



# SAFE HOME IRELAND

## DIASPORA SUPPORT SERVICE

# 2024 Year in Review



**Safe Home Ireland is a not-for-profit Irish charity with a global remit.**

Safe Home Ireland (Safe Home) was established in 2000 initially, to assist qualifying older Irish-born emigrants abroad in their desire to return to Ireland. Since inception, Safe Home has assisted 2,328 Irish-born individuals to secure accommodation in Ireland, supported by collaborations with local authorities and housing providers across the 26 counties.

As well as providing housing assistance, Safe Home now offers a targeted range of services to Irish emigrants abroad, regardless of age or circumstances, who wish to return to Ireland. In addition, Safe Home supports people who have returned independently, often in crisis and challenging circumstances, by providing holistic, person-centred support. For the majority, returning to Ireland was a lifelong dream that could not have been realised without the intervention and support of Safe Home.



*The Long Road Home - Fundraising Walk*



*Our ambassador Seán Keane in concert, City Quay Church, Dublin*



*Returned Emigrants Network official launch*



*Opening of Ireland House in New York*

Safe Home Ireland, St. Brendan's Village,  
Mulranny, Co. Mayo F28 A386

Web: [www.safehomeireland.com](http://www.safehomeireland.com)

Email: [info@safehomeireland.com](mailto:info@safehomeireland.com)

Tel: + 353 98 36036 / + 353 86 059 4538

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## Our Work in 2024



### Direct Support Service

**Our Direct Support Service continued to provide information, advocacy, and outreach support to individuals before, during, and after their return to Ireland.**

In 2024, we carried out 105 outreach appointments to support people in their transition back to Ireland; we carried out 40 home visits to housing applicants in England and 12 home visits to applicants in the U.S. Meeting with clients 'face to face', enabled us to provide clear guidance and information for those planning the move home and offer tailored support to those who had already done so.

We facilitated 14 Returning to Ireland Information Clinics in partnership with Irish and other welfare centres abroad, covering topics such as planned returns, moving with children, retiring in Ireland, and accessing benefits/entitlements on return. Additionally, we held virtual and in-person meetings with Irish Welfare Agencies in England, the USA, and Australia to share information, learn from each other, and make necessary cross referrals to ensure services are better informed to support their clients who are considering returning to Ireland.



*Returning to Ireland  
Information Clinic*

We continued to work closely with Consular Services in Ireland and abroad, offering guidance and support to individuals in vulnerable and challenging situations. In October, we met with the entire Consular team to provide a detailed briefing on our work and discuss mutual clients referred as well as referral protocols. We also attended the DFA Consular Forum in October, where we explored challenges, trends, and innovations in international travel, consular services, and consular assistance delivery.

Throughout the year, we responded to 424 new requests for information and processed 57 new housing applications. We secured accommodation for 47 individuals in 2024, bringing the total number of people supported with housing since our inception

to 2,328. We continued our campaign to advocate for the allocation of at least one 'age-friendly' property in each Local Authority catchment area for our housing applicants and those eligible to apply to Safe Home for housing support.

In December, we bid farewell to Brenda Fleming, one of our Outreach & Advocacy Officers and a key staff member providing direct support to clients. Brenda had been with Safe Home since 2002. Over the 22 year period Brenda's unwavering commitment, deep compassion, and tireless work ethic have had a profound impact on countless individuals, and she will be greatly missed. Brenda's retirement prompted new staff recruitment and after an extensive selection process in November and December, a new staff member was selected to join our team in January 2025.



*Retirement party for Brenda Fleming*

### Testimonials

**"Thanks to you all at the Safe Home office and to Brenda for coming all the way down to Cork to help my brother, Pat, with all the important documentation. He is so happy to be home again. Without Safe Home, he would still be here in London, dreaming of life in Cork, so for all of that, I can't thank you enough."**

**"Thanks to the Safe Home team for all the help you have given us to start a new life back home in Ireland surrounded by all the new friends and more importantly to be surrounded by our whole family at Christmas for the first time in more than twenty years d more importantly to be surrounded by our whole family at Christmas for the first time in more than twenty years"**

**"Coming back to Ireland is what I've always wanted. It's where my heart is and Safe Home were the people to help me do this"**



## Networking & Representation



We continued to work with a broad range of agencies and service providers in Ireland and abroad, to ensure that potential applicants/returnees are aware of the services and supports offered by Safe Home and can navigate a seamless referral process. We ensure, where possible, to avoid duplication of services with other partner Emigrant Support Programme (ESP) funded projects in Ireland and abroad and we aim to promote peer-learning information sharing in our work.

We maintain strong connections with key Irish-based ESP-funded organisations such as the Irish Council for Prisoners Overseas (ICPO) and Crosscare Irish Diaspora Support Project, as well as the Returning to Ireland unit within the Citizens Information Board. We meet quarterly as part of the Returning to Ireland Forum, which focuses on collaborative projects, cross-referrals, emerging trends, and issues faced by returning emigrants. The forum met twice in 2024.

In January, our Chairperson, (on her trip home to Australia), visited the **Claddagh Association** in Perth, Western Australia, where she met with staff and volunteers to learn about their work supporting recent arrivals, particularly those facing challenges. She also explored referral protocols and future partnership models going forward.



In June, we were honoured to be invited by our Patron, The President of Ireland, Michael D. Higgins and his wife, Sabina Higgins to attend a Garden Party at Áras an Uachtaráin 'Celebrating Communities in all their Diversities' in Ireland.



It was a special occasion for Safe Home to be recognised for our work and celebrating the diversity of the Irish diaspora both at home and abroad.

We had the opportunity to meet with and present on our work to visiting delegations from **Cabo Verde** and **Latvia** in July. Their respective visits to Ireland were part of fact-finding to explore models of good practice in our work with returning citizens as well as learning more about Ireland's Diaspora strategy.



*Presentation on our work to visiting delegations from Cabo Verde and Latvia in July*

In September 2024, our CEO conducted a valuable outreach visit to the US, traveling to New York, Boston, and Philadelphia. During this trip, she met with the management, staff, and volunteers of nine Irish Welfare/Cultural Centres. In each city, Returning to Ireland Information sessions were held. Separate sessions for staff and volunteers were also held, to better inform them about the work Safe Home does and the support we offer to those considering returning to Ireland. The visit coincided with concerts by our Ambassador, Seán Keane, in all three cities, providing an excellent opportunity for Seán to raise awareness of Safe Home and for our CEO to connect with concert attendees interested in our services.



*Irish Outreach & Support Services- Rian Immigrant Center in Boston*

*Irish Pastoral Centre, Boston*







Aisling Irish Community Center, New York.



Emerald Isle Immigration Center in Woodside, New York



New York Irish Center



Emerald Isle Immigration Center, Bronx, New York



Irish Diaspora Center, Philadelphia

We were featured in several **media interviews** and **print articles** throughout the year, enhancing our visibility, including a short documentary by *Keep it Lit Media* entitled *The Long Road Home: A Story of Irish Emigration and Repatriation*. The documentary features the story of a Safe Home returnee. It also includes insights from Safe Home CEO and Historian in Residence at the EPIC Irish Emigration Museum (providing historical context on Irish emigration) and an interview with Safe Home Ambassador, Seán Keane.

## Advocacy and Project Work



*Returned Emigrants Network* was officially launched in October in County Laois by Seán Fleming TD

We collaborate with key partners and advocate for policies that support our mission. The Returned Emigrants Network (REN) was established in November 2023 to address a number key areas in assisting returnees to integrate into their local communities upon returning to Ireland. It met 7 times in 2024. The Network was officially launched in October in County Laois by Seán Fleming TD, former Minister of State for the Department of Foreign Affairs (International Development & Diaspora). Returning to Ireland can be a stressful and often times lonely experience and the primary aims of the REN group is to; offer a hub for people who have been through the same 'journey' to meet; act as an information sharing and problem-solving forum to identify common trends where returned emigrants face particular challenges; and advocate for policy changes in those areas. Overall, the Returned Emigrants Network was identified as an opportunity to improve the return experience for those who recently returned home to Ireland, as well as providing valuable insights for those considering returning home in the future.





In July, we established an organising committee to examine the challenges Irish people face in returning from the US face in regard to US/Irish licence exchange (and vice versa for Irish moving to the US). This committee had its first meeting in July 2024 and will be formally launching the Campaign in February 2025. Our CEO, together with the Executive Director of the Irish Diaspora Centre in Philadelphia and Ciaran Staunton of Irish Lobby for Immigration Reform are the joint chairs. Membership of the committee include key Irish welfare centres in New York, Chicago, Philadelphia, Boston and San Francisco, together with individuals from the US and Ireland who have been affected by this challenge. Irish partner agencies include the Irish Council for Prisoners Overseas (ICPO) and Crosscare Irish Diaspora Support Project.

In November, we attended the first meeting for an Erasmus+ project, *European Return and Migration Network: Advancing Intra-European Mobility and Overcoming Barriers to Free Movement (ERMine)*. Safe Home is a proud partner in this 18 month project, alongside Crosscare Irish Diaspora Project in Ireland and key partners from Italy, Spain, Poland, Latvia, England with the lead partners based in Germany. The ERMine project aims to overcome some of these barriers and support the development of a more integrated and inclusive European approach to mobility by fostering collaboration and sharing good practice. This marks our first involvement in a European project, and we are excited to build on this experience and strengthen our network for future initiatives.

## Governance and Compliance



In March, we launched our new **2023-2028 Strategic Plan**. We took the opportunity to organise an information seminar at the same time. The Seminar, titled, *Social Inclusion in Action for Returning Irish - Priorities and Challenges* was a hybrid 'in-person'/

online event and was co-hosted by The University of Galway. A number of key challenges faced by returning Irish emigrants came up during the Seminar; Driving Licence exchange issues, primarily for returnees from USA; Carer's Supports (for those returning to take up a short-term caring role for a family member); Transfer of skills/qualifications from abroad. We have highlighted some of these issues already with relevant Departments. We will continue to work with our colleagues in Irish community groups and other interested representatives around the whole issue of potential licence exchange between Ireland and USA.

The Board continued to meet **bi-monthly**, with various **sub-committees** meeting separately to address specific areas of risk, governance and fundraising. We worked diligently to maintain **compliance** with all relevant statutory obligations and to review and update policies and procedures as required. In October 2024, we reported on full compliance with the Charities Regulatory Authority (CRA) Governance Code, for the fourth year. Annual returns were also completed in relation to Lobbying, CRA Annual Reporting and Approved Housing Bodies Monitoring protocols.

In line with our planned succession protocols, we bid farewell to two of our founding Board members, Teresa Cowley and Michael Joe Ginnelly, in November. Both Teresa and Michael Joe had been with Safe Home since its inception, providing invaluable support, guidance, and a real passion for our cause. We are pleased that they will continue to be involved with the organisation through 'Friends of Safe Home Ireland'. We also said goodbye to Joan O'Flynn, who stepped down from the Board after three years of dedicated service. Joan will remain connected with Safe Home Ireland, lending her expertise and support to smaller projects. In November, following a Board recruitment process, we welcomed three new Directors to the Board: Edel Shovlin, Pauline Gallagher, and Troy Gallagher, who bring a wealth of experience in human resources, research fundraising, and the lived abroad experience.

Finally, in line with good governance, we completed a tendering process for Safe Home Audit, resulting in a new Auditor being formally appointed by the Board for the period 2024 to 2027.



2023-2028 Strategic Plan Launch



## Fundraising and Development



2024 was a highly successful year for fundraising at Safe Home with additional funds raised through various initiatives.

Our Ambassador, Seán Keane, continued to promote Safe Home at concerts across Ireland and abroad. By speaking about his role and the work of Safe Home, he raised awareness among audiences, many of whom have relatives living abroad and were previously unaware of our services. In February, Seán was a guest in a special concert by singers Ger O'Donnell and Trevor Sexton in Milltown Malbay, Co. Clare with the proceeds to Safe Home Ireland. In December, we held our annual fundraising concert at City Quay Church, Dublin, by our Ambassador. During this event, we also launched the Safe Home 2025 charity Calendar.



### The Long Road Home... Ag Siúl le Chéile

Our Fundraising Walk will begin at EPIC The Irish Emigration Museum in Dublin's Docklands and finish at The National Famine Museum in Strokestown, Co. Roscommon.  
Saturday 11th May to Sunday 19th May 2024

The National Famine Way is a 165km trail that traces the footsteps of the 1,450 famine emigrants who left Strokestown in 1847. It commemorates the heart-breaking walk of forced emigration from Ireland.

**Registration €30**  
Join us for an hour, a day or come for the full 5 day challenge!

**SAFE HOME IRELAND**  
DIASPORA SUPPORT SERVICE

Safe Home Ireland is a registered charity that assists Irish people abroad to 'Come Home' and also offers support and advocacy once they have returned.  
Your support is vital for us to continue providing essential services to those in need, both now and in the future.

**Contact Us:**  
Safe Home Ireland, St. Brendan's Village, Mulranny, Co. Mayo, F28 A386  
Tel: +353 98 36036  
Email: karen@safehomeireland.com  
Website: www.safehomeireland.com

Charity Number: 20048119  
Company Number: 301378

Other highlights included our second National Famine Way Fundraising Walk entitled 'The Long Road Home – Ag Siúl le Chéile' which took place over 9 days in May, from EPIC The Irish Emigration Museum (EPIC), Dublin to Strokestown House/The National

Famine Museum, Co. Roscommon (167km). UTS Technologies generously sponsored a range of new merchandise for the walk, and the walk itself helped raise funds as well as advancing Safe Home's profile through significant media coverage and partnerships with key stakeholders, including EPIC, The National Famine Way, and Strokestown House. A particularly generous and heartwarming contribution came from Jim Callery, the owner The National Famine Museum, Strokestown, who, in celebration of his 90th birthday in October, walked the National Famine Way himself! Jim donated a substantial portion of the funds he raised to Safe Home.



UTS Technologies



Cheque Presentation at Strokestown Park

January marked the second anniversary of *Friends of Safe Home*, a group who continue to play a key role in expanding our network of sponsors and collaborators, while directly supporting initiatives like our 2024 Friday Friendship Calendar, with each Friday sponsored by various individuals and companies, our Famine Way Walk and our annual concerts with our Ambassador. The printing of our Calendar continues to be sponsored by UTS Technologies.

In October, a recently returned emigrant from Luton to Co. Sligo, participated in the Dublin City Marathon, donating the proceeds of his fundraising to support our work.



Fundraising Events 2024



Launch of 'The Long Road Home – Ag Siúl le Chéile' at EPIC Museum



'The Long Road Home – Ag Siúl le Chéile' fundraising event



Dublin City Marathon



An Evening of Music & Song with Seán Keane



# Snapshot of our work and impact in 2024

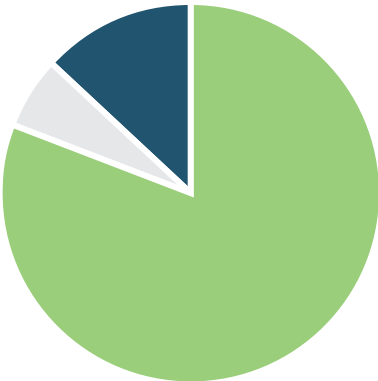
## Total Interventions

4943

### Information

We support Irish people while still abroad, to make informed choices about returning to Ireland.

This includes home visits to Safe Home housing applicants (UK only); Information Clinics on Moving to Ireland for Irish abroad as well as peer-support sessions with Irish and other Welfare Agencies abroad



New contacts/  
information requests

424

81% Irish Born  
6% 2nd Generation  
13% Other

### Outreach

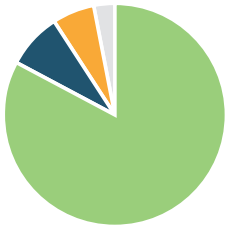
We assist returning Irish citizens to feel socially included on their transition back in Ireland by providing person-centred and holistic outreach support on accessing services and rights

	Outreach Appointments (Ireland)	105
	UK Home visits/ outreach (UK)	52
	Returning to Ireland Information Clinics	14

### Housing

We explore housing options throughout Ireland, for qualifying older Irish born emigrants abroad in vulnerable/challenging circumstances.

This is done primarily in partnership with Local Authorities and Housing Associations throughout Ireland



Housing applicants

83% UK  
8% USA  
6% Europe  
3% Other

	Active Housing Applications	330
	Accommodation secured	46
	New Applicants	57
	Total Accommodation secured since 2000	2,328

### Connect

We offer a connection to home for those who remain abroad. We do this via our monthly e-bulletin, our social media platforms and our Returning to Ireland Information Clinics.

	People in contact	7854
	E-Bulletin / Newsletter circulation	1,898
	Social Media	6,939

Web: [www.safehomeireland.com](http://www.safehomeireland.com)  
Email: [info@safehomeireland.com](mailto:info@safehomeireland.com)  
Tel: + 353 98 36036 / + 353 86 059 4538  
@safehomeprogramme  
@Safehomeireland



## Our Team



Directors	Nova Fariss (Chairperson)
	Ann Roddy (Treasurer)
	Patricia Codyre (Secretary)
	Niall Foley
	Edel Shovlin – appointed 20/11/2024
	Troy Gallagher – appointed 20/11/2024
	Pauline Gallagher – appointed 20/11/2024
	Teresa Cowley – retired 20/11/2024
	Michael Joe Ginnelly – retired 20/11/2024
	Johanna O’Flynn – retired 20/11/2024
Staff	Karen Mc Hugh – CEO
	Mary Ann Fadian – Co-ordinator
	Johnny B. Broderick – Information & Communications Officer
	Brenda Fleming * and Noreen Mulrine – Outreach & Advocacy Officers *Retired 31/12/2014
Friends	Diarmuid McAuliffe
	Loretta Gordon
	Ann Lawler
	Teresa Cowley
	Peter Grogan
	Stephen Graham
	Michael Joe Ginnelly
	Paul Reardon
Patron	Michael D. Higgins, The President of Ireland
Ambassador	Seán Keane, Singer
Life President	Dr. Jerry Cowley

## Our Work in Action



**“Safe Home Ireland is the only ‘navigator’ to trust if you want to return home to Ireland”**

### Moving from Eastbourne (UK) to Cork Stewart & Molly - Our Story



**Safe Home Ireland is a charitable organisation that reaches out to members of the Irish diaspora who find themselves isolated and often desperate to return home to the country they left (often unwillingly) many years before.**

I knew nothing at all about Safe Home until I made up my mind that I had to get back to my roots come hell or high water. However, I soon discovered that no matter how appealing the prospects are in theory, the practical reality of finding one’s way through a maze of bureaucratic red tape is daunting to say the least.

It’s important to emphasize that Safe Home is a not-for-profit charity that does not provide sponsorship of a financial kind. For the unwary, it’s important to point out that pulling up roots after many years is not only very emotionally draining but can be very expensive as well. No amount of financial backing can help a returning emigrant negotiate their way over the hurdles on the way to the finish-line. **And that’s the key to a successful outcome: careful preparation and an insider’s knowledge of how the system in Ireland works.**

***To this end, Safe Home is the only ‘navigator’ I would trust to sit next to me on this difficult journey.*** The practical and moral support, bordering on genuine friendship, is worth its weight in gold. Not a single stone is left unturned in their efforts to turn what sometimes feels like an impossible dream into reality. This amazing service is available to any bona fide Irish citizen who has settled overseas for perhaps most, if not all of their adult lives, and who discover that the road home is inevitably littered with obstacles that can seem insurmountable.

## How do they do it you might ask?

It's all about maintaining regular communication, via e-mail, mobile and, in our case, a personal visit to Eastbourne by a Safe Home Outreach Officer, who came to gather information about our personal circumstances and present us with a 'roadmap' for moving forward. Besides the advice and encouragement that were given so readily, what also impressed me very much is the sincerity and honesty that goes with it. ***Nothing is sugar-coated to make one believe that a successful outcome is guaranteed, whether it be applying for social housing or any of the welfare benefits that one may or may not be eligible for.***

***In a nutshell***, what you see is what you get. With so much at stake, it cannot be otherwise. But quite apart from that, what we appreciated so much throughout the lengthy process was the humanity and warmth of our engagement with Safe Home. A palpable feeling that there are people who actually care about what happens to you. Such freely given gestures of humanity are becoming more and more rare in a world that increasingly puts profit and material possessions above people.

We will forever be indebted to Safe Home for guiding us on our journey back to my homeland after fifty years of teaching and living abroad. We would never hesitate to recommend their services to anyone who find themselves in a similar position. They are good people who will 'have your back', lend a sympathetic ear and go the extra mile to do everything they can to make the process a great deal more positive than it might otherwise be.

**“Just came up against ‘a brick wall’”**

### John from New York (USA) to the Midlands



John, a single man aged 62, originally from the Midlands returned home to Ireland in October 2024. Having lived and worked in the US for over 30 years, he fell into ill health and needed to return to be close to his family network in Ireland for support. The plan was to stay with family initially and then go on to apply for social housing with the Council.

## The Problem



John contacted us for assistance having encountered a number of difficulties on his return. He told us that he had “just come up against a brick wall” and wasn't sure where to turn. He went on to explain that he and his family had tried to begin the process of applying for a Medical Card (a necessity due to his health conditions) and also began the social housing application process with his local Council, but faced a number of challenges.

In order to complete the Medical Card application process, John had to nominate a GP in the area. However, he had tried numerous GPs in the locality and none were taking on new patients. The lack of a GP was also a complication when it came to applying for a Disability Allowance payment as a medical report from a GP is required as part of that process.

An issue also arose for John around accessing documentary proof of his US social security pension and recent bank statements from his US bank. Evidence of both form part of the assessment process for Medical Card, Disability Allowance and Social Housing Applications.

Prior to leaving America, John had been registered for online banking and also had an online account for accessing his social security records. However, part of the security protocols in place for both involved sending text verification messages to his US phone number, which was no longer in use. Despite several calls and emails to his former bank branch in the US, without the text verification process, staff would not engage with him in order to send out recent bank statements to his new address in Ireland.

While John understood the need for security measures to be in place, he was frustrated that despite explaining his circumstances in detail, no alternative avenue was provided in order to help him access his statements. A similar situation arose with trying to access his online Social Security Account. Access was blocked due to the phone number at registration now being invalid.

However, after speaking to Social Security staff, John did receive a commitment that proof of his 2024 Social Security payment would be posted out to him in Ireland but that this could take 6-8 weeks to arrive in Ireland! These are some of the complexities involved in moving to Ireland.



## The Solution



With John's consent, we worked with the Irish Centres in New York to identify key staff at his former bank. After direct contact with the bank, they verified security protocols and issued the required bank statements to John's Irish address within 5 working days. We also contacted the Federal Benefits Unit (US Embassy – Dublin) to request proof of John's US Social Security Payment. With his consent, they issued a letter of entitlement to his Irish address within 3-5 days.

Once John had his most recent bank statements and evidence of his current Social Security entitlement in his possession, we were able to progress matters for him. A Safe Home Outreach Officer visited John at

the family home to ensure that all relevant paperwork is in order, advise on any other relevant entitlements and offer support with reintegration, as required. This included: (a) Applying for his Medical Card online. As part of this process, we included information on the range of GPs that John had already tried locally. However, further engagement was still required with relevant HSE offices and political representatives when John's application was placed 'on hold', due to continued delays in assigning a GP for him (b) Submitting an application for social housing to the local Council to have his long-term housing needs assessed, allowing him to be considered for own independent secure tenancy in the future and (c) Advising on the completion of the Disability Allowance application.

## Supporting Padraig



In the 1970s, Padraig set off from a village in the west of Ireland to look for work in London. Many years on, as a single man who was nearing retirement, he made contact with Safe Home as he wished to return home to live close to his siblings and extended family. Throughout his years abroad, he had maintained a good relationship with family and friends at home and had visited regularly for family events and for GAA fixtures.



*1970s London*

When one of the Safe Home Outreach Officers visited Padraig at his home in London in mid-2022, Padraig told her that he had always lived in private rented accommodation or in shared houses, he didn't want to commit to buying because his wish had been to return home, sooner rather

than later. Sadly, the work opportunities he had hoped for back in Ireland did not materialise so he remained on in England for much longer than he had planned. During the outreach visit, Padraig recounted the difficulties he had experienced over the years, living in rooms, in shared housing. He explained that a number of co-tenants had mental health and addiction issues which made things stressful for everyone concerned. He said that the properties were poorly maintained, with dampness and lack of heating making living conditions uncomfortable. However, he advised that he had coped with the challenges by keeping to himself and focusing on his work.

When he retired in 2023, without his daily working routine, Padraig found life in London quite difficult. Thankfully in the summer of 2024 he was offered a tenancy in the small town he grew up in back home in Ireland. Once again, our Outreach Officer who had visited Padraig in London, was 'on hand' to assist him when he returned home. She helped with transferring his state pension, getting registered with the local medical practice and applying for a medical card, a free travel pass and household benefits. Padraig's sisters and niece helped him with the practical aspect of moving and assisted him with decorating his new home.

Towards the end of 2024, in her final support visit to Padraig at his new home, our Outreach Officer was heartened to see a marked improvement in his demeanor, noting his positivity and pride in finally having a secure home all of his own that he would not have to share with anyone else.



## Vision



Our vision is that any Irish person living abroad who wishes to live in Ireland can do so with dignity and respect.

## Mission



Our mission is to support Irish people abroad, particularly those who are in crisis and challenging circumstances, to transition and settle into community life in Ireland.

## Values



**Compassion** We commit to acting with empathy to provide practical and professional support to people and organisations.

**Inclusivity** We strive to ensure that our service is non-judgemental and is underpinned by equality and human rights.

**Partnership** We are committed to working in partnership with stakeholders in Ireland and abroad.

**Accountability** We uphold and promote the principles of good governance and integrity through transparency, effectiveness and strong leadership.



With Consular Services team at Irish Foreign Ministry Dublin



With Sighle FitzGerald, Consul General for New England, Boston



The Famine Memorial



'50 years of the Irish in Britain' and to EPIC The Irish Emigration Museum

**Safe Home Ireland**  
St. Brendan's Village,  
Mulranny, Westport,  
Co. Mayo, Ireland,  
F28 A386

[www.safehomeireland.com](http://www.safehomeireland.com)  
[info@safehomeireland.com](mailto:info@safehomeireland.com)



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