

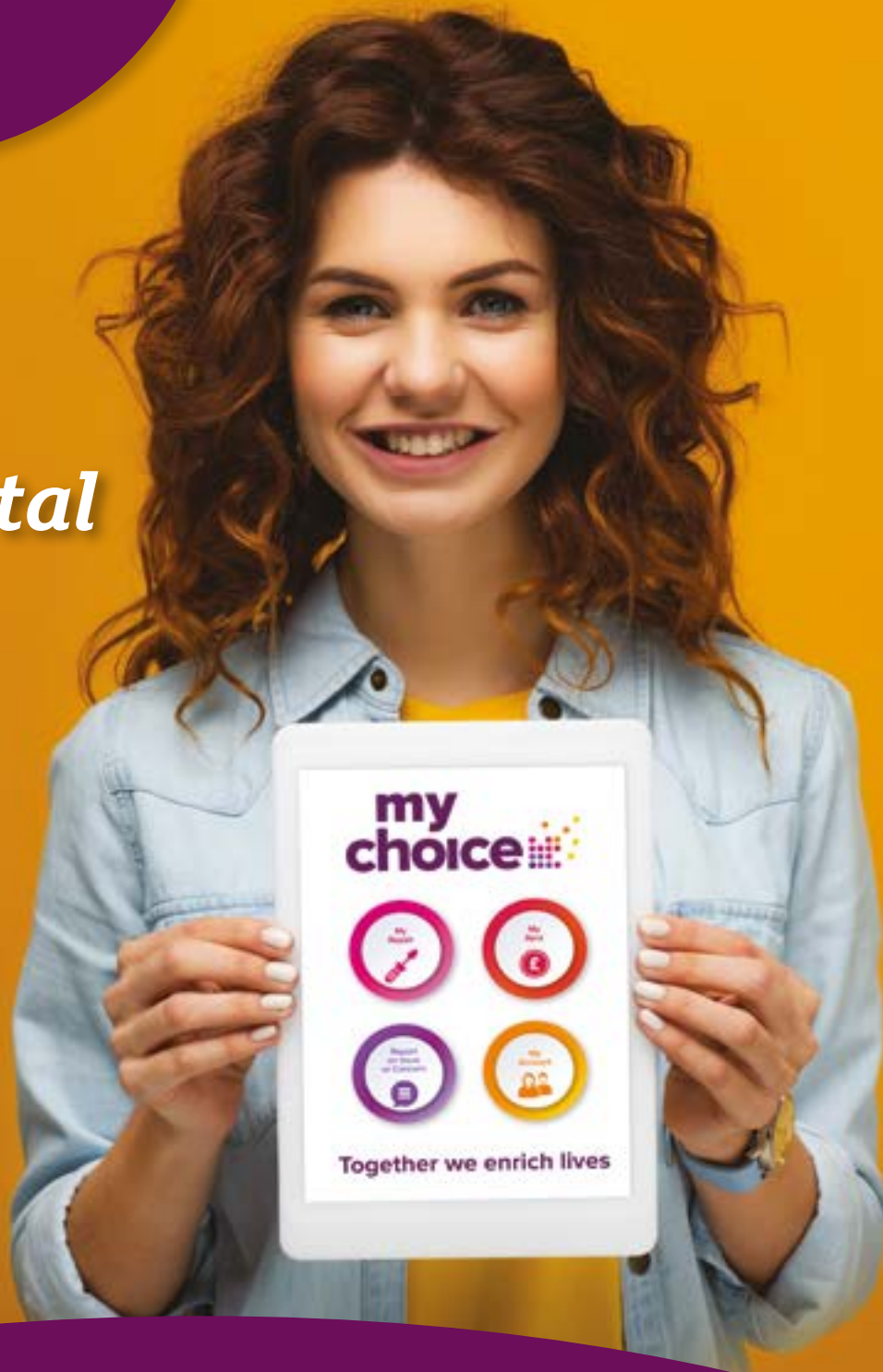
my choice *Our online Tenant Portal*



Help with
your money



Help with
energy costs



A message from Michael, our Group Chief Executive



Welcome to the Autumn/Winter edition of Choice News.

These are tough times for communities across the country so the focus of this newsletter is on how Choice Group can help you, your family and friends to manage the challenges that lie ahead. We have had a Financial Inclusion Team in place for several years and their work has never been more important. Please take the opportunity to avail of our advice on household budgeting and the various financial support measures in place across government. There are lots of changes emerging and planned in relation to assistance for the increasing cost of living, so don't hesitate to contact one of our advisers to get the most up-to-date picture.

I'm glad that Choice has also had a focus on energy for many years and again these colleagues can advise you on getting best value from your supply. More specifically, this newsletter contains a number of energy saving tips to keep your bills as low as possible through the months ahead. We also provide guidance on how to protect your home from condensation during the damp winter months.

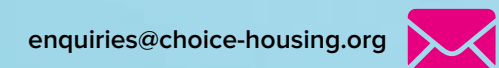
We are delighted to continue our partnership with both Homeless Connect and Trussell Trust. The latter operates a network of food banks across the country and Choice is pleased to support their work through our community investment fund. It is a shocking reality that the number of people now relying on food banks has grown and that the Trussell Trust is a safety net for so many. In turn, we provide much needed funding to Homeless Connect to support people moving from homelessness to more stable and independent living. Once again, the number of people registering as homeless continues to increase so support for the most vulnerable in our society remains a priority for the Choice Group.

Finally, I just want to highlight the article about Safe Places. This nationwide initiative seeks to provide a network of locations which can provide a temporary refuge for anyone feeling anxious, scared or at risk. I'm pleased that Choice is now part of this support community and would encourage you to promote this initiative more broadly.

Thanks for being a tenant of Choice and I hope everyone has an enjoyable Christmas and New Year.

Michael McDonnell

Connect with Choice



Follow us on social media - from Facebook, Twitter to YouTube and LinkedIn - we've got something new for you every day! It's a great way to stay connected, engaged, informed and entertained! Feel free to like, follow, share, and ask questions on any of our social media platforms.

We're looking forward to connecting with you!

Join us on Social Media!



We are pleased to advise that we have commenced a phased roll out of our online tenant portal, 'My Choice'. On the online portal you can access your rent account to view your rent statement, report a non-emergency repair and amend your contact information.

What services can I access through 'My Choice'?

Currently in 'My Choice' you can quickly and securely:

- Access your account online to view your rent account
- Report a non-urgent repair and view current/past repairs
- View your contact information and update your contact details
- Report an issue or concern

You can access your account with 'My Choice' on your smartphone, tablet, laptop or computer.

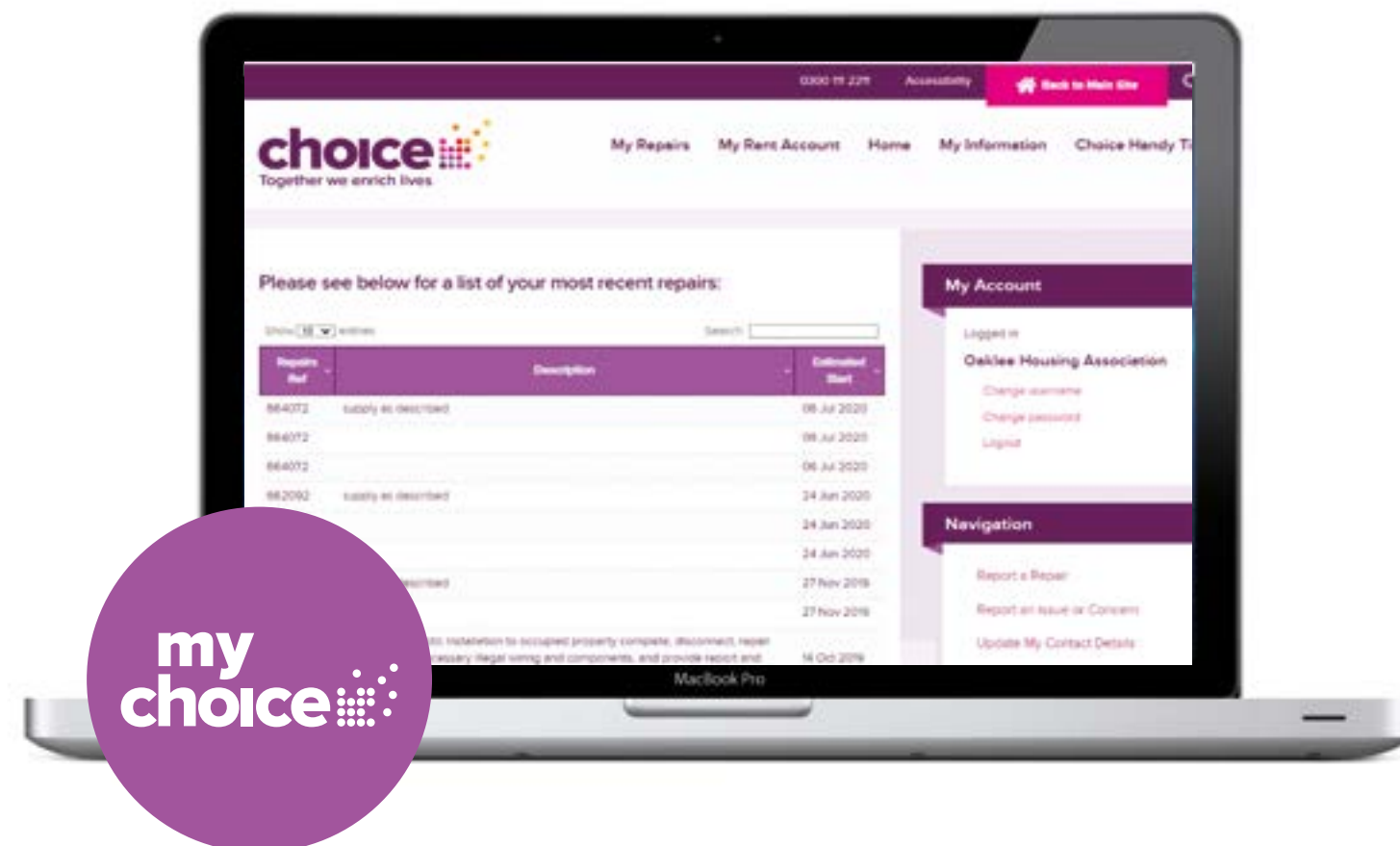
How do I register for 'My Choice'?

The roll-out programme for our new tenant portal has commenced and will continue until the end of January 2023. If we hold a valid email address for you on our system, the Tenant Portal Admin Team will send you an email inviting you to register for 'My Choice'. When you advise the Admin Team that you would like to register you will be sent a username and password (which you can change). After that, you will have access to the online portal.

I have been set up with an account on 'My Choice' and am having trouble logging in, what should I do?

If you are having difficulty logging in please contact us on tenantportal@choice-housing.org and a member of our Tenant Portal Administration Team will contact you to assist.

If you are having difficulty logging in please contact us on tenantportal@choice-housing.org and a member of our Tenant Portal Administration Team will contact you to assist.



Available immediately

SHELTERED LIVING

Edgar Boyd Court
Killynure Gardens
Carryduff
BT8 8RT



Visit our regularly updated website for properties available in your area.
choice-housing.org

For more information and to apply contact:

T: 0300 111 2211
enquiries@choice-housing.org



choice
Together we enrich lives

HOMES IN
THE HEART
OF THE
COMMUNITY



Marking a milestone at The Silvergrove

Residents and staff of Choice Housing came together to celebrate the 30th anniversary of Silvergrove - their sheltered living scheme located on the Montgomery Road, Belfast.

The Silvergrove was opened in 1991 and is designed specifically for older people providing 40 homes to residents who enjoy independent living within a safe and supported environment.

The celebration, which took place later than originally planned due to the pandemic, gave the tenants an opportunity to mark the important date and reflect on their own lives and journeys living in Silvergrove. The schemes longest standing tenant Mrs Nell Erskine who has been a tenant at the scheme since January 1999 was presented with a bouquet of flowers during the milestone event.

Choice Group Chief Executive, Michael McDonnell said, *“Whilst marking an important milestone like this demonstrates the contribution that we have as a housing association in developing sustainable living, more importantly it shows how our tenants contribute to the lifeblood of all our schemes.*

Without the tenants of Silvergrove it would not be the scheme it is today; they have made this their home and have become an important part of the community as a result. A range of social activities have ensured a cohesion within Silvergrove, and the wider community and tenants have developed lifelong friendships. This is an important element of maintaining the sustainability of independent living schemes like Silvergrove.”

30
ANNIVERSARY



The fabulous John Morgan wins the Good Neighbour Award

Congratulations to John Morgan from Millmount House in Banbridge, winner of the 2022 Muriel Smyth Good Neighbour Award. Everyone at Millmount House was ecstatic at the well-deserved recognition for all the kindness and generosity John shows to his neighbours and wider community.

John was nominated by his neighbour, Maggie McPolin, who sadly passed away very recently at the age of 96. Maggie’s daughter Kate recounted how fond her mother was of John, and was able to tell of the many kindnesses John has shown everyone over the years, from assistance with chores, shopping and even driving neighbours to hospital appointments. John’s daily good deeds are a way of life for the man who once promised his own mother that he would “do a good turn” every day. John has more than lived up to that promise and is a true force for good in his community.

Congratulations John from all your friends, neighbours and everyone at Choice.

JOHN MORGAN
winner of the
Good Neighbour
Award
2022



Help with energy costs



Ways to Save on Energy Bills

1 Maximising Income

1 Maximising Income

If you are worried about being able to manage payment of your bills, call Choice's Financial Inclusion Team on **0300 111 2211** or email financialinclusion@choice-housing.org

If you purchase your energy via direct debit or key pad, your supplier may be able to provide additional financial assistance. Contact your supplier for more information:

Domestic electricity suppliers in Northern Ireland

PowerNI	03457 455 455	home@powerni.co.uk
Budget Energy	0800 012 1177	talktous@budgetenergy.co.uk
Electric Ireland	0345 600 5335	customerservice@electricireland.com
SSE Airtricity	0345 601 9093	customerservice@sseairtricity.com
Click Energy	0800 107 0732	chat@clickenergyni.com
Bright Energy	*	**

* **All Bright customers have been transferred to Power NI. Contact PowerNI for further information.

Domestic natural gas suppliers in Northern Ireland

SSE Airtricity (gas)	0345 0262 658	info@airtricitygasni.com
Firmus Energy	0330 0249 000	furtherinfo@firmusenergy.co.uk

Correct at time of publication.

2 Switching Energy Suppliers

It may be possible for you to switch energy supplier to get a better deal. If you are on a variable tariff or your energy contract has come to an end, use the Consumer Council price comparison tool on their website www.consumercouncil.org.uk/comparison_tool/begin to

check if you can get a better deal. Or you can contact them by phoning **028 902 51600** or emailing info@consumercouncil.org.uk.

3 Energy Saving Tips



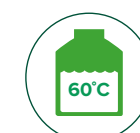
Change all lights to energy saving LED bulbs.



Turn your thermostat down by 1°C to save 10%. Time your heating for when you need it and don't block radiators.



Ensure you have a full load when using the washing machine or dish washer.



If you have a hot water tank, set the cylinder to 60°C.



Turn all lights off when not in use.



Wash your clothes at 30°C where practical.



Only boil what you need when using a kettle.



Turn taps off properly. In a single week, a dripping hot tap can waste enough hot water to fill half a bath.



Don't leave your mobile phone charging all night – most only need a couple of hours.



Keep curtains open in the day to let sun energy into your home and close your curtains at dusk to stop heat escaping.



Dry clothes outside when possible.

4 Improving Energy Efficiency

Choice have a target to achieve an average Energy Performance Certificate (home energy rating) score of 78 across our properties by 2025. NI Social Housing average is currently **73** and our average is **76**.

In order to achieve this Choice schedule energy improvement works as part of the planned maintenance programme of our properties.

Routine energy improvement works include:

- Boiler and heating upgrades
- LED lighting
- Loft insulation
- Window and door upgrades

Further information and help is available by contacting the Northern Ireland Energy Advice Line on **0800 111 44 55**. You can also download Choice's Energy Saving Guide, visit: www.choice-housing.org/energy



Help with food costs

Food Banks

Nobody should be left hungry or living in extreme poverty, sadly this is increasingly common in these difficult times. Trussell Trust have a network of food banks providing emergency supplies and dignified support to people locked in crisis.

Where can I find my local Food Bank?

There are over 21 Trussell Trust food banks across Northern Ireland.

The services provided by food banks may vary from area to area, as they react to the needs of their community to provide help and compassionate support to local people.

To get help from the food bank you will need to be referred with a voucher. Each food bank works with different frontline professionals, like doctors, health visitors, social workers, and Citizens Advice. These professionals will be able to refer you to a food bank and give you a food bank voucher if they think you need emergency food.

The food bank and referral agency will use this voucher to gather some basic information about you. This will help them to understand why support is needed and offer practical guidance, and the right emergency food. Once you have been given a voucher, you can exchange this for a minimum of three days' emergency food at your nearest food bank centre.

Visiting a Food Bank

Visiting a food bank might seem daunting, but you'll get a warm welcome in a safe environment, a listening ear from trained volunteers, and a food parcel. Your food will be packed in supermarket carrier bags – the food bank will supply these, but if you'd prefer to bring your own, these can be used instead.

What's in a Food Parcel?

Trussell Trust have worked with nutritionists to make sure that the food parcels supplied by food banks contain at least three days' worth of nutritionally balanced meals for individuals and families. These emergency food parcels are not designed to meet long-

term need – that's why food banks also offer additional support like debt advice where possible.

A typical food parcel includes:

- Cereal
- Soup
- Pasta
- Rice
- Tinned tomatoes/ pasta sauce
- Lentils, beans and pulses
- Tinned meat
- Tinned vegetables
- Tea/coffee
- Tinned fruit
- Biscuits
- UHT milk
- Fruit juice

Food banks will also provide essential non-food items like toiletries and hygiene products where they can.

Dietary requirements

When visiting a food bank centre, one of the Trussell Trust volunteers will run through the food parcel packing list to check for any special dietary requirements.



Ways to Donate Food

Over 90% of the food distributed by food banks in the Trussell Trust network is donated by the public – that's why food donations are absolutely vital to give everyone referred to a Food Bank a balanced and nutritious three day supply of food. Without goodwill, food banks would really struggle to operate.

Ways you can donate food:

1. Directly to your local food bank
2. At collection points in supermarkets across the country.
3. By hosting a collection at your school, church or business for your local food bank.

If you're organising a collection for your local food bank, please check with them first to see which items they are currently in need of.

www.trusselltrust.org

THE COST OF LIVING SQUEEZE



There are over 21 Trussell Trust food banks across Northern Ireland.



L-R Aidan McCrea Choice Financial Inclusion Manager, Carol Ervine Choice Group Director of Tenant & Client Services and Jonny Currie Trussell Trust Northern Ireland Network Lead.

Choice partners with homelessness charity to support new tenancies

Choice Housing has partnered with local charity Homeless Connect to provide people moving from homelessness into a new tenancy with much needed support as they begin their tenancy journey. The 'Getting Started Boxes,' which includes a range of essential items will help new eligible tenants set up their new home.

The Getting Started Boxes contain a range of food and basic hygiene items and are an addition to the Home Starter Packs that provide basic household items to set up home. Such items include a microwave, slow cooker, kettle & toaster, cutlery, crockery, towelling and bedding etc.

Choice also manages a Financial Inclusion Programme which supports tenants improve their financial capability through money management and maximisation of income. In the last year, this Programme helped tenants access £4.6 million in financial gains. Specialised staff at Choice continue to help tenants with benefits, debt, and budgeting advice.

HC Homeless Connect



Carol Ervine, Group Director of Tenant & Client Services said,

"For any first-time tenant there can be a significant financial burden in setting up their home and it is vital that tenants are supported during this process. Our support helps new tenancy holders create a solid foundation to promote long term sustainable tenancies."

Choice has committed to working with partners in supporting sustainable living across Northern Ireland. With the continued rise in the cost of living it is clear that there is a growing demand for help such as the Getting Started Boxes and we were keen to fund this addition to the project."

Kathy Henry from Homeless Connect said:

"We exist to prevent and reduce homelessness in Northern Ireland. One very practical way of doing that is to help people with the transition from homelessness to home by providing essential items, to get them settled in. The support from Choice will enable us to offer Getting Started Boxes to more people which is especially important in this tough economic climate."

choice-housing.org

SAFE PLACE

Choice sign up to become a Safe Place organisation

Choice Housing have recently signed up our offices Maple House and Leslie Morrell House to the Safe Place initiative run by Onus. Safe Place is a simple but effective way for anyone affected by domestic abuse to receive information on the support available to them. The support is available both for Choice Housing staff members and the general public who visit Choice offices.

Our Safe Place sites displays the Safe Place logo and posters on the premises and have Safe Place cards with details of helpline numbers in an accessible location.



Further information on Safe Place can be viewed on the Onus website <https://www.onustraining.co.uk/play-your-part>

choice-housing.org



Protecting your home from condensation & mould

Choice is mindful of the squeeze on household budgets but it is important that tenants are aware of the need to control and manage condensation which contributes to mould growth that may damage your health, home and belongings.

All homes produce some amounts of excess moisture and we are all familiar with condensation on windows and pools of water on window sills. In severe cases, if not managed, this can lead to damp patches on walls and mould growth. In homes, unsightly mould can form around window panes, corners of rooms and behind furniture. Condensation is the first sign that your home is producing excessive moisture or that moisture cannot escape through ventilation. Moisture and mould build up is not only unsightly but can cause damage to clothing, furnishings, decorations and can aggravate certain health conditions.

Where Does The Moisture Come From?

All air contains some moisture. Modern appliances such as dishwashers, washing machines and tumble dryers all produce large amounts of moisture. As many as 20 pints of moisture is added to the air in the home by an average family per day.

How Do The Problems Start?

Generally, the problems start in winter when there is too much moisture in the air which condenses on cold surfaces. In older properties which were poorly insulated and drafty, any excess moisture could easily escape.

Today our homes are much better sealed and insulated. Unfortunately excess moisture, once sealed into our homes now makes them prone to problems such as windows streaming with condensation. Excess moisture, if left unchecked, will lead to damp in the building fabric. Double glazing, insulation and draught proofing all help to retain heat, but can make condensation problems much worse by reducing natural ventilation. Since it is neither practical nor desirable to make our homes less-well sealed, the answer is to reduce the amount of moisture we produce and physically remove the excess moisture. If excess moisture is allowed to build-up in the home, moist air will inevitably come into contact with a cold surface such as a window or external wall when the outside temperature falls. At these low temperatures beads of condensation form, initially on windows and then spread elsewhere. Soon the condensation turns into damp and may result in mould spots growing.

How Does The Moisture Spread?

Moist air is never concentrated in one place for long, it will drift around the home. Moisture produced in one room, for example a kitchen or bathroom will circulate around the house, until it finds a cold place where it will condense and create areas of localised damp. This may be a cool bedroom or inside a wardrobe for example. Condensation and damp can, therefore occur in any room of the home. Usually these are the rooms that are least well heated, not necessarily the ones where the moisture was produced.

*If your home is affected by condensation please contact
0300 111 2211*



How Do You Reduce Condensation?

Condensation can be effectively managed by controlling moisture generation, adequate heating and ventilating your home.

TOP TIPS

- Do not dry your clothes indoors - each load of washing will contain 5-10 pints of water.
- Wipe condensation from windows in the morning and wring the cloth or sponge into the sink.
- Treat mould with a proprietary mould treatment following the manufacturer's instructions.
- Keep lids on pots when cooking, open a window and use the extractor fan if provided.
- Keep bathroom doors closed during and after bathing or showering. Open the window or use the fan if provided.
- Let fans run or leave windows open for at least 15 mins after showering, bathing or cooking.
- When filling a bath or sink run the cold water first before adding hot to reduce. This reduces steam and will prevent scalding.
- Ensure all rooms are adequately heated even if rarely used.
- Don't use stand-alone gas heaters as these appliances produce water.
- Don't cover radiators with curtains or furniture.

- Keep a space behind furniture to allow air movement and avoid placing furniture against external walls.
- Ventilate properly (ventilation removes stale, moist air). The most effective way to ventilate is to open several windows to allow a through draft.
- Don't block or close wall, ceiling or window vents.
- Don't isolate fans or ventilation systems if fitted. They are efficient and cost very little to run.
- Treat mould with a proprietary mould treatment following the manufacturer's instructions.

In cold weather, opening windows for 5-10 minutes several times a day will remove moist air without allowing the fabric of the building to cool significantly. This method will conserve heat and reduce energy loss as most heat in a property is held within the building fabric (walls, floors etc.) and not the air itself. If you suspect rising damp, penetrating damp such as defective render or leaking pipework please contact us to arrange an inspection.

Further advice is available in your Repairs Handbook or visit Choice website: choice-housing.org

If you have any queries or concerns contact Choice Services Centre on 0300 111 2211 or arrange a visit from your Property Services Officer.

Peters Hill Supported Living Scheme win Choice's Best Kept Garden

Peters Hill supported living scheme in Belfast has been crowned the winner of Choice Housing's 2022 Best Kept Garden competition. The winning garden has been transformed by residents and guided by scheme staff into a comfortable outdoor green space for residents and staff to enjoy.

The scheme is jointly managed by Choice and Inspire, and provides support to tenants with learning disabilities and mental health issues. The Best Kept Garden Competition now in its seventh year, invites tenants across Northern Ireland to showcase their green-finger skills.

The residents and staff worked hard to overhaul and maximise the small area of the scheme, carefully selecting perennial plants to survive all seasons and

boost biodiversity. Several fruit trees are dotted around the garden and the residents harvest the produce to use in baking and jam making. The colourful seating area is a popular spot, allowing residents and staff to enjoy nature and socialise outdoors.

Conor Mullin from Inspire Wellbeing said,

“Access to fresh air and green spaces can have a positive impact on people’s health and wellbeing, and we have already seen the positive impact this new space is having on residents at Peters Hill. Whether you have an interest in gardening, want to socialise outdoors or simply want a welcoming space to spend some quiet time, this new area does exactly that.



PETERS HILL
winner of the
Best Kept Garden
Award
2022



*Congratulations to the staff and tenants at Peters Hill,
who worked very hard to transform their outdoor space.*

Choice Services announce expansion throughout Co. Down

Choice Services, the award-winning in-house maintenance and repairs provider for Choice Housing has announced its service expansion which will cover the whole of Co Down, securing 28 jobs and servicing more than 4,600 homes across Co Down.

The agreement between Choice and former service provider BEST Maintenance Services included the full transfer of 28 employees to Choice Services. The transfer doubles the number of homes now serviced through Choice, increasing from 4,257 homes to more than 9,000 homes across NI and Ireland.

The employee transfers included 3 apprentices and 1 work placement student and brings the total staff employed by Choice Services to 91.

In 2020/21 over 18000 repairs were delivered by Choice Services, with the organisation overseeing further expansion to support Oaklee activities (Choice Subsidiary) the continued mobilisation of the first social housing Public Private Partnership (PPP) in Ireland, and the development of several Planned Maintenance Schemes within Northern Ireland.



“We’ve seen our team grow significantly over the last eighteen months, which given the challenging circumstances we have worked through during the pandemic is testament to our colleagues and their commitment to supporting tenants. This transfer of services to Choice will ensure that homes across Co Down will continue to receive quality efficient customer service with real value for money.

“The transfer of 28 colleagues further strengthens our capability to respond to the needs of our customers, both in the Co Down area and across NI and Ireland. Doubling the number of homes we service demonstrates our commitment to providing value to more tenants across the island of Ireland.”

James Sterling, Managing Director Choice Services



Total staff employed by Choice Services increases to

91

Choice Services recently won the Chartered Institute of Housing ‘Excellence in Customer Services’ award for their service provided to their tenants which comes following a successful in-house transfer of the response repair services. The Services now delivers 80% of general response repairs needs, ensuring value for money for tenants.



Meet the newest addition to our fleet- our first electric van, which produces no CO2 or NOx emissions with the added benefit of reduced running costs.

Finals Day Fun for all

Sunday 31st July was Finals Day, the culmination of 8 weeks of football for Ballynahinch Olympic FC in partnership with Choice Housing, through the T:BUC funded Housing For All Programme.

Choice were proud to partner with Ballynahinch Olympic FC to deliver a programme of summer football events, created to encourage good relations in the Ballynahinch area. Finals Day was a roaring success with a whopping 24 teams playing their hearts out in the sunshine, cheered on by their friends and family.

As well as the fantastic football skills on display, attendees were treated to a barbecue, tuck-shop, bouncy castles, the all important prize presentations, and even some of the grown ups enjoyed a kick about.



Martin Sloane from Ballynahinch Olympic FC-

"What a fantastic 8 weeks of football for all the primary school children in the area. The participant feedback was extremely positive and the event was well received by all in attendance. The partnership with Choice Housing and the Housing For All initiative was integral to making the event successful."

The club are extremely grateful to Choice Housing for their support of this event and the local community. We look forward to working with Choice on other opportunities that can provide benefit to the local community."

Well done to all the volunteers and staff, Choice are delighted to have supported and contributed to such a special community event.



Carol Ervine, Group Director of Tenant & Client Services at Choice Housing commented: *"It was our pleasure to partner with Lisburn & Castlereagh City Council this summer. This programme of events across the council's parks provided free, fun and inclusive activities for the wider community. It's fantastic to see our shared spaces being used to bring people together."*

Park Life

Choice partnered with Lisburn & Castlereagh City Council to welcome the return of its full 'Park Life' programme of free fun in Wallace Park, Moira Demesne and Moat Park this summer.

This year's Park Life programme events suited all ages, ranging from a Mini Mela to a Heroes and Princesses day to interactive messy fun with a petting farm and craft workshops.



Good Relations Week 2022

Good Relations Week is the annual celebration of the work that goes on all year round to build peace and good community relationships. The week's activities are drawn together by the Community Relations Council.

The theme for this year's celebration is 'Change Starts With Us' and focuses on the UN's Sustainable Development Goals to highlight the political, social, economic, and environmental challenges Northern Ireland faces.

As part of our community development work, Choice in partnership with Newry, Mourne & Down District Council and Co Down Rural Community Network invited Ukrainian newcomers staying with host families within the Rowallane district to a welcome event in Ballynahinch Community Centre during Good Relations week. The evening included music, food, advice and most importantly an opportunity for Ukrainians new to the area to come together and meet local support agencies and develop friendships during their stay.



'Change
Starts
With Us'



Ballymena Putting Health & Wellbeing First

The Services Club opened its doors and welcomed the wider Ballymena community for a very successful Choice Health & Wellbeing event. Attendee's enjoyed learning how to make positive choices around health and wellbeing by participating in free health screenings and enjoying complimentary relaxation sessions. Exhibitors and the local community also sampled delicious homemade soups and stews in a plot to plate initiative with the Tullygarley Allotments.

A big turn out ensured a fantastic atmosphere, participants and health professionals were joined by some familiar faces too including: Health Minister Robin Swan along with both Ian Paisley MP and Johnny Mercer MP.



If you would like further information on upcoming community events in your area, please contact our Community Development Team on 0300 111 2211 or email: enquiries@choice-housing.org

Ballymaglave Court on tour!

Remember when it was hot and sunny? Here's our tenants from Ballymaglave Court, Ballynahinch on a trip to Tayto Park, supported by the Housing For All programme.





MINORCA DRIVE, CARRICKFERGUS

Sean McGreevy of McGreevy Construction said,

“This is a significant housing project for the Carrickfergus area which, following consultation with the local community will be a welcome addition. The 146 new homes will provide safe, secure homes for more than 560 people.”

**£20m
investment**

Choice has announced plans to deliver 146 new homes in Carrickfergus. The scheme, located to the North-West of Carrickfergus Town Centre is accessed off Minorca Drive and was home to the former Courtaulds textiles factory site in Carrickfergus. The development will also facilitate a public open space, landscaping and a children’s play area and is expected to be completed by March 2025.

The project will include a mix of accommodation to meet the growing and diverse needs of local residents. This will include a range of 2, 3 and 4-bedroom houses with a number of these properties to be wheelchair accessible.

The new development, designed by MHS Architects, will also be supported by a much-needed upgrade in infrastructure to the local area such as, roads, footways, and other services including ancillary works to include the diversion of an existing public sewer crossing the site and the installation of a new wastewater pumping station.

Choice is working in partnership with local South Down Developer McGreevy Construction Ltd to deliver the design and build, who undertook a series of community led consultations leading to planning approval by Mid and East Antrim Planning Committee in 2019 and updated approval in February 2022.

The site once formed part of the Courtaulds Industrial Complex and part of the railway which serviced the production of salt in Carrickfergus, employing thousands of people from east Antrim and the surrounding area. The company closed its Carrick site in the early 1980s.

146 NEW HOMES



Choice Group Chief Executive, Michael McDonnell said,

“The population of Carrickfergus is growing and with it comes increasing demand for housing and other amenities to support this growth. This new development is forming part of this plan and the road infrastructure surrounding the development will be a vital element.

“There has been significant investment in the Mid and East Antrim area, this latest investment of £20m further demonstrates our commitment to addressing the growing need for quality affordable housing in Carrickfergus”.

Energy Saving Week 2022

Energy Saving Week in Northern Ireland ran between 17th - 21st October.

During this week, we visited tenants and worked with organisations from across Northern Ireland to share effective tips to help households save energy, reduce their bills, and limit the impact of our energy use on the environment.

Saving energy at home can reduce carbon emissions as well as energy bills, so we're joining the Energy Saving Trust and inviting everyone to join us in making a change.

We have lots of helpful advice on our website, looking at

- Being wise about your energy
- Quick wins to save money
- Taking control of your heat
- Simple changes mean easy savings
- Keeping the heat in



If you would like to speak to a member of our Sustainability and Energy Team call 0300 111 2211 or visit us on www.Choice-housing.org



Sustainability and Energy Strategy 2022-25

We have outlined our plans to invest in a range of energy efficiency and carbon reduction measures over the next three years. The plans, outlined following the launch of our new Sustainability and Energy Strategy 2022-25, set out our commitment to achieve Net Zero by 2050. This is a timely strategy in the climate of soaring energy costs and these plans will ensure homes are future proofed in terms of sustainability and energy usage.

Sustainability and Energy Manager Daniel Egerton said,

“Since the inception of our energy team over ten years ago, Choice has delivered sector leading examples of energy efficiency, sustainable housing, and cost-savings for our tenants. From 2019 to 2022, we have achieved a 10.6% reduction in scope 1 and 2 Carbon Dioxide Emissions, equivalent to the average heating emissions for 226 households in the UK.

“To truly achieve net-zero we need to transform our management of greenhouse gases – improving energy efficiency and managing energy consumption are two key areas we are looking at. We are committed to building the capacity of our tenants to deliver changes within their own homes and communities also.”



Don't tip your oil tank



Choice are aware of increased incidences of tenants wedging or tipping oil tanks before arranging a refill.

Whilst we appreciate that many of our tenants suffer from fuel poverty, it is extremely important that you do not tip your tank to increase the oil flow as this often results in damaged oil lines, oil leaks, environmental contamination, damage to oil burners and makes the tank unstable and dangerous.

We recommend to avoid refilling with small drums as these are expensive and increase the likelihood of contamination. However, if you do refuel with a small drum, please do not stand on the valve to reach the opening.

Oil tanks are designed to retain a small amount of oil at the bottom of the tank. This is intended to act as a reservoir for sediment and moisture, which may damage the oil burner if used.

Where damage is caused by tenant misuse, we will recharge all costs and your tenancy is at risk.

For further information on oil buying clubs please visit: www.nihe.gov.uk/Community/NI-Energy-Advice/Oil-Buying-Clubs

If you require any further information and advice on refilling your oil tank please contact ChoiceServices Centre on T: 0300 111 2211

USEFUL TIPS FOR REFILLING YOUR OIL TANK...



- Never tip your tank
- Always refit and secure the lid
- Avoid running out of oil and check oil levels regularly
- Avoid refilling with small drums as these are expensive and increase the likelihood of contamination
- Consider joining an oil buying club in your area to help budgeting for oil.

Aids & Adaptations

Choice works closely with the Health and Social Care Trusts, Department for Communities and the Northern Ireland Housing Executive to provide aids and adaptations for tenants with sensory impairments or disabilities living in our accommodation.

This service can offer those tenants a measure of independence and have a positive effect on their well-being. Adaptations can improve the quality of life for many people by enabling them to live independently. If you are having difficulties accessing facilities to carry out normal day-to-day living activities, an aid or adaptation could help.

Please contact Choice should you have any queries or require advice on eligibility or available options. Tel: 0300 111 2211 or Email: enquiries@choice-housing.org



How we're performing



Choice are at the forefront in the provision of social housing and are committed to delivering quality housing and excellent customer services that enhance the lives of customers and communities.

It is important that your voice, in relation to our services, is heard as the feedback that we receive is vital for Choice to identify and correct any problems within our service delivery and to ensure that we meet the needs of all our customers.



Performance figures are for the year ended August 2022

Out & About

Choice has more than 12,000 tenants, over 400 staff and works with numerous partners and stakeholders; so it's no surprise that there is always plenty of activity going on in all the communities we support.

Read our Out & About section to find out more and don't forget to let us know about your events!

Email us: enquiries@choice-housing.org

Contact us at:

editor@choice-housing.org



BALLYNAFEST 2022

Choice had the pleasure of hosting Open Ormeau and the wider Ormeau community on a gorgeous day in Belfast during the summer.

Dance, food, arts, music, circus and song in the sunshine, lifted everyone's spirits and brought people together.

CADHLA WINS THE CHOICE COLOURING COMPETITION

Congratulations to Cadhla from Belfast who has won the recent Choice Colouring In Competition. Cadhla's multi-coloured dinosaur caught the judges with a roar to win a family pass to Ark Open Farm in Newtownards. Don't forget to enter the colouring competition on page 38 for your chance to win a fantastic prize for the whole family to enjoy!



CHAMPIONING LINEN MEWS

The tenants at Linen Mews in Lisburn have a beautiful outdoor space to share and enjoy. These pictures were sent in by the Community Champion at the scheme, Seamus McKenna.

Our Community Champions are tenants who represent their local community, working alongside Choice staff to improve their neighbourhood. If you would like to learn more about his role or to volunteer as a Community Champion please contact our Community Development Team on 0300 111 2211.



SAFETY FIRST AT ST. BRONAGH'S

Fire Fighters, Frank and Ronan visited St. Bronagh's in Rostrevor to have a chat with tenants about safety in the home.

Tenants were reminded of this helpful guidance-

STOP Fire

One of the easiest ways to prevent a fire is to follow our 'STOP Fire' message:

S – make sure you have smoke alarms on every floor of your home.

T – test those smoke alarms weekly to make sure they're working.

O – be aware of the obvious dangers in your home. You can find advice about these below.

P – plan your escape route should a fire occur.

FIRE



If you're over 50, or have a disability then you're entitled to a free Home Fire Safety Check by Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service, visit <https://nifrs.org/home/staying-safe/community-safety/home-fire-safety/home-fire-safety/> for further information.



MEET THE TRUSEDALES

Mr & Mrs Trusedale who live at Hazelbank Court, Belfast, recently celebrated a significant happy milestone. Married 70 years, the happy couple were joined by friends and family to mark the very special occasion on 23rd August this year. Don't be surprised if they look familiar, they even featured on UTV Live to talk about the secret to their success! Our Housing Officer, Thomas Robinson visited to present them with a small gift from everyone at Choice just before they headed off for their anniversary staycation to Portavogie. Congratulations Mr & Mrs Trusedale!

A COLOURFUL NIGHT OUT FOR CABINHILL COURT

Tenants and staff from Cabinhill Court, Belfast, recently visited the theatre to watch 'Joseph and his technicolour dream coat', a fantastic night of music, song and drama in beautiful surroundings.



COMING TOGETHER AT THE METROPOLE, DERRY~LONDONDERRY

The community spirit at the Metropole in Derry~Londonderry is alive and well, tenants at this North West sheltered living scheme regularly come together to chat and have coffee together.



OFFICER TOM VISITS ST. BRONAGH'S

The local Crime Prevention Officer visited St. Bronagh's sheltered living scheme in Rostrevor. Tenants were reassured that developing home security can be simple, inexpensive and prevents opportunist criminals from taking advantage of insecure homes. If you would like to know more you about how you can keep your home safe visit: <https://www.psni.police.uk/safety-and-support/keeping-safe/protecting-your-home>



CHOICE TENANT PUBLISHES SECOND BOOK - A DIFFERENT KIND OF LIFE

At Choice we enjoy celebrating the success and talents of our tenants so we are shining the spot light on Christine Holmes; a writer who lives at Stevenson Park in Lurgan.

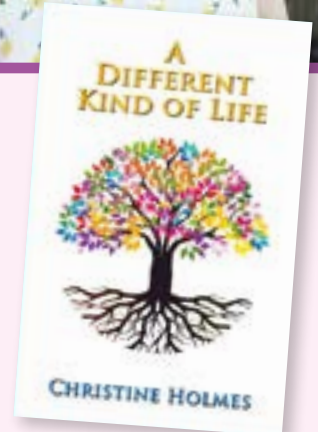
Christine has written since childhood. Completing stories, articles, and poetry as a hobby until she published her first book in 2004. Having dreamed of writing another, 2020 gave her the time to devote to her new book, 'A Different Kind of Life'.

Christine says – "I was reflecting on my life and how things don't always work out like I'd planned.

I'd experienced a lot of painful times and as a Christian, my faith in God was the one thing that brought me through. I realised I had a different kind of life and that became the title for the book."

So far the book has been well received and Christine has been encouraged by messages from readers. Now settled in her new home at Stevenson Park she is planning her next novel.

Christine's works are available to purchase on Amazon.



REMINISCING AT ST BRONAGH'S

Sean Campbell lives at St. Bronagh's in Rostrevor. Sean has been well known in the local community since his rally driving days of the 1970s.

Also a successful business man Sean moved into the sheltered living scheme in 2021 and has been regaling everyone with his tales of adventure ever since.





MACMILLAN COFFEE MORNING AT BENMORE COURT

Maura Ross, Scheme Co-ordinator at Benmore Court, Belfast, held a coffee morning for Macmillan on Tuesday 4th October. To maximise the fundraising Maura invited local community and church groups to come along together and they raised a massive £609!

Maura said – “I would like to thank the Family of the late Margaret McDonnell who made a very generous donation on behalf of their Mother.”

Well done to all involved, staff of Finaghy Community Centre, Bluebell Disabled Group, staff and tenants of Ballydown Court, friends from The Church of the Epiphany, Clonard House, and of course tenants, staff and friends of Benmore Court.



SIZZLING. SUMMER. SOCIAL.

Everyone at Lisnavar Court, Belfast, enjoyed coming together this summer in the sun. In July, Shauna Cusack, Scheme Co-ordinator, organised a BBQ for the tenants, making sure everyone at the scheme feels connected and part of the community.

Through the weekly coffee mornings and donations by the tenants, enough money was raised to buy a BBQ for the scheme.



BBQ COOK UP AT SILVERGROVE

Tenants at the Silvergrove in Belfast made the most of the good weather this summer and enjoyed a delicious BBQ in their beautiful communal garden.

Everyone sat back, relaxed and enjoyed each other's company whilst enjoying a burger or two!

OLIVIA'S GREATEST FAN

Our colleague Natalie Fan, scheme co-ordinator at Hill Court Lurgan, was lucky enough to meet the late Olivia Newtown John a number of times over the years, she shares her experience with us.

'Olivia Newton-John has always been my absolute favourite!'

I was three years old when Grease came out, I must have really loved it as I remember my Dad getting me her Greatest Hits album when I was about eight. I played that LP every day, all day!

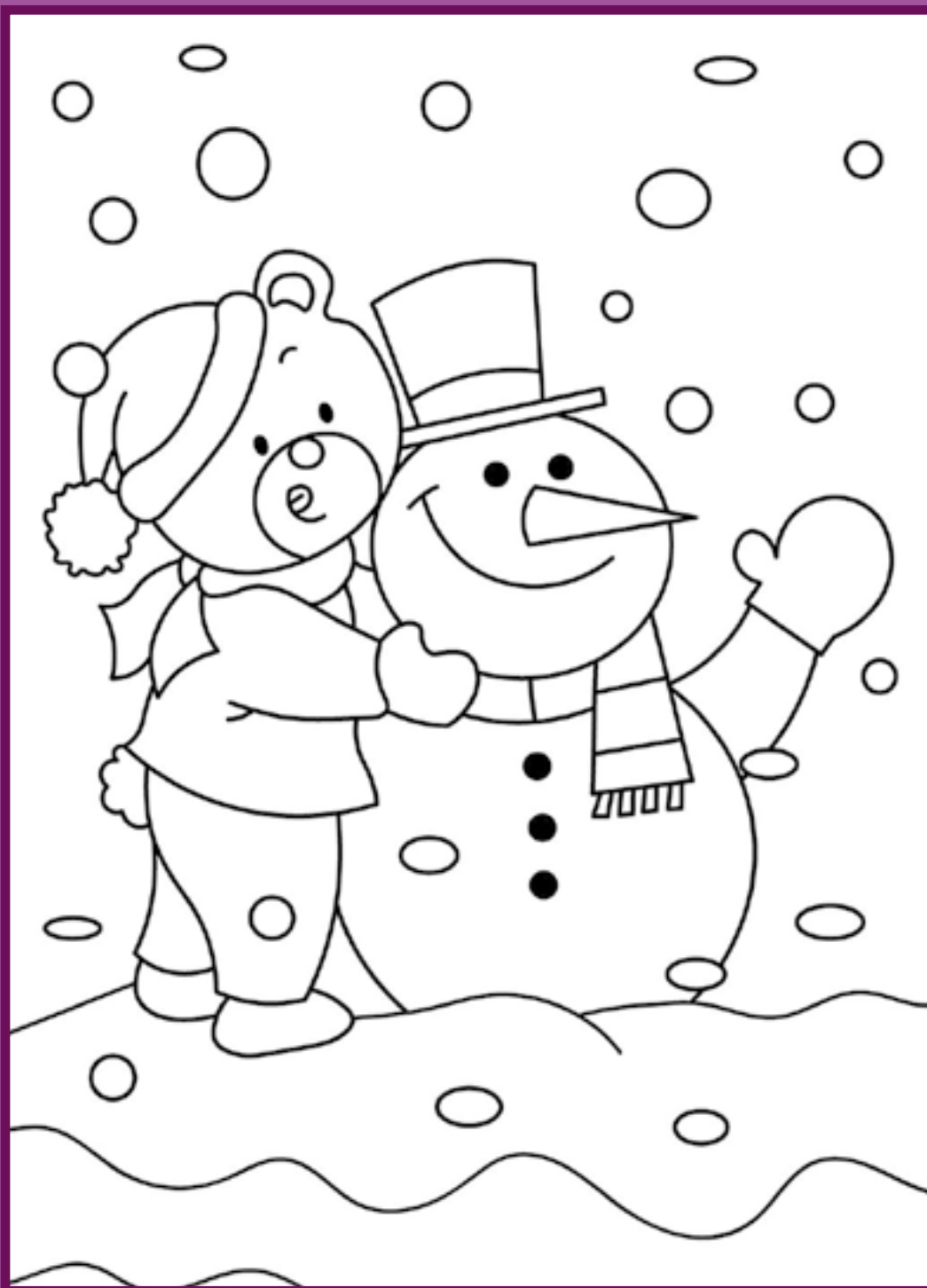
I never dreamt I would ever get the chance to meet such an iconic superstar. But, I met her five times and on one occasion I even sang with her! They say don't meet your idols as you will be let down, this was NEVER the case with her. She was lovely to me every time! Even though I knew she was living with cancer, I had no idea she was so bad.'





Children's Colouring Competition

Open to children 16 years and under



It's really easy to enter, just pull out this page and colour it in anyway you like! Then pop it in the post along with your name, age, address and telephone number in the reply slip below to:

The Editor,
Choice News,
FREEPOST BEL2371
Belfast BT1 6BR.

One lucky winner will receive this great prize! Entries must be received by **Friday 27th January 2023.**

*(Please note that the parent or guardian must be a tenant of Choice Housing Ireland).
Ts & Cs apply.*

Win a family pass to a local Open Farm!

POST TO: The Editor, Choice News, FREEPOST BEL2371, Belfast BT1 6BR

Name Age

Address

Daytime Tel. Evening Tel.

Different ways to pay your rent and other charges

In order to make paying your rent, rates and service charges both safe and easy, we offer a wide range of options that will mean you can choose how you pay. Ways to pay your rent:



Direct Debit – You can set up a Direct Debit agreement. Please contact the Income Recovery Team on 0300 111 2211.



Going Online – You can pay your rent online at www.choice-housing.org by clicking on 'Pay Rent' on the homepage.



The allpay App – You can pay your rent via the allpay App which is available to download from the Apple App Store, Windows Phone Store or Google Play.



Phone us using your debit or credit card – You will need to give us your rent reference number (on your rent payment card), your debit or credit card details, and the amount you want to pay.



At any Post Office, shop, garage displaying the Paypoint sign
You can pay cash and show your rent payment card. Make sure you get a receipt and keep it safe.



Post – Send a cheque or postal order to our head office. Never send cash. You need to allow three days for your payment to reach us on time.



Universal Credit direct payment – if you claim Universal Credit, the housing cost element is automatically paid directly to your rent account. However, if this does not cover the full amount of your rent you need to pay the difference.

Support for our customers - Anti-social Behaviour

Choice appointed Insec Security to provide assistance to tenants whenever problems are encountered in relation to Anti-social Behaviour (ASB). This may include problems with excessive noise or threatening behaviour.

Please contact the Association if you require further information regarding this service.

Please note the following:

- This service is only available to Choice tenants **OUTSIDE OFFICE HOURS.**
- Tenants should continue to report all cases of ASB to the Services Centre on 0300 111 2211, during normal office hours.
- Any tenant who has concerns for their own safety, or believes that a crime has been committed, should contact the PSNI.

- Tenants living in sheltered housing schemes should continue to report all cases of ASB directly to their Scheme Co-ordinator or to the Services Centre on 0300 111 2211, during normal office hours.
- Insec Security will only visit the person who is causing the ASB.

INSEC WILL NOT VISIT THE TENANT MAKING THE COMPLAINT. THIS PROCESS IS TO ENSURE CONFIDENTIALITY IS MAINTAINED.

Work with us

Choice employs over 400 staff at various locations throughout Northern Ireland providing careers in:

Housing Management

Development

Administration

Information Technology

Human Resources

Finance

and a range of support roles in our sheltered living schemes



WHY WORK AT CHOICE?

We believe every team member is integral to our success and contributes to achieving our mission of enriching lives through great homes, services and communities. We are driven by our values in being Caring, Committed and Creative:

We are
CARING

We are
COMMITTED

We are
CREATIVE



WE ARE CARING:

We offer all employees free access to a Health Cash Plan; we provide Mental Health First Aiders, First Aiders, Menopause Champions and Health & Wellbeing Champions; Death in Service Benefit and generous holiday entitlement.



WE ARE COMMITTED:

We offer family friendly initiatives to help employees achieve work life balance.

WE ARE CREATIVE:

We set our people up for success with opportunities to complete external qualifications, training and continuous professional and personal development.

Check out our website for information on our current job vacancies:
<https://www.choice-housing.org/work-with-us>

