

## Draft An Óige Members Update From the Board of An Óige August 2022

Dear Member,

I hope you are keeping well as we all look forward to the summer of 2022 free from the restrictions of the past couple of years due the Covid 19 pandemic.

As you know, our Association has been deeply affected by the pandemic and the loss of the Dublin International Youth Hostel in mid 2019. All hostels were closed and nearly all activates ceased or were severely restricted in 2020 and 2021 due to Covid 19. Our hostel and head office staff members were either put on lay off or short time and unfortunately there have been redundancies. During this period the Board has been working very hard to chart a course in these difficult circumstances to ensure our survival. 2021 was also An Óige's 90<sup>th</sup> birthday, however, we were not able to fully celebrate this in the way we would have liked to for the all the reasons just mentioned.

The good news is that the restrictions imposed by the pandemic have ended, that our Glendalough hostel reopened in March 2022 after two years of closure and that it is doing well. This represents the first green shoots of the revival of our organisation. I would encourage you to support the hostel by booking a stay especially mid week over the summer and beyond. Please also spread the word about the hostel to your family and friends.

The uncertainty around the Covid 19 situation and the difficulty in recruiting new hostel staff has led to a cautious and gradual approach to reopening hostels in 2022. In this context the request from the Department of Children for the use of the Knockree hostel to accommodate Ukrainian refugees was considered by the Board as a good response to the international humanitarian crises while offering a steady income and helping to secure the longer term future of Knockree as a youth hostel. This has now been agreed and refugees will be accommodated in the hostel from June. Errigal hostel is open on a rent a hostel basis in 2022 and Glenmalure hostel will open on a rent a hostel basis for July and August. The Ben Lettery hostel is due to open later in the summer under a new lease agreement with a Galway based hostel company.

Unfortunately, as indicated at our 2021 AGM, the Board has made the decision to sell the Killarney hostel following a building assessment and repair reports that indicated it would cost a minimum of €700,000 (the current inflationary period would make this an under estimate) to bring the listed building back to a standard that it could be safely opened and with none of the necessary improvements to make it suitable for modern hostelling.

After many years of service to An Óige, our CEO, David Owens, has moved on. David led the Association through the many changes that have taken place in hostelling in Ireland over the past 20 years. We wish David and his family all the very best for the future. An Óige is now seeking a new senior executive to take up the baton.

The Board has been working on a new marketing strategy to feed into a new strategic plan for the next few years. We need especially to focus on new youth membership to achieve our charitable goal of helping people to love and explore our natural environment and culture through hostelling.

The 2022 AGM is being planned to take place in the autumn. The board is finalising the arrangements for Thursday 22 September.

An Óige still faces many challenges ahead but we are on the road to not only reviving but hopefully to becoming a thriving organisation.

Best wishes,

Jim Barry

Chair

On behalf of the Board