

FIRSTLIGHT NEWSLETTER

Quarterly newsletter of FirstLight



OVER 94 FAMILIES SUPPORTED IN TEN MONTHS

BY FIONNUALA SHEEHAN

Over the last ten-months FirstLight provided professional counselling support to 94 families across Ireland whose child died suddenly. In addition, a number of families referred in previous years, particularly in 2018, also received support. This is the largest caseload that FirstLight has managed since its inception. Fortunately, to date, we have not had to operate a waiting list. I want to express my sincere appreciation to Mags McGoldrick and FirstLight's committed team of therapists who have tirelessly and professionally supported all of these families following the sudden loss of their child.

On 9 October we received the very sad news of the sudden and untimely death of Adrian O' Grady. We extend our heartfelt sympathies to Adrian's wife, Helen and Adrian's children Paul, Seán and Kate. Adrian was a highly qualified psychotherapist with particular expertise in trauma and critical incident stress management. He generously shared his talents, experiences and skills with a significant number of individuals and agencies and will be missed by so many.

In his role as a member of FirstLight's Council he contributed significantly to the development of FirstLight's clinical services. He provided training in critical incident stress management to a number of FirstLight's therapists in July this year and facilitated sessions for bereaved Mums and Dads who had experienced trauma associated with the loss of their child. May he rest in peace.

We have some new initiatives to share with you in this edition of our Newsletter: a new patchwork Memory Quilt ; research, facilitated by our award of a grant from Dublin City Social Enterprise scheme, into the feasibility of a revenue earning service for investment in delivery of our free counselling services; a new look FirstLight Christmas Card; and our plans for a further Pop-up shop in the run-up to Christmas in Stephen's Green Shopping Centre. We also take a look at the ISIDA Newsletter archives.

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Supporting Suddenly Bereaved Parents & Families



CHRISTMAS CARDS

On Thursday, October 31st, we hosted an exclusive poll on the FirstLight Facebook page to help pick the designs for the FirstLight Christmas Cards for 2019.

The response to the survey was overwhelming, and we would like to thank everyone who participated in the Facebook poll. The winning designs have been selected, and we are now taking pre-orders where you can purchase a pack of 6 cards for €7 or two boxes of 6 for €12 plus p&p.

**Pre-Orders can be made via
Email info@firstlight.ie or
Phone 01-8732711.**

NEWSLETTER SCHEDULE 2020

We plan to continue to issue FirstLight Newsletters in 2020 (January, April, September and November.) We are keen to receive feedback and ideas for the FirstLight Newsletter, so please don't hesitate to email your thoughts to info@firstlight.ie or send them by surface mail to Andrew Mernagh, Marketing and Administration Manager, FirstLight, Carmichael Centre, 4 North Brunswick Street, Dublin 7.

A NEW MEMORY QUILT

BY ANDREW MERNAGH

On Monday, October 21st the first meeting of the new *Memory Quilt* group took place here at the Carmichael Centre, Dublin 7. Two quilts were previously created, the first in 1997, the second in 2013. In attendance on the evening was Liz Lynch, one of the founding members of the Irish Sudden Infant Death Association (ISIDA) now called FirstLight.

Liz gave a talk about how the first two quilts were created. She also related her own personal story of her child's death from SIDS and how ISIDA supported her family. All attending found the gathering to be very beneficial and supportive.

The group will meet again at 7:30 pm on Monday, November 12th in the Carmichael Centre and is open to all FirstLight/ISIDA families.

The new *Memory Quilt* is being made with the generous support of the Drogheda Quilters Group who helped complete the first quilt in 1997. We want to take this opportunity to sincerely thank Liz Lynch, and Catherine Payne and her colleagues in the Drogheda Quilters Group for their help to date in getting this new quilt project started.

The new quilt has space for 60 patches and is open to all FirstLight/ISIDA families nationwide (on a first-come, first-served basis) who would like to include a patch in memory of their child. If you wish to complete a patch, just Email (info@firstlight.ie) or phone (01-8732711) and we will send on all the details to you.

**To add a patch in memory of your child just Email or Phone the head office and we will send you all the details.
Email: info@firstlight.ie : Phone 01-8732711**



CHRISTMAS GIFT WRAPPING

BY ANDREW MERNAGH

On Thursday, December 12th FirstLight will open its Christmas Pop-Up shop in Stephen's Green Shopping Centre Dublin. Now in its third year, the shop offers a fantastic opportunity to raise much-needed funds for the year ahead. A gift-wrapping service will be available, and FirstLight candles and Christmas cards will be on sale. The FirstLight Pop-Up shop provides an ideal opportunity to meet FirstLight and ISIDA families of the past 43 years.

On display again this year will be the two ISIDA/FirstLight Memory Quilts along with a selection of the many *Shine a Light* contributions from the past 12 months which have included paintings, poems and stories. The shop will be located on the top floor of *Stephen's Green Shopping Centre*, directly beside Santa's Grotto, and will be open daily from 10:00 am to 8:00 pm from December 12th until 3:00 pm on Christmas Eve. All are welcome to pop along at any stage and please don't forget to tell your family, friends and neighbours about it.

SOCIAL ENTERPRISE AWARD WINNER

BY ANDREW MERNAGH



Fionnuala Sheehan, CEO of FirstLight receiving the Dublin City Social Enterprise Award 2019 on behalf of FirstLight

On September 27th FirstLight was presented with a Dublin City Social Enterprise Award - the funding awarded allows us to examine the feasibility of researching the development of a CISM training programme within FirstLight. We would like to again sincerely thank the late Adrian O' Grady for his guidance and support in securing this award.

Now in its fifth year, Dublin City Social Enterprise Awards aims to increase awareness of the vital contribution that social enterprise makes to building communities, creating employment and developing the skills of the participants who get involved. The scheme was first established in 2015 through a collaboration between Dublin City Council, Inner City Enterprise (ICE) and the Local Enterprise Office (LEO) Dublin City to provide grants to kick-start the creation and development of social enterprises in Dublin City. The awards are funded by Dublin City Council and the Department of Rural and Community Development and are managed by Inner City Enterprise.

This year's awards were presented by the Deputy Lord Mayor of Dublin, Tom Brabazon along with Minister Michael Ring presented at Wood Quay Venue, Dublin City Council.

FROM THE IRISH SUDDEN INFANT DEATH ASSOCIATION ARCHIVES

BY ANDREW MERNAGH

In the past twelve months FirstLight has archived the last 43 years of the ISIDA/FirstLight newsletters, of which extracts will now be published in the quarterly newsletter. The first extract is from 1989 and *Newsletter No. 29* and is from a talk at the ISIDA Autumn Seminar in Dublin. The talk was from Maria Powell, a Family Case Worker with the Eastern Health Board, and was titled "*The Impact of Sudden Infant Death on The Family*". Included in the photo is ISIDA founder Eimear Berry, ISIDA Chairperson Dr Victoria Coffey along with ISIDA advocates Prof. Gerard Cussen and Dr Pam Davis.



AT THE AUTUMN SEMINAR

Dr. Pam Davies, Prof. G. Cussen, Eimear Berry, Dr. Victoria Coffey and Ms Maria Powell.

"The Impact of Sudden Infant Death on the Family"

Ms Maria Powell

In the first three months following a cot death parents are trying to deal with a significant lost dream, along with this there is a loss of capacity to love and a particular avoidance of outside activities or interests or supports that previously were of great help to parents. There is **SHOCK AND DISBELIEF** which is sometimes suggested as being prolonged for much longer in families experiencing cot death as compared with other anticipated losses.

ANGER is a prevalent reaction and is sometimes directed at the child himself/herself for leaving us in this position, it is sometimes directed at ourselves for exposing ourselves to this possibility or at health professionals for what they did or did not do, or often at God himself.

There is a sense of **HELPLESSNESS** that complicates grief for two reasons – there is the stark finality of the loss and the absolute necessity to try to come to terms with it.

DENIAL OR ABSENCE OF EMOTION is one reaction which causes a great deal of friction and strain between parents themselves as a couple. For some parents it provides a particular release to almost think that the death had not really happened.

On the other hand **GUILT**, which is often associated with depression, is a reaction which is particularly associated with cot death and one which is suggested to be particularly prolonged.

A depressive guilt is a very normal reaction to grief. It is characterised by a feeling of continuous sadness which is very difficult to shift, a nostalgia for the situation which we had and a questioning for a time of the "ifs" and "buts" of the relationship which we had and the quality of care that we gave the child.

It is very important that the guilt feelings are nipped in the bud because minor questions at the initial stages of grief (in its first three months) can become major problems later on. It is very difficult for any one parent to deal with them alone, they must really be diffused by some supportive health professional or extended family. The disorganisation which is a primary factor in the family functioning after the loss creates a lot of tension and insecurity, particularly in relation to other children in the family. When the routine and stability of that goes then the other children sometimes show behaviour exhibiting upset and it is in this way that we can see the way it is affecting the whole family.

Now gradually working through these reactions is what we call the **MOURNING PROCESS** which can last up to two years at least. Through this process parents can move from a state of **SHOCK**, through **ACUTE DISTRESS** to a **RE-INVOLVEMENT** and **INTEGRATION** in life. It is a very slow piecemeal process and a very difficult one which involves time and energy. If we go through it successfully we can expect to come out of it with some kind of loosening of the bond with the child that is gone. This is not the same as forgetting that the child was there or the meaning that the child had for us, rather it involves incorporating that memory to some small extent into our everyday lives.

Those families who are able to share and express their feelings of sadness and despair and the pain that is involved along with the less acceptable reactions of anger and guilt are better able to meet the stress of death.