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Got a local LGBT+ story? Want to write a story? Get in touch! We would love to hear from you.

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CARLOW! PRIDE

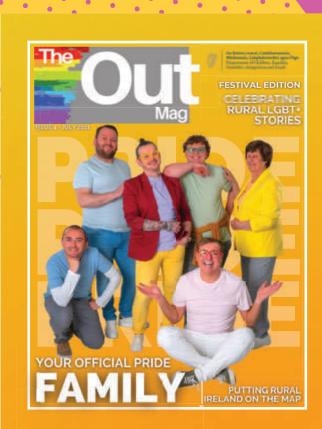


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Letter from the editor

This year we won't be celebrating pride in the park. This magazine is replacing that celebration and highlighting the lives of proud Carlow people. What we have learned through this project is that there is so much life in our county, and that some people's voices were never heard, or taken seriously. Until now.

This magazine has opened up a new space for conversation locally about who we are as LGBT+ and the right we have to live our lives peacefully in Carlow. Over the last four issues, we have had over 100 people volunteer, and work together to connect and create magaznes that document rural LGBT+ people. These volunteers have learned new things and made new connections with people they would never normally meet. That is something that can only make us all better people. In 2022, we are planning to hold our most colourful festival yet.

Read, learn & enjoy!

John Paul & team



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Why create an LGBT+ magazine for Carlow?

Over the past year, you may have seen the online trolling of LGBT+ people, homophobic grafitti in our town and lots of misinforamtion about LGBT+ people. This is why this magazine exists.

We also wanted to produce something that can showcase rural LGBT+ peoples contribution to Ireland. This magazine will also showcase the talents, stories and creative community that thrives here. Our town and county has some of the most unique people. This project also aims to save lives, and to end the stigma of being LGBT+ in Ireland.

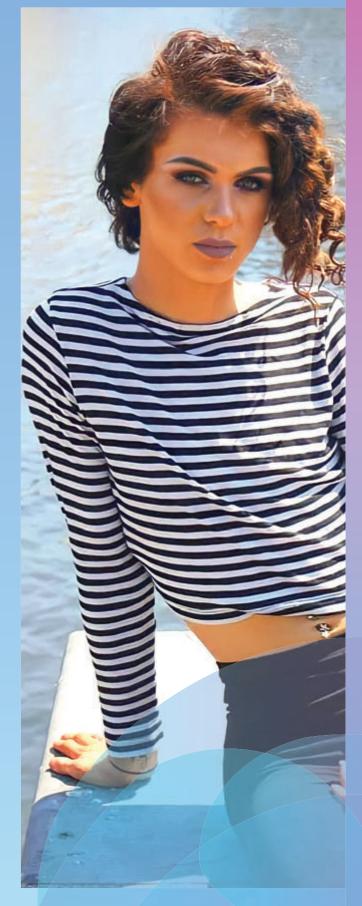
Carlow Pride Festival has been an integral part of making sure everyone can live here safely and in peace. We are here to stay.

ASANON-BINARY TRAVELLER By Ryan Shannon

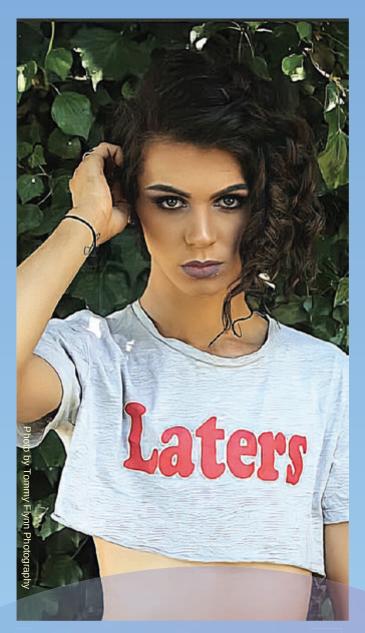
Many communities accept LGBT+ people differently. One of the most well known minority communities in Ireland is the Irish Travelling Community. Gay, lesbian, bi and Trans Irish Travellers have been public about issues they have experienced from other Irish Travellers regarding sexuality or gender identity. Irish Travellers are known for their strong beliefs, but as time passes, these beliefs are changing. Thankfully, many people in the Irish Travelling community now feel that they are able to come out and speak freely about their sexuality, gender identity or gender expression. I recently had the pleasure of interviewing Pauly Kavanagh, who himself is an LGBT+ traveller.

Since Pauly came out to his family in 2010 as bisexual he has come out again, as gay and then a few years later as nonbinary. After coming out Pauly said that most of his family were very accepting of him and supported him through his journey. While he did have some family members who distanced themselves from him, he never let it get him down and instead focussed on the positive support he got from those who were accepting of him. "The majority of my family have been supportive since day one. Like with everything you have like yin and yang, good and bad, so there were obviously some who didn't agree with it. I decided to focus on my own happiness and took it from there". His general experience of coming out in the Irish Travelling community was mixed. "There's going to be people that are still living in the past and use a lot of homophobic slurs. When I first came out, I was bullied because of who I was".

Over the past few years tere has been a change in Ireland, to become more accepting of the LGBT+ community and those from the Irish Travelling community have been changing their opinions also. "In the past being LGBT+ in the Travelling community wouldn't have been accepted at all, whereas nowadays we've realised that someone's sexuality doesn't define who they are as a person. I like to think that as a community, we're moving forward and becoming more accepting to change. We've changed so much over the years. If you told me when I first came out that things would change to how they are today I would have said you were crazy." While there is work still to be done to protest LGBT+ Irish Travellers, seeing a change in our communities in rural Ireland are becoming more accepting is encouraging.



"Idecided to focus on my own happiness and took it from there"



What is non-binary?

Non-binary is an umbrella term for gender identities that are neither male nor female—identities that are outside the gender binary.

Aminority in a minority

According to information found on the Pavee Point website, a study by the All Ireland Traveller Health Study Team (AITHS Team) (2010) - All Ireland Traveller Health Study: Technical Report found that suicide rates within the Irish Travelling community are 6 times higher than the general population. Suicide accounts for 11% of all Irish Traveller deaths. Another report by LGBTIreland commissioned by GLEN and BelongTo, and funded by the HSE's National Office for Suicide Prevention found that LGBT+ teenagers are twice as likely to self-harm and three times more likely to attempt suicide. These statistics are worrying when you couple together the fact that Irish LGBT+ Travellers are an at risk minority within an at risk minority.

Luckily, Pauly has grown from his own experiences, and they have shaped the person he is today. "If i could talk to my younger self I would tell him not to take everything that was said to heart and to live everyday for himself and not other people. Not to let others lead you down the wrong path and do things I didn't really want to do. To keep your head up because things will get better."

Many LGBT+ Irish Travellers may be afraid to come out, or even seek help. They may not know where to go or who to ask for help. "Every single person is in a different situation and some families are more accepting than others. I would say that once you can be true to yourself and accept yourself - that's the most important thing.

Coming out was very hard for me and everyone's experience in coming out will be different. You're always going to get some good and some bad comments, some people will love you and some people may dislike you. We can't change other people's opinions so just follow your heart and find your own happiness."

Did you know?

LGBT+ teenagers are twice as likely to self-harm and three times more likely to attempt suicide.

LGBTIreland commissioned by GLEN and Belong To, and funded by the HSE's National Office for Suicide Prevention

Suicide rates within the Irish Travelling community are 6 times higher than the general population.

All (reland Traveller Health Study Team (AITHS Team) (20:10) All Ireland Traveller Health Study: Technical Report

Have you been effected by the topics discussed in our articles? 24/7 Anonymous Text Support: Text LGBTI+ to 086 1800 280 Pieta House (24 hours a day): 1800 247 247



Poetry Feature

By Thomas Brown Lawlor

Poetry by Derek Coyle Commisioned on behalf of The Out Mag.

We are so fortunate to have a wealth of artists, authors and poets in Carlow County. Our community has used it's downtime in such positive and creative ways, from murals to gardens, conceptual dance to online programming. Sometimes we have to go through the motions to realise what is really important - family and friends.

The Out Mag team commissioned this special poem, by internationally renowned poet Derek Coyle. The poem itself is a testament to what Pride means to us, and to you. It's a bird's eye view over our heads on the day of Pride, and captures the essence of the day so people can remember, remark and discover the magic in the air in Carlow. We know that this poem will revitalise you for our next event.



Carlow Poem #79

It is like a feeling you cannot throw out, it should be planted in the flowerbeds by the Burren, outside Pimento, this pride. In a dream I kiss its hands, and can see its rainbow stretch from the Brownshill Dolmen all along the Pollerton Road. It spills out onto Tullow Street, all across the road, and turns right at the Library, up College Street, and into the grounds of St Patrick's, where its laughing head splits in all directions to dance this jig of life. Like we are all on stilts, this eternal party, dressed in hot pink, indigo, violet, yellow, green. Proud of the love that lives in our hearts, as if walking on air. The children blow rainbow bubbles, with love hearts on their faces, painted in orange, turquoise, red. This isn't too difficult. How we celebrate this pride. I see dogs run around the lawns of St Pat's, with little rainbow ribbons on their tails. We are not like a dull mannequin in a shop window -unable to speak, inert, deadas our hearts are made of flesh, beating with love and blood, joy pulsing every vein. There is life in this town. I see two men kiss under the Liberty Tree, free. I see two women stroll in the Town Park.

Derek Coyle (pictured left) has published poems in The Irish Times, Irish Pages, The Texas Literary Review, The Honest Ulsterman, Orbis, Skylight 47, Assaracus, and The Stony Thursday Book. He is a founding member of the Carlow Writers' Co-Operative. He lectures in Carlow College St Patrick's. His first collection in 2019, Reading John Ashbery in Costa Coffee Carlow was published in a dual-language edition in Tranas, Sweden and Carlow, Ireland. This collection was shortlisted for the Shine Strong Award in 2020, as one of the best books by a new Irish poet.

stop beside the Barrow. It seems to waltz.

I hear them hum. The ducks and swans look on.

Local %

We asked hundreds of our followers on social media how they felt. Here are the results.

78

per cent of people felt they were doing 'OK"

83

per cent of people felt the third lockdown was harder than previous ones*

91

per cent of people felt they had someone to talk to*

95

per cent of people were looking forward to this summer

68

per cent of people felt events will return in full by Spring 2022**

58

per cent of people said they would attend a concert in September

24

per cent of people felt they didn't know where to get support if they needed it***

*Survey was conducted by Carlow Pride Festival via Instagram and Facebook Stories. Over 1000 responses were gathered. Date 25th January 2021.

**Survey was conducted by Carlow Pride Festival via Instagram and Facebook Stories. Over 500 responses were gathered. Date 6th April 2021.

***Survey was conducted by Carlow Pride Festival via Instagram and Facebook Stories. Over 300 responses were gathered. Date 25th March 2021.

You are not alone.

There are services to help. You have someone to talk to. A real person, who understands.

Here are some local and national numbers. Always remember you are never alone. Many of us have been helped by the following services.

Local

CARLOW MENTAL HEALTH ASSOCIATION Tel 085 818 1353 Email carlowmentalhealth@hotmail.com

MUI (MY UNIQUE INDIVIDUALITY) Youth Group Tel 082 2722379 / 059 9133714

FOLLAINE COUNSELLING Call or text 085 2780307

National

THE SWITCHBOARD LGBTQIA+ Support (7 days) Tel 01 872 1055 www.theswitchboard.ie

TENI (TRANSGENDER EQUALITY NETWORK IRELAND)
Tel 01 8733575

1ei 01 8733575 www.teni.ie

SAMARITANS

24 hour free phone 116 123 24 response email jo@samaritans.ie

LGBT KILKENNY Tel 1890 929 539 Email info@lgbt.ie

Helpisthere.

THEOUT MAG 7



'Female Trouble' and the trash trilogy live on through the generations. So much so that as an alternative, queer teenager in rural Carlow in the early 2010s, these films changed my life and significantly influenced my drag persona. I found validity in the weird and escapism from the norm. They showed me not only an alternative way of thinking but, the power of celebrating the absurdity and uniqueness of being queer.

'Female trouble' is not for the faint of heart. Viewed through a 'woke' 2021 lens, it is as likely to shock and offend as it did in the 1970's. However, the viewer invariably finds themselves cackling wickedly at taboo topics like body modification are explored in the most absurd and comedic ways.

In the 1970's film world, Queerness was a subgenre by necessity. LGBT+ people were excluded from heteronormative society the 1970's. We created our own world, where we were never afraid to explore the taboo and the macabre, as LGBT+ people were already considered unsavoury and unwholesome in some parts of society.

Glamour has never been more grotesque than in the 1973 cult classic 'Female Trouble' by acclaimed director John Waters. Waters rose to Notoriety in the early 1970's thanks to his scandalous and provocative art house films, such as 'Mondo Trasho' (1969), 'Multiple Maniacs' (1970) and 'Pink Flamingos' (1972). Waters wrote 'Female Trouble' as the second act in his 'Trash Trilogy'. To realise his depraved vision, Waters teamed up with his larger-than-life muse and all-round 'filthiest person alive', drag artist Divine.

The film chronicles the outrageous journey of protagonist Dawn Davenport (Divine) from bratty suburban teenager, hell-bent on getting 'cha-cha heels' for Christmas, to a psychopathic killer, who feels like 'the most beautiful person alive' after a face-altering acid attack. Dawn's character arc explores the theory that 'the worse the crime gets, the more ravishing one becomes.'

While the glorification of all things taboo is most definitely metaphorical, I can't help but feel that Waters' aim is to challenge the viewer's perspective on morality. Waters completely subverts normal morality in that the protagonist gets happier and more beautiful the worse their behaviour gets. It is an eye opener to everyone who thinks that queer life is one of emptiness and loneliness on the fringes of society. It can be divinely debauched and fabulous and we do not need hetero institutions to feel fulfilled or content.

The film is undeniably and unashamedly queer. 'Female Trouble' was ahead of its time by celebrating queerness on screen. The film even features a hilariously subversive reverse 'coming out scene', in which Dawn's neighbour and rival Aunt Ida (Edith Massey) tries to convince her nephew to date men... 'The world of heterosexual is a sick and boring life!'

Of course, the film's star is herself a bastion of pure, queer authenticity; Divine was unapologetically herself both on and offscreen (no small feat in conservative 1970's Baltimore) and gave hope and visibility to countless closeted people struggling to find their place in a heteronormative world.

When I start to doubt what I'm doing in drag I find myself asking 'WWDD': What would Divine do? It is a way I channel my 'do what I want' energy, to be unashamedly myself and remind myself why I do Drag. As the mainstream world has been exposed more and more to one specific kind of Drag through reality TV shows like 'RuPaul's Drag Race', I believe it is more important than ever for our community to be aware of significant historical queer films like 'Female Trouble'.

Let's end the stigma. Know your status. Get tested.

How can I get tested and know my status?

You can get tested at sexual health clinics across Ireland. These tests are free and confidential. If you are not sure where your nearest clinic is you can use the testing centre locator at hivireland.ie.

Rapid HIV Testing

MPOWER offers free rapid HIV testing to gay, bisexual, and other MSM, on weekday evenings and weekends. Testing takes place at their offices in Dublin City by appointment booked through their website.

HIV Self Test

MPOWER offers a free HIV Self-Test. The kit can be ordered online and is delivered free of charge directly to your door in discreet plain packaging. The MPOWER team is available to support you every step of the way by phone, email, WhatsApp or Zoom.

Who can help?

MPOWER is an initiative by HIV Ireland, aiming to empower gay, bisexual and other MSM, towards improved sexual health and wellbeing. MPOWER is peer-led. community-based sexual programme that is funded by the HSE Sexual Health and Crisis Pregnancy Programme. The team is made up of four outreach workers who are there to offer support, guidance and referrals to services. If you have any questions about sexual health or wellbeing can contact Mark you mark.doyle@hivireland.ie or Whatsapp/text on 086 600 2996. You can also connect with MPOWER on Instagram and Facebook @mpowerprogramme.

HIV Awareness

PEP

PEP is a 28-day course of HIV medicines. You should ideally start it within 24 hours, and definitely within 72 hours of unprotected sex. You can get PEP from public sexual health clinics during opening hours, or you can get a PEP starter pack from some hospital emergency departments (at a cost) when the clinics are closed.

What is PrEP for?

PrEP is a pill that is almost 100% effective at preventing HIV-negative people from acquiring HIV. PrEP is free in Ireland but must be accessed through an approved clinic. You can find your nearest approved PrEP clinic on sexualwellbeing.ie.

Undetectable = Untransmittable (U=U)

Effective HIV treatment (or medication), and an undetectable viral load, means that the risk of HIV being passed on through sex is zero. People living with HIV can now feel confident that having an undetectable viral load means HIV cannot be passed on to sexual partners.

How can I get a full STI Screen?

You can get a full screen at a sexual health clinic. Clinics are returning to normal services following covid disruption. You can find a list of clinics on hivirleand.ie. If you have any difficulty you can contact the MPOWER team by emailing mark.doyle@hivireland.ie or texting 086 600 2996. Instagram and Facebook @mpowerprogramme.

Did you know?

31

In 2018, 31% of people who were diagnosed with HIV identified as straight (hetrosexual). (Information via www.hivireland.ie).



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Will is a strong supporter of the Carlow Pride Festival Committee. He was the first openly gay member of Carlow County Council and its first gay Chairman in 2010/11 and today is the first member of the Council in a same sex marriage.

Tell me about your husband Brett?

I met my husband, Brett, in October 2010. Brett is originally from South Africa. Both he and I are exmarried with four children between us. We clicked together from the very first moment because we had a lot in common. Brett proposed marriage in July last year and I said yes on condition that we did not have a long engagement. We planned to get married on 24th April this year but COVID-19 restrictions kicked in and like so many other couples we had to change our weddings plans. Changing celebrants, finding locations, finding suits, rings, barbers! In the end we got married in the Dolmen Hotel on Wednesday, April 21st with two friends as witnesses. And then we went out to Duckett's Grove for wedding photos which was a blast. We plan to have a celebration with our families and friends when the COVID-19 restrictions are lifted and it is safer to do so. The reaction to our wedding has been phenomenal. We have been overwhelmed by well-wisher's texts, phone calls, social media messages, cards, flowers and gifts. Our "big day" has been covered by the Carlow Nationalist, KCLR96fm and The Out Mag so we are definitely feeling the love!

Have you ever experienced homophobia?

Honestly, I can positively say that neither Brett nor I have ever experienced homophobia in Carlow or Tullow. From the get go even when we were holding hands or kissing in bars or restaurants in town, no one ever commented. In fact the very opposite, we would notice people looking over in our direction and sometimes after a while the people staring would come over and say something like, "Lads I never thought that I would see the day that two men would hold hands in public in Carlow!" It was the start of some great conversations! While we have been so lucky, we have met many lads who grew up in Carlow who did not have the same positive experience. I am very much aware that a good number of young gay people left Carlow as soon as they could and never came back. We meet them in Dublin at gay events and they don't have good memories of Carlow but remember being bullied at school and being harassed because they were gay.



"Honestly, I can positively say that neither Brett nor I have ever experienced homophobia in Carlow or Tullow."





Thankfully, Irish society has changed in recent years and I will never forget being down in Cillian Hill outside Kilkenny tallying votes in the Marriage Referendum. I tallied two boxes of votes from Tullow and saw a 60/40 divide in favour of same sex marriage and in my heart I knew the referendum was won. My only regret was not going to Dublin Castle for the overall result.

Any advice for those afraid to come out?

While things have changed in recent years, there are so many men (and women) are still in the closet. They are scared of the reaction of their families and friends. I look at it this way - I was separated with three children and a local politician in the public eye when I came out! I made it though and I genuinely believe so can everyone else. The hardest part of coming out is the pressure you place on yourself! Thinking about acceptance and rejection, how people will react. But the feeling of telling some about being gay or some other human being knowing is so liberating. I did it slowly and then the rumour mill took over but at that stage I was free of the chains in my mind. And twelve years later I can say coming out publicly was the best decision of my life. People know I'm gay and the electorate have returned me to serve at Carlow County Council not because of my sexuality but because of who I am and the work I do for my community.



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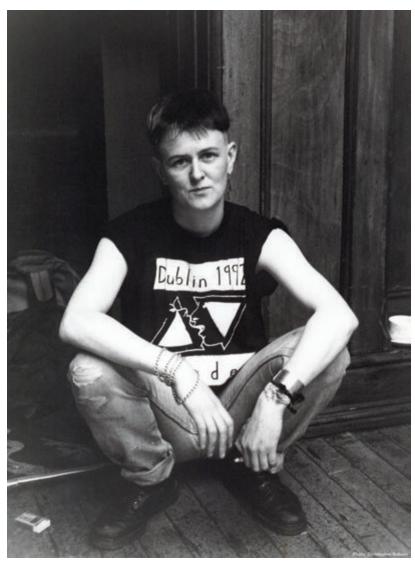
(NOT QUITE)

STRAIGHT OUTTA CARLOW

by Izzy Kamikaze

My name is Izzy Kamikaze, but when I was growing up in Carlow, my name was Ruth O'Rourke. I was born in St Brigid's Hospital on Dublin Street, back when babies were still being born in Carlow, which makes me as "scallion eater" as they come. But like all the young rebels of that time, I left Carlow as fast as I could, right after I finished school. There was nothing wrong with Carlow in particular. Every town in Ireland was much the same – There was nothing to keep us there. Those that could get their hands on some money went further afield, but Dublin was grand for 17 year old me.

I doubt many young people now understand just how deep the closet was that we somehow climbed out of. We knew nothing about sexuality. We all went to single sex schools run by religious orders. Sex education was a complete joke. It was the 1970s and the occasional far-away pop star might be making waves by coming out as bisexual, but in smalltown Ireland, the changes were coming slow if they were coming at all. The Irish safety valve was always migration. If you didn't like the way things were, you got out of town. Change was something that might happen somewhere else, but never where you were - or more to the point, where your family was. It sounds harsh, but if you were gay, it was kinder to yourself and your family to just disappear. You were a complete disgrace.



The t-shirt is from 1992, but Izzy thinks the picture was taken in the Mansion House in 1994. (Picture: Christopher Robson).

In school I had lots of crushes on girls a couple of years older than me. I used to make up silly stories about stuff I had to do in their area, just to have an excuse to tag along with them on their walk home. One of them told me I should be careful, "the way I was carrying on" people would say I was a lesbian. I was 14 then, so obviously I knew everything and there was no way I could admit I didn't know what a lesbian was. I looked in the dictionary at home, but the word wasn't in it. I looked it up in school the next day, nope, nothing. After school, I walked down to Mrs McHugh's Bookshop on Tullow Street and in a dictionary there I found "lesbian (noun) an unnatural woman." I was none the wiser really, as I made my unnatural way home...

The girl who said this to me probably knew no more than I did. "Lesbian," whatever it meant, was just something you didn't want said about you, something that would make you the butt of every nasty joke forever. And she was right, of course, it was being said about me, even though I had boyfriends and did my best to be like the other girls- and it would have been said about her too if she had let me walk her home.



A captivating image of the Dublin Lesbian & Gay Pride March in 1984. Izzy Kamikaze (Right). Image by Clodagh Boyd.

And so I spent my last few years in school having absolutely no idea why nobody would sit with me on the bus when we had a school tour or walk home with me after school. Girls walked around in pairs all the time, but I was always one of the ones who tagged along, that awkward Third Girl who was surplus to requirements and I honestly hadn't a notion what it was all about,

It turned out that whatever a lesbian might be, it was easy enough to entertain the idea that somebody else might, nudge, nudge, be "one of them," but somehow much harder to make that connection to yourself. The culture of the time was to whisper such things behind your hand rather than shout them to your face (something I also lived through later on) so when us "freaks" finally left home and found each other, this was a story we found a lot of us shared. We had been lonely and rejected and, of all our circle, we were the last ones to know the reason why.

When we got to the city, any city, and started to find each other and build new lives, most of us were still very careful about doing anything that would lead people to (correctly) believe we were gay, but some of us found we didn't care very much anymore what people thought. We knew we were OK. I was part of the latter group and I was very lucky the time I washed up in Dublin.

There was a queer community centre in Dublin by then and a lively but oppressively discreet gay scene – I mean, it took me two years just to find it! But it was about to change, in ways both good and bad and I got to be part of those changes.

I got to be part of the Fairview Park March, the very first LGBT-led march through the streets of Dublin in 1983. That was a somber occasion - a gay man had been beaten to death by a gang of youths and they'd been freed on suspended sentences - but the march gave a glimpse of the strength we can have when we leave the darkness of our individual closets and stand together in the light of day. Two months later, I was on Ireland's first Pride march. Years later, I was there for the first gay marches on the streets of Galway and Belfast. I was involved with Dublin AIDS Alliance, responding to the HIV crisis during a time when the government was still looking the other way and counting on emigration to make sure it wouldn't happen here. There were no Pride parades for seven years from 1985 to 1992, because the still-tiny pool of gay people who were prepared to do anything quite so public were just far too busy with work brought on by HIV.

In 1992, I was one of the handful who brought Pride back to the streets of Dublin and I was there a year

later when a much bigger crowd danced on the streets to celebrate the long-overdue decriminalisation of homosexuality. Later still, I was a founding member of Northwest Pride which in 2006, brought LGBT Pride to the streets of the mainly rural north west. Northwest Pride was determinedly community-focused and though our numbers were modest, we were the first Pride to make our programme "family-friendly," the first to run a whole programme of age-appropriate events for LGBT teenagers and the first to provide accessibility information and support for disabled people attending Pride.

So many firsts! I was there the first time a Dublin mayor invited LGBT people into the Mansion House and the first time a President invited us to the Áras. I was there for sadder moments too – the unveiling of the AIDS memorial quilt and the planting of the (now forgotten and neglected) "Memory Tree" in the Millennium Park. I was there when the first-time rainbow flags were flown on the streets of Dublin. Name any important milestone for the LGBT community in the past 39 years and chances are I was there. I got to be a small part of history and Ireland today – and Carlow too – is a better place than it once was.

There was one first I didn't get to be part of and could never have even imagined and that was Carlow's first Pride. When we went to the cities, we might have stopped caring about what people thought/knew about us being gay, but we knew our families and friends back home hadn't stopped caring. The whispers still hurt them, and it was just easier for everyone to let our connections to "home" wither away. Our visits were infrequent and mainly confined to the family home.



Izzy (in cape) at Dublin Pride 1992. Photographer unknown.

"lam happy to know that young LGBT people growing up in Carlow today know they're not the only one"

We didn't keep in touch with old school friends or go out anywhere where people would ask awkward questions and then we wouldn't have to choose between telling lies and feeling we were disgracing, or at least embarrassing the people we cared about. You could move away like I did, get a new haircut and a new name and after a while people forgot (or pretended to forget) you had ever existed and the chances of them recognising you in the (fairly scant) media coverage of some gay event became virtually non-existent. I didn't go out in Carlow for well over 30 years. I didn't spend much time there until my father was dying and by that stage, I doubt there were a dozen people in the town who would recognise me on sight.

I didn't make it to the first Carlow Pride, but my mother and sister were there and that made me very happy. Times have changed. I was in Dublin, honouring a prior commitment made to a group of young trans people. I am happy to know that young LGBT people growing up in Carlow today know they're not "the only one". I am happy they are no longer so ignorant they don't even understand the names they are called. I'm happy that the first association they will have with the existence of LGBT people is a big bunch of happy, smiley people in rainbow colours, dancing in the park. That is the way it should be.

There are still people who would like to make trouble for us and there always will be. The only weapon we have ever had against them is our solidarity with each other – but it has always been enough! If I could make one wish for Carlow it would be that the town would become famous for the kind of social solidarity I needed as a teen and could not find, and that Carlow Pride would be the flagship for that solidarity. All of us scallion eaters together can make that happen – some of us have done it all before. As soon as this pandemic is over, I just can't wait to "follow ye up to Carlow Pride" and finally banish all "brooding o'er the old disgrace!".

MY CHILDS STORY

By John Paul Payne & Robbie O'Brien

A note from the editor: This story was recounted directly from the mother of the child. We decided to not identify the child in this story, as the identity of the child isn't important, but the child's story is. Every child has a right to privacy, and our goal is always to protect the most vulnerable in the community. We will refer to the child Brian in two ways for editorial purposes, firstly using their deadname "Mary" and their name now "Brian". A deadname is the name someone was usually born with but no longer fits their gender identity. Use of the deadname is at the request of the mother, so the story is clearer. All names and identifying factors have been changed to protect the privacy of the family in question. This story deals with gender identity at a young age. Gender identity and sexuality are two different things. Gender is something we are aware of at a young age, through colours and clothing for example. Sexuality is something you typically develop later in life, in your late teens or as an adult.

Jessica is a mother from County Carlow. She has two children, Rebecca who is 19 and Brian who is 12 and going into secondary school soon. "I had my first little baby girl Rebecca, she was totally into everything pink! She had to always be in a big dress. When I had my next child - whom I named Mary, I had some clothes and bits from Rebecca, which saved me a lot of money. Life was pretty much normal. Mary was a real outdoor kid, always likes to be out in the garden. We did all the usual things as a family."

"When Mary was around 2 or 3 years old, there was always a game she wanted to play. She would pretend to be a little boy called Barry. At the time I never thought anything about it. As she got a little older, she would refuse to put on a dress and preferred leggings and a top. At the time I thought because she is always active, and playing in the garden maybe the dresses were getting in her way. As she was getting older, she was getting much more distressed about what clothes she was wearing."

"At about 3 and a half years old, was the first time we had a major incident with clothing. Mary was very distressed and broke down in tears, and couldn't stop her crying. She just wanted to take off the top I had put on her. At the time I didn't think it was a big deal, I just wanted to dress her and get out to go to work. She used to say "Mammy, this is a girls top, everyone will laugh at me". I was perplexed, and she then stated "Everyone will laugh at me wearing a girls top, because I am a boy". In the end I found another tshirt Mary would tolerate." "Since that incident, from about 4 years old every morning Mary would start to have conversations with me about different things and making statements about herself. It followed on from the game she used to play. One day she got a little braver in the car and asked me if she could pretend to be a boy today. I felt it was a huge step for her. At this time, I still didn't really understand and like any parent would be I was worried. Around her age of 4, was one of the most intense periods of both our lives."

At this point Jessica turns to her doctor for support and professional help. "I mentioned it once or twice to friends, and people thought I was exaggerating. Saying "It's only a phase, she's a tomboy". It was constantly dismissed due to her age. Which I can understand. At the time, I didn't know what was happening and I would be open minded. I wasn't as worried about Mary beings transgender, my main worry was how distressed she was becoming. She couldn't cope mentally or socially. It was all consuming. It was affecting the entire family."

"My doctor was very good, but wasn't sure about what was going on. He referred me to a family psychology service in Carlow. They had not encountered a child like this before. They were very supportive, but they didn't have experience in this field. So I was referred to TENI (Transgender Equality Network Ireland). They were my savior's. They have a family support worker, I have goosebumps thinking about it. It was the first time I spoke about the subject and they understood exactly what I was talking about."

"Every single issue Mary had, it was familiar to them. They had heard my story before. I have been to see every professional out there, because I wanted to keep reaching out to all the right people to make sure I was making the right steps for Mary. TENI have an online support group for parents and families who have transgender children. It really changed everything for us when we got that support."

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"This one day in school, when Mary was about 5 years old, things really started to get bad. I was really nervous and trying to keep things as easy as possible, but I was getting calls in the school, when she was using the wrong toilet. Mary would get into fights because she was trying to tell other kids she was a boy. She was so consumed about what was happening inside her, the teachers felt she had no capacity inside her for learning. She couldn't read, she couldn't count. She couldn't even write her own name. I was so concerned, I thought that there were major learning issues. It was getting progressively worse. So we contacted TENI again. The professional advice at this point was we either go with it, or we try and stop it. If we try to stop it, we could be facing a bigger problem. So we began a social transition starting with school. The school was very supportive at all times. Mary's was finally free to be Brian."

"When the first school year was over after the social transition, I met with Brian's teacher and she said the difference in Brian's school work was completely unbelievable. He was engaged more, was articulate on and off the page, better in class, a great student and like a brand new child. He is just like any other child in the class. Mary must have been in such torment, and that hit home to me. He was finally writing his own name, Brian. I knew we were doing the right thing, finally."

"He can finally live a normal life. It no longer dominates our lives. When he was given that acceptance, and allowed to wear jeans and change a few words around, it was a very powerful moment in our family. It changed our lives. The school has been an incredible support throughout this journey."

"We went out for dinner one evening and it so happened to be the day Brian got his first really short haircut. He was helping the waiter take the plates off the table after the meal and the waiter just said in passing "Good man yourself, thanks."

"I just want people to stop calling me Mary-Iam Brian" "Everything stopped. Brian looked at me, his eyes lit up, his grin was huge. Brian said "How did he know?". He floated on that moment for weeks. It was amazing to see him finally be content. Mary used to tell me she didn't want to be alive, because she didn't want to suffer anymore and live like this. So to go from a child who was so distressed, a horrific experience, to being more confident and content just walking out the door reflecting on the outside how you feel on the inside is just very inspirational to me. I don't know where he gets his strength. I will never put any pressure on my children on how they want to be, if it changes overnight so be it, it's not about me. I want my children to live happy lives like everyone else. That's what we all want."

"There were some issues with some of the kids, and any issues we did have, were usually with the kids whose parents had an issue with it. Some kids would say things to Brian like "I am going to call you by your girl name" if they were arguing. Brian has had to overcome a lot of hurdles, it's complicated. My most immediate concern is secondary school, because around that time is puberty. And that's coming soon. I thought about leaving Carlow, but why should we? Running doesn't solve anything, and it doesn't teach the children the right things in life. That's why I am doing this article. We love Carlow and we want to be here, so why should we run? I want to make this town a place we can all live."

I asked Jessica what message she has for other parents. "I'd ask other parents to support families like mine by being more open and supportive. It's OK to have questions, if it's your first time encountering something, it's natural you are going to be concerned or cautious. Educate yourself about it. People still think gender is the same as sexuality. Brian is only 12, and he knows nothing about sexuality yet. His gender is what makes him who he is as a person. It's his sense of self. It's hugely important to him. He has gotten braver now, and he will correct people who misgender him or use his deadname."

"It is very black and white in Brian's world. He doesn't see himself as transgender, he sees himself as a boy."

Jessica said the message Brian wants to get out to people through this article is "I just want people to stop calling me Mary, and stop calling me a girl - I am Brian. It's OK to be who you want to be, and I am a boy, obviously!"

The journey to being equal in Ireland By Ciaran Rea

Lily Ray and Celine McEniry welcome their child Ellis into the world. Here is there story.

When did you start your process of having a baby?

We met each other in 2016, and from the very beginning we were both open about the possibility of having a family one day. On my 37th birthday, the infamous biological clock became all the more deafening. It was time to take action.

We got stuck into Grey's Anatomy to get us through the dark evenings. That's where it started, with light conversations, through the quiet moments of Grey's. The decision itself involved a few hard conversations and quite a bit of research. This was one of the hardest parts of the process for us as a couple.

What was the first step?

The first step was deciding which Clinic we were going to attend. There are a number of clinic options, both here and abroad, and we decided to go with Sims Fertility Clinic, Dublin. The process from that point onwards was pretty straight forward. I made an appointment with Sims to have a blood test to check my egg count, followed by an appointment with a Consultant to discuss options. We opted to go with IVF treatment from the start and both Celine and I had to attend a mandatory counselling session to discuss the process of choosing the Donor.

At that point we had to put things on hold as I was deployed overseas to Lebanon to work for three months. While in Lebanon, myself and Celine had to create a shortlist of potential Donors. This process involved choosing the Donor Bank and trawling through endless profiles, with limited information. You get the basic information like health, education, family history and physical characteristics etc. This was one of the most confusing stages of the entire process, as it can be a bit of a lottery. When I returned after Three months we had everything organised to hit the ground running. I had one scan just before Christmas and had hoped to get started in December. however, the Consultant had other plans and wanted us to wait until the New Year. The Clinic was great and we never once felt like we were any different to any other couple trying to have a child. As a gay couple trying to have a child, we expected there might be



some level of prejudice, but this was not our experience.

My treatment started mid-January 2020 and over the course of 2 weeks, I underwent multiple scans, medication, daily injections, followed by more scans, raging hormones (poor Celine), egg retrieval, fertilisation and then an embryo transfer. We then had an anxious two week wait before getting a pregnancy test. We were incredibly lucky to get pregnant on the first round of IVF and from there the journey began.

Pregnancy & Birth:

We're pregnant! Celebrations! Bang came COVID 19, less than two months into pregnancy. The absolute fear we both felt at this time; it was like nothing we ever experienced. How do we protect our unborn baby from something we know nothing about? With that came the exclusion of Celine from absolutely everything. She was very lucky to attend a 7 week scan but due to restrictions, she was blocked from attending all subsequent scans and appointments.

At 28 weeks, I suffered a pregnancy complication where we were told to prepare for a very early arrival. This was an absolutely terrifying time for us, what if something happened to our baby. What if something happened to me? Even though Celine was involved in every decision in relation to us having a child, she had zero legal rights to our daughter at that point, as we were a same sex couple.

Thankfully things settled quickly, but it was feet up and rest for the remainder of the term, where Celine had to wait on me hand and foot. Thankfully Ellis arrived safely albeit three weeks early via c-section; our very own little family was now complete. I think I can speak for both myself and Celine here, that this day was truly magical. We had our very own daughter. I still find it hard to believe.

Registration and the hurdles LGBTQ+ parents face:

I first had to register Ellis as a single parent under my own name. Even though Ellis has two loving parents, there was no place for Celine "her mother", in this process. Like a lot of people, we wanted a family of our own one day, and when marriage equality passed in 2015, like a lot of LGBTQ+ people, we felt a sense of freedom, acceptance, normality and equality! No more shame, hiding or feeling like a second class citizen. I could add to this list, but I sat looking at the blank space on her birth cert under the heading "Father" and things are still not equal.

Sadly there's still plenty of confusion around equality for same sex parents in Ireland. A lot of children of same sex couples are effectively being discriminated against because they are not legally connected to both parents. Equality for Children was formed in 2019 when a group of LGBTQ+ parents came together to fight for equality for their children. The CFRA 2015 (Children and Families Relationships Act) was a step in the right direction and while some children have benefitted from this legislation, there are lots of LGBTQ+ families who fall outside of the parameters of the CFRA.

Ellis doesn't have a father, she has two loving mothers. Very quickly after Ellis was born we started the legal process to get Celine and our family the rights we truly deserve. Celine is her Mama and the fact she was excluded once again filled me with so much sadness even though I knew it was just a technicality in our case. Ellis was conceived three months prior to when the regulation of the CFRA commenced (May 2020).

In our case we were required to apply for a court order and attend a court hearing in order to re-register Ellis, and acknowledge Celine as her legal parent. Maria from John O'Sullivan Solicitors, Carlow represented us in court and all I can say is that Maria took the entire process out of our hands and reassured us the whole way.



The legal process took five months to complete, but if something had happened in this technical waiting period, Celine had zero legal rights or recognition to her own daughter. She would be considered a legal stranger in the eyes of the law. I think any family with new-born babies can get consumed by the what if's and the absolute fear of something going wrong, but most families are not waiting for legal recognition for their own children.

Every child deserves to be treated equally

Did you know?

Children still excluded* are:

- Children born to male parents.
- Children born via surrogacy.
- Children conceived or born outside of Ireland.
- Children conceived using at-home insemination.
- Children conceived using known or anonymous donors.

(Note that some amnesties apply for children born or conceived prior to May 5th 2020)

By Jaymie Doyle Carlow success

Thomas Brannigan is from Carlow, identifies as gay and works in HR. He has qualifications in business, an Ordinary Degree in Marketing and an Honours Degree in Business Studies and Marketing. The life Thomas has now is one he strived for when he was younger. Growing up in Carlow, Thomas attended Carlow Vocational School. "I did as much as you can, it was rough at times. I was very much a try fit in. I had an older brother and sister in the school."

"Being LGBT+ wasn't really talked about in the 1980's and 1990's. Seeing Lily Savage and Joan Rivers on TV helped make me see what Gay or Queer culture was. I was about 7 or 8 years old when I realised I was not interested in girls. This terrified me as I didn't understand why I felt different. Between 12 and 15 I realised I was gay and I tried to cover it up. In my teens, people made negative remarks about me. I remember the TV show 'Queer as Folk' late at night. It made me realise that maybe there is a world outside of Carlow for people like me". I came out as bisexual first to Robbie O'Brien when I was 18. At 19, I moved away to college and I got scared. I was presenting as straight, sometimes bisexual in first year. During second year, I couldn't take hiding anymore and came out fully as gay. It was around 23 years of age when I started to be more comfortable about who I was."

Coming out wasn't straightforward for Thomas. "I had a major issue with with being gay and I expected others to feel the same. It affected my mental health, because I fought with it alot. It caused many conflicts with people at the time, arguments were had. Luckily time passed and all of that was resolved."

Thomas Brannigan works at CitiBank on the Talent Acquisition team and a Senior Recruitment Partner for the last 18 months. A career highlight for Thomas was setting up an LGBT+ Network where he got to speak on a panel with the then Taoisach Leo Vladkar and MEP Marie Walsh. Their aim was to open up the lines of communication between the LGBT+ staff and new allies in the workplace. Sometimes he has felt that being gay has not always helped him in the workplace. "I have experienced homophobia in the workplace and in public. I have been in conversations where someone has said they don't want me on their



team because "I'm too gay". Or sometimes they would say "I don't want him on the team in case he's looking at me". Sometimes I would overhear they might not go for drinks after work with me in case I tried it on with them. Which is upsetting.

Thomas now has a greater understanding of LGBT+ needs in society and the workplace. "Be open, be yourself. You are the person that got you to where you are, so bring all of you and do it with respect and dignity - speak out if you need to or experience any direct inequality. I have helped create open safe spaces for staff to talk and learn. Having allies have their voice heard, on education and on all aspects of LGBT+ life and culture. I aim to help improve diversity and equality in the workplace across all industries and all levels for both LGBT+ and Allies."

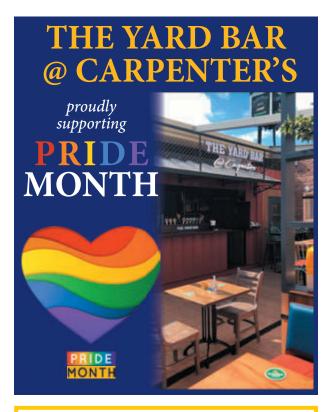
LGBT+ cultural icons have helped Thomas on his journey. "Panti Bliss helped me explain what the refferedum meant to me as a member of the gay community. It helped me explain to my family, in words that worked and why it was so important outside of religious reasons. She also helps humanise the gay commuity dressed as a six foot drag queen. I also love Leslie Jordan. Since the pandemic began, he has put out amazing content online."

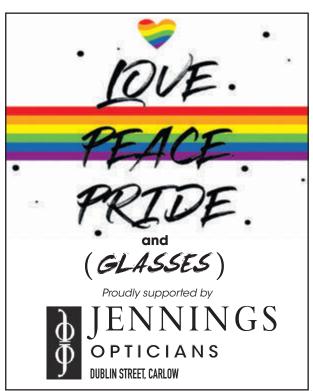
Thomas now feels deeply rooted in LGBT+ life. "Its people's creativity in expression, the feeling of family and community itself. Expression of true self, expressing true love. Without Pride we would not be where we are today. We need to all band together to support each other.

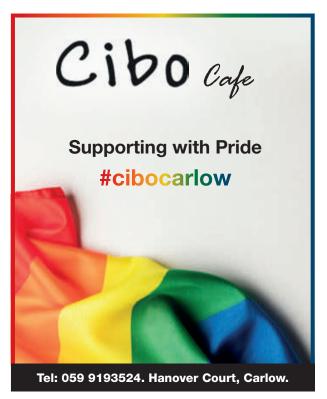
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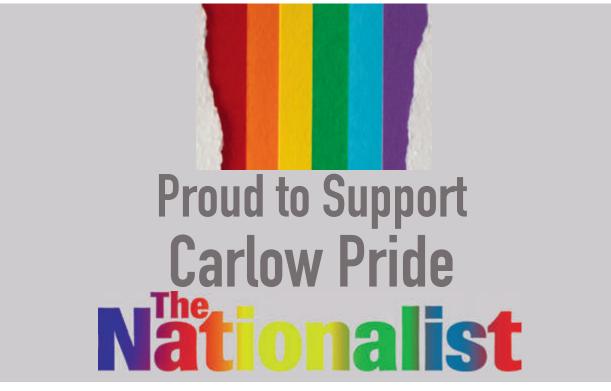
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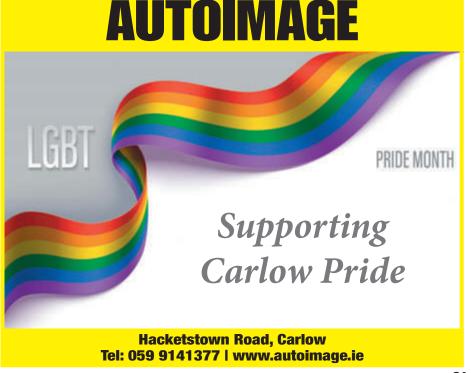
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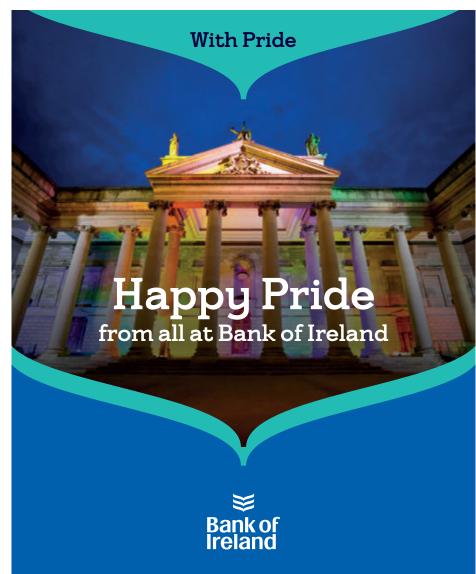
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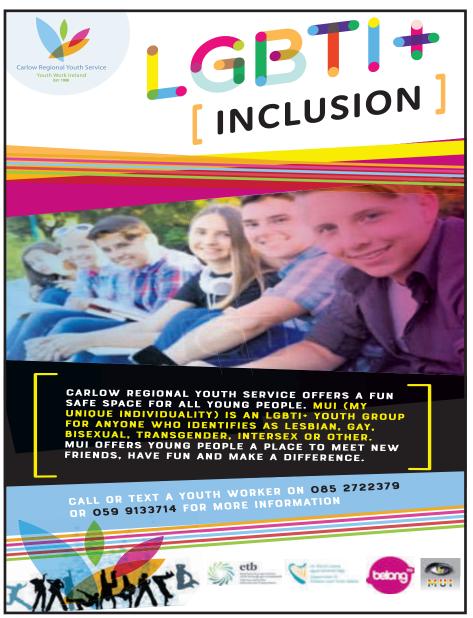








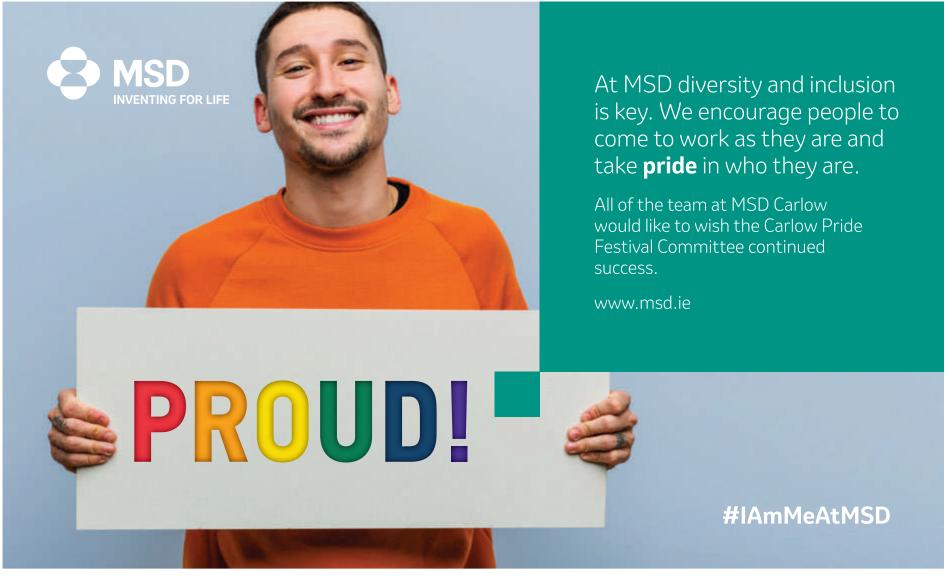
















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