

FIRSTLIGHT NEWSLETTER

FirstLight Quarterly Newsletter

*"I send thanks for your life,
far too brief but infinite in
its impact on mine"*

MESSAGE FROM FIRSTLIGHT CEO

BY FIONNUALA SHEEHAN, CEO FIRSTLIGHT

Dear families, friends and supporters of FirstLight, I am writing this message as we approach mid-Summer, a time of the year when FirstLight's Mile in Memory Remembrance Walks take place throughout the country. Social distancing measures prevent the Walks taking place in the traditional way this year.

We are very conscious that families experiencing the sudden loss of their child have little or no time to say 'Goodbye' to their loved one. The longstanding rituals that happen around a death and that often provide comfort cannot be performed during the current COVID-19 pandemic as people follow HSE advice and comply with social distancing guidelines. Suddenly bereaved families are feeling the physical and social isolation acutely.

With your support, the FirstLight *Mile in Memory Remembrance Walks* can take place in a virtual way on June 21st. We encourage you to come together while remaining apart on Sunday, June 21st to remember your loved one, or to show your community and solidarity with your family members, friends, colleagues or neighbours who have been impacted by the sudden loss of their child. Information on how you can do this safely can be found inside.

June 21st is Father's Day. We have chosen this day for the *Mile in Memory Remembrance Walks* to highlight the fact that Dads are often the forgotten grievers. There is a great deal of societal pressure on bereaved Dads to 'hold it all together' for the family and to take care of everything silently. And the fact that men and women grieve differently can be a source of tension between couples. While offering a warm hug to a grieving Dad may not be possible in all cases at present, you might send a message, offer a virtual hug, or let him know that you are thinking about him and are there for him.

We look forward to walking with you, virtually, on June 21st,

Fionnuala Sheehan, CEO, FirstLight

IN THIS ISSUE:

THE
FIRSTLIGHT
VIRTUAL MILE
IN MEMORY
WALK

THE GRIEVING
FATHER

FIRSTLIGHT
ENHANCED
ONLINE
COUNSELLING
FACILITY

MILE IN
MEMORY WALK
POEM

COPING WITH
ANXIETY


FirstLight

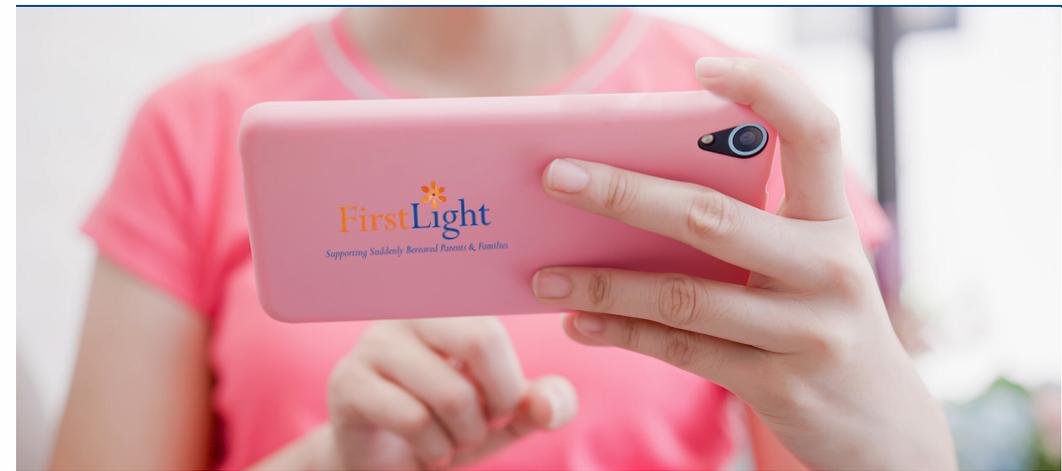
Supporting Suddenly Bereaved Parents & Families



THANK YOU FOR YOUR SUPPORT

BY ANDREW MERNAGH

In our March Newsletter, FirstLight CEO, Fionnuala Sheehan outlined the immediate impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on FirstLight’s ability to fundraise and called for support for the FirstLight Community Spirit Fund. She referred to the fact that half of the funds needed annually to deliver FirstLight’s services come from non-State sources such as fundraisers, sponsorships, corporate and trust donations. Many events such as Marathons have been cancelled or postponed. We are very grateful to all who have responded to FirstLight’s call and want to thank most sincerely those who have undertaken fundraising events, and those who have supported them. There is no doubt that the human capacity for innovation is unlimited – marathons have been run on treadmills and in back gardens and cycle marathons have been completed on exercise bikes. People have generously supported Beauty Salon raffles and birthday and anniversary fundraisers on Facebook and GoFundMe. FirstLight has also been a beneficiary of some of the local authority PPN Emergency Fund Grants. While we still have a distance to go to address the 2020 funding requirement and to enable us to continue to provide services free of charge to all who require support, we are very encouraged and heartened by the response received to date. Thank you for your support.



PLANS FOR ENHANCED COUNSELLING SERVICE

BY ANDREW MERNAGH

Like many organisations across the world FirstLight has had to adapt to the new environment heralded by Covid-19. In order to comply with social distancing guidelines, we now provide our counselling and therapy services via telephone and video link. To facilitate group support we have set up three private member’s groups on FirstLight’s Facebook page, one for Mums, one for Dads and a third, more general one, for parents. Our recent application to The Community Foundation of Ireland for a grant to enable further development of our on-line supports was successful. We are now in the process of building a new, secure video conferencing facility into the FirstLight website; this will go live within the next month and will enable FirstLight’s Clinical Services Director and the counsellors and therapists across the country on FirstLight’s Register to provide counselling and therapy in a secure and flexible way via video conference. As well as supporting provision of our services during the Covid-19 pandemic, this facility will remain as a services delivery option alongside Face to Face delivered services into the future.

NEW HSE CAMPAIGN #HOLDFIRM



#HOLDFIRM

On May 10th the HSE launched a new campaign titled *Hold Firm*, which is inspired by the words of President Michael D Higgins, written in his 1993 poem.

Take Care
by President Michael D Higgins

In the journey to the light, the dark moments
should not threaten.

Belief requires that you hold steady.

Bend, if you will, with the wind.

The tree is your teacher,
roots at once more firm from experience
in the soil made fragile.

Your gentle dew will come and a stirring of
power to go on towards the space of sharing.

In the misery of the I,
in rage, it is easy to cry out against all others
but to weaken is to die in the misery of
knowing the journey abandoned towards the
sharing of all human hope and cries is the
loss of all we know of the divine reclaimed

for our shared humanity.

Hold firm.

Take care.

Come home together.

**For further details of the
#HoldFirm campaign and other
COVID-19 information please visit**

www.hse.ie



FIRSTLIGHT VIRTUAL MILE IN MEMORY WALK FATHER'S DAY JUNE 21ST

BY GEORGIA HOWARD, CLINICAL SERVICES DIRECTOR, FIRSTLIGHT

The Covid-19 Pandemic has made the FirstLight Mile in Memory Remembrance Walks 'unsafe' - it would not be possible to operate within Government guidelines on social distancing and social gatherings. However, we are conscious of the importance of this annual remembrance walk for many FirstLight families. We have, therefore, come up with an alternative walk, a Virtual Mile in Memory Remembrance Walk which will take place, via Facebook, on Father's Day, Sunday, June 21st. FirstLight families across Ireland are invited to walk in memory of all children who have died suddenly; individual family groups are invited to walk from or within their own home at a time and for a distance of their choosing on June 21st.

We would ask families undertaking the Virtual Walk, to ask their extended family and friends to complete a similar Virtual Walk. Families can walk around their balcony, patio, garden, backyard, field, bedroom, kitchen....as long as it is in keeping with the Government social distancing and group gathering guidelines. FirstLight asks all those participating to share a live stream or 30 second video of their Walk on FirstLight's Facebook Private Member's Group page on June 21st.

This Private Member's Group page is now live on FirstLight's Facebook page. All FirstLight families and friends are welcome to join this Group. Families who wish to fundraise for the Virtual Mile in Memory Remembrance Walks can do so via Facebook and nominate FirstLight as their chosen charity. Subsequent to June 21st, we will publish a special Virtual Mile in Memory Newsletter to record stories, poems, photos and interviews with participants.

So how can you host a Virtual Mile in Memory Remembrance Walk in your area?

- Request to join the private members FirstLight Virtual Mile in Memory Remembrance Walk Facebook Group.
- Upon joining the Group, write a post about where in the country you reside, in whose memory your walk will be undertaken, and how you plan to complete the walk.
- Via Facebook, invite other family members, friends and people living in your locality to join the Facebook Group and join you in a virtual way in the Walk on June 21st.
- All participants to post a live stream or a 30 second video of their Walk on the FirstLight Virtual Mile in Memory Remembrance Walk Facebook Group Page, and state who the Walk is in memory of.

If you have any queries around hosting a Social Distancing Mile In-Memory Walk, please do not hesitate to contact FirstLight by emailing andrew@firstlight.ie or phoning 087-2911028.

THE GRIEVING FATHER

"A mother may bear the child in her womb, but a grieving father carries them in his heart."



BY AMRITA OF THE STILL STANDING MAGAZINE

I remember I handed over my phone to my husband as soon as I entered the hospital, not wanting to deal with the world. We had just found out our son had died when I was 28 weeks pregnant and I was to be induced. Everything seems so blurry right now, yet so clear. I remember waking up in the morning and crying while hugging my husband. I'd just spent the first night in the hospital and unbeknownst to me, had a long road ahead.

A long way to delivery; my mental state and its journey are another subject. At that point, it didn't occur to me that maybe my husband didn't want to deal with the world too. He had to field a volley of questions, update concerned family and friends, run around for medicines, take care of me all the while managing his grief. While I was crumbling and he looked as steady as a rock. I have lost count of the number of times he has woken up to me sobbing in my pillow and has offered his support. Two years later, I still find myself crying, and he is there to hug me while I wallow in my grief. I have had fights with him about why wouldn't he cry like me or share things with me. The truth is, men and women grieve differently.

It took me almost a year to understand that while I needed to talk about my grief, my husband had his ways of dealing with it. But every time we speak about our son, he is still the same calm, rock-solid shoulder of support that he was to me in the hospital. I was surrounded by our families in the hospital, but I wonder did anyone stop and ask him how he was doing? Friends come and ask you how you are feeling, but they forget to ask the father.

This is a heartbreak of a unique kind; you wish your heart could stop beating too, but you find life doesn't end. Nobody holds a grieving father by the hand and offers him comfort. Nobody offers to feed him food and make his bed. Nobody even sees him crying. He is supposed to take care of everything silently; the storm inside and outside. I am not sure I could be as strong for my husband as he has been for me. Sometimes I wish we could both crumble, but I know even when my husband looks calm, the water inside is running deep. Maybe grieving dads need other grieving dads to talk about their emotions. Or possibly some men don't function that way. Either way, it is not easy being a grieving Dad. He is expected to get up and go to work like his life didn't just come to a standstill. I am sure it broke my husband's heart into a million pieces too, yet he found it in his heart the strength to help me heal.

A grieving father doesn't look different from any other father. But inside, he has lived and lost since his baby died. He has lost the opportunity to play ball with his kids, the opportunity to know whom will they look like, the many chances he would have to watch movies with them, the opportunity to give away his daughter at her wedding or to watch his son bring home the girl of his dreams. It is not just a miscarriage/stillbirth/death; it is a lost lifetime. Yet, he gets up every day, braving the maelstrom of emotions, holding his wife while she cries herself to sleep. How do men find such immense strength to go on? Where did my husband find the fortitude to help himself and me to sail through. If you ever come across a grieving father, although I hope there are none in this world, offer them a warm hug. They don't talk much, but just sitting next to them at this time is enough. Maybe make sure they have everything they need, or that they have eaten and gotten their rest. For a grieving dad is the strongest person out there, but even the strongest need support.



ANXIETY LIKE GRIEF COMES IN WAVES

BY GEORGIA HOWARD, CLINICAL SERVICES DIRECTOR, FIRSTLIGHT

We often describe anxiety as a feeling yet on reflection it is not an emotion. In the mental health movement it has become a relatable buzz word to grab the reader's attention with an evocative and relatable sensation. Anxiety is a bodily sensation triggered by an overwhelm of emotion. Our thoughts usually race to catch up and find an ideal scenario to match and make our feeling of anxiety plausible. During times of fear and dread we begin to think and imagine the worst.

What if the beginnings of anxiety were more like "*a smoke detector or an alarm*" alerting us to a feeling we are ignoring. It could be grief, sadness, loneliness, disappointment, anger etc... The more we dismiss and ignore it, the more the anxiety rises. Anxiety is a defence, its function is to keep us away from how we truly feel. When we cannot express our emotions honestly, whether it is to cry, scream, punch something, talk about it, rock back and forth to sooth, or be afraid, we push it further down and the sensation of anxiety gets stronger.

If we start to view our anxiety as a warning of an unexpressed emotion and in its infancy start to be curious about it and ask, "why now, what's really going on with me?, what's causing this sensation?"; this interrupts it manifesting into panic. An awareness of how we are feeling before we are overwhelmed interrupts us tipping over into an attack of panic. Allowing the emotions expression causes anxiety to dissipate.

We can feel so full up with emotion, it feels like it comes in waves. If you imagine it as water, which our bodies are made up of (80%), the waves come more frequently; closer together the feeling of becoming overwhelmed gets more unbearable, it's harder to breathe, the sensation in your chest feels like it will burst. Crying relieves it, some water is emptied out. If we can acknowledge we are upset and need to cry before this stage, the panic doesn't come in an attack to jolt us to express what we can no longer contain.

When anxiety manifests, be curious about what else you might be feeling. Allow yourself the time to notice what emotions are there, don't stop yourself expressing your feelings. When we hold emotion back our feeling of anxiety builds; by being curious about what we are feeling, noticing what it feels like and expressing it, it is the beginning of self-care and the first step on lowering anxiety and panic.



THE MILE IN-MEMORY WALK POEM

On this breeze, I send you love.

**Love which is not dimmed by time or
diminished by death.**

**Love so strong, so beautiful that
it makes the shedding of a million salty tears worthwhile.**

**Love which is immeasurable,
indescribable.**

Love which fills my broken heart.

**On this breeze, I send you
gratitude.**

**I send thanks for your life, far
too brief but infinite in its impact on mine.**

**I send thanks for what you have
taught me, for the strength you have made me discover in myself.**

On this breeze, I send you a promise.

**A promise to remember you always, a
promise to count you always, a promise to hold you close in the twinkling of a
starry sky, in the beat of a butterfly's wing, in the lapping of salty foam
along the shore.**

**On this breeze, I send you Love.
Forever and always My Love.**