

# Our time to stand together



Karen and Olive receiving donations of personal protective equipment from the team at Heroes Aid

## Summer Newsletter 2020

# Our Deepest Thanks



**My name is Karen Feeney, and I am Head of Client Services with Galway Simon. I have been working in the organisation supporting those experiencing, or facing homelessness in the West for over 13 years.**

As we continue to face challenges in providing supports to some of the most vulnerable people in our community, for those at risk of, or experiencing homelessness,

Coronavirus is a crisis on top of a crisis. Prior to the outbreak of Covid-19, our services were already extremely stretched.

**Throughout the 40 years of our work, I don't think our Services have faced a challenge like this. Our experience with people at their most vulnerable teaches us that one of the most difficult features of being homeless is the feeling of isolation and disconnection.**

Like everywhere else in the community, for those experiencing homelessness, the social distancing restrictions due to Covid-19 have been difficult, lonely, and frightening. This brings a whole set of new challenges for me and the team in trying to support and protect clients.

Thankfully, we have an incredibly dedicated team of frontline staff and volunteers, who continue to work tirelessly to protect those in our services and maintain positive relationships with our clients to reassure them that they belong and that they are valued.

**We are also fortunate to have deeply committed supporters and we appreciate all that they do to help and care for those who are living in – or facing – homelessness.**

The ongoing Covid-19 pandemic is an incredibly difficult time for all of us, yet as we face these challenges, you are standing with us and I would like to thank you for your continued support and commitment to protecting those facing homelessness.

Yours sincerely,

**Karen Feeney,**

Head of Client Services, Galway Simon Community

Watch Karen's recent update on adapting our frontline services during Covid-19 here



# Embracing Lockdown

Despite the challenges faced because of Covid-19, many of the people we support are embracing lockdown by taking part in new activities and hobbies. Here is a look at some of the fantastic projects they are taking part in:

## Furniture Upcycling



“Doing the upcycling of old furniture and staff being so helpful, it gave me a real sense of purpose. I suffer with manic depression so I know more than most it’s imperative to be looking after my emotional well-being but being isolated and

having to self-isolate leaves you despondent, helpless. It gave me a sense of purpose and also pride knowing I was doing something for a charity who have helped me so much.”

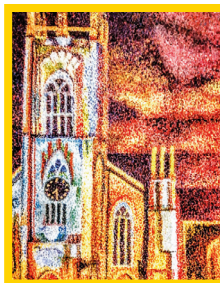
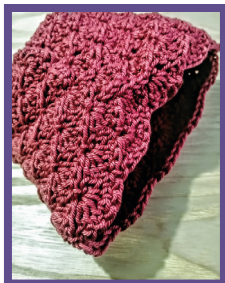
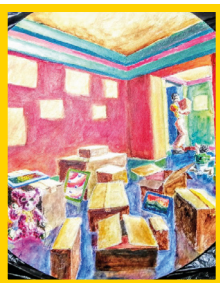
- Client in our Housing Services



## Arts & Crafts

“While in lock down we have been doing many craft things to keep busy because I don’t think I would be able to cope if I didn’t have these to do. The days rolled into each other and doing similar things everyday, it was starting to become hard to keep upbeat. Me and Andrew have also made over 50 cards since the lockdown and Andrew has also been doing lots of painting and drawings”

- Ellen and Andrew





## **Galway Simon's Choir Goes Virtual**

**Fiona Thornton, Occupational Therapist with Galway Simon speaks about the importance of the Project in these difficult times.**

The Galway Simon Music Project began in 2017 when a small group of clients, volunteers and staff came together to prepare a short performance at the annual “Knights Before Christmas” concert in the Cathedral. Since then, the choir has gone from strength to strength, one highlight being the group performing for President Michael D. Higgins in 2018.

**The power of being part of something, and belonging to something, it just does such wonders for overall health and well-being.**

We started our weekly rehearsals at the end of January but unfortunately, as Covid progressed, we could no longer meet together in person. We really weren't sure at all how we could continue but thanks to our

choir coordinators Brian and Carol, and with the use of technology, we were able to take the choir online and host it on Zoom. Personally, I look forward to this group every week, now more than ever we need to have opportunities to have fun, laugh and connect with people.

**For clients, being able to see each other - seeing their peers- their friends, it is that connection that binds the group together.**

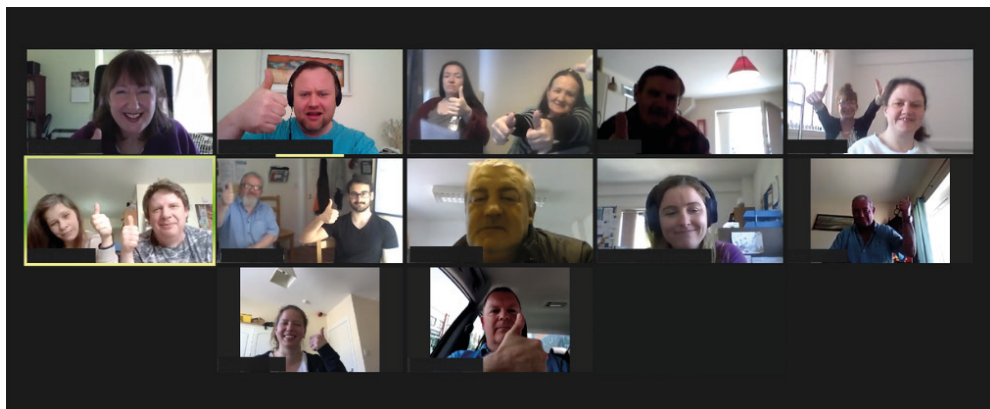
It is amazing to see people developing friendships and developing personal skills. There are even a few people that weren't involved in the music project before Covid that are logging on to the group now, so it's breaking down barriers for some clients in that they can join from the comfort of their own space.

**Although Covid-19 has been very challenging, this has definitely been one of the silver linings for me.**

Watch the Music Project perform at our 40th Anniversary Event in 2019 here



# Billy Reconnects with Friends Online



One of the Galway Simon Music Project's lead singers, Billy, shares how important the music project is for him and his peers during these difficult times.

“When I first joined the Music Project, of course, it is about singing songs, but then it became more of a community thing for us. Once or twice a week we would meet up and have fun. It just became such a natural part of our week.

When it was suggested about using Zoom [for the Music Project] I wasn't sure because I had never used Zoom before. But I said I would try it.

And it has been brilliant in the lockdown sense, because we take

part every Thursday, and it is something we all look forward to. It is great seeing familiar faces again and being able to say hello.

Everyone seems to be enjoying it. We are even recording a few songs at the moment, we all sing by ourselves and then Brian [Choir Coordinator] brings it together with a backing track.

During the lockdown period, it is a new way of re-connecting with people. Galway Simon have been fantastic with it. Even during the pandemic overall, Galway Simon have been more than fantastic.”

- Billy, Lead Singer with the Music Project



## **\*Cathal's Journey Home**

**Through the extension of our Independent Living Programme, so far this year we have acquired 8 new homes and supported 7 individuals to move into a home of their own.**

Olive, Galway Simon's Housing & Services Support Coordinator, speaks about the day she accompanied \*Cathal into one of these homes at the start of the year.

I have been supporting \*Cathal since early 2016 when he moved from one of our residential houses into Galway Simon's transitional community based housing. It had been a long journey for him so you can imagine how special it was to be the person who could go with him to see his new home for the first time and to hand over the keys. We live for these moments in Galway Simon!

Since he was a teenager, he has suffered with very poor mental health and has sadly spent the majority of the past 20 plus years either in hospital under the care of the psychiatric service or in homeless services.

**When he first came to Galway Simon, it was so that he could have a stable base and so that we could help him to build on his life skills.**

On the 19th of February when we opened the door to his new home, a small one-bed apartment in the City, his initial reaction was absolute disbelief. Through all my years working with him, even at the lowest points of his illness, he has always spoken about how being independent is important for him. However, with going in and out of hospital and from there to homeless services for



years he was feeling like he had no control over his life.

**After a moment's thought he turned to me in the apartment and said "Olive, we need to talk about my independence".**

To this I couldn't stop smiling as I said... "this is your home, no one else will be living here, these are your keys you can come and go as you please". I think it was only then that it hit home to him that he was finally having his greatest wish fulfilled: a place that was his alone, no more sharing with other people like he had done for the best part of his life.

**With this the tears welled up in his eyes. He replied... "I could have a girlfriend having a place like this, couldn't I?"**

This was a poignant moment for me. It struck me that the very basic need for love and companionship felt unattainable to him because of his circumstances up to that moment. I could not imagine thinking that I could not share my life with someone because I felt I didn't have the choice.

**Our deepest thanks to our incredible friends at Hewlett Packard Enterprise, DXC, Microfocus and ISS who have funded the fit out of 7 new homes so far this year through their incredible Corporate partnership with us in 2019.**

*\*To protect identities, the name used has been changed, however Cathal's story is very much real.*



## Covid 19: On the Frontline of Homeless Services



My name is Peter and I am a Service Manager with Galway Simon where I run two services. One is an Emergency Service which currently supports 10 men who are experiencing homelessness and who would otherwise be sleeping rough. The second is our Supported Housing Service which is currently a home to 6 older gentlemen that for the most part, have experienced entrenched homelessness over the years and

would have experienced trauma in their lives.

**Most people have their own house where they can shelter and self-isolate to prevent Covid-19, they can cocoon if they need to and they can do it themselves on their own terms. But for those experiencing homelessness, this is a luxury they just don't have.**

Social distancing has been a huge challenge. People are doing their best to keep the spirits up but it has changed the atmosphere. Unfortunately, due to the guidelines, we have had to close the communal areas in our services. It's a major issue because there was a real sense of fun and community from our communal areas and that's gone, for now. But we know that this is only temporary, and that it's an issue for everybody.

I think our biggest challenge at the moment is keeping our clients as healthy and as safe as possible. Because many of the men in our services have underlying health issues, they are at higher risk. So we are dealing with the very real fear that someone could get very sick, very quickly and we would have to manage that inside the services.



My name is Elsa Edwardson and I have worked with Galway Simon's Community Support Service since it was set up in 2011. Before that I worked in various roles across our Supported Housing Services.

I've seen so much change since I first started with the organisation because of the homelessness and housing crisis. My role now is focused on helping people maintain their homes and to prevent people from becoming homeless in the first place.

### **Since Covid-19, we've had to change the way we support our clients.**

For example, when we first start supporting someone, we need to draw up a support plan which involves going through some personal information. Before Covid, we could invite clients into our office to go through things face-to-face, to make sure it was done in a private setting but I suppose that's not really appropriate now. A lot of this work is being done over the phone.

Recently I met a client in Eyre Square, we found a quiet spot to sit just so I could meet him face to face because I'd only ever spoken to him on the phone. His circumstances have changed completely since Covid-19 has come along. He had been working before Covid and had a home, but both of these things are now gone. He's been staying with a friend and he's been told his job may not be there for him after lockdown. So he's lost his job and his home.

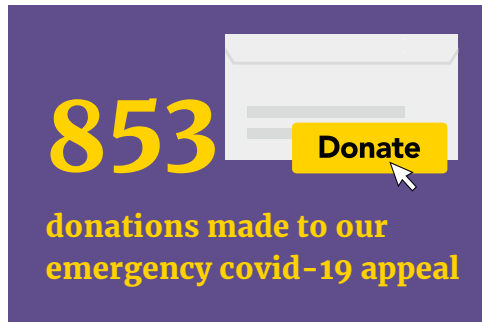
**My fear now is that there's something being stored up for the future and there'll be another wave of people in crisis homelessness after lockdown has been lifted.**

*Read more updates from our frontline here*

# Thank You!

Even during these uncertain times, as people try to find their own way through Covid-19, the generosity we have received from our supporters has been incredible. This truly showcases the power and sense of community here in the West.

We can't thank our supporters enough for their commitment to helping those facing homelessness during this crisis. Here are just some examples of the support Galway Simon received since March:



**Get Involved!**

**VIRTUAL**

# SLEEP OUT

FOR  
Galway  
*Simon*  
Community



**TAKE THE CHALLENGE, JOIN THE EXPERIENCE, MAKE A DIFFERENCE**

For the past four years, Galway Simon Community's annual Sleep Out has made a huge impact on homelessness prevention services throughout the county and 2020 is set to be no different.

**This year, Galway Simon's Sleep Out is going virtual as we ask the people of Galway and beyond to swap their beds for sleeping bags in solidarity with those facing homelessness in the West of Ireland.**

While we may not be able to gather together in various Galway locations, we are inviting friends and family, colleagues and teammates to join us from a distance and sleep out in your own back garden, your driveway or even your bedroom floor. Forego your usual comforts in a gesture of solidarity as you spend the night fundraising in a unique and powerful way.

For more information on how you can get involved, visit [galway.sleepoutforsimon.ie](http://galway.sleepoutforsimon.ie) or contact

**Amy, Community & Youth Partnerships Coordinator at**  
[amy.lavelle@galwaysimon.ie](mailto:amy.lavelle@galwaysimon.ie)

Watch our official launch video here 



# Galway Simon Community

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Galway Simon Community is operating to the Charities Institute 'Triple Lock' standards and is compliant with the Irish Charity Voluntary Governance Code, the Statement of Recommended Practices (SORP) and the Statement of Guiding Principles for Fundraising.