

SPOKE OUT



IWA Personal Assistants

SPOTLIGHT ON.

IWA stages demo at Leinster House

OTHER FEATURES:
Basketball friendships, Housing Conference, Casey's Paralympic ambitions plus lots more

SPOKEOUT December 2025

Hello readers, welcome to our December edition.

Can you believe we've made it to the final month of the year? December always brings a special mix of cosy moments, holiday energy, and that little spark of excitement for what's ahead.

Whether you're powering through your to-do list, enjoying time with loved ones, or just soaking up the season at your own pace, we're glad you're here with us.

We are aware that many of our members are facing financial hardships this winter as a result of a very disappointing Budget. Please know that our Advocacy Team, with members' support, are campaigning vigorously for an Emergency Winter payment and were part of a Disability Coalition Group who staged a protest outside Leinster House on Tuesday last. You can read all about it inside.

The Christmas season reminds us of the importance of family and friendship and we are delighted to showcase the strong and meaningful friendships shared by our younger members at Killester Tigers Junior Club.

In this edition we are also very proud to shine a spotlight on IWA's incredible personal assistants who go above and beyond to make it a special Christmas for members.

There's all this and lots more to enjoy.

Finally from all of us here, we wish a happy and peaceful Christmas to all who celebrate, and we look forward to sharing more with you in the new year.

Marie



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Spotlight on IWA's Personal Assistants

Celebrating our PAs who work hard to make Christmas happen

On Christmas day, while many of us are devouring chocolates for breakfast it's good to remember IWA's Assisted Living Services PAs, hundreds of whom will be still hard at work.

Our PAs will be zipping from house to house faster than Santa, visiting members and making sure their Christmas Day happens the way that they want.

In Inishowen, north Donegal Molly McGlinchey and Majella Grant have worked many Christmases together for over 15 years as part of a team that works across the entire Inishowen Peninsula up to the very top of Ireland, Malin Head.

Because Molly and Majella are delivering essential personal assistant services for members, even on Christmas Day.



L-R PAs Majella Grant and Molly McGlinchey have worked many Christmases together in Inishowen for over 15 years.

"Our team is always out on Christmas," explains Molly McGlinchey. "Everybody has the support and the love of family on Christmas Day. But certainly, we're in there on a Christmas morning. "We keep it light, we keep it bright," is Molly's philosophy to make sure every member gets what they need. The community in Inishowen is very close, but Christmas can be an emotional time, so Molly explains the team are conscious during November and December, discussing Christmas plans to make sure everyone has company and no one is isolated or alone for the day.

While this year's Christmas rotas are being set, Thursdays are Molly and Majella's day off, so in theory, they won't be scheduled to work this year, as Christmas falls on a Thursday. But the sense of team and camaraderie with colleagues who have small children means they will likely be back on the road at some stage over Christmas Day. "It's no biggie" laughs Molly, "but I have a feeling we might....!"

"When I started off, my kids would have been a lot younger, and it was hard," says Majella Grant. "Because everybody was up in the morning and then you were heading out, and you're missing the important bit. So it was just something that I didn't like. But see, once you got out, everybody was just so appreciative that you were coming out. It was just lovely. It was sad to be missing out, but then when you were needed, it made up for it, and you still had time for family," says Majella.

Christmas Day can be a Long Day for Some

Many members will spend Christmas with family, but Deirdre Ryan, who is based in Kilkenny, explains that some members cannot travel to family for health reasons or have family overseas, so Christmas Day can be a long day for some people.

For the past two years, Deirdre has cooked Christmas morning breakfast with a member living nearby. However, later in the evening, Deirdre also pops in to visit a couple of members she knows who are not scheduled for a visit but would appreciate one anyway. "I've a little dog, Daisy, and she's lovely. I bring her with me, and they love her. It's a nice little boost," says Deirdre.

Deirdre is happy to think of members on Christmas day and feels it's a natural part of the flexibility she enjoys in her work. Deirdre has medical appointments with her own father at the moment and says she has great support from the members she visits and her IWA team. "The members I work with are brilliant, and they are always so flexible," she says. Deirdre is happy to pop in with Daisy for a chat on Christmas evening, even though she is not working.



PA Deirdre Ryan, based in Kilkenny, pictured with her poodle Daisy.

"People Really Appreciate That You Are Around"- PA Alyena

Alyena Rogozhkina has been working for IWA in North Dublin for two years. Alyena's religion doesn't celebrate Christmas, so she enjoys supporting members and enjoys the build-up to Christmas without any of the stress. "I will work this Christmas and the previous 2 years. I really like it. There is no traffic that day, and everything goes so easily, no stress, no panic, and you feel like you own the world," she says.



“Lots of colleagues spend the time with their families, and people take holidays, so there are always requests for extra help, which I can cover,” says Aleyna. “I feel since I’m available, it takes off the pressure and helps make the day more special for people without any stress. People really appreciate that you’re around, and if you feel very appreciated, it makes you happy as well,” she says.

“The best anyone can be is of use...”

Andre Neubert has been with IWA for about 20 years and works across Dublin. He is always busy and the days over Christmas are no different. “I need to pay the bills,” he jokes. “The way I look at it, the best anyone can be is of use. You’re being of use to people to afford them the possibility, the opportunity to partake as much in society as they want to.”

“Christmas time, it's no different to any other time...”

Maureen McEvoy from Kilkenny supports a member on Christmas morning getting to mass with his family. “It doesn’t affect my day because my kids are grown up now. We get ready for mass- it’s all very Christmassy, it makes my day every year,” she says.

Maureen cheerfully puts things in perspective, “Christmas time, it’s no different to any other time,” she says. “We still do the same jobs. Just because it’s Christmas Day, it’s still a Thursday, and people need us,” she says.

PA Alyena Rogozhkina, working in north Dublin, enjoys supporting members and enjoys the build up to Christmas without any of the stress.



Andre Neubert has been a PA with IWA for about 20 years and works across Dublin.



PA Maureen McEvoy, based in Kilkenny, pictured with IWA members on a recent social night out.

Advocacy

Emergency Winter Payment Now: IWA members take their message to Leinster House



Irish Wheelchair Association (IWA) members braved Storm Bram on Tuesday 9th December and gathered outside Leinster House for a demonstration demanding that the government introduce an emergency winter payment for people with disabilities.

IWA members were joined by Disability Federation of Ireland (DFI) and Access for All Ireland for the powerful demonstration, which was organised following a disastrous Budget that left people with disabilities up to €1,400 worse off.

The protest was organised after the government ignored weeks of criticism from people with disabilities, many of whom were forced to share their personal stories of struggle in a desperate plea for compassion and equality.



Some of the protesters who gathered outside Leinster House on Tuesday, seeking an Emergency Winter Payment.

Those who attended carried signs with slogans such as “Heat or Eat” and “Choice Not Charity”, while politicians from across the political spectrum came out to meet members and to hear how they and their families had been affected by the Budget.

There were a number of impassioned speeches at the demonstration, including one from IWA National Advocacy Manager Joan Carthy, who said she's heard from disabled people who are going into their local libraries in a desperate bid to stay warm this winter.

"People need to be able to pay their bills, they need to be able to live at home independently, and they need to be able to put food on the table like everybody else," Carthy said.

"More and more we are hearing that people with disabilities right around the country have no money to heat their houses. They're living in one room, they're putting on as many extra layers of clothes as they can. Actually, some people are going to their local libraries to try to stay warm in some cases."



IWA Member, Kayleigh McKeivitt speaking outside Leinster House at the demonstration on Tuesday

A number of politicians also spoke at the demonstration, including People Before Profit-Solidarity TD Paul Murphy, Social Democrats TD Liam Quaide and Sinn Fein TD Martin Quinlivan. No government ministers attended, but Irish Wheelchair Association members made sure that their message was heard loud and clear through chants, placards, and by the sheer number of people who attended, despite the bad weather.

We will now wait with interest to see what the response from government will be – and whether they'll implement the emergency payment that so many desperately need to stay warm and healthy this winter.

Many members were unable to make Tuesday's protest. However, [you can still support our campaign by emailing the TDs in your area through our easy to use tool.](#)

Together we are stronger.

From Dublin Castle to the European Parliament

Conor Dillon writes about his year as a Gaisce Youth Ambassador

After completing my bronze, silver and gold Gaisce Awards, Leslie Timmons from IWA contacted me to say that Gaisce had a new opportunity I might like to put my name forward for.

They were looking for 12 Gaisce Youth Ambassadors for a new panel. I applied and was then shortlisted for an online interview. I was delighted to be chosen – the youth ambassadors came from all over Ireland, not just Dublin, and I was the only one with any kind of disability.

Our first meeting was in Gaisce HQ, which is in Ratra House, near Áras an Uachtaráin in the Phoenix Park. That meeting was all about getting to know each other. At other meetings we heard from the CEO of Gorm Media, discussed the new strategy plan for Gaisce, met and got uniforms from Craghoppers, one of our sponsors, and heard from two Gaisce alumni about their experiences.

We were also involved in several events that were to do with promoting Gaisce, both on social media and in person. “Be The Arrow” was about being active citizens in your community and was headed by Gaisce’s patron at the time, Michael D Higgins. The sitting President of Ireland is always the Patron of Gaisce, so now it will be Catherine Connolly.

Some of us also did radio interviews for our local stations. I did one on Phoenix FM on a show called Disability Matters, which is available on YouTube. I also went around with Joy Winston, who is Gaisce’s development officer for North County Dublin & Wicklow, encouraging people with disabilities to sign up. Some of you may remember us – we did our first talk at the IWA in Clontarf.



Conor Dillon who was delighted to be chosen as one of Gaisce's Youth Ambassadors

Visiting the European Parliament was like a trip to Disney for me!

It really was a brilliant year, and I have two standout moments to share. Firstly, we were invited to the European Parliament in Brussels for three days. I have an interest in politics, so this was like a trip to Disneyland for me! MEP Maria Walsh was our host while we were there. On the first day we had a tour – it's massive. The second day we heard from three people who worked in different departments telling us how they ended up working in the European Parliament, and on the third day we joined a youth forum with autism charity As I Am. It was a fantastic experience.

My final duty as a Gaisce Ambassador happened just a few weeks ago at an event called PALcon in Dublin Castle. It was to celebrate Gaisce PALS (the people who help you achieve your awards). We did a meet and greet, did some interviews, and I also presented Minister Helen McEntee with a gift from Gaisce. The event took place in the same room where Catherine Connolly was inaugurated as President of Ireland just a few days before.

It was a brilliant year and one I will never forget. What's next I wonder?



Conor Dillon pictured at the European Parliament during his year as a Gaisce Ambassador

Friendship and Inclusion at Killester Tigers

Dylan and friends find their happy place at Wheelchair Basketball

Killester Tigers is Dylan Murphy's 'happy place'

15-year-old Dylan trains with the with Junior Wheelchair Basketball team every Tuesday evening from 6pm in Clontarf IWA and travels all the way from Dunboyne to do so.

He told *Spoke Out*: "I really enjoy it, I look forward to the session every week, everybody is very friendly."

His mum Julie adds: "Dylan is a wheelchair user and unfortunately there is not a lot of choice when it comes to playing sport. Considering the amount of children who have disabilities there should be more available."

"His training with Killester Tigers is the highlight of his week, it is his happy place. He has found great friendships and inclusion in team sport because in an able-bodied school that is not always possible."



Killester Tigers Junior Wheelchair Basketball player Dylan pictured with his mum, Julie.

Dylan's team-mate Julianna Corkish is equally as enthusiastic. She told *Spoke Out*: "I love playing team sport, I am a competitive person and look forward to the games. It is really fun hanging out with my friends here."

"I would encourage anyone thinking of joining to just try it out."

Her mum Jennifer Patton points out that being involved in the team is much more about just sport.

"It's the social element, the exercise, the friendships, the inclusion. For many of the children, in their schools they may be the only wheelchair user. Their school mates are coming in with their stories from their GAA and activities and for Julianna she now has her sport stories to tell."

Both mothers admit that it is not just their children who benefit from being involved. The parents and families do too!

"We are a real community, like family. We support one another outside of wheelchair basketball. We are all trying to navigate a lot of the same issues and there is great support along the way," said Julie.

"I would encourage parents no matter where you are living to find a club and get your child involved. Many wouldn't have sport if it wasn't for wheelchair basketball. It is the only outlet for many disabled children outside of school. For us it is worth the journey from Dunboyne because Dylan loves it so much."

New members are always welcome. To get in touch with Killester Tigers Junior Wheelchair Basketball please contact Julie.killestertigers@gmail.ie or phone 087-9878293



Killester Tigers Junior Wheelchair Basketball player Julianna pictured with her mum Jennifer



Members of Killester Tigers Junior Wheelchair Basketball Club pictured at a recent blitz

Accessible Housing Conference

IWA unites with key partners to drive national action on accessible homes.

We know that housing continues to be a big issue for many of our members and the wider disability community.

On Dec 1st, we teamed up with **the National Disability Authority (NDA), the Irish Council for Social Housing (ICSH) and Age Friendly Ireland** at a landmark conference aimed at driving national action on accessible homes.

Opening the event, Ann Marie O'Grady, CEO of Irish Wheelchair Association, said: "Accessible housing is not a luxury—it is a basic requirement for independent living. Too many disabled people are denied the opportunity to live safely and sustainably in their own communities because homes have not been designed with them in mind. This conference is about changing that reality and putting Universal Design at the centre of Ireland's housing future."



IWA Member Edith Geraghty with Staff and Board Member John Fulham at the Accessible Housing Conference on Dec 1st. The Conference "Universally Designed Homes: Housing for All," aimed to drive national action on accessible homes.

The one-day event featured national and international experts, policy leaders and representatives with lived experience of disability and explored;

- Needs, Rights & Reality – understanding the lived experience and policy landscape
- Universally Design Homes – applying best practice in Ireland
- Innovations, Solutions & Opportunities — global insights, new models, and future-focused planning

This was a key moment in our housing advocacy plans and we will continue to lobby with and on your behalf.

A formal outcomes report will be published following the event to support ongoing national policy development, but the coalition are hoping that this is a turning point for inclusive housing.

[You can read a full summary of the event on our website.](#)

We would also like to remind you of our Think Ahead, Think Housing Campaign which encourages you to think of your future housing needs.



Representatives from the four partner organisations who organised the recent housing conference, Universally Designed Homes: Housing for All. L-R Fionnadh McGonigle (NDA), Declan Gaffney (AFI) Catherine McGillycuddy (ICSH) and Jean Coleman (IWA National Housing Manager).

Add your voice to the future of IWA

Your voice matters in the development of the next strategy.

We are busy developing the next strategy, but we need you. Central to our strategy is the focus on impact.

Your feedback and input guides the organisation, and much of your voice has helped create the strategy developed so far.

It is vital that this next strategy is shaped by you for you. We cannot move forward without you.

IWA's Strategy 2022-2025 ends this year.

It is important that you see yourself represented in the next strategy whether you are an IWA Member; a person who avails of our services, programmes, and supports; employee; volunteer; funder or donor; or a member of a person's circle of support.

[We are asking you to take a look at our Strategy webpage](#), where our handy video will bring you up to date on our direction so far.

Then, there are two ways to get involved.

1. [Register your interest](#) to attend an in-person consultation or
2. [Complete a feedback form](#).

We look forward to hearing your thoughts and views to see if we got it right so far, or any reflections you have to make it better.

Your voice matters in the development of the next strategy.

Thank you



Fundraising

Corporate Partnerships: A Record-Breaking Year of Impact and Momentum



Together with our members, colleagues and a growing group of committed companies, we have raised significant funds and delivered real change in IWA Community & Outreach Centres and services across the country. We are hugely grateful to everyone involved and proudly share some highlights here.

Freenow By Lyft

Our partnership with **FREENOW** by Lyft has had an incredibly positive impact on our services and members. Through the “Round Up to Donate” feature on the FREENOW app, passengers who choose to add a little extra to their fare have collectively donated over €300,000 for IWA so far this year. IWA members have also collaborated with FREENOW by Lyft to make improvements and shape how their services work for wheelchair users.



Ash Puri (Corporate Partnerships Manager IWA), Garreth Greene (Design & Digital Projects Manager, IWA), Danny O’Gorman (General Manager UK & Ireland – Freenow by Lyft), Anne Holden (Receptionist IWA) & Breige McGinn (Head of Fundraising & Strategic Projects, IWA), pictured at IWA Clontarf.

Chadwicks

Our long-term partnership with **Chadwicks** has gone from strength to strength and 2025 has been our best year yet. Chadwicks' support and supply of materials have improved IWA facilities across the country.

- New flooring installed in our Community Centre in Belmullet.
- Painting of Clonakilty Community Centre's outdoor area completed.
- New bathroom installed in IWA Letterkenny.
- Chadwicks provided fencing and significant material for landscaping works for IWA Tenants in Tipperary

Chadwicks' stores and employees have gone above and beyond volunteering in IWA Clontarf and taking part in a static cycle challenge raising an incredible €20,000 for Irish Wheelchair Association.



Julian Mahady (National Housing & Property Officer IWA) and Tipperary Branch colleague and resident Lorraine Fahy pictured with Chadwicks' Sean O'Sullivan (Branch Manager, Clonmel), Seamus Delahunty (Assistant Branch Manager, Clonmel) and Brian Leonard (Sales Representative).

NetApp

NetApp hosted an inclusion and impact presentation in Cork providing funding for and increasing awareness of IWA. We received vital funding from The State Street Foundation towards our DAISY Young Ambassadors Programme through which young people with disabilities will increase awareness and promote inclusion in schools across Ireland.



Andrew De Medeiros Gannon – Thrive Belonging Program Manager (NetApp), John Fulham (Public Engagement Manager IWA), Siofra Kelleher (NetApp) & Ash Puri (Corporate Partnerships Manager IWA) pictured with NetApp colleagues at the Presentation.

These are just a few examples of the invaluable corporate support Irish Wheelchair Association has received in 2025.

If you would like to find out how your organisation can work with us, do contact our Fundraising Partnership Manager, Ash Puri, by emailing fund@iwa.ie or [find out more on our website](#)

Sport

Paralympic ambitions for Casey Fitzgerald.



2 0-year-old Para Powerlifter Casey Fitzgerald has been on a continuous rise since making her debut in 2023 in the sport.

With her sights fixed on representing Ireland in the Paralympic Games one day, her journey began when family friend and Co. Cavan native too, Britney Arendse, recommended the sport to her.

“I found out about Para Powerlifting from a family friend and Paralympian Britney Arendse, I wanted to try it, but as I was only 12, I was too young and had to wait until I was 16. I had my first tryout just a few days after my 16th birthday. I had never taken part in any sport before then.”

Not being deterred by a four-year wait to try Para Powerlifting, it proved to be worth biding her time when Casey reflected upon the effects the sport has had on her, with Para Powerlifting helping her physically, making life managing Spastic Diplegia, Cerebral Palsy easier and boosting her self-confidence.

“Physically, I have dropped weight, over 2.5 stone since I began, my scoliosis has improved, and my general health and mood has improved.

“While mentally I am like a different person, I am now quite outgoing and love to talk to everyone. Before this, I was a bit anti-social and kept myself within my immediate family circle and my bedroom.”



Since entering Para Powerlifting Casey Fitzgerald has celebrated great success

Even in what would be considered to be a quiet year (competition-wise) in Irish Para Powerlifting, it's been another year of success for Fitzgerald. Competing in the Irish Invitationals in July and, more recently, at the World Championships in Cairo, Egypt.

With only three months between the two competitions, Casey shared how she prepared for them, thanks to the help of her coach Brian Foy, with fierce determination and adaptability.

"My coach, Bryan Foy and I were working on technique quite a lot before the Irish Invitationals and focus then changed when I found out I had been picked for Cairo. Even harder work began as I wanted to bring home gold.

"Training was very intense and technique-focused. I didn't get the gold, but I hit a new Personal Best and brought home silver from the World stage," she said.

Para Powerlifting requires a lot of dedication and resilience, maybe more than other sports. However, the motivation for Casey is simple: Become a Paralympian in 2028.

The possibility of joining Team Ireland and representing my country at the LA Paralympics in 2028.

Casey has competed in multiple European and World competitions since her international debut in 2023. The support around her has played a key part in the success she's enjoyed already.

When asked what her favourite memory is so far in her Para Powerlifting career, while hard to single one moment out, currently it's having her coach alongside her on stage for the first time at the recent World Championships.

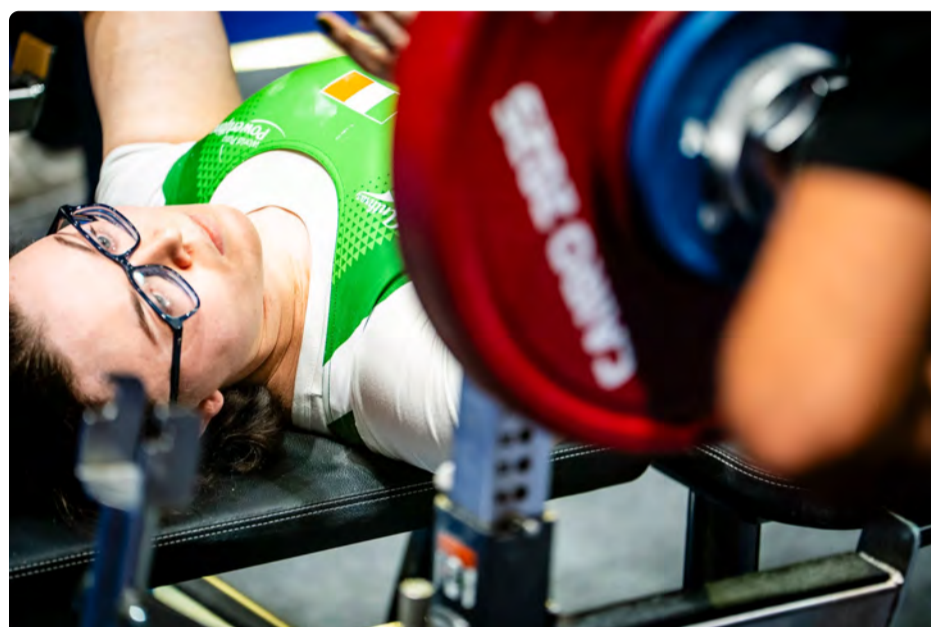
"All my memories have a special place in my heart, but my favourite now is being on stage with my coach Bryan for the first time in Cairo at the World Championships in October."

But a special 2025 is reaching an end and there's a brief moment to rest before the Leinster Open takes place on January 2024 at Club Active Kells, Co. Meath. Even during downtime and the Christmas holidays just around the corner, Para Powerlifting is still on her mind when we wondered what might be on her Christmas list.

"Definitely new wrist wraps, I would love a speed bar for the gym to measure my rep speed. Santa might be nice and bring me one to help me improve even more!

In 2026 Casey's bid to compete at the Paralympic Games in LA continues with European Championship in Tbilisi, Georgia in March and World Championships next December in Bahrain. After setting a new Lifetime Best in Egypt back in October, The Cavan native says she's a New Year Resolution to smash that current best.

"To try and hit 100kg in the Europeans in Tbilisi Georgia in March 2026," she said!



Eyes on the prize - Casey Fitzgerald is determined to become a Paralympian

Thanks for your company

If you like what you're reading, please spread the word!

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Remember:

Your voice, your choice! We're all ears for your feedback, thoughts, and suggestions.

Share what topics intrigue you the most and what you'd love to see in future magazine features.

SPOKE OUT

SpokeOut is Irish Wheelchair Association's lifestyle magazine published every month for our members.

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