

ANNUAL REPORT 2019



Cottage Autism Network Wexford CLG

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Cottage Autism Network CLG

Chairperson's Address

2019 has been another busy, successful and positive year for CAN as an organisation. We are very proud of each and every one of the children and families within CAN who put their trust in us to provide meaningful and beneficial activities for their families. We are also extremely grateful for our member's constant support and encouragement.

I think Wexford, as a county, has made great strides in the past year to become a much more inclusive and open community and I can only hope that the momentum continues throughout 2020 and beyond.

CAN has been chaired by a few different people in the past 12 months, each of them striving to move forward and always make progress, while maintaining the governance of CAN as a charity and a company limited by guarantee.

Mag Furness

Chairperson

Cottage Autism Network CLG

Cottage Autism Network Wexford CLG aims to improve the quality of life of people on the Autism Spectrum and their families by providing support, promoting equality and inclusion as well as raising awareness in the community by being a voice for our members.

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Impact in 2019

Coffee Mornings in Kelly's Café @ Meadow and Byrne's, Drinagh Retail Park, Wexford Town.

During the year our fortnightly Coffee mornings have become a well - established get - together for mams (and sometimes dads) to meet up. Attendance can vary from six to sixteen in attendance and these have enabled parents to meet up to share experiences and knowledge.

World Autism Awareness Month 2019

Cottage Autism Network Ball 2019: was one of the highlights of the year for us as an organisation. We had a massive 240 attendees in the Talbot Hotel Wexford for a night of celebrations including our MC Eileen Dunne, Wexford Hurling Manager Davy Fitz, Wexford Senior Hurling Captain Matthew O' Hanlon. Our main sponsors were Cloney Agricultural Contractors Ltd, Top Tyres and Simon Donoghue.



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This is Me:

We produced a Lámh video to the This is Me song from The Greatest Showman. It was sung beautifully by Hayley Crosbie and consisted of lots of clips of our fabulous kids using Lámh sign to communicate the words of the song. It highlighted our children/young people as the fabulous fun-loving people they are. We were subsequently invited down to Beat FM to talk about the video and it was a really great experience for the families involved. Our video reached a whopping 247,853 people on social media.

<https://youtu.be/SAwA6D-bedk>

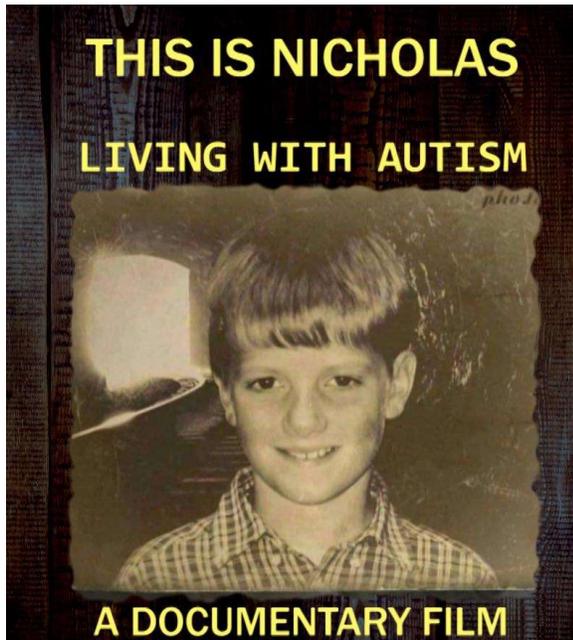


We displayed this sign to raise awareness of Autism on Wexford County Council's Welcome Wall on the quay in Wexford town from April 1st-30th. It was designed by Derek Dodebier.



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This is Nicholas Screening @ Wexford Omniplex – Thursday 11th April 2019



CAN were delighted to link with Ray and his team in Wexford Omniplex to hold a screening of Nicholas Ryan Purcell's "This is Nicholas". It is a brilliant documentary and got a great attendance with a special visit from Nicholas himself who did a Q & A session after the film.

Images of Autism Photography Exhibition – New Ross Library

This wonderful exhibition got another outing in 2019 and rightfully so. It is compiled of photographs from a parent/carer photography course run by CAN and the WWETB Adult & Community Education. It was opened by Cllr Michael Sheehan and ran from April 2nd – April 30th, 2019.



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Other Awareness campaigns throughout 2019



CAN were delighted to link with Tony O' Donovan of ALF – Autism Life-Skill Friend trolleys and Pettitt's Supervalu St. Aidans, Wexford to introduce two ALF trolleys into store in July 2019. Pettitt's also introduced a weekly Autism-friendly shopping hour on Tuesday evenings from 7-8pm where ovens would be turned off, deliveries reduced, music turned off and till beeps lowered to make it a more sensory friendly shopping experience. Lee Chin very kindly attended the launch. We hope that the introduction of these trolleys will encourage parents to bring their children and young adults to Pettitt's Supervalu to teach them the essential life skill of grocery shopping.



Leinster Final Programme

We were delighted to be included in the Match programme for the 2019 Leinster Final. What a fabulous way to raise awareness of CAN and promote the Cúl camp.



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Activities

- Thanks to the work of our treasurer, and Board member Ciara Kehoe, we have a detailed account of activities for 2019. We took part in 27 different activities throughout the year, a really brilliant range of old and new.
- Our weekly activities are subsidised by CAN, while parents usually pay a minimal contribution.
- Members benefit from a slightly reduced rate, while most activities are open to non – members also.
- All our facilitators and all volunteers that have access to children are vetted by CAN and processed through Carlow Volunteer Centre.
- Our activities are fully insured and facilitators are recruited that are trained/ experienced in their relevant area.
- Parents/ Guardians are required to stay on – site during activities to ensure that each child is supported to participate to their individual ability and help to reduce anxiety. We see the huge benefit this is for parents/guardians too as they are given the opportunity to chat and develop friendships with other parents.
- Numbers are usually kept small in our groups to maximise participation and keep the environment as sensory friendly and calm as possible.

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Lego/Bricks 4 Kids

Our weekly Bricks 4 Kids group takes place in Wexford on Tuesday evenings. Between 10-12 children benefited on a weekly basis. This activity helps to improve social skills through turn taking, sharing and teamwork as well as an opportunity for kids to use their creativity and serves as an introduction to STEM. Eileen & Anita were always super encouraging and helpful to all the kids and the parents too. We had approx. 22 weekly sessions in 2019.



Tekcentral Wexford & New Ross

Tekcentral in Taghmon moved home to the Allied Hub in Wexford during the course of 2019 and we moved with them. We were also delighted to expand to a weekly Coding class in Educate Together New Ross from Sep 2019. Always a firm favourite, we held 28 sessions between Taghmon & Wexford and 10 in New Ross. With approx. 10 kids per class. We also held 3 Gaming Days in April, August and November.



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Soccer 4 Fun Wexford & New Ross

One of our longest running groups, Soccer 4 Fun has grown from strength to strength. In Wexford, it takes place in Scoil Mhuire, Coolcotts every Saturday between 10am-1pm with approx. 30 children taking part each week. The session is coached by 2 FAI coaches and supported by some of our many wonderful CAN volunteers. We have 3 different groups each Saturday and which equated to 25 Saturdays or 75 hours of Soccer in Wexford in 2019. Soccer in New Ross also took place in St. Mary's Secondary School and we had 11 sessions there over the year.

Little Friends

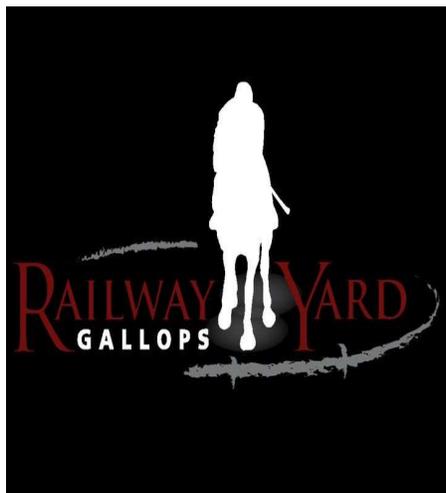
Our fortnightly play group for younger children aged 3-5 years continued throughout 2019. This group is run by volunteers who have experience in the area of childcare/ additional needs/teaching/ home tuition. This group is limited to six children per session and is open to kids newly diagnosed or awaiting a diagnosis of Autism. 15 sessions took place in 2019 and it wouldn't be possible without CAN's super volunteers. We also had 2 Playful Páisti sessions and a visit from Nore Valley Pet Farm.



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Horse Riding/Equine Therapy

CAN Members enjoyed no less than 98 equine assisted therapy sessions during 2018 at the Railway Yard in Duncormick. Again, thanks to funding we were able to facilitate so much more sessions this year and expand it to include siblings. Everyone really enjoyed the experience.



Cycling Programme

We teamed up with Southeast Cycling Safety during 2019, 10 of the 14 kids involved over the 4-week programme were successful in learning to cycle and the remaining kids made great progress. Cycling is a life skill that has really boosted the confidence, particularly of the older kids, and is improving kid's physical fitness.

Forest School



CAN ran a Forest School in 2019 which ran from January finishing up in April and again it was based in the Irish National Heritage Park. They foraged, built campfires, toasted marshmallows and learned about insects and bugs. Ciara from Earthforce Education had a wealth of knowledge and enthusiasm for this activity and everyone thoroughly enjoyed it.

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Archery & Shield Making

We held an Archery & Shield Making workshop in the Irish National Heritage Park with 33 participants

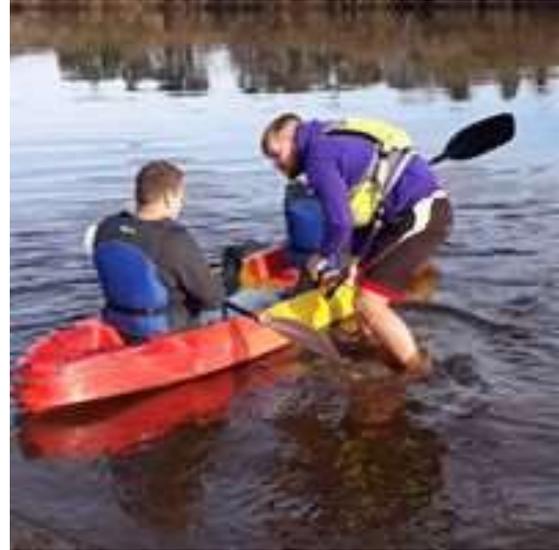


IOAC

The International Outdoor Adventure Centre in Tagoat was home to 4 CAN sessions throughout 2019 with 28 participants taking part. We had 2 x Kayaking sessions in the IOAC in Tagoat at Easter and 2 on the Slaney from Edermine Bridge in November.



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Family Days/ Activities

Easter Egg Hunt



CAN Annual Easter Egg Hunt took place at the Irish National Heritage Park on Easter Sunday 2019. 40 children and their families thoroughly enjoyed this tailor-made Easter Egg Hunt which is facilitated solely for CAN members by the fabulous staff at the Heritage Park.

Santa Train



In December, CAN organized a Santa Train Experience for over 150 members. This was done in conjunction with Wexford Winterland and this ensured that families could experience a festive activity in an autism friendly manner. It was a lovely event and every child received a selection box when they departed the train.



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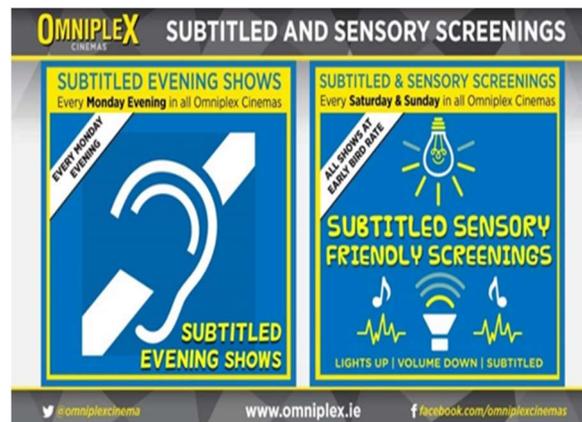
Surfing

In partnership with the Surf Shack in Curracloe, CAN organized 4 days of surfing sessions for members as well as a very successful 2-day surf camp in August. In all, over 50 children benefitted, and the parents enjoyed it too. We did 5 sessions with 94 participants excluding the Summer Camp. A now annual and much-loved activity among our group.



Sensory Friendly Cinema Screenings

In partnership with Wexford Omniplex, CAN subsidised a monthly sensory friendly screening of a children's film. This helps ease anxiety for children with ASD and helps to encourage our members to engage in this activity. CAN subsidized 12 sensory screenings in 2019 on the 1st Sunday of every month.



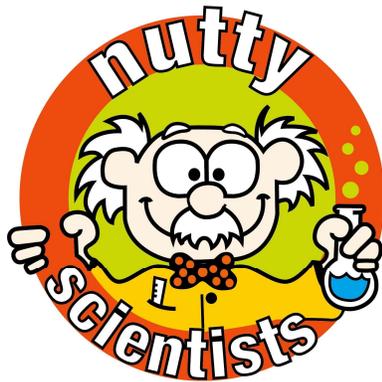
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Sew 4 Fun

We had a wonderfully creative class of sewing fun at Sew 4 Fun where 5 kids made some beautiful creations.



Nutty Scientists



We had 2 groups for Nutty Scientists in the TAG office with 16 young people participating. It was a great science-tastic workshop, and everyone thoroughly enjoyed it. This was made possible by a grant from the Creative Arts Dept of Wexford County Council.



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Swimming @ Wexford Swimming Pool



We were delighted to talk with Sinead in Wexford Swimming Pool with the help of CAN member Katrina Rice and the support of Sports Active Wexford to start a weekly Autism Swim group. We had 2 instructors for each of the sessions and it was specifically for kids on the spectrum only. We had 9 sessions in the latter half of 2019.

Stir It Up Cookery

We held 2 sessions with 11 participants in the TAG office in November with the lovely Samantha from Stir it Up Cookery. The kids had a blast and they made some brilliant creations.



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Zaeire Choc Making Class

Leigh from Zaeire Artisan Chocolate Making facilitated a class for us in Dec 2019 where we made snowmen, hot chocolate and biscuit reindeer. They were yummy!



Bowling & Lego

A new group developed in 2019 in association with Leisuremax. The kids had 1 hour of bowling followed by 1 hour of Lego fun. This group was held on the 1st Friday of each month and we had 2 sessions in 2019 with 16 participants.

Teen groups:

We were delighted to have 2 monthly groups running specifically for teens and their teenage siblings. Horse riding took place in the Railway Yard, Duncormick the 2nd last Thursday of every month and the Bowling took place the last Thursday of every month in Leisuremax. We had 10 sessions of Bowling with 63 places availed of and 4 horse riding sessions with 15 spaces filled.



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Wells House Celebration Day

CAN was delighted to be invited by Wells House to their Celebration Day in June 2019. This day was complementary and 80 people from CAN attended and enjoyed a wide range of activities including a tasty BBQ.

Tintern Abbey Visit



We linked up with Tintern Abbey, again thanks to Katrina Rice (CAN Member) for liaising with them on our behalf, to organise a visit offering our families a guided walk on their Tintern Trails on Sunday 29th Sep. Tintern also kindly gave families a free pass to their magnificent gardens.

RNLI Visit

We were delighted when the Wexford RNLI got in touch to invite us down for a visit. Great experience for the families who attended and brilliant to see and hear about the fabulous work they do.



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Nora Qoirin Vigil

The news of this young girl's death sparked something within our group we held a candlelight vigil in Selskar in Wexford to remember her. We had beautiful music by Hayley Crosbie, and we signed a book of condolence.



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Summer Camps

Summer Soccer Camp – Our soccer camp this year took place in Scoil Mhuire Coolcotts on Tue 30th July, Wed 31st July, Thurs 1st Aug and Friday 2nd Aug. We had 2 groups with 25 kids in total aged 5 years – 15 years. We got fabulous gear from the FAI thanks to Jamie and Conor (our soccer coaches) and Will Doyle, Wexford FAI Development Officer. We finished off the week with a welcome visit from the ice-cream van.



Cúl Camp – 6th, 7th, 8th August. The very 1st Cúl Camp specifically for kids on the Autism Spectrum and their siblings took place in Wexford Park. Wexford GAA linked with CAN on the project which was a roaring success. We had 126 children/young people and even enjoyed a visit from Lee Chin, Joe O' Connor and the Leinster Cup – Bob O' Keefe.



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Bricks 4 Kids Summer Camp & Robotics Camp – CAN had a 3-day Bricks 4 Kids summer camp in Wexford on Mon 12th, Tue 13th and Wed 14th and a 2-day Robotics camp on Thurs 15th and Fri 16th Aug 2019. There was fabulous creativity on display, and everyone got a Lego t-shirt on completion. We had 12 kids for the 3-day camp and 6 older kids for the Robotics.



CAN Summer Surf Camp - CAN's 2019 Summer Surf Camp took place with the guys in the Surf Shack Curracloe on Aug 19th and 20th. We had 20 kids in total and some fabulous weather to boot!



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CAN Summer Party & Office Launch 2019



CAN Summer Party 2019 & Office Launch on Sunday 30th June from 12-3pm – We invited all CAN Members to our 2019 Summer Party and also to officially launch our new office space in the Taghmon Action Group building in Taghmon. We had an obstacle course bouncy castle, giant games, LEGO, computer gaming and a quiet space. We had hot food for the kids and tea and sandwiches for the parents. It was a great afternoon of fun.



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CAN Calendar for 2020

Michelle Cogley and Catherine Fedorca – 2 CAN volunteers took on the mammoth task of compiling a 2020 CAN Community Calendar. It turned out beautifully and we are extremely grateful to the ladies for all their hard work. It contains some super photos of all our members and their families and serves as an excellent reminder of a brilliant 2019.



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Governance

Our Board met approximately every six weeks (with a break in July over the summer).

Our Designated Child Liaison and Welfare Person for 2019 was Board member Chantel Johnson.

During 2019, CAN successfully recruited numerous volunteers both from our membership and from the wider community.

CAN is also on the journey to complying with the Charity Governance Code.

Individually Board members attended numerous talks and training throughout the course of the year including:

- CARA's National Seminar for Inclusion in November.
- International Charity Bazaar in the RDS.
- The Progressing Disability Services for Children and Young People Conference in Limerick in December.
- The Social Enterprise Summit in Dublin in October.
- PPN Networking Events
- Governance training with the Carmichael Centre.
- Autism in sport training with Cara.
- Disability inclusion also with Cara.
- Beyond Limits: empowering young people with disabilities.

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Talks



Cottage Autism Network in partnership with Inclusion Ireland hosted a free workshop- Advocating on Behalf of Your Child in primary and secondary school in St. Michael's Hall. This was a workshop for parents of children with disabilities and covered the following:

- The rights that children with disabilities have at school.
- Individual Education Plans (IEP) and how you can make them work for your child at school.
- Negotiating with teachers and advocating on behalf of your child.



CAN were delighted to welcome back Shannon Eidmann, Behaviour Analyst and Managing Partner of Scope Therapy Services to host a workshop on: Effective Behavioural Supports: It was a Practical Workshop for Parents and Professionals(full-day workshop) This presentation was to assist parents and professionals in understanding why

challenging behaviours may occur, and outlined a range of intervention strategies to decrease unwanted behaviours while encouraging more desirable behaviours.

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CAN were delighted to have Diarmuid Heffernan from ASC hosting a workshop on "A day in the life of a young person with ASD". The format of the workshop worked chronologically through the day of a teen with ASD and the various difficulties they may encounter, covering topics such as:

- Creating a positive morning routine, washing, dressing, eating and exercise.
- Pre-emptive problem solving, morning exercise and mindfulness.
- Daily expectations, school, socialising and managing their day, school point of contact.
- Post school routine, decompressing, managing homework, food etc.
- Evening, The dreaded computer games!, creating boundaries, how much is too much, and negotiating with your child.
- Night time, pornography, sexuality and consent
- Sleep, how much is needed and how to create better sleep routines.

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Parent/Carer Activities

- CAN successfully attained funding from the WWETB Adult & Community Education programme to run a Woodcarving Course in their base in Whitemill Industrial Estate as well as funding for a First Aid refresher course .
- We held a Parent night out in October in the Ballast Bar, Talbot Hotel.
- We held a Parent/Carer Christmas Party night in the Talbot Hotel in December.
- We received funding from the Lottery Grant to hold a Jewellery making course. It was held in Johnstown Castle and facilitated by Liz Cash von Engelbrechten.

Achievements in 2019

- We moved into an office space in the Taghmon Action Group Building in Taghmon. The office is a huge step forward for CAN.
- The 1st Autism Spectrum Cul Camp was a hugely proud achievement for CAN to liase with Wexford GAA on and is only the beginning of a further inclusion plan within GAA in Wexford.
- Establishing a link with Pettitt's Supervalu St. Aidans where we seen the introduction of a weekly Sensory shopping hour as well as 2 ALF trollies. Tony O' Donovan from the Autism Life Skill Friend trollies was with us all the way.

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Public Support

Many thanks to all the organisations that have supported us in any way during the year. These include:

- Waterford and Wexford Education and Training Board Community Education Programme.
- International Charity Bazaar
- Wexford County Council- Creative Ireland.
- Wexford GAA
- Hayley Crosbie
- Communication Steps
- Wexford CBS Primary – who held a crazy hair day for CAN in April and raised €316
- Piercestown Primary School – held a collection at their Carol Service and raised €153.20.
- Businesses that supported the Ball including our main sponsors – Cloney Agricultural Contractors, Top Tyres and Simon Donohue.
- Tony Dempsey
- Dart's Competition in the Riverbank in July organised by CAN Member Elizabeth Byrne raised €1,500.
- Dart's Competition held in Belfield for CAN organised by Richard O' Brien.
- Tony O' Donovan from the ALF trollies who not only assisted us with introducing these fab trollies to Pettitt's Supervalu St Aidans but he also donated two lap pads that we raffled off to our members.

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- Sports Active Wexford who part-funded a swimming initiative in Wexford Swimming Pool.
- Wexford Swimming Pool
- The Trad House New Ross held a collection at their Christmas concert in December and raised a wonderful €585.



VHI Women's Mini Marathon



- Lorraine Kehoe and Nicola Warren raised a huge €1,800 which will be used to purchase half zips and tops for our Soccer stars! Thanks a million ladies.

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Wexford ICA



The super supportive ladies of the Camross ICA group held a series of walks in 2019 which raised €460 for CAN.

Lighthouse Brigade



CAN were very lucky to be chosen by this fabulous group for their fundraising campaign for 2019. They held 2 x busking days in the Bullring in Wexford and the Carne Beach Family fun day and raised a whopping €3,826 for CAN. Thanks so much to Marlo O' Brien and his huge team for their support.

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Thank you

There are a long list of people who, without their dedication, CAN could not continue to offer and execute so many activities. From helping out with teen bowling to hosting the coffee mornings, amending the website, the list is quite extensive. Thank you to each and every one of you, members and non-members who have given your time for CAN families.

- Catherine Fedorca
- Michelle Cogley
- Nicola Reck
- Louise Fitzgerald
- Rosemary Doyle
- Jacinta Doran
- Annette Ormond
- Aisling Finnegan
- Scoil Mhuire Coolcotts
- Michelle Kennedy
- Martina Barton



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Challenges Ahead

- Maintaining momentum.
- Devising a innovative strategic plan with clear goals.
- Developing and sustaining a good Board and sub-committees that can work in tandem to continue growing CAN as an organisation.
- Keeping all governance and statutory requirements up to par. The Charitys Governance Code has been introduced and to try be on top of all policies and related training as well as those relevant to CAN as a Company Limited by Guarantee.
- To remain relevant to all our members from the very young to the ones entering adulthood.
- Meeting the demand of the influx of new members.

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Conclusion

2019 was a massive year for everyone in the Cottage Autism Network community. Wexford has definitely made huge strides forward in many ways in the past 12 months and we really hope that the momentum continues throughout 2020. CAN's vision for the coming year includes following through on a few initiatives – Autism Friendly town initiative, linking with Carlow IT with regard to parent training, continuing to develop our relationship with Wexford GAA, to open the discussion about becoming a more neurodiverse group as opposed to Autism specific to name a few. CAN has received such fabulous support from the public, our members and funding bodies throughout the year that we look forward to what 2020 will bring for our families.

Cottage Autism Network CLG

Contact Information

Cottage Autism Network Wexford CLG

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