

FIRSTLIGHT NEWSLETTER

*"It's okay to feel every single emotion under the sun.
It's okay to be angry. . . you're not going mad. . .
Just because other people don't understand it
and don't know what to say, doesn't mean that
your feelings are any less valid."*

*Rebecca, Mum of Finn
and FirstLight Client*

BABY LOSS AWARENESS WEEK MESSAGE FROM FIRSTLIGHT CEO

As we move into Autumn with cooler weather and darker evenings our landscape is filled with vivid colours and softer light evoking a sense of beauty but also sadness. There is an invitation to contemplate the cycles of life, the passage of time, and the fragility of existence.

This is particularly so during Baby Loss Awareness Week which runs from runs from 9th to 15th October. The week helps us raise awareness of the impact of pregnancy and baby loss, the importance that bereavement support plays in learning to live with loss and the need for compassionate and open conversations, offering solace to grieving parents.

Baby loss, whether through miscarriage, stillbirth, or neonatal death, is a deeply personal tragedy and is often an isolating experience. We have come some way to removing the shroud of silence that often accompanied this loss in Ireland, with many fantastic support organisations such as *Féileacáin* and *A Little Lifetime Foundation* offering resources and helping families build their own rituals of memory and celebration. This week allows us to share a gentle acknowledgment of the depth of such loss and ensure that our community of bereavement has space for families to remember their babies in ways that feel right for them.

Although it is often difficult to find the words to acknowledge pregnancy and baby loss, it is important to meet the grief with kindness and empathy and to acknowledge the loss of someone loved. Openness can help families heal, encouraging them to acknowledge their pain, rather than feeling pressured to move on quickly or to grieve in private.

Ar scáth a chéile a mhaireann na daoine.

Jennifer McCarthy Flynn
FirstLight CEO

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BABY LOSS AWARENESS WEEK 9TH - 15TH OCTOBER 2024

This year marks the 22nd year of *Baby Loss Awareness Week* - a week for everyone in the baby loss community and beyond to come together to remember and honour our much-loved and missed babies.

Baby Loss Awareness Week began in 2002 as an October remembrance day initiated by parents in the UK. The following year, the events expanded to include the very first 'Wave of Light' service, in which families light candles at the same time in honour of the babies they had lost.

Since then, the campaign continued to grow and form into what we now know as *Baby Loss Awareness Week* which is a series of events, virtual and in-person, held annually from the 9th to 15th of October. These events are organised by the *Baby Loss Awareness Week Alliance*, a working group made up of various charities in the UK and Ireland, including FirstLight, who provide support in the area of pregnancy and infant loss.

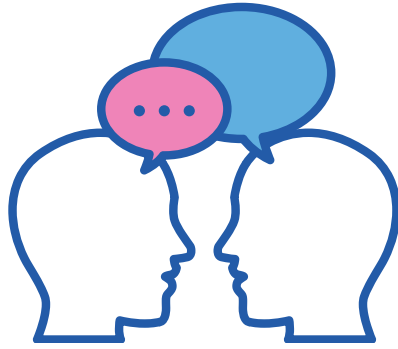
Baby Loss Awareness Week is an opportunity:

- To support bereaved parents and families and to unite with others across the world to commemorate their babies' lives and lost pregnancies.
- To raise awareness about pregnancy and baby loss.
- To drive improvements in care and support for anyone affected and in the prevention of pregnancy and baby loss.

The week also provides an opportunity to raise awareness of the impact of pregnancy and baby loss; the importance that bereavement support plays in the ongoing bereavement journey; and of the vital work that is needed to improve pregnancy outcomes and to save babies' lives.

Getting Involved in Baby Loss Awareness Week

For some bereaved parents, **Baby Loss Awareness Week** is an opportunity to connect with others who have been through similar losses, to access supports and resources and to honour and commemorate their baby or babies who have died. For others, however, **Baby Loss Awareness Week** can feel overwhelming. Social media and news feeds are flooded with articles about baby loss, and these stories and images can trigger challenging thoughts and feelings which can be too much to cope with at times. If this is what it feels like for you, there is no shame in prioritising your wellbeing by stepping away and not engaging in the content and events of **Baby Loss Awareness Week**. But for those who do wish to participate in some way, here are ideas for getting involved in the campaign.



Break the Silence

Pregnancy and baby loss can often feel like a 'taboo' subject. You can help to break the silence around baby loss by talking to your friends, family and colleagues about Baby Loss Awareness Week. You can also join the conversation on social media and connect with others discussing the issue and their own experiences by using the hashtags #BLAW and #babyloss on your posts. And don't forget to follow Baby Loss Awareness Week on social media for updates, event details and resources:

Instagram: @babyloss

Facebook: Baby Loss Awareness UK

X / Twitter: @BLA_Campaign

Wear a Ribbon Pin Badge

You can buy and wear a Baby Loss Awareness ribbon pin badge to support families affected by the death of a baby. You can buy the pin badge from babyloss-awareness.org. If you would like to, you can share photos of your pin badge on social media to show your support and help raise awareness - don't forget to use the hashtags #BLAW and #babyloss.



Take Part in Events

From Pink & Blue buildings and landmarks to ribbon remembrance events and hospital displays, find out what's on in your community and show your support. To find out more, you can visit <https://babyloss-awareness.org/events/>



Share Your Story

If you are a bereaved parent, grandparent, sibling, healthcare professional or anyone who has been affected by a pregnancy loss or the death of a baby, we welcome you to share your story. You can do this by contacting FirstLight by email at administration@firstlight.ie or you can visit <https://babyloss-awareness.org/share-your-story/> to share your story on the Baby Loss Awareness Week website.



Join the Global #WaveOfLight

Unite with bereaved families across the world by lighting a candle at 7 p.m. on the 15th of October in memory of every baby who has died. Post a photo of your candle with the hashtag #waveoflight and tag FirstLight to have your photo shared on our social media. To learn more about the Global Wave of Light, visit: <https://babyloss-awareness.org/get-involved/#wave-of-light>





Baby Loss Awareness Week

Join us for the global

Wave of Light

15 October, 7pm

*Light a candle in memory of all babies' lives gone too soon.
Join us 7pm local time.*





Share your #WaveOfLight pictures
babyloss-awareness.org/get-involved/#wave-of-light

Stories of Love, Loss and Hope from FirstLight Clients

Last year, FirstLight created their first information video with the aim of giving a platform to bereaved parents and families to share their experiences.

As part of the video project, four FirstLight clients and bereaved parents bravely shared their experiences of losing their child. While their full interviews were too long to share in our one informational video, their stories were so powerful that we knew we would have to find another way to have them heard. We have released each of their interviews as a short video as well as a full-length podcast. All of this content is available in the resources section of our website. Please visit www.firstlight.ie/resources or click the links throughout this article.

We hope that by sharing the stories of these beautiful children and their courageous parents, others who have gone through similar experiences will feel seen, understood, and less lonely in their grief. We also hope that the bravery and resilience of Karen, Rebecca, Rob and Amie will inspire glimmers of self-compassion and hope in what is the most devastating time any parent can go through.

We also hope that these stories will be heard by the wider public, who may not have personal experiences of child loss or bereavement. We hope that they will gain insight into the lives and experiences of bereaved families. Those who have lost a child deserve empathy and compassion, and we believe that by raising awareness and promoting understanding of this devastating experience, we can create a society where grieving individuals feel supported.

By sharing these stories we also hope to increase awareness of the services provided by FirstLight. We want bereaved families and frontline professionals to have an understanding of what it's like to engage with our service. We want everyone who needs us to know that we are here for them and what they can expect from us. We hope that this video will give families, individuals, and professionals the confidence to reach out to us and understand that they will be treated with empathy, compassion, patience, and respect.

Finally, we want to take this opportunity to sincerely thank the individuals who took part in this project. We thank Karen for sharing her story of what it was like to experience the death of her smiley son, Zack. We thank Rebecca who shared how FirstLight helped her after the sudden death of her baby son, Finn. We thank Rob for telling us about the life and passing of his gorgeous daughter Emily. We thank Amie for sharing what it was like to give birth to and experience the passing of her beautiful baby Áine at just 23 weeks during Covid. We are so grateful for their generosity and courage in telling us their stories of love and loss of their children.

Karen and Zack's Story

"If someone lives in our shoes for a week, a month, even a day, to experience the pain, the loss, the fear, the anger...they'd get some insight into what it's like to lose a child.." - Karen

In 2023, bereaved mum and FirstLight client, Karen, sat down with our Clinical Services Director, Georgia, to speak about the death of her gorgeous son, Zack.

Karen was courageous in telling her story of experiencing the sudden and traumatic death of her son, Zack, at aged 1, from a rare and aggressive brain tumour.

Karen speaks about the joy and laughter Zack brought to her family and the world during his devastatingly short life.

Click [here](#) to watch Karen and Zack's video, and to listen to the full podcast.



Rebecca and Finn's Story

"It's okay to feel every single emotion under the sun. It's okay to be angry...you're not going mad...just because other people don't understand it and don't know what to say doesn't mean that your feelings are any less valid." - Rebecca

Rebecca, sat down with our clinical team to courageously tell us about her experience of losing her gorgeous son Finn at just 2 weeks old.

Finn died from Ectopic Atrial Tachycardia (EAT), which causes an abnormally fast heart rate.



Finn had just had his two-week check-up at the doctor, and all seemed well, but unfortunately, that night, things took a devastating turn for Finn, Rebecca and her family. Rebecca speaks about the terrifying and tragic time at the hospital, and the aftermath of Finn's death, how it impacted her and her family and how they are coping now.

Click [here](#) to watch Rebecca and Finn's video, and to listen to the full podcast.

Rob and Emily's Story

"For other, say, dads in particular, that might not be inclined to talk to someone or talk to a counsellor - just do it." - Rob

FirstLight dad, Rob, speaks to us about the heart-breaking experience of seeing his daughter Emily get ill and die from cancer at just seven and a half years old.

Rob tells us about the light and joy Emily brought to her family and the world during her devastatingly short life, as well as describing her illness, treatment and, ultimately, her tragic death.

Rob also speaks about how FirstLight has helped him, and he encourages others who are struggling to seek support.



Click [here](#) to watch Rob and Emily's video, and to listen to the full podcast.

Amie and Áine's Story

"I don't want to be fixed, because if I was fixed it means I would be over losing Áine, and I'm never going to be." - Amie

Amie bravely tells us her tragic story of losing her beautiful daughter.

Amie speaks about experiencing fertility issues, finding out she was pregnant with Áine, then having to give birth to her at just 23 weeks, and Áine's passing soon after this. Amie's devastating experience was further compounded by all of



this having occurred during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic. We are so grateful to Amie for her generosity and courage in telling us her story of the love and loss of beautiful baby Áine.

Click [here](#) to watch Amie and Áine's video, and to listen to the full podcast.



Aoibhín and Jo's Story

Aoibhín is a FirstLight mother, who experienced the tragic loss of her baby girl, Jo, when she was 21 weeks pregnant.

Aoibhín is a women's health physiotherapist and a writer. She is currently writing a book about her journey towards healing after the devastating loss of her daughter.

The following is an excerpt from Aoibhín's book which is yet to be published.

'It is not the order of things we remember, but snapshot moments. A pre-assessment room, a young doctor, kindness, another scan to confirm. To confirm what? Somewhere else, a darkened room, modern ultrasound equipment, screens for happy parents to watch their babies kicking. A radiographer introduced herself. Now, in my mind's eye, she has no name or face. More kindness. Staring at the ceiling panels, the familiar strong hand holding mine, cold gel on my exposed tummy. A silence that meant more than any sound ever would, ever will, in our lives again and then the words "I'm so sorry, but your baby's heart has stopped beating."

Did we make a sound? Did we roar? Did we cry? I can't tell you. But I now know how the river feels when she is dropped off the edge of the falls. The shock of hurtling, not towards the ground, because it is the solid ground you have left behind, but plummeting, tumbling, into a space that you have never been before, a space that might never end and if it does or it doesn't, you wonder if you will survive, a space that once entered, you feel that some part of you has gone on ahead, some part of you has already died.'

We thank Aoibhín for sharing this piece with us, and we look forward to the publication of her book. If you would like to read more of Aoibhín's work, you can follow her over on Substack: www.aoibhinswift.substack.com

Poetry Corner

Excerpts from the poem
'A Silent Birth' by Kaley Kiewiet

Deeply, I wanted you
Bravely, I fought
Trusting to be with you
Instead, I'm at loss.

Gratefully, I carried you
Painfully, delivered you
Heartbreakingly lost you
Into the hands of God.

You knew the sound of my voice
The steady rhythm of our choice

To love and keep you well, my dear
For all the days you had numbered here.

Not one. Not even one moment with me
Instead, your first breath was eternity
I held you close, though cold and frail
You were mine to love. You were mine to care

Why did you have to go so soon?
And leave me with an empty womb
The only hope I have today
Is that I might see you again one day.

Darkness has taken over now
Joy, but a fading memory
But not forever as you'll see
Love will grow inside of me.

CURRENT FIRSTLIGHT FUNDRAISERS YOU CAN HELP SUPPORT

As a registered charity, FirstLight relies on the support of our wonderful donors and fundraisers to ensure that we can continue to deliver our crisis intervention and professional psychotherapy services free of charge to bereaved parents and families across Ireland.

There are so many individuals, families and communities working tirelessly to raise essential funds for FirstLight, and we'd love if you could support their efforts and help them reach their fundraising goals by donating or by sharing their campaigns through word of mouth or on social media. Here are some of our current fundraisers who we'd love for you to support and shout about.



4Alfie Fundraiser

This Sunday, October 12th, Alfie's dad Aidan will be undertaking his fourth and final Adventure Quest Challenge in Killarney. Aidan has been undertaking these gruelling challenges in honour of his baby son Alfie, who died tragically at just 4 days old.

In Alfie's memory, his parents, Aidan and Amanda O'Reilly, are aiming to raise €4,000 for each of their four chosen charities—FirstLight, A Little Lifetime Foundation, Blood Bike South, and Cork City Hospitals Children's Club. All of these charities are close to their hearts, as they contributed meaningfully to Alfie's life and help other families experiencing similarly tragic situations. We are so grateful to Aidan and Amanda for choosing FirstLight as one of the beneficiaries of their amazing fundraising efforts. **Sunday 12th October will be the last chance to donate to their campaign, so act fast by clicking [here!](#)**

Run4Henry

Darren's Run4Henry Fundraiser will see him embark on the monumental challenge of participating in the Dublin City Marathon.

This incredible endeavour is not just an ordinary marathon; it is a deeply personal journey undertaken in loving memory of his beautiful baby boy, Henry, who tragically passed away at the tender age of 7 months in 2020.

Darren's unwavering determination and strength will not only be dedicated to honouring Henry's memory, but will also be channelled towards supporting FirstLight. FirstLight has supported Darren in navigating the profound grief of losing his beloved, beautiful baby boy, Henry and empowering him to seek justice. As a result of this resilience, an apology from the HSE was secured at the Four Courts in May 2024.

Please help Darren smash his fundraising target by donating [here!](#)



Marathon for Max

Teresa is running the Dublin Marathon this October in honour of Max O'Connor, and to raise much-needed funds for FirstLight.

Max died tragically while swimming, at just 15 years old. His sudden death has rippled through his whole community, devastating everyone, but especially his beloved parents, siblings, extended family and his friends - particularly the brave young boys who tried tirelessly to save Max, along with the emergency services on that sunny afternoon in May.

Max's family have chosen FirstLight to be the beneficiaries of their fundraiser and are so grateful to anyone who can support them - donate [online here.](#)



THANK YOU TO OUR RECENT FUNDRAISERS

We have been truly blown away by the innovation, tenacity and hard work of our amazing fundraisers so far this year. We wish to extend our heartfelt thanks to each and every person who supported us in continuing our vital work of providing free crisis intervention and professional psychotherapy to bereaved families.

While we would love to, to name each individual supporter and donor here would take a lifetime, but please know that we are so grateful for your contribution to our work, and that each cent you have raised goes directly to funding our professional support services for families who have experienced the death of their child. Below, we would like to shine the spotlight on just a few of the amazing individuals, families and communities who contributed to our cause in 2024 so far.

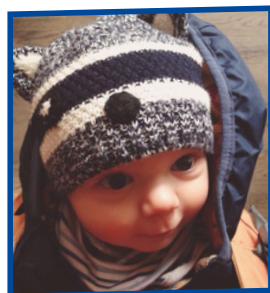


In April, **Skerries Rowing Club** (Top) raised €2,500 for FirstLight by holding a rowing marathon. Massive thank you to Stephen Comiskey and all those to who donated and participated on the day.



Our amazing Chairperson **Oliver Blackwell** (middle left) summited Mt. Aconcagua in February, raising in excess of €17,000 for FirstLight, in honour of his beloved son David, who died unexpectedly at just 14 months old.

Also in February, **Ballboughal Boxing Club** hosted their annual 'Go Blue for JJ' Fundraiser in aid of FirstLight, and in memory of Baby JJ Harford (middle right), raising €2,000. Big thank you to the whole community of Ballboughal for your continued support of FirstLight,



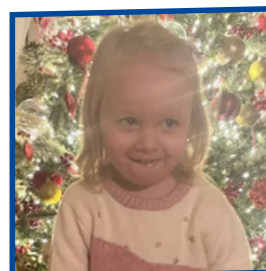
In March, **Portmarnock Triathlon Club** (bottom left) held their annual memorial swim and fundraiser in honour of Ruairí Keegan, who died suddenly last year, at just 5 years old. They raised in excess of €10,000 through their online fundraiser, and incredibly, their donation was matched by the **Z Zurich Foundation**, bringing the total to over €20,000. We are incredibly grateful to everyone from the Tri Club and Z Zurich Foundation.

In June, **Chloé Garde** completed her first triathlon in honour of her son, Brody (bottom left), who died tragically from a rare congenital heart defect called ALCAPA syndrome in 2020. Chloé smashed her fundraising target and raised an amazing €2,350 for FirstLight.

In July, the **McHale Family** (top right) raised a staggering €20,717 through their 17-day Walk or Run Challenge in honour of their son, AJ, who died after just 17 days of life due to complications from Trisomy 18/Edwards Syndrome. The funds were split between the family's 3 chosen charities - SOFT Ireland, Sligo University Hospital and FirstLight.



Also over the summer, the **Trimble Family** and the community of Kinnegad raised an incredible €20,000 for FirstLight through their Remembrance Walk and other fundraising initiatives, in honour of beloved baby Willow Trimble (middle left). Willow died suddenly in December 2023 at just 2 years of age.



In August, **Lewis King** (top right) raised €2,561 for Féileacáin and FirstLight through his 127km Wicklow Way 3 Day Ultramarathon in honour of his son Freddie who was stillborn last year.

A massive thank you to the **Heneghan Family** (middle right) and the community of Clonbern who have raised almost €60,000 in support of FirstLight over the last 10 years. Their annual Baby Noel Heneghan Barn Dance raised an impressive €8,400 this year - thank you to all involved.



And finally, big thank you to **Steph and Diarmaid** (bottom) who cycled an amazing 100km in aid of FirstLight and the NMH Foundation (Helping Holles Street) raising €9,250 in honour of baby Aila.

FirstLight are Recruiting:

New Charity Trustee & Board Member (Voluntary Position)

FirstLight is seeking to recruit a Charity Trustee & Board Member with a fundraising background to strengthen and support the Board's work in all areas of fundraising and to chair its Fundraising Committee. This position is a voluntary role, and we are seeking an energetic and dedicated person with an interest in the values and objectives of our organisation. You will work with the Board and a staff team helping to provide strategic direction to our fundraising efforts.

We are developing a new Strategic & Business development plan and we are seeking to strengthen our Board by appointing a new Trustee & Board member with a knowledge of philanthropic giving and experience with developing engagement with corporate social responsibility programmes and sponsors.

Key Responsibilities:

Collaborate with fellow Trustees and the staff team to support the development and implementation of a comprehensive fundraising strategy aligned with FirstLight's vision and goals.

Provide strategic advice on diversifying our funding base, including helping us design and implement a corporate fundraising strategy.

Provide insight into cultivating and maintaining relationships with existing donors, while also helping to identify and engage new potential supporters.

Support FirstLight to develop a diversified funding base and innovative ideas to increase our fundraising events, campaigns, and other initiatives.

To find out more about the role, please visit <https://firstlight.ie/recruiting-charity-trustee-board-member/>

Please send your expression of interest to Jennifer McCarthy Flynn at ceo@firstlight.ie

Submit Referrals @ www.firstlight.ie

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If you have a newsletter query or a story for inclusion in the newsletter please email info@firstlight.ie