant in the English Department at Trinity College, Dublin. She likes visiting museums, and spending time with her family.*

## USEFUL CONTACTS

The Equality Tribunal Tel: 01 477 4100

Web: [www.equalitytribunal.ie](http://www.equalitytribunal.ie)

Email: [info@equalitytribunal.ie](mailto:info@equalitytribunal.ie)



# Festive **FRUSTRATIONS**

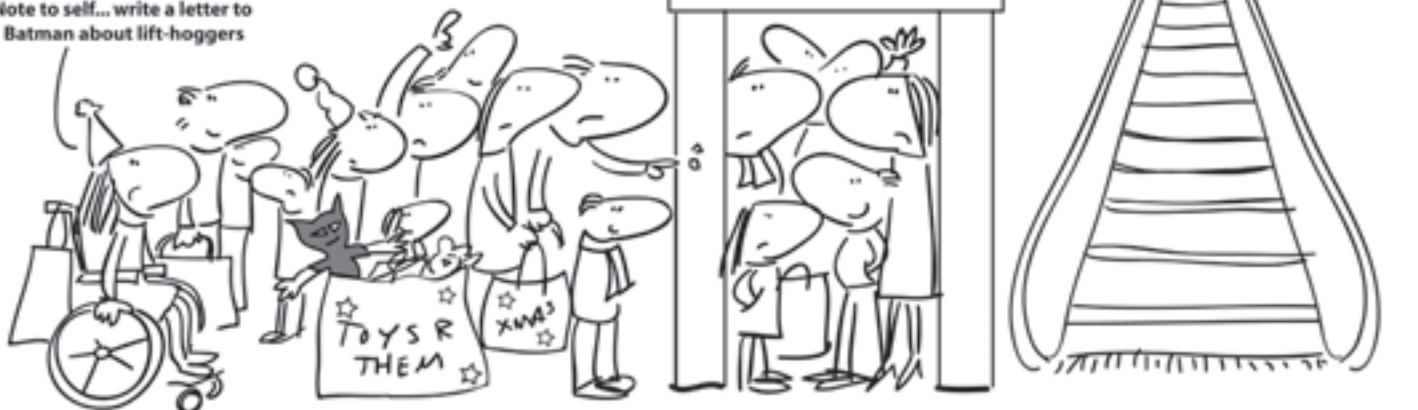
After a month of frenzied shopping, parties, decorating your home, and generally doing your utmost not to run over blow-up snowmen, Christmas is finally here...

CARTOONS BY JOHNNY CONNAUGHTON





Note to self... write a letter to Batman about lift-hoggers



# Warming the spirits

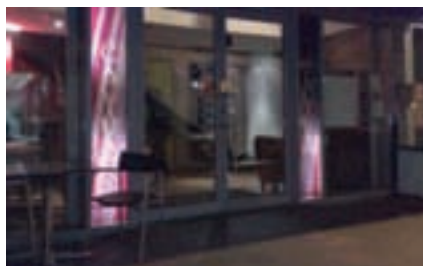


In the run up to Christmas, **Garreth Greene** suggests some cosy places in Dublin and Meath to enjoy a few drinks or a bite to eat with friends



**LA BUCCA RESTAURANT**  
Corballis Shopping Centre, Ratoath, Co Meath. Tel: 01 689 6040  
Web: [www.labucca.ie](http://www.labucca.ie)

I don't know about you, but sometimes restaurants intimidate me quite a bit. Yes, I know that's weird, but I think it's hard to stuff yourself in public! However, La Bucca in Ratoath renewed my faith in a restaurant where I could actually feel really comfortable. I'm not sure if this is due to the restaurant being completely accessible with a lift to the first floor, the CLEAN wheelchair toilet uncluttered by various cleaning equipment, or the really relaxing and spacious décor. Or it might have something to do with the mouth-watering pasta, pizza and grill menu! The staff were excellent and very courteous, and after finally finishing a gorgeous 12oz steak and not feeling too light in my wallet for it either, I was happily on my way to the pub! Five stars easily.



**CACTUS JACKS RESTAURANT**  
Millennium Walkway, Middle Abbey Street, Dublin 1.  
Tel: 01 874 6198

As any of my friends will tell you, I'm unhealthily obsessed with chilli con carne. I pretty much survived on it during my twenties so it was only right and proper to try out the real thing at Cactus Jacks Mexican Restaurant tucked away on the Millennium Walkway just off Middle Abbey Street. Firstly, I hit a bit of a fluke finding two wheelchair parking spaces on Great Strand Street, which left me about 10 seconds from the front door! After that, I was pleasantly surprised to pass a wheelchair toilet while being shown to our table. Staff were great and not intrusive and the food was delicious and very generously portioned. Price-wise it was okay and the servings were so big we ended up bringing some home, so don't snack too much beforehand if you decide to pop in here after a stressful Christmas shopping spree!



**MacTURCAILL'S PUB**  
15 Townsend Street, Dublin 2.  
Tel: 01 679 0981

After sweating through my chilli earlier on, we thought a nice cool drink was in order and decided to re-visit my old haunt, MacTurcaill's, just across from the fire station on the corner of Tara Street and Townsend Street. MacTurcaill's has always been a great spot on weekends, but can get packed to the brim, so get in and pick your spot early. Spacious enough with two bars, it does have a wheelchair toilet, but, be warned, it can be risky! No lock and a bit on the gritty side, it's the one bad point about this pub. But in my opinion the atmosphere more than makes up for the unfinished quality of the facilities. Definitely a weekend favourite.

*Garreth Greene runs [smallerworld.ie](http://smallerworld.ie), a website devoted to reviewing accessible venues and connecting people. Version 2 of the site has just been launched and aims to take reviews from members all over Ireland. The site has been totally redesigned, so check it out and get reviewing! [www.smallerworld.ie](http://www.smallerworld.ie)*

# Exploring New Zealand



Once ignored as Australia's smaller neighbour, New Zealand has developed into a popular tourist destination. **Gary Allen** shares the highlights of his recent visit, from wine tasting in the Marlborough region to sailing on an ex-Americas' Cup racing yacht in Auckland

**A** little while ago, my wife and I were invited to a wedding in New Zealand and we felt it was too good an opportunity to pass up. So, after much planning and saving, we hopped on the plane in Shannon.

If long haul flights aren't your thing, be warned: flights don't come much longer than Ireland to New Zealand! From Shannon, we headed to Heathrow, where we boarded a flight to Sydney which had one short stop off in Singapore. Once in Sydney, we had to catch another flight to Christchurch in New Zealand.

New Zealand is made up of two Islands, North Island and South Island. We flew into Christchurch which is mid way up South Island. Christchurch is called the 'Garden City' and it's not hard to see why. The river Avon flows through the city and the magnificent old buildings all combine to give Christchurch a very English feel.

We had booked our accommodation well in advance. As the exchange rate is so good, we could afford to splash out a small bit and stay in a nice hotel called 'The George'.

At The George, we found the disabled facilities to be quite good and I didn't have any problem negotiating my way around the place. In fact, the same could be said for Christchurch city in general.

While in Christchurch, we picked up our hire car which we would use for the remainder of our stay. We had not booked the car before leaving Ireland which meant we couldn't source a car with hand controls and had to manage with a standard hatchback. In hindsight, this is something we'll do differently in the future.

On leaving Christchurch, we travelled up the coast road towards Blenheim which is right on the tip of South Island. The road provides stunning views of the Pacific Ocean most of the way and passes by Kaikora which is reputedly one the best places in the southern hemisphere for whale-watching.

In Blenheim, we stayed in a motel called Brydan on Rose which I had found online. The hotel boasted that it had disabled facilities and, with a very generously-sized accessible bathroom, it met my needs more than adequately.

Blenheim is in the heart of the Marlborough wine region and was a real highlight of the trip. You can travel from winery to winery and they will usually let you sample their wares. It's also home to several fabulous restaurants.

Blenheim is only a short drive from Picton where you catch the ferry across the spectacular Cook Strait to Wellington in North Island. It's a passenger ferry so we had to leave our car behind, but we picked up an identical one at the other end.

We didn't stop in Wellington. Instead, we immediately headed north to Hawkes Bay where the wedding was being held. This is a beautiful area right on the ocean and another wine producing region. The main city is Napier which is quite an unusual spot. The city was levelled by an earthquake in 1931 and rebuilt in an Art Deco style.

Once the festivities of the wedding were over, we headed off again, this time to Lake Taupo. This area is famous for its volcanic activity and the first thing that hits you in the area is the smell of sulphur which can be quite strong. The best way to see the sights here is via a short helicopter trip. The company we used didn't flinch when I asked about lifting me into the helicopter and we were in the air in no time. Be warned though: there is lots of dipping and swerving on these flights. I've a strong stomach so I thought it was well worth it. Huka Falls is also a big attraction for anyone brave enough for white-water-rafting.

We spent the night in Lake Taupo at a nice hotel called The Bayview Wairiki and departed for Auckland, New Zealand's capital, the following morning. On arrival, we checked into Auckland's Sky City Grand Hotel. This was a fabulous hotel which would have been way beyond our budget were it not for a last minute internet deal.

Auckland is a large city with a beautiful harbour. Sailing is clearly very popular there and several ex-Americas Cup racing yachts are moored in the harbour, offering trips to tourists. When I asked whether they could they accommodate a wheelchair, they thought about it for a second and simply said, "Dunno, let's find out!" So, they lashed the wheelchair into the side of the boat and we headed off. It



Gary and his wife, Linda, enjoying a glass of the local wine at a restaurant called 'Herzog' in Blenheim

was mighty craic! When the boat heeled, everyone else would move to the high end of the boat, and I just got wet, but that was half the fun!

So, there you have it, New Zealand in a nutshell. There is a tonne more to see and do that we didn't get around to. Sounds like a ready-made excuse to go back to me!

## USEFUL CONTACTS

### Flights

[www.qantas.com.au](http://www.qantas.com.au)

### Visas

[www.visabureau.com/newzealand/tourist-visa.aspx](http://www.visabureau.com/newzealand/tourist-visa.aspx)

### Accessibility

[www.disabilitytravel.com/independent/new\\_zealand/index.html](http://www.disabilitytravel.com/independent/new_zealand/index.html)

### Accommodation

[www.innz.co.nz](http://www.innz.co.nz) (General)

[www.thegeorge.com](http://www.thegeorge.com) (Christchurch)

[www.brydan.co.nz](http://www.brydan.co.nz) (Blenheim)

[www.wairakei.co.nz](http://www.wairakei.co.nz) (Taupo)

[www.skycityauckland.co.nz](http://www.skycityauckland.co.nz) (Auckland)

### Things to do

[Christchurch Botanic Gardens](http://www.ccc.govt.nz/BotanicGardens)

[www.ccc.govt.nz/BotanicGardens](http://www.ccc.govt.nz/BotanicGardens)

[Marlborough Restaurants and Vineyards](http://www.destination.co.nz/marlborough/wine_&_food)

[www.destination.co.nz/marlborough/wine\\_&\\_food](http://www.destination.co.nz/marlborough/wine_&_food)

[Lake Taupo helicopter trips](http://www.helistar.co.nz)

[www.helistar.co.nz](http://www.helistar.co.nz)

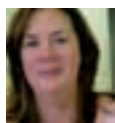
### Sailing

[www.sailingnz.co.nz/site/content.aspx?pagelid=2](http://www.sailingnz.co.nz/site/content.aspx?pagelid=2)



Gary takes a helicopter ride around Lake Taupo

# Holidaying **at home**



Fancy a break to kick-start the new year?

**Colette Molloy** suggests some unique places to stay...



## **CARLTON ATLANTIC COAST HOTEL**

**The Quay, Westport, Co Mayo. T: 098 290 00  
[www.atlanticcoasthotel.com](http://www.atlanticcoasthotel.com)**

The Carlton Atlantic Coast Hotel, in the shadow of Croagh Patrick, is located in a restored 18th century mill overlooking Clew Bay. A four star hotel, considered one of the finest in Westport, it is just 90 minutes drive from Galway and a 40 minute drive from Knock Airport.

There is level access to the hotel with lifts serving all four floors. There are two wheelchair accessible parking bays in front of the hotel. Located on all floors, the wheelchair accessible bedrooms are spacious with adequate room for transferring. The en suite bathrooms have a roll-in shower, fixed seat, and grab rails.

The hotel is located on the waterfront and the surrounding area is level and wheelchair accessible. Local taxi hire can be arranged at the hotel.

**Need to hire a hoist?** Contact JS Dobbs. Tel: 01 839 1071. Email: [www.jsdobbs.ie](http://www.jsdobbs.ie)



## **ARDMORE COUNTRY HOUSE**

**The Walk, Kinnitty, Birr, Co Offaly. T: 057 913 7009  
[www.kinnitty.com](http://www.kinnitty.com)**

Ardmore Country House, built in 1840 and beautifully restored maintaining many original features, is located in picturesque Kinnitty. Good food, turf fires, a peaceful relaxed atmosphere and comfortable accommodation are assured. The house is just three minutes drive from Kinnitty Castle and less than two hours' drive from the airports in Dublin, Shannon, Cork and the ferryport in Rosslare.

Approached by a gravelled driveway, there is plenty of space for parking. Visitors are advised that there is one step at the entrance of this historic building. There is adequate circulation space in the reception areas. The wheelchair accessible bedroom is at ground level, and is spacious with room for a hoist. The en suite bathroom has a roll-in shower, shower chair and grab rails.

Local attractions include Birr Castle Gardens and Lough Boora Nature Reserve.



## **WOODSIDE HOLIDAY HOMES**

**Courtown Harbour, Gorey, Co Wexford. T: 053 942 5858  
[www.woodside.ie](http://www.woodside.ie)**

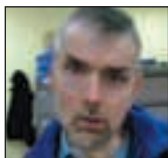
Woodside self-catering properties are spacious detached houses in a holiday home development. Courtown Harbour is a five minute drive from the busy market town of Gorey and 60 miles from Dublin.

There are three wheelchair accessible properties making them an ideal base for families or groups. Each house has private parking for two cars and there is ramped access to entrance. The houses are spacious and the wheelchair accessible bedroom is located on the ground floor. The spacious en suite has a shower, shower chair and grab rails. The gardens are level and there are two private patios.

Within a short stroll is the village of Courtown with many hotels, restaurants and pubs and also entertainment attractions for children. The harbour is a popular fishing location attracting many visitors and provides anchorage for yachts and leisure cruisers.

Somewhere to recommend? Contact [colette.molloy@iwa.ie](mailto:colette.molloy@iwa.ie) or 01 818 6485

# THE LOURDES STORY



Lourdes has been a popular destination with IWA members for many years. On the 150th anniversary of the apparitions, **John Graham** reminds us of the story behind it all and talks to IWA members about their experiences of Lourdes

Lourdes was originally a humble market town lying in the foothills of the Pyrenees, but this all changed in 1858 when a young girl claimed she experienced visions of Our Lady. Since then, the town has developed into one of the most popular locations of Christian pilgrimage, and every season it accommodates up to five million pilgrims and tourists.

I have been to Lourdes a few times and two memories stand out in my mind. The first is the candlelight procession in the evenings which stretched for miles. My second memory is the baths in Lourdes: on leaving them, your skin seems to dry instantly.

Many IWA members share my love of Lourdes. Sr Catherine Garry from Raheny, who attends the Clontarf Resource Centre, has been visiting Lourdes since the 1960s. Her most recent visit was in September with the Dublin Diocesan Pilgrimage. "Lourdes is a very spiritual and uplifting place. It's an opportunity to make friends, engage in fun and games and go shopping! And it's certainly not

just for older people – many young people visit Lourdes, particularly volunteers, and love it."

Another member of the Clontarf Resource Centre, Carol Walsh, who lives in Raheny, visited Lourdes in 1972 for the first time and has been there several times since. "There is something there calling you back and you feel a need to return. There is great friendship among the pilgrims and there are many volunteers available to help. It's a great feeling...magic, indescribable."

Sr Catherine Garry



Carol Walsh



## USEFUL CONTACTS

### Dublin Diocesan Pilgrimage:

Web: [www.lourdes.t73.nuahost.com](http://www.lourdes.t73.nuahost.com) Email: [info.lourdes@dublindiocese.ie](mailto:info.lourdes@dublindiocese.ie) Tel: 01 837 6820

**Irish Pilgrimage Trust:** Web: [www.ihcpt.com](http://www.ihcpt.com) Email: [info@ihcpt.cm](mailto:info@ihcpt.cm) Tel: 091 796 622

**Joe Walsh Tours:** Web: [www.joewalstours.ie](http://www.joewalstours.ie) Email: [pilgrimages@joewalstours.ie](mailto:pilgrimages@joewalstours.ie) Tel: 01 241 0802

## THE STORY BEHIND THE APPARITIONS...

Bernadette Soubirous was born on 7 January 1844 into a loving and devoted family. At the time of her birth her family was relatively prosperous; however, due to a series of misfortunes they were soon plunged into dire poverty. Despite their material privations, the children were brought up in a loving environment and accepted their lot without complaint. Bernadette suffered from ill health and missed the opportunity to get a proper schooling.

On Thursday 11th February 1858 Bernadette together with her sister Marie-Toinette and a friend Jeanne went to collect firewood at the foot of a hill called Massabielle, where there was a small cave or grotto where cattle often sheltered.

Marie-Toinette and Jeanne waded across the little stream in search of dead wood, leaving Bernadette hesitating because of the cold. Suddenly she heard what sounded like a strong wind and, as she looked towards the grotto, she noticed that the vegetation growing beneath the higher opening was tossing, though nothing else moved. She saw a figure in the opening – a Lady of small stature and incomparable beauty, surrounded by light and inclining her head as if inviting Bernadette to approach. On her right arm was a rosary with large white beads on a golden chain. Bernadette felt frightened, and yet she did not want to run away. She was fascinated, experiencing a mysterious attraction and quite naturally took out her rosary and started to recite the prayers. The vision lasted about a quarter of an hour and, as Bernadette finished the rosary prayers, quite suddenly the Lady disappeared.

This vision was to be the first of eighteen apparitions over the next few weeks, with many people in attendance out of curiosity, as by now the story of the Lady was a talking point in Lourdes.





# THE AUTOMATIC DEAL... OR NO DEAL!



**Niall McDonnell examines how changes to VRT/VAT relief have affected the price of automatic cars**

In the spring 2008 edition of Spokeout, I wrote an article about the then impending CO<sub>2</sub> Emissions Regulations, explaining why they were being introduced and considering their possible financial effects on motorists with disabilities. Under these new regulations, which came into effect in July, the basic principle is that the higher the CO<sub>2</sub> emissions a vehicle produces, the higher the VRT and road tax bracket it will fall under.

Over the past few weeks, I have been surveying a broad variety of vehicles in both their manual and automatic variants to see how the new regulations have affected their prices.

Unfortunately, I didn't like what I found. While it seems that many cars in their manual variants have dropped in price, the same car with an automatic gearbox has not done so, and in some cases it has gotten even more expensive.

Most of us on the VAT and VRT relief scheme drive automatics as they are by nature easier to adapt to our needs.

In fact, a large proportion of us are only licensed to drive in automatics as we passed our driving test in one and would not be insured to drive anything else. We have no choice but to purchase the more expensive automatic models, and do not have the option of changing to a greener and cheaper alternative like the rest of the general public.

As we all know, the Drivers and Passengers with Disabilities Tax Relief Scheme, is designed to alleviate some of the cost of purchasing a car, making it easier for those of us with disabilities to afford to get on the road. The existence of the scheme is itself recognition of how invaluable it can be for a

person with a disability to have access to their own transport. However, even though the rebates allow us a reduction in the cost of a vehicle, they have not changed since their inception in the mid-eighties. At that time, the rebates were more than adequate, but over time there has been a steady rise in the cost of cars, adaptations and petrol. The scheme itself was never index-linked and as such its usefulness has been somewhat eroded.

Prior to the CO<sub>2</sub> scheme being introduced, one might expect that adding an automatic gearbox would add approximately €800-€1,000 to the purchase cost of a small vehicle, €1,000-€1,400 for a mid-sized vehicle,

and €1,400-€1,600 for a large vehicle.

However, on initial inspection of the new figures, the aver-

**"We have no choice but to purchase the more expensive automatic models, and do not have the option of changing to a greener and cheaper alternative like the rest of the general public"**

age cost of adding an automatic gearbox seems to be a whopping €3,000!

It must be stressed that these price differences between manual/automatic are no fault of the manufacturers. The cost for them to produce the gearbox has not changed, just the VRT band that the vehicle is being put into.

There have been a couple of notable exceptions where there is only a small rise in price when adding the automatic gearbox. One from Renault, the Koleos, a mid-size Sport Utility Vehicle that only differs by €700 and, even more amazingly, the Golf Plus 1.4 TSI that only costs an extra €215 when fitted with the new DSG gearbox!

On the other end of the scale, one particular car was a massive €9,175 more expensive than its manual counterpart, and all this on a everyday large saloon car that is not even in the 'luxury' car market.

When Joe Public buys a car, he makes his decision based on many factors, and the average driver with a disability is no different. We look at our finances and see what will suit our budget. If our budget is limited, we will have fewer choices from the already limited range of vehicles available as automatics. In many cases, we also have additional limiting considerations we have to think about. Can I get in and out of the vehicle? Beyond the automatic gearbox, is it adaptable to my needs? How large is the driver's door? Can I get my chair in? Is the car the right height (if it's too high I won't be able to get it, if it's too low I won't be able to get back out)? Will I be able to stow away my chair if I am alone? Is there enough boot space for my chair if my friends are with me? The list is endless.

On that last point, the size of the car can be hugely important and this will definitely have a substantial effect on the emissions and therefore the price. This is also before many people have thought about the resale value of the vehicle. Even though they are more expensive when new, automatics often don't command the same resale value as their manual counterparts as they have higher running costs, higher road tax and less fuel efficiency.

Surely it's time that the Government changed the amount that can be rebated on the Drivers and Passengers with Disabilities Tax Relief Scheme?

**"The scheme itself was never index-linked and as such its usefulness has been somewhat eroded"**



Golf Plus



Interior of the Koleos

Unfortunately, in the current climate this seems very unlikely as they seem to only be interested in making cuts in spending and raising taxes. I would also be concerned that if they increased the rebate amount, they might undermine the value of the increase by also increasing the duration we have to keep our vehicles from two to three years. None of us would like to see that happen as it would be counterproductive. Perhaps if the Department of Finance was to take the time to examine the way the VRT/VAT changes have affected the affordability of automatic vehicles, as I have done here, they might begin to realise the increasing costs facing motorists with disabilities. The danger is that these spiralling costs will become so prohibitive that some people with disabilities will have no choice but to get off the road altogether.



Koleos

*Note: All of the cars researched for this article were base models that have exactly the same engine in both manual and automatic variants.*

# Choosing WALKING EQUIPMENT



Walking equipment can provide increased mobility and confidence. **Moira Fraser** from Assist Ireland explains the different type of walking aids available

**W**alking equipment can be used as part of a rehabilitation programme if you are recovering from an injury or operation, or as a long-term aid to mobility if you have permanent difficulty with walking.

Walking equipment may perform one or more functions including:

- ◆ Provision of greater stability and balance by providing a wider support base.
- ◆ Facilitating the walking pattern of the user in terms of speed and evenness of stride. The equipment may also help maintain an upright body posture.
- ◆ Weight redistribution – some of the weight carried through the legs when walking is transferred through the arms of the frame or stick as it is leant on for support. This may help reduce pain in the joints, muscles and ligaments in the lower limbs.

All of the above should help increase the confidence of the user in his/her walking ability.



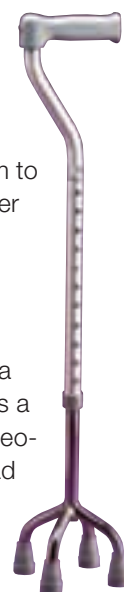
A household trolley with small castors

and stepped into. They are therefore used as a rehabilitation aid but, where possible, other types of equipment are recommended for long-term use.

Wheeled pulpit frames are basically the same as standard pulpit frames but instead of rubber feet, known as 'ferrules', they have small wheels on the front legs. It may be possible to exchange the ferrules on a standard, non-mobile frame for wheeled extensions. The small wheels make them more suitable for indoor use but, as the wheels do not swivel, they can be difficult to manoeuvre. Wheeled frames are useful for people who find it difficult to use a traditional frame as they make a more continuous walking pattern possible, and do not need to be lifted clear off the ground to move forwards.

Rollators are larger than traditional pulpit frames, can have two, three or four wheels and are suitable for outdoor use. Handgrip styles vary between models. For example frames may have two pushing handles, a horizontal bar or may have contoured grips. The design of the handle and the position of the extras such as baskets and seats will determine whether the frame is pushed in front or stepped into. If the frame is stepped into, it will offer the user more support.

Some household trolleys have been especially designed to provide a degree of walking support and may be appropriate to use if you are unsteady on your feet. They are designed for indoor use and their main advantage is that they enable items to be carried safely from room to room, and give the user security. Generally, larger wheels cope better than smaller wheels over higher thresholds and thick pile carpets.



Adjustable small-based quad stick

## TYPES OF WALKING EQUIPMENT

### Walking frames

Standard walking or pulpit frames are commonly known as zimmer frames and are mostly used indoors. The height of some models is fixed, on others it can be adjusted. Consider the size of the base if it is going to be used in a domestic setting, as some may be too wide to fit through small doorways. If door width is an issue, narrow frames are available, but bear in mind that they may not offer sufficient stability.

Although walking frames are useful because they provide a large area of support, they do not allow the user to walk using a flowing walking pattern. The user has to keep stopping and starting as the frame is picked up, moved forward

### Crutches

There are basically two styles of crutches: axilla (or underarm crutches) and elbow crutches. As a general rule, underarm crutches are used by people who must not weight bear through their bad leg and elbow crutches by those who can partially weight bear.

### Walking sticks

When using only one stick, it should be held in the opposite hand to the affected leg so that a

natural walking pattern and an upright posture can be maintained. The stick and the affected leg should be moved forwards together. If using more than one stick, professional advice should be sought for guidance on the most suitable pattern of use.

Walking sticks with a seat attached are particularly useful for people who need to rest periodically, for example for those with breathing difficulties or a heart condition. However, they are not recommended for people who need to take a lot of weight through the stick as the addition of a seat alters the balance of the stick. The height of many of these sticks cannot be adjusted and it is important to ensure that the overall height is appropriate for the individual user so he/she gains walking support from it. The seat size is often small and seat height varies between the models; the lower the seat the more difficult it is to stand up from. Most do not provide back support or armrests to push up from. Those with three or four legs provide a broader base of support.

## THINGS TO CONSIDER WHEN CHOOSING WALKING EQUIPMENT

### Height

When selecting a walking frame, it is very important to have the frame at the correct height for use. If the frame is too high, the person will find it difficult to straighten out his/her elbows sufficiently and will not take enough body weight through the arms. If the frame is too low, it will encourage the person to be bent over in a poor posture. However, a physiotherapist may deliberately set up a frame

### ADDING ACCESSORIES

- ◆ Rubber feet, also known as 'ferrules', should be fitted to all walking aids. Different sizes are available to fit different diameters of shaft. Remember, they must be replaced as soon as they show signs of excessive wear and tear.
- ◆ Comfort handgrips can be fitted over the top of standard walking sticks and crutches to make them more comfortable to hold. They may be made of fleece, foam, rubber, terry-towelling or gel.
- ◆ A bag, basket or tray can be attached to some walking frames. Care should be taken when using accessories that attach to the front of a walking aid as they will alter the balance of the device and may make it unstable. Net bags, apron style bags with pockets and wire baskets are available.

Some of the different shapes and sizes of ferrules available



at a low height for people who tend to fall backwards – this will encourage them to lean forwards. Always be measured for the height of your walking frame wearing appropriate and supportive footwear. To ensure that the arms are in the best position for weight bearing, the height of the handgrips should be at the level of the wrist bone, when the user's elbows are very slightly bent (at an angle of about 15° flexion).

It is also very important to have walking sticks, tripods and quadropods at the correct height for use. If the height is incorrect, then the support will not be adequate. The most effective method of ensuring this is to have people standing in their regular footwear with their hands by their sides. The measurement to take is the distance between the wrist bone and the ground. A variety of different shaped handles are available including crook handles, swan neck handles and contoured handles, each providing slightly different support and comfort.

### Base type

The more points of contact a walking device has with the ground, the more stable it will be. Also the wider the base of support, the more stable the frame will be.

All walking equipment without wheels should be fitted with rubber ferrules to maximise grip.

### Wheels/castors

A larger wheel or castor facilitates travel, especially over rough ground. Small solid wheels or castors are really only suitable for use indoors. Pneumatic wheels will require pumping up from time to time, but provide more suspension than solid rubber tyres. People with painful hands that may be aggravated by jarring may find this an advantage.

### Brakes

It is very important to ensure that a fully mobile frame has brakes and that they can be operated quickly and easily by the user, so that he/she always feels in control. The most common types are pressure brakes operated by downward pressure on a spring-loaded frame, cable brakes (similar to bicycle brakes) and locking brakes which enable the user to lock the brakes in the 'on' position so that the grip does not have to be continuously maintained. This safety feature is important when using a frame with a built-in seat.



Folding rollator



# THE GARDEN IN MID-WINTER



**Mid-winter sees your garden stripped bare and is the perfect time to re-evaluate the space says **Helen Rock****

It is now, in mid-winter, that gardens are at their most minimal. It is the best time to make plans and improvements. Leaves are down from deciduous trees and shrubs, many hardy perennials have gone underground to recover after their heroic efforts, and the architectural evergreens plants, the winter-flowering shrubs and sensational bark of certain acer and cherry trees, are left holding the fort.

Add to that the hard-landscaping – the paths, walls, gates, sheds, planting tubs, big pots and any permanent raised beds – and what you've got is the bare bones of your garden. Without the frill and froth of fleeting flowers and herbaceous leaves, it is the perfect time to stand back and take a good critical look at what lies in your domain.

Those people who think that nothing happens in the winter garden winter are missing out on a lot of excitement. When it's 'put to bed' around Hallowe'en, a garden doesn't just stay there sleeping tidily until Easter but is part of the non-stop cycle of the natural world. There is something

interesting, however understated, to investigate every day, not least the scent of winter box (*Sarcococca*) and *Viburnum*.

Beyond the urban sprawls, the Irish winter landscape is full of movement and colour. All the long grasses become plasma-coloured now, bleached and sere by winter's end and the heathers are a rich, lively reddish brown. Every tree bark is a different colour and all the branches make a haze of purplish blues when seen in a mass. The bare limbs of the dogwoods (*Cornus*) are purple, yellow and red, and nothing is cut back except by the hand of nature, when its time comes round.

Which brings us to the question of cutting things back, of what to leave and what to remove, and when to do it. Really, it's up to the individual gardener, but my advice is quite pragmatic: cut back only those things that you find a complete eyesore, or that do need specific pruning at this time, or to make room for planting something new. Then, just allow all the other things die back in their own good time, judiciously removing those that bother you while making sure to leave anything that might be valuable as winter food or cover for birds and other wildlife.

## **FROST BITE**

Plants growing in containers are immediately at risk when a sudden frost bites hard. Their straitjacketed roots are vul-

nerable, with only a shallow depth of soil and the sides of their pots between them and the probing fingers of a killer frost. Those whose hardiness is in doubt need to be wrapped with whatever you can provide, including hessian, straw, bracken, bubble-wrap, leaves, compost, newspapers or even the last grass clippings of the year.

If you are growing little alpine plants in raised sinks or stone troughs, don't be fooled into thinking they are immune to extremes of cold because they come from mountain homes, where snow covers them for much of the year. In their alpine habitats, they stretch their roots deep down between crevices in the rocks to reach their perfect, free-draining home turf.

Alpine troughs, no matter how brilliantly constructed to resemble alpine habitats, are shallow by comparison. These also need to be covered when frost is in the air, in case the top few inches of soil freezes and many of the little bulbs and their roots freeze solid and die.

Clay pots outside need to be raised off the ground, to stop them freezing and cracking. There is a nice range of terracotta pot feet available to put under them and these would make a good Christmas present for any gardener. A top dressing of grit or gravel gives pots a well finished look, acts as a mulch and stops messy splashes on plant leaves.

## VEGETABLE GROWING

Garlic and shallots need a spell of hard, cold weather to get them moving, followed by a long growing season. That means an early winter planting and midsummer harvest in most places. There's an old rule that says garlic should be planted on the shortest day of the year in December and harvested on the longest, in June.

Health-giving garlic is very hardy and does well in all but waterlogged ground. Ideal for raised beds and container culture, it asks only for a fertile, well-drained soil and a place in the sun. Enrich your growing medium in advance of planting, using compost or leafmould but not strong animal manures; no member of the onion family likes freshly manured ground (the same goes for snowdrops, incidentally). Then let the soil lie and relax for a few days before planting.

Shrivelled old garlic cloves just won't do as bulbs for planting. Instead, use the plumpest, juiciest single cloves or bulbs detached from the whole heads, preferably bought from a reputable dealer. Bury the cloves, with the pointed end up, about 4-6 inches deep and 9-12 inches apart in the

loosened soil. Sit back and wait for six months. Each garlic clove you plant should metamorphose into a whole new head of very tasty fresh garlic.

Shallots, indispensable to the French cook and increasingly popular in Ireland (try them roasted – skinned and left whole – around a free-range chicken), are along with leeks, probably the easiest onion to cultivate. They like much the

same conditions as garlic and look pretty growing in rows or used as edging along a path.

Shallots are usually grown from specially prepared bulbs sold as 'sets' (as are onions) rather than seed. If you can't find any in your local garden shop, try using those bought for cooking, but only firm ones. Harden them off first by spreading out in a cold, dry place for a few days before planting.

Using a trowel to avoid damaging them, insert the bulbs gently in ruffled soil, root end down and six inches apart, until only the tips of their noses are showing above ground.

## WINTER PRUNING

A frequently asked question at this time of year is "what do I prune now?" It's a big subject but we'll have a stab at it, beginning with apples, which are winter-pruned from late November and into December, when they have dropped all their leaves. This is usually just a matter of cleanly cutting out and burning any twiggy bits that have grown distorted during the summer. This is mostly caused by an infestation of Woolly Aphis so, in the interest of garden hygiene, it's best practice to burn all infected plant material.

Winter is a good time to prune grapevines, most honeysuckles, wisteria and any other deciduous climbers that need either curbing or encouraging (pruning can do both). Exceptions at this time are those climbers that flower in early to late spring, such as Clematis montana, C. alpina, the freckled winter-flowering Clematis cirrhosa and the clattery, evergreen and deliciously scented C. armandii, which along with C. Montana, is vigorous enough to cover a small house or climb to the top of a big tree.

It is too late now to hard-prune roses. Wait until spring, otherwise cutting will encourage them to produce soft new growth that could easily be browned or even melted by frost, and that means the job of pruning will have to be done all over again. However, do feel free to cut back any long stems that could whip around in winter gales, attacking passers-by and causing the plant to rock backwards and forwards, thus losing its foothold. You can also completely remove spent old rose stems and diseased leaves, which will help mitigate the spread of unsightly blackspot.

**"There's an old rule that says garlic should be planted on the shortest day of the year in December and harvested on the longest, in June"**



# ACCESSIBLE RECYCLING

Wheelchair accessible underground bring banks for glass recycling have been installed at Sean Walsh Park, Tallaght. The new underground bring banks look similar to a litter bin, however when glass is placed in the chute it drops into a bin below ground. The openings on the new underground bring banks are lower

than standard bring banks, offering clearer access to the chute for wheelchair users. To install these bins, South Dublin County Council received funding from the National Disability Strategy Fund.

Eamon Colleary, who was involved in the project to install accessible recycling bins



# DISABLED GO

Member Sean O'Kelly reviews the 'Disabled Go' website recently launched by Dublin City Council

Dublin City Council is continuing work on its online access guide for people with disabilities in Dublin City. This guide is available at [www.accessdublin.ie](http://www.accessdublin.ie) and is also part of an international website called [www.disabledgo.info](http://www.disabledgo.info)

On the Disabled Go site, the Dublin City guide appears alongside 55 other access guides to goods and services in cities across the UK.

The access guide rates the level of

accessibility of hotels, cinemas, restaurants, shops, pubs and other services in Dublin. There are categories from food to healthcare to leisure. I was particularly impressed by the healthcare section which includes loads of good places to access alternative therapies. And, after a night in town, it may be handy to know that there are thirteen fast food restaurants in Dublin 2 with accessible toilets!

The guide is a useful source of

information for tourists with disabilities as they can find out what level of accessibility to expect at particular venues. This guide will benefit people choosing to travel to Dublin, and Irish people looking to travel to cities and towns in the UK. Disabled Go are also looking to expand their access guides into other Irish cities.



## IWA Patrons' Monthly Draw winners

The winners of €800 each month for the past six months are:

May: Anne Carroll, Balbriggan, Co Dublin

June: Gaye White, Raheny, Dublin 5

July: Joseph Finn, Kenilworth Park, Dublin 6

August: Brendan Dolan, Tullamore, Co Offaly

September: Gaye White, Raheny, Dublin 5

October: Alan Gascoine, Skerries, Co Dublin

# DUBLIN TO BECOME most accessible city in world

Dublin is aiming to become the most accessible city in the world for people with disabilities by the end of the decade. This was the ambitious objective discussed recently at a conference called 'Access and the City'. At the event, Dublin City Council, the National Disability Authority, and the Centre for Excellence in Universal Design, discussed all aspects of accessibility, including infrastructure such as roads, footpaths and buildings and the use of technology. Speakers from Europe and the United States provided practical examples and guidance on how cities can become physically and virtually accessible.

To find out more about the 'Access Matters' campaign that is helping Dublin City Council deliver on its intent to be one of the world's most accessible cities, visit [www.accessdublin.ie](http://www.accessdublin.ie)

## Recommendation: ACCESSIBLE GYM

**Name:** National Aquatic Centre.

**Address:** Snugborough Road, Blanchardstown, Dublin 15.

**Years in operation:** Five years.

**Wheelchair parking:** 20 parking spaces, and two marked drop-off points at the main entrance.

**Toilets and changing areas:** There are several accessible toilets. Changing areas incorporate benches, showers, changing beds and hoists. Additional handrails are available in the complex.

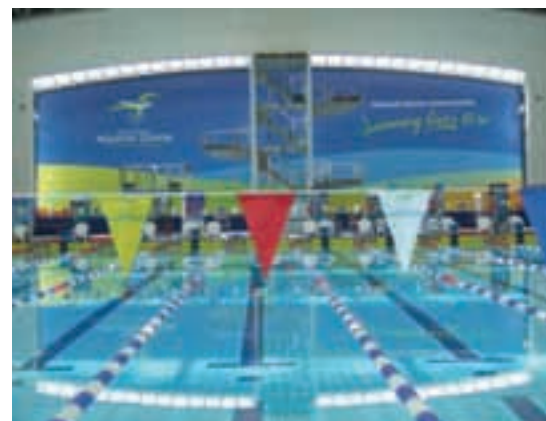
**Do you cater for people with physical disabilities in any of your programmes?** We have introduced new classes and programmes in our schedule which are inclusive of people with special needs.

**Do you have a lift?** Yes, all areas

accessible by stairs are also accessible by lift.

**What wheelchair accessible gym equipment do you have?** At the moment the steam room and sauna are fully wheelchair accessible. In our fixed weight section, we have an ergometer bike. We are currently in the tendering process for new gym equipment, and are seeking IFI (Inclusive Fitness Initiative) accredited equipment. We aim to become one of Ireland's premier dual access gyms.

**Are your staff proactive with disability issues?** Approximately 75 percent of our full time staff have received Disability Awareness Training. A full programme of mentoring and training is in place for our two disability officers. Evacuation chairs are in place in key locations throughout the building and training in their usage has been received by key staff.



## Funding opportunity for artists with disabilities

*"The Award opened up a whole new challenging and exciting chapter in my life..."*

The Arts and Disability Awards Ireland is a unique bursary programme for individual artists with disabilities living in Northern Ireland and ROI and working in any art form. The Awards aim to challenge and inspire creativity, experimentation and artistic

excellence. Each applicant can apply for a maximum of €6,200 or £5,000.

The programme is funded by the Arts Council of Northern Ireland and the Arts Council of Ireland/An Chomhairle Ealaíon and administered by the Arts and Disability Forum in Belfast. There are two application points each year, May and November. For further details, please contact: Arts and Disability Forum, Ground Floor, 109-113 Royal Avenue, Belfast, BT1 1FF. Tel: 048 9023 9450; Email: gillian@adf.ie; Web: www.adf.ie

Selection of award winners L-R: Margaret Mann, Pdraig Naughton, Christopher Lynch, Mo McDevitt and Maurice Orr



Sean Haughey TD with Conor Murray, Corporate Services Manager, Open Training College, at the launch of the BA in Applied Management

### APPLIED MANAGEMENT COURSE

The Open Training College delivers educational courses to the disability sector. Courses include a BA Degree in Applied Management, which aims to raise managerial standards of participants when interacting with prospective and existing employees with disabilities. For more information, please contact the college on tel: 01 298 8544; email: info.otc@smh.ie; web: www.opentrainingcollege.com

# TOP GUN

**Clay pigeon shooting can be an intimidating sport to take up if you have a disability, but once you get over your fears, it is exhilarating says [Niall McDonnell](#)**



Niall on a shoot at Abbeyfield Farm

**F**rom as far back as I can remember, I have been interested in shooting. Being from a country background, having a shotgun in the house was not an unusual thing, though it is not something I would have mentioned at school! One summer, however, when my friends were working with me on my dad's farm, my father brought the shotgun out and we each had a shot at a gallon paint can. We talked about it for the rest of the summer.

When I became old enough to get my own gun, I did so, and started clay pigeon shooting. Some of my friends got guns of their own and they would come to the shoots with me. It was a great sporting outlet for me considering I was never very gifted when it came to ball sports (I would have to say that I am as good at football now as I was before I had my accident).

My accident happened in 1992 and, as a result, all thoughts of shooting left my mind as I came to terms with being a wheelchair user. My friends continued to go shooting and tried, time after time, to get me involved. But I had many fears about whether I would be capable of doing it. Fear itself became more debilitating than my disability.

The turning point came when one of my father's friends came to me to tell me that my old gun club was having a shoot. He himself had been partially paralysed after an operation to remove a brain tumor, but he had, through great effort, made a full recovery. He explained that he had had his own fears when he returned to shooting but said he never regretted taking it up again and loved the sport.

Inspired by his story, I decided to face my fears and see if I would be able to shoot again. To my own amazement, I hit the first 10 out of 10! Needless to say, the great start was a bit of a flash in the pan, and I ended up finishing in the middle of the field. But I was hooked once more! Ever since, I have been shooting regularly with friends who are able bodied. I've often thought that it would be great to get to shoot with other wheelchair users. It really is a very exciting sport that requires a lot of skill and hand eye co-ordination.

If anyone out there would like to give it a go, I'd love to work with IWA sport to organise an event. There are a number of accessible venues around the country and a shoot, or several shoots, could be arranged for next spring/summer. We would cater for all levels of experience – from people who have never shot before to experienced shooters – and for varying levels of physical disability. There would be no need to own a gun as the venue would have guns available for hire. If anybody is interested, please contact either myself, Niall McDonnell, on [puddlesmcdonnell@eircom.net](mailto:puddlesmcdonnell@eircom.net) or Mark Barry in IWA Sports at [mark.barry@iwa.ie](mailto:mark.barry@iwa.ie) Who knows, you too might conquer your fears and become 'top gun'!

## USEFUL CONTACTS

Abbeyfield Farm, Country Pursuits, Richardstown, Clane, Co Kildare. Tel: 086 8164130  
Web: [www.abbeyfieldfarm.com](http://www.abbeyfieldfarm.com)

## ACHIEVEMENTS

### TEACH EMMANUEL SENSORY GARDEN

Two years ago service users at Teach Emmanuel, Athy, began work on a sensory garden at their centre in the grounds of St Vincent's Hospital. The work undertaken included the building of raised beds, the construction of a greenhouse and accessible working benches, along with the creation of a water feature and wildlife garden. The project was grant-aided by Kildare European Leader Teoranta (KELT) who supported a range of innovative community-based and private sector projects.



Pictured (l-r): Back row: Maurice Deegan (KELT), Lorraine Bracken, Suzanne Wallace (KELT), Carol Marnell (IWA Regional Manager), Carmel Fitzpatrick, Mary Vaughan, Brian Kelly (KELT) and Bertha Mulvey (KELT) Front row (l-r): Neil Collins, Bridie Murphy and Mary McCabe

## FUNDRAISERS

### ANGEL CALENDAR 2009

Ennis Resource Centre recently organised a colouring competition for national school children in Co Clare. Children were asked to draw colourful images of angels, and the winning entries were reproduced as part of the centre's 2009 fundraising calendar. Winners were presented with a prize at the launch of Angel Day in November.



### SAWDOCTOR LAUNCHES ANGEL CAMPAIGN IN TUAM

Tuam Resource and Outreach Centre got support from the lead-man of The Sawdoctors, Leo Moran, when they launched the Angel Campaign in early November.



Pictured (l-r): Leo Moran with Joe Gormally and Michael Coen

### SISTERS ARE DOING IT FOR IWA!

Carmel, Majella and Mary Gilligan, sisters of Joan Gilligan, a service user in Co Laois, took part in the recent Dublin City Marathon, raising funds for IWA. This is Majella and Mary's first marathon and Carmel's third. Carmel also intends to take part in the Rome 2010 and New York 2012 marathons to raise further funds for IWA.



Pictured: Carmel (standing) with (l-r) Majella, Joan and Mary

**EVENTS**

**NORTH EAST SPORTS PROJECT**

IWA's North East Sports Project is very grateful to State Street International (Ireland) Ltd for choosing its sports project as the recipient for this year's charity funding. The funding will be used to purchase sports equipment which can be shared amongst the IWA centres in the North East. The aim of the sports project is to encourage people of all ages and abilities living in the Louth, Meath, Cavan and Monaghan areas to become actively involved in physical activity, either at recreational or competitive level, and it is hoped that close on 300 people will benefit from participating.



Pictured accepting the cheque are (l-r): Margaret Whelan, Senior Associate, State Street International (Ireland); Shane Doyle, Community Affairs Officer, State Street International (Ireland); John Cooney, Physical Activity Assistant, IWA Sports Project; Frank McCourt, Administrator, IWA Sports Project; Emma Whelan, Assisted Living Coordinator, IWA Meath and Seamus Casey, Fundraising Officer, IWA North East

**TUAM MEMBERS MEET DANIEL O'DONNELL**

Members of the Tuam Resource Centre saw Daniel O'Donnell in concert in Castlebar in July 2008. Daniel took time to have a chat with all the fans and took requests before the concert.



Nora Quirke (left) and Sabrina Hopkins with Daniel O'Donnell

**LUCAN FISHING COMPETITION**

On 11th September 2008, Lucan Resource and Outreach Centre held its third annual fishing competition. IWA centres in Laois, Drogheda, Ardee, Clane and Longford participated with more than 60 competitors in total. Despite the awful weather, a great day was had with many fish caught. Teams from Lucan were delighted to take first and second places, with Longford taking the third prize.



Pictured (l-r): Jean Tate, Liam Tate, Carol Marnell and John Dore with 'the cup'

**LIMERICK SERVICE USERS TAKE A BREAK IN CUISLE**

Limerick junior service users spent a very enjoyable break in Cuisle in August. Activities included a visit to the Athenry Heritage Centre, where visitors dressed in medieval costume and took part in an archery competition. A shopping trip to Athlone was also enjoyed by many, whilst others had a great time on a boat ride on the River Shannon.



Pictured (l-r): Tommy Quill and Marie Murphy dressed in costume



Pictured (l-r): Shane O'Gorman and Ray Ryan practicing archery

# Bookish delights

**Books make great gifts and are best enjoyed in the quiet days between Christmas and the New Year. And, if you are inspired to read these books yourself, we have three copies of each to give-away**

## BIRDWATCHING IN IRELAND WITH ERIC DEMPSEY

**A comprehensive guide by expert bird-watcher Eric Dempsey**



Have you ever wondered why there are more birds in your garden at certain times of the year, and where they go the rest of the year? *Birdwatching in Ireland with Eric Dempsey* provides both

beginners and experienced bird-watchers with an understanding of Ireland's birds, their behaviour and migration patterns.

Divided into two sections, part one covers bird-watching as well as explaining migration patterns, survival methods and why Ireland has lost some species but gained others. Part two focuses on bird identification and explains techniques for identifying birds you may encounter, from the homely garden robin, to owls, warblers and gulls.

Published by Gill & Macmillan  
€24.99/£19.99

## A HISTORY OF IRELAND IN 250 EPISODES

**A momentous survey of Ireland's history by Jonathan Bardon**

Stretching from the Ice Age to the peace settlement in Northern Ireland, *A History of Ireland in 250 Episodes* provides an accessible yet detailed overview of the history of Ireland.

The book is based on a series of over 200 short radio programmes commissioned for the BBC in 2005. Each 'episode' or story is sufficiently self-contained to allow the reader to open a chapter at random and delve into any of the fascinating historical accounts. Alternatively, the episodes read in sequence provide a complete narrative history of Ireland.

Published by Gill & Macmillan  
€29.99/£22.99



## THE IRISH TIMES BOOK OF THE YEAR 2008

**The year as seen through The Irish Times writers and photographers**



*The Irish Times Book of the Year 2008* edited by Peter Murtagh is a collection of the best stories

from September 2007 to September 2008, accompanied by stunning photography.

2008 has been an eventful year –

from the departure of Bertie to the murder trials of Siobhán Kearney and Meg Walsh to the escapades of rogue solicitor Michael Lynn and the highly contentious Lisbon Treaty.

This book offers 298 pages of engrossing stories and images. Spokeout Editorial Assistant Kiara Lynch is a particular fan "I don't like reading papers because I find them physically awkward to manage, so this book is the ideal solution."

Published by Gill & Macmillan €26.99

## OVERHEARD IN DUBLIN

**Endless entertainment provided by ordinary Dubliners**

*Overheard in Dublin* is a compilation of stories overheard in Dublin. On the back of the book, it tactfully says that

the stories and turns of phrase depict "the unique approach to language and intelligence that only Irish people have, particularly Dubliners." For example: *Heard a girl answer her phone in the waiting room of Holles Street Maternity Hospital: "Well, tell me, am I an Auntie or an Uncle?"*

This book will make you chuckle. It's well worth the read – if only to help you make sense of the things you hear on Dublin public transport!

Published by Gill & Macmillan €6.99



To enter a draw for a copy of any of these books, write the name of the book you would like, together with your name and address, and send it on a postcard to Spokeout, Irish Wheelchair Association, Blackheath Drive, Clontarf, Dublin 3.

# Crossword

To be in with a chance of winning one of three annual subscriptions to *Prudence* magazine, simply send your completed crossword to: Spokeout Crossword, Irish Wheelchair Association, Blackheath Drive, Clontarf, Dublin 3. Correct entries will be entered into a draw on Friday, 30th January 2009 and three winners drawn.

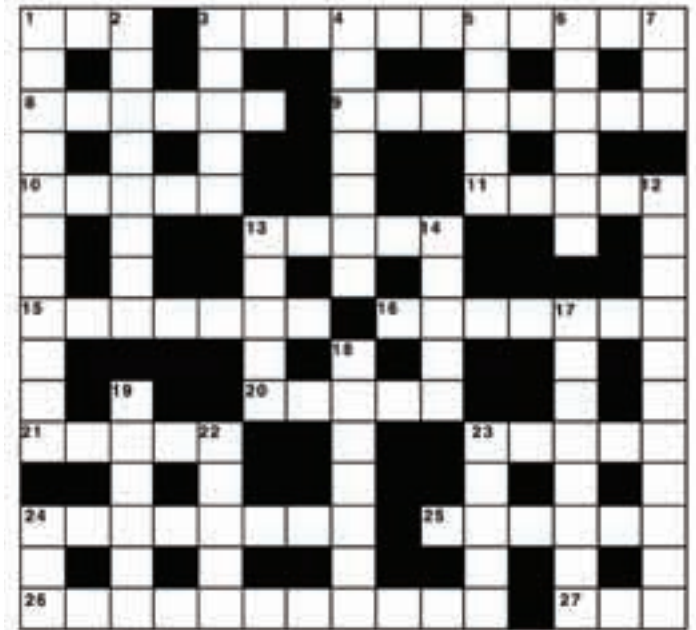
Crossword No. 2 by Gordius

## Across

1. Meadow. (3)
3. Seasonal song to make Glen sell jib. (6,5)
8. Collect. (6)
9. Reused; reprocessed into reusable form. (8)
10. They can be performed by an assistive pet. (5)
11. Requirements. (5)
13. See 5 down.
15. Cutting tooth. (7)
16. Superb female performer. (7)
20. Retrieve. (5)
21. Pays attention to. (5)
23. A kind of nut. (5)
24. See 2 down.
25. Engaging in espionage. (6)
26. The first date on the calendar, seen as weary deny confusion. (3,5,3)
27. Obtained. (3)

## Down

1. As darkness falls, this can be operated by an assistive pet. (5,6)
- 2 and 24 across. Such youngsters can benefit greatly from interaction with suitably-trained pets. (8,8)
3. Taunts. (5)
4. The era of clothing? Rubbish! (7)
- 5 and 13 down. How to be an angel for the IWA! (3,2,5)
6. The flowers of fifty-one falsehoods. (6)
7. Unhappy. (3)
12. Carol of peace and quiet. (6,5)
13. Reserved, distant. (5)
14. This tree makes the learner coy. (5)
17. Santa should fill this presently! (8)



- (8)
18. The Saint phones part of the orchestra. (7)
19. Evaluative report. (6)
22. Move sideways. (5)
23. Cuddly young canine. (5)
24. Metal container. (3)

## COMPETITION WINNERS FOR AUTUMN 2008

Crossword:  
George Chambers, Knocklyon, Dublin 16; Dominic Byrne, Ballyboughal, Co Dublin; Michael Doyle, St Mullin's, Co Carlow  
Harvey's Point weekend break:  
Bridget Gardiner, Nenagh, Co Tipperary

As a supporter of the Irish Wheelchair Association, you will know just how much we value your loyalty. There are numerous ways you can support us, one of those being through the **IWA Credit Card**. In conjunction with MBNA, we are now offering a unique IWA branded Credit Card.

**Show your pride and support by applying for one today.**



### The IWA Credit Card has a host of exciting features and benefits, which include:

- Excellent interest rates- 1.9% APR on balance transfers for the first 6 months the account is opened, 13.9% APR (variable) on card purchases
- 24 hour Customer Satisfaction line
- Exclusive Credit Card cheque book – you can use this highly convenient service to pay bills or other large transactions

For each account that is opened, a contribution is made to the Irish Wheelchair Association on your behalf, we also receive a percentage back on retail transactions made with the IWA Credit Card.

The IWA Visa Credit Card is issued by MBNA Europe Bank Limited, which is authorised and regulated by the UK Financial Services Authority, and is registered as a branch in Ireland under number 903873 at Dublin Road, Carrick-on-Shannon, Co. Leitrim. Incorporated in England and Wales under number 2783251. Registered Office: Stansfield House, Chester Business Park, Chester CH4 9QQ. Credit is available, subject to status, to Irish residents aged 18 years or over. Balances cannot be transferred from another MBNA account. We will monitor and/or record some telephone calls. There is a stamp duty charged by the Government on all Irish credit card accounts.

**To apply for the IWA Credit Card please call: 1800 409 510 and quote reference no: 32A2Z44V**

## **YOUR VIEWS** Got something to say? Write to us at Spokeout, Irish Wheelchair Association, Blackheath Drive, Clontarf, Dublin 3

### **DISASTROUS DART JOURNEY**

Dear Editor

Last Saturday a friend and I were invited to a dinner dance in Tallaght and decided to get the DART to Connolly Station, and then take the Luas. We arrived at Killester DART station at 7pm to find the station was unmanned. Fortunately, my friend managed to locate the ramp and put it in place so that I could board the train. When we arrived at Connolly Station, my friend got off the train to find a porter and ramp. But, alas, the whole process took too long and the train took off with me on board. I ended up in Pearse Street Station where two fellow passengers kindly lifted me off. I then had to go down in a lift and up a long ramp so that I could board a train back to Connolly.

Surely, in this day and age, there should be proper wheelchair accessible trains? There must be some system where an automated ramp comes out from the carriage, similar to that used on Dublin Bus's low floor buses. Failing this, a button in each carriage to alert the driver that a wheelchair user needs to disembark is a necessity. I am frustrated with Iarnród Éireann and want to know whether anything is going to be done. Why are the stations not manned at such busy hours and why is no

help number advertised for wheelchair users who want to ensure a ramp is ready at their destination? What is one to do? Are they trying to stop wheelchair users using the DART? Yours sincerely,

Nora Alford, Killester, Dublin 5

### **ACCESS IN LONGFORD**

Dear Editor

I agree with Mr Paddy Doyle's article in the summer 2008 Spokeout regarding wheelchair access in Longford. In the year 2008, the level of access is deplorable, even in new shops. Often the ones we do manage to get into are all cramped up with boxes and other obstacles. We can't buy what we want unless a member of staff goes looking for us, so we don't bother, as it is not worth the hassle. Instead, as with many things, we do without. If everyone spoke out like Paddy we might have a better life for disabled people in this and other counties throughout Ireland. Yours sincerely

Joe Donlon, Longford Town

**The views expressed on this page do not necessarily represent the views of IWA**

## small ads

*If you have an item for sale, a holiday contact or a personal advert, please send approx 25 words to Small ads, Spokeout, IWA, Blackheath Drive, Clontarf, Dublin 3. Small ads are free-of-charge to members. Adverts for accessible holiday accommodation are €20.00 (cheques or postal orders payable to IWA Ltd).*

#### **Cars and accessories**

**Fiat Scudo JTDsx 2 litre diesel 2004** Lowered floor, inertia reel tie-downs, space for five passengers and wheelchair user, 25,000 miles, NCT 2010, excellent condition. €17,000 ono. Tel: 042 932 7873

**Kia Sedona TS 2007** Top of the range, five seater plus wheelchair passenger, automatic, 15,000 miles. €35,000 (inclusive of VRT/VAT which is refundable). Tel: 086 373 1524

#### **Wheelchairs, scooters and adaptive equipment**

**Freerider Mayfair power scooter** Excellent condition, hardly used.

Cost €3,000, best offer. Tel: 01 842 0779

**Freerider Knightsbridge three-wheel scooter** Very low mileage, rain cover, charger, spare key and manual. Cost €3,400, sell €1,200. Can deliver in Dublin area. Tel: 01 868 5227

**Portable ramp** Free to good home. Tel: 868 5227

**Invacare Lynx mobility scooter** Unused. Cost €1,800, sell €1,600. Tel: 01 295 5474

**Swivel seat** Adapted for Kangoo car. €250. Tel: 01 457 1955

**Scoota Mart electric wheelchair** Excellent condition. €650. Tel: 01 288 1476

**Rascal electric mobility scooter 329LE** Excellent condition, two unused 12v batteries. €1,750. Tel: 087 629 3004 (Dublin)

**Stair lift** Four steps, perfect condition. Free to good home. Tel: 01 269 7823

**Ultralite 765 power wheelchair** Excellent condition, as new. Cost €2,500. Best offer. Tel: 086 253 3435

**Ramp** Never used. Cost €300. Best offer. Tel: 086 253 3435