



**Dublin North Health and
Welfare Branch Newsletter
Issue 2, January 2019**

Hello from the branch's assistant general secretary

Inside This Issue

- 1** Meet Ryan McKinney, the branch's assistant general secretary (AGS)
- 2** A message to members from senior general secretary, Shay Cody
- 3** A reminder of some of the membership benefits that you may not be aware of
- 4** Photos from Fórsa's recent event at PCRS and Connolly Hospital
- 5** Upcoming events
- 6** In the next edition



It's been a momentous first year as AGS for the Health & Welfare branches in Dublin, Kildare and Wicklow. I probably found it easier than most to make the transition from 'Impact' to 'Fórsa' having only been in post a few weeks before members of all three constituent unions voted to create the biggest public service union in Ireland's history. Nonetheless I understood the significance of this and more so the need to ensure that the opportunity afforded by the creation of Fórsa was not missed.

The Dublin North Health & Welfare branch is an important part of the new union and over the last twelve months I have seen just how important it is to have a strong, organised union branch in Dublin North City and County. I hope to be in a position to contribute to the growth of the branch and to use my experience to the benefit of you; the members.

My own background includes a five year stint at the Labour Relations Agency (a Belfast based organisation, with a similar role to the WRC) and more recently I spent eight years as a union official with NIPSA, the largest public sector union in the north. I first became a union activist as a civil servant, having tried my hand at a variety of low paid, long hours' jobs where union membership was strongly discouraged and once I first experienced the power and protection of a union I became a committed trade unionist.

The health services are challenging places to work. Resources have been scarce for many years and most of you will have been subjected to the emergency measures from which we are only now emerging. The stronger your union the better in these circumstances so if your colleague sitting beside you is not a member that dilutes your union's power. If we don't have the power in your workplace we don't have it at the negotiating table, in the boardroom, in the WRC or in the Dáil. That has been the most important lesson I have learnt since I started working 25 years ago.

Ryan McKinney

This is a year of contrasting anniversaries. It's just 12 months since IMPACT amalgamated with the PSEU and CPSU to form the new 80,000-strong organisation Fórsa. And it's a decade since the worst economic crash in modern Irish history led to mass unemployment, huge damage to public services, and deep cuts in the incomes of the people who deliver them.

We all recall the imposition of the pension levy, without agreement, in 2009.

A few months later, we came tantalisingly close to reaching an agreement that would have saved billions while avoiding a further cut in incomes. But the then-Government reneged on the deal and an additional average 7% cut in pay rates was imposed at the beginning of 2010. At the same time, new entrants had an additional 10% pay cut imposed.

But we stayed united and engaged in industrial action, which soon led to the Croke Park Agreement. This deal – much criticised in the media at the time – survived the arrival of the Troika and put a stay on further pay cuts. It also blocked widespread privatisation and avoided the compulsory redundancies that were a feature in most other struggling economies.

We stayed at the negotiation table for the difficult talks that led to the Haddington Road Agreement, which cut another €1 billion from public service costs.

But even in those difficult days, we were setting the agenda for restoration. While Haddington Road introduced further temporary pay cuts for higher-paid members, most people's incomes were left intact. The deal also secured the first modest cut in the pension levy, and won improvements for new entrants.

It also meant we could re-enter talks as the economy picked up, which seemed by no means certain at the time. The union was later able to shape the outcome of those talks into the Lansdowne Road deal because we had an internal discussion and planned for what we wanted. We sought a flat-rate pay settlement and secured a €2,000 adjustment over two years.

We were able to build on that significantly in the 2017 PSSA agreement, which secured pay adjustments worth 7.5% for lower-paid workers and 6.5% for the rest. And we have also used the agreement to address recruitment and retention issues and outstanding injustices like new entrant pay scales.

The recovery in public finances, which is down to the efforts and sacrifices of working people and their communities, means the health service and other public sector employers are hiring again – although many gaps in our public services remain.

Our job now is to continue to protect and enhance incomes, and to restore career structures. We are doing this by planning for the next agreement, through mechanisms like the hard-fought reintroduction of health service job evaluation, as well as the work Fórsa's health division has been doing with the Public Service Pay Commission to address recruitment and retention problems in the sector.

One of the few positive spin-offs of the crisis is that the union has, over the last decade, refocused its attention on building union strength through organising, training, communications and campaigns. I'm full of admiration for the hard work and dedication of activists like the Dublin North Health and Welfare branch committee and workplace reps. And I'm proud to say our organising and training programmes mean we now have more and better-prepared activists – including many younger reps – than we've had for decades.

The creation of Fórsa last year has strengthened public sector trade unionism in many ways, including by bringing all clerical and admin staff across the civil and public service into one family.

It has enabled us to negotiate better financial deals and other benefits for members, and it has amplified our voice in national debates and campaigns about social issues and public services, from housing and homelessness to gender pay equality, childcare and health service structures.

I believe it will also improve our hand next time we sit down to negotiate pay improvements for our members in the Dublin health and welfare and across the public service and community sector.



A message to Dublin North Health & Welfare Branch members from senior general secretary, Shay Cody

A reminder of some of your membership benefits

Fórsa members can save a lot of money with our enhanced package of financial benefits provided or negotiated by the union. Some of the deals are free to all Fórsa members. Others are optional benefits, available only to Fórsa members, which can mean savings on insurance, salary protection, additional pension coverage and more.

Fórsa members are entitled to*

- €5,000 personal accident cover
- €5,000 critical illness or death benefit
- Spouses covered for death benefit too
- €5,000 illness benefit if you're out of work for more than 12 months
- Evacuation or repatriation expenses up to €250,000 for members deceased, seriously injured or ill abroad

Free Fórsa helplines

- 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year
- Free legal help in bodily injury cases 1850-77-66-44
- Free 24/7 legal advice helpline 1850-77-66-44
- Free 24/7 confidential counselling helpline 1850-77-66-55
- Free 24/7 domestic assistance helpline 1850-77-66-44

Fórsa members can opt into Fórsa-facilitated financial benefits

- Car insurance
- Home insurance
- Travel insurance
- Additional pension benefits
- Salary protection and life cover.

* Terms, conditions and some restrictions apply.

Membership of Fórsa has so many financial benefits. Here's a reminder of some that you may not know about.



Pictured left is David Byrne. David works in PCRS - Primary Care Reimbursement Service and is a member of the Fórsa in house committee. David and the committee were instrumental in supporting and organising workplace events in 2018. The most recent event was a 'meet and greet' morning. Fórsa Full Time Release Officer Michael Davis and Industrial Relations Officer Eimear Ryan were both in attendance. Members were invited to come to the canteen and meet with the in house committee, discuss issues and campaigns and get to know their union



The second photo is taken in Connolly Hospital, Blanchardstown. Dabney Melia (pictured on the left) is a branch executive member and also involved in the local in house committee. Dabney and her colleagues organised a Christmas event outside the staff canteen in December 2018. Again, this was a wonderful opportunity for members to get to know their union. Visibility of the union is important to our branch and if you'd like to have an event similar to these, please don't hesitate to get in contact

Photos and description by Eimear Ryan – DNHW Branch Industrial Relations Office

Upcoming events

The Dublin North Health and Welfare Branch
are pleased to announce their AGM will
take place on

Thursday 21 February 2019 at 6pm in Club
Na Múinteoirí (The Teachers' Club) 36
Parnell Square West, Dublin 1, D01 T6V6.

For directions:

<https://maps.app.goo.gl/oW62K>

**ALL BRANCH MEMBERS ARE
WELCOME**

LIGHT REFRESHMENTS WILL BE SUPPLIED ON ARRIVAL

The next edition of our newsletter will feature news from the branch AGM, we will also continue our series of 'meet the branch' specials with an interview with the branch's industrial relations officer (IRO) Éimear Ryan and much more. If you would like to contribute an article or photo for the next newsletter please contact your local workplace rep.

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