

# FIRSTLIGHT NEWSLETTER

*"Talking about the most difficult things in life makes living them so much easier"*

## MESSAGE FROM FIRSTLIGHT CEO

Dear families, friends, and supporters of FirstLight,

As I am writing this piece, the recent good weather continues to hold and I am hearing increasingly of family members, friends, and neighbours who have received their first vaccination. And with the vaccination rollout gaining momentum, there is hope that a greater sense of normality will return before too long.

As mentioned previously, we have set Father's Day, June 20th, for FirstLight's annual Mile in Memory remembrance event. But, as we don't yet know what level of restrictions will operate in late June, we are planning this event as a virtual one, similar to the 2020 Mile in Memory. We would like to encourage as many as possible to become involved and details on how to do so are included inside.

Included in this Edition is a reference to a resource (*Pregnancy After Loss: A day-by-day plan to reassure and comfort you*) to help those who are pregnant after a loss. Pregnancy after a miscarriage, infant loss of a stillborn baby is anything but easy. Becoming pregnant again, although joyous, can be a frightening and isolating experience. This book is a day-to-day guide to help you cope with the common day-to-day fears often experienced with pregnancy after loss.

Also included in this Edition is a piece by a parent about her journey through grief, and details of a book *Tadhg to the Rescue* written by Tadhg's Mum.

I came across Kintsugi recently, the Japanese art of repairing broken pottery by mending the areas of breakage with laquer dusted or mixed with powdered gold, silver, or platinum. The philosophy behind Kintsugi is to value an object's beauty as well as its imperfections, focusing on them equally as something to celebrate, not disguise....a metaphor, perhaps, for the human journey, and a practice that can serve as a reminder that sometimes, it's okay to feel broken too. The grief that parents feel after loss will be forever part of them, but makes them who they are and gives them the qualities of strength and compassion that carry through their lives.

*'Grief is something that alters you at a cellular level. You never get over it, but you learn to live with it.'*

As we look forward to greater opportunities to meet up with family and friends, my very best wishes to you to keep safe and well,

Fionnuala Sheehan  
CEO, FirstLight

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**National 24-Hour Helpline  
1850 391 391**

**FirstLight**

Supporting Suddenly Bereaved Parents & Families

## PREGNANCY AFTER LOSS: A DAY-BY-DAY PLAN TO REASSURE AND COMFORT YOU



Pregnancy should be a time of joyous anticipation, but those forty weeks can feel very different if you are one of the many women who has previously lost a baby. It can be a frightening and isolating experience, a path Zoe Clark-Coates knows all too well. Following the devastating loss of five babies, Zoe decided to use her counselling qualifications and twenty years of experience in the business and charity sectors to improve support for anyone who suffers baby loss.

She founded the Mariposa Trust with her husband, which in just five years has become one of the leading support charities in the UK, reaching over 50,000 people each week across the world. The *Secretary of State for Health and Social Care* in the UK appointed Zoe to co-chair a new national review of loss across the NHS and the UK.

In her book *Pregnancy After Loss*, Zoe has created a compassionate guide to lead you, day by day, through your pregnancy. It addresses such issues as facing fear, coping with scans and pregnancy milestones, building relationships with your medical team, and processing your ongoing grief whilst pregnant and is a helpful resource for women who are pregnant.

To purchase a copy of *Pregnancy After Loss: A day-by-day plan to reassure and comfort you*, visit <https://www.zoeadelle.co.uk>.

## VHI WOMEN'S MINI MARATHON GOES VIRTUAL FOR 2021



The Vhi Virtual Women's Mini Marathon will return for the second time this September. The team behind it has some fun and exciting plans for this year's virtual event, and FirstLight hopes you will be able to participate in this event later in the year, wherever you are. We will let you know all the details in the coming weeks across our social media pages.

In light of the above, the physical race will not go ahead on the June Bank Holiday weekend, due to the ongoing Covid-19 restrictions. Anyone who already has an entry for the 2021 Vhi Women's Mini Marathon will be sent an email outlining a choice of options for their entry. They can either choose to receive a full refund on their entry; alternatively, their entry will automatically be rolled over to the 2022 event.

If you have any additional queries please contact the VHI Mini Marathon team directly at [info@vhiwomensminimarathon.ie](mailto:info@vhiwomensminimarathon.ie).

## VOLUNTEERING WITH FIRSTLIGHT



FirstLight, originally Irish Sudden Infant Death Association (ISIDA,) was established some 44 years ago. It is through the contribution and commitment of many people over the years who generously shared their talents and experience, and gave of their time and personal resources that the organisation has flourished.

FirstLight is enabled by this generosity and commitment to provide professional bereavement support services to some 150 families in Ireland each year that have experienced the sudden loss of their child.

Volunteers have supported the organisation in many different ways: for example, as Council members; as befrienders to suddenly bereaved families in their community; in the provision of administrative support; in organising remembrance events; in organising fundraisers or in supporting fundraising activities organised by FirstLight.

If you are interested in volunteering your expertise and some of your time to FirstLight, please contact us on [info@firstlight.ie](mailto:info@firstlight.ie) and include your CV and a note outlining how you might like to volunteer.

## VIRTUAL MILE IN MEMORY WALK 2021 on FATHER'S DAY SUNDAY JUNE 20TH



In 2020 Firstlight hosted a virtual *Mile in Memory Walk*. It was a tremendous success with families, friends, and neighbours participating across Cork, Kerry, Wicklow, Wexford, Clare, Tipperary, Northern Ireland, and even as far afield as Australia. Due to the continuing COVID-19 restrictions, it will not be possible to undertake this year's Mile in Memory Walk on an actual basis. Firstlight, therefore, intends to host its second virtual Mile in Memory Walk, on Father's Day, June 20th.

The **2021 Virtual Mile in Memory Walk** will again acknowledge the father's role within the family following the sudden loss of his child. We know that as a result of societal pressure, bereaved fathers often feel they cannot allow themselves to mourn and express their grief. By scheduling the Mile in Memory Walk on Father's Day, we hope to encourage families to come together and, as well as supporting each other, provide an opportunity for bereaved Dads to reflect on their loss in the comfort and with the support of their family and friends.

So we invite you to start the planning now for your virtual Mile in Memory Walk, taking account of prevailing social distancing guidelines.

We have set up Firstlight's *Virtual Mile in Memory Walk* Facebook Group. All Firstlight family members and friends are welcome to join this Facebook Group and we would like you to share your plans, progress in relation to them as you move towards June 20th, and a 30-second video capturing moments on your Walk on June 20th, on this Facebook Group page. Subsequent to the Walk, we will issue a special Mile in Memory Walk Newsletter recording stories, poems, photographs and interviews with Walk participants.

### **If you would like to host a *Virtual Mile in Memory Remembrance Walk* in your area:**

- Join the FirstLight *Virtual Mile in Memory Walk* Facebook 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 virtually join you in the Walk on June 20th
- On Sunday, June 20th, post a 30-second video of your *Virtual Mile in Memory Walk* on the Facebook group

**For all additional queries, please email [info@firstlight.ie](mailto:info@firstlight.ie) or phone 01-8732711.**



# SOCIAL PRESCRIBING: A COLLABORATIVE APPROACH TO HEALTH AND WELLBEING



## What is Social Prescribing?

Social Prescribing refers to the use of non-medical support to address the needs of people whose mental health is affected by depression or anxiety. It may also be a route to reducing social exclusion, both for vulnerable populations in general, and for people with enduring mental health problems. It emphasises supporting health and wellbeing, through non-medical, community-based activities and supports, such as exercise, art, reading, or gardening. The Social Prescribing Co-ordinator will talk to you about what activities interest you, the benefits of participating in them and will assist and support you in attending these activities.

## Who is it for?

The programme is for you if you feel that you need some support to mind your health and wellbeing or if you feel isolated, stressed, anxious, or depressed. Using resources within the community will help you to benefit from meeting other people or taking part in a new activity.

This project offers a unique opportunity during the Covid-19 pandemic to support positive mental health outcomes and build resilience.

## Social Prescribing Options

- Online Engagement
- Links with Sports Partnerships E-Library Services
- Walking Groups
- Books for Health
- Community Gardening Self Help Groups
- Minding Your Well-being online

## How it works

- Your GP, mental health practitioner, or another clinician will refer you to the Social Prescribing Co-ordinator. You can also self-refer.
- The Co-ordinator will meet you either virtually or physically to discuss your needs and the various Social Prescribing options available.
- You will begin your chosen activity, with support.
- The Co-ordinator will meet with you after a number of sessions to discuss how you are getting on and your interest in continuing with your new activity.

For further details on Social Prescribing visit [www.hse.ie](http://www.hse.ie) or contact your local GP.



## World Health Day 2021

On Wednesday, April 7th the World Health Organisation celebrated World Health Day. FirstLight would like to take the opportunity to thank all our frontline workers across Ireland for their tireless work these past 12 months of the COVID-19 pandemic.

## FirstLight AGM 2021

In light of ongoing COVID-19 restrictions the Irish Sudden Infant Association t/a, FirstLight AGM will take place virtually via Zoom on Tuesday, June 22nd at 7:30 pm.

For ISIDA members interested in attending the AGM virtually please email [info@firstlight.ie](mailto:info@firstlight.ie) by 5:00 pm Friday, June 18th.

## MY JOURNEY THROUGH GRIEF



On July 9th, 2016, I dropped my middle child and only daughter Ciara at the Lidl car park in Kilkenny for the concert bus to go to Kodaline in Marley Park. I never thought the last time I would ever see Ciara's smiling face was in my rear-view mirror as she ran after the car, and the last words I would ever hear my daughter speak to me were, 'I need some money to go to Pegasus.'

Later that night, when John and I received the phone call from her friend that Ciara had collapsed at the concert, it was the day our lives changed. We changed. There are so many facets to grief, and it not only physically robs you of that one person you would have died for, but I was robbed of being me. I couldn't breathe without heart-wrenching pain; I couldn't concentrate; there was a constant white noise in my ears. I lost my empathy. I lost the joy of life. A child is not supposed to die before their parent.

The one thing that kept me going was my sons and my husband. People told me that I wouldn't ever get over Ciara's death, that I would take the pain to my grave. I know people meant well, but their words of comfort were not helpful at all. I went to a grief counsellor. We discussed that I had started writing in 2013 when Ciara told me to do something in my life other than drinking coffee in town with my friends. The counsellor suggested I should start writing again. I couldn't read a sentence, let alone write one. She told me just to write my grief. So I wrote my pain and heartbreak, and soon it turned into a *Dear Ciara Diary*.

I was on the second draft of my novel *Dublin's Girl* when Ciara passed away. I tried to go back to writing the book, but my concentration was gone. There was a constant white noise in my head. But I continued to write in my *Dear Ciara Diary*. At first, it was all the pain of losing her, and slowly in time, I would tell her what her dad is doing and what her brothers are doing.

In November 2018, John and I were on the train to Dublin, and as I was scrolling through Twitter and berating myself for being on social media, I saw a Ryan Tubridy Tweet that it was the last day to send in Letters of Regret to a loved one. When I read the tweet, I immediately thought of Ciara and that my only regret was not giving her a hug before she left for the concert. As we walked around Dublin, I was thinking about the *Letter*. In my *Dear Ciara Diary*, I would ask her, did she remember when we did something. I didn't tell John about the *Letter*.

When we arrived home in Kilkenny, I checked the RTE One website, and Thursday was the penultimate day for the *Letters*. I typed the *Letter* and wasn't too sure about sending it but hit send about 11.30 before going to bed. The following morning I went for my usual Friday morning swim and forgot about the letter. After my swim, I checked my phone. I had missed calls and voicemail messages that Ryan had read my Letter of Regret. Not only had Ryan read my letter, but I had won a cash prize. That wasn't why I wrote the letter. It helped me get back to writing, and I needed that validation to continue to do things without Ciara.

In 2019 I submitted the novel to Kate Nash Literary Agency and was stunned when she accepted it and it led to my three-book deal with Aria/Head of Zeus. Grief can be lonely. You watch people move on, and their children move forward in life, leaving school, going to college, achieving all the milestones and rights of passage that you expected your child to achieve. But, when a person loses a child, they are suspended. And that is lonely because you can't begrudge people sharing their happiness with their child's achievements.

There is guilt with the grief, that you are forgetting about your loved one when it eases. And it is coming to terms and accepting that you have to live. And I know Ciara wouldn't want her dad or me to stop living. The madness grief brings, and the flashbacks have gone. I still have a way to go, as I still find it hard to talk about Ciara. When I go to sleep, my first waking thought is Ciara. She is with me all day. But the excruciating pain of a broken heart has dulled to a constant ache.



# IN A LAND NOT FAR AWAY LIVES A LITTLE BOY CALLED TADHG Ó FAINÍN

GRANDAD SAT TADHG DOWN AND EXPLAINED TO HIM 'THESE ARE LETTERS FROM ALL THE LITTLE CHILDREN THAT ARE WORRIED ABOUT THINGS IN THEIR LIVES AND DON'T THINK THEY CAN ASK ANYONE FOR HELP'.

Tadhg asked 'how do these letters get to us?'

Grandad said 'the children write the letters or get help in writing them, give them to an adult like an Aunt, Uncle, Grandparent or teacher who send them on to you and I'.

If they don't give the letters to an adult they leave them in the pouch at the back of this book and leave the book outside their bedroom door.

And with a little bit of magic they get delivered to us.



Kariann & Eoin Ó Fainín's world fell apart the day Tadhg, their son, was taken away from them in a tragic accident. Speaking about Tadhg, Kariann and Eoin said, "Tadhg is an extraordinary 5-year-old boy who left a massive imprint on the people he met, even if he only met them once. We never think of Tadhg as part of our past as he will always be very much in our present and future. As I said, our son Tadhg is an exceptional, fun-loving, friendly, and most definitely funny little character. He's known as Cosa Sasta (Happy feet) in school as he would always be on his feet. Music and films are among Tadhg's favourite things, as well as his love for Gaeilge and books. A significant chunk of our hearts was taken from us, which we will never get back.

With help along the way from friends and family following Tadhg's sudden death, Kariann and Eoin established Tadhg Ó Fainín Foundation which they closed in 2017. The Foundation logo contained a picture that they took from Tadhg's obair bhaile; in the picture, he has drawn his mammy, daddy, brother Feidhlim, nanny Clare and uncle Alex, and of course himself. The drawing shows how we are always together as a family and he showed love using so many colours as he is so colourful himself. The Foundation published the children's book *Tadhg to the Rescue*, written by Kariann Uí Fhainín with beautiful illustrations by Bronwyn Clohissy Boyd and designed by Karen Nelson. Speaking about the work of Bronwyn and Karen, Kariann said they are two of the most talented people I have met on this journey who got stuck in straight away. Kariann wrote the book with all proceeds donated to children's charities across Ireland

## Copies of *Tadhg to the Rescue* for €10 each with all proceeds going to FirstLight

Kariann and Eoin have very kindly donated 80 copies of *Tadhg to the Rescue* to FirstLight. The book can be purchased for €10 per copy, with all proceeds going directly to FirstLight.

If you would like a copy of *Tadhg to the Rescue*, email [info@firstlight.ie](mailto:info@firstlight.ie) or call 01-8732711.



FirstLight

Supporting Suddenly Bereaved Parents & Families

**National 24-Hour Helpline 1850 391 391**

Carmichael Centre, 4 North Brunswick Street, Dublin 7  
Phone: 01-8732711: Website: [www.firstlight.ie](http://www.firstlight.ie): Charity No. CHY7716

If you have a newsletter query or a story for inclusion in the newsletter please email [info@firstlight.ie](mailto:info@firstlight.ie)