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Minister Gordon Lyons visits the Stella Maris facility in Belfast. He is pictured with: Project Group Manager Catherine McGarrell, Depaul Chief Executive Officer David Carroll and Senior Services Manager Deirdre Canavan.

Haemochromatosis UK report launched at Stormont

Haemochromatosis UK (HUK), a charity dedicated to supporting people affected by genetic haemochromatosis (GH), recently announced the launch of a report on the economic impact of screening for GH in Northern Ireland.

The findings indicate that there is a clear economic case for routine population-based GH screening in Northern Ireland under a range of assumptions for the prevalence of GH. The economic case is strongest for screening people in their 40s. The report was formally launched at an event in Stormont recently, opened by Mike Nesbitt MLA, Minister for Health, Northern Ireland.

The report's authors reveal, in their independent report, that there is a clear economic case for routine population-based GH screening in Northern

Ireland under a range of assumptions for the prevalence of GH.

- Screening saves lives, saves money
- For every £1 spent on screening, over £3 of benefit is generated (*)
- The case for screening is strongest for people in their 40s - both men and women (#)

Over the past 3 years, Haemochromatosis UK has been running cross-community screening programmes across Northern Ireland (and in other areas of high prevalence across the UK). These demonstrate that 1 in 10 people in NI are at risk of iron overload from genetic haemochromatosis

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HOMELESSNESS ORGANISATIONS DOING ESSENTIAL WORK

Communities Minister Gordon Lyons said there is no single, or simple, solution to the issue of homelessness in our society.

But he added that, as Minister for Housing, he remains determined to play his part in tackling the problem.

The Minister was speaking during a visit to the Stella Maris Project in Belfast. Run by the Depaul charity, the centre helps people who

are homeless, or at risk, and often have additional complex needs.

The Minister said: "Hearing about the experiences of staff and service users at this facility, it is clear that each case they deal with is unique. Very often, it requires tailored

interventions, involving a range of organisations and agencies. However, putting a roof over someone's head must be the starting point.

"There is also an appreciation that homelessness is ultimately about the individuals themselves.

Accommodation is key, but it has to be accompanied by support services which recognise the often complex needs of those who are facing homelessness.

Continued on page 4

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BABY HOPE'S FIRST BIRTHDAY INSPIRES HEARTFELT DONATION TO THE ULSTER HOSPITAL'S NEONATAL UNIT

A special act of kindness from a special baby girl has touched the hearts of families and staff at the Ulster Hospital's Neonatal Unit.

Baby Hope Jackson, a former Neonatal patient from Comber, returned to donate story books to the unit that once cared for her.

Hope arrived nine weeks early, at just 31 weeks, on 27th January 2024. To mark her first birthday, her family invited loved ones to gift books that could be donated to the Neonatal Unit. Knowing what they experienced when Hope was there, Hope's parents believed this small gesture would help bring comfort to parents and babies going through a similar experience.

Baby Hope's Mum Ruth Jackson reflected, "When Hope was in the Neonatal Unit, reading to her was such a comfort. It helped develop our bond and helped drown out the noise of the machines. These books will hopefully give other families a chance to



develop their bond." Hope's family expressed their deep gratitude to the Neonatal Unit, acknowledging the dedication of the staff who played a vital role in Hope's journey. Now

she is a thriving, happy one year old. Infant Feeding Lead Cathy Flinn was delighted to receive the books, "We really value and appreciate Baby Hope's donation

to our unit as reading is so important for a baby's neurological development. It is great to see our neonatal graduates thriving when they pop back in a see us!"



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AIR AMBULANCE CALLS FOR NEW VOLUNTEERS ACROSS GREATER BELFAST TO GIVE AN HOUR

Air Ambulance Northern Ireland is proud to have been re-accredited the prestigious Investing in Volunteers (IiV) accreditation, the UK quality standard for involving volunteers.

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The charity has a dedicated team of volunteers who help raise funds and awareness for the life-saving service, and is calling for more support in 2025.

Janice Crowe, Volunteer Co-ordinator at Air Ambulance NI charity said, "Our volunteers are the backbone of the charity, and the accreditation honours the contribution made by each of them who have shown such support. We have a bigger events portfolio for 2025 and need volunteers to help at Moy Park Belfast City Marathon, North West 200, Shanes Castle May Day Steam Rally and many other collections and events. Some of our volunteers give an hour or two each year, some an hour or two a week, so please get in touch if you even have an hour to spare."

April McCartney, volunteer for Air Ambulance NI from Dundonald said, "I help out at fundraising events when I am free and enjoy being part of the volunteer team at Air

Ambulance. I've been able to visit the airbase and see the helicopter that serves our community. It's good to know that by giving my time as a volunteer I am playing my part in helping to save lives."

The IiV accreditation is the UK quality standard for good practise in volunteer management. It acts as a seal of approval for an organisation's ability to provide an outstanding volunteer experience by thoroughly assessing the quality of volunteer management and involvement, acknowledging areas where an organisation is performing well and identifying where there may be room for improvement.

Air Ambulance NI was first awarded the accreditation in 2021 when they had 128 volunteers. That family has now grown to 200 volunteers, people of all ages and backgrounds who lend their support across three volunteer roles: event support volunteer;



collection box co-ordinator and community ambassador. Feedback from volunteers is an essential part of the IiV assessment process. In total, 30 volunteers were interviewed as part of Air Ambulance NI's accreditation, as well as 4 members of staff and one trustee.

Air Ambulance NI was assessed against a range

of best practice standards and proved to excel in all aspects of working with its volunteers. Denise Hayward, Chief Executive Officer at Volunteer Now, said, "Volunteer Now is delighted to announce Air Ambulance NI's successful achievement of this Award. They have demonstrated a real commitment to volunteering, and proven

that their volunteer management policies and procedures meet nationally recognised standards."

The charity Air Ambulance Northern Ireland, in partnership with the Northern Ireland Ambulance Service, provides the HEMS for Northern Ireland. The service brings urgent medical assistance to

anywhere in the province, operating seven days a week for 12 hours per day. It can get to anywhere in Northern Ireland in approximately twenty-five minutes.

If you would like to volunteer for Air Ambulance NI, please contact Air Ambulance NI by email at info@airambulancenir.org or call 028 9262 2677

Continued from page 1

"I have met representatives from a range of groups who are working on the frontline with people in crisis. As

well as hearing about the work of the Stella Maris project today, I have visited facilities which provide vital support to those most in need. This is very much a collective effort - involving government at

every level, through the statutory and voluntary sector and frontline organisations - and I commend those involved in all areas."

The Minister outlined the steps he has taken to address homelessness. "In December, I unveiled the Executive's Housing Supply Strategy, which outlines a way forward to tackle a range of housing issues in Northern Ireland, including homelessness," he said.

"I also announced a further £6.7m for the Housing Executive to prevent homeless service closures and ensure

statutory obligations are met. In addition, I confirmed funding until the end of the current financial year for service providers, ending the monthly model. Also, for the 2025/26 financial year and going forward, the Northern Ireland Housing Executive will have their own specific funding allocation for homelessness prevention.

"But today my focus is on the frontline. Organisations such as Depaul, and those at the Stella Maris centre, provide an essential service. I wanted to recognise this and thank everyone here for the vital work they do."

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Translink Encourages Belfast Passengers to Join them on a Novel Journey

Translink, No Alibis Bookshop, in Botanic Ave, and Libraries NI are encouraging more people to pick up a book or enjoy an audiobook as part of their travels with a reminder to join its virtual Novel Journeys Book Club which is now in its fifth year.

Each month both an adult fiction and children's or young adult book is nominated, with a focus on local authors or publications which feature local themes and content.

David Torrans, owner of No Alibis bookshop, added:

"Whether it's a 10 minute journey or an hour-long commute from further afield, bus and train travel is the perfect opportunity to get lost in a great book. Through the partnership with Translink and Libraries NI, Novel Journeys is a great way to support local authors and promote new publications. We're excited to showcase many great new reads throughout the year and would encourage everyone to build more time for reading into their day."

Julie Reid, Deputy



Head of Service, Libraries NI, said: "Whether you prefer physical books, eBooks or eAudiobooks, your library card gives you free access to thousands of titles to enjoy on your journey. Translink's Novel Journeys is a fantastic opportunity to discover something new each month, and with Libraries NI, it's easier than ever to borrow and enjoy great reads. To start your reading adventure, simply join online or visit your local library."

Chosen Novel Journeys books can be purchased at No Alibis Bookshop or borrowed through Libraries NI in a variety of formats. There is also an opportunity to win a copy of the book each month on Translink's Instagram competition by following along at @TranslinkNI.

For more information on Novel Journeys please go onto Translink's Instagram Account @TranslinkNI.

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AWARE NI UNVEILS NEW SURVEY ON PEER SUPPORT'S IMPACT

In recognition of Time to Talk Day recently, an annual event highlighting the power of conversations for mental health, AWARE NI, Northern Ireland's leading charity for individuals with low mood, depression, anxiety, and bipolar, is unveiling new survey findings on the impact of peer support.

These findings reveal the effectiveness of the charity's peer-led mental health support groups, including the East Belfast Support Group.

Time to Talk Day encourages people to break the stigma around mental health, but it can still be difficult for many to open up. AWARE NI offers 24 peer-led mental health support groups across Northern Ireland, including in East Belfast, which provide a safe space for people to

share experiences, reduce feelings of isolation, and find hope on their journey to better mental health.

Caroline McLoughlin, Support Services Manager at AWARE NI, shares: "One in five adults in Northern Ireland experience mental ill-health. Our peer-led groups, like the one in East Belfast, provide a welcoming and judgment-free environment where people can talk about their mental health challenges and learn positive coping

strategies."

To mark Time to Talk Day, AWARE NI has published its second biennial Support Group Attendee Report, showing that 98% of participants felt their mental health support group helped them manage anxiety, 96% felt supported in managing depression, and 95% felt less isolated after attending.

Testimonial feedback from the survey shared the individual transformative impact with one respondent saying, "Attending the group has really helped me feel more accepted by other people and helped motivate me to try and do better at working toward making my life more like how I

want it to be."

"We were delighted to see our latest report showcased that 97% of attendees would recommend an AWARE NI mental health support group to others," continues Caroline. "AWARE NI's East Belfast Support Group provides a lifeline to people who may feel isolated and overwhelmed by their mental health struggles. Our support groups are free to attend, have no waiting list, and are open to anyone 18 and over. We would encourage anyone feeling alone and struggling with their thoughts and feelings to come to one of our support groups. It could change your life."



The East Belfast Support Group meets weekly on Monday at 7pm at Strand Studios NI STARS,

providing vital support for individuals living with mental ill-health.

For more information on

our mental health support groups, or to get involved with our fundraising efforts to help us continue

providing vital mental health support to Belfast and beyond, please visit: aware-ni.org

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Schoolchildren across Belfast and beyond to become lifesavers with free digital CPR training

A new interactive online learning tool has been launched by British Heart Foundation Northern Ireland (BHF NI) to equip thousands of schoolchildren with essential life-saving skills.

Classroom RevivR is a game-changing tool that makes teaching lifesaving skills to students aged 11 to 16 easy and fun. It meets Northern Ireland curriculum standards and can be taught in one easy lesson plan - minimising teachers' workload.

Working together, young people will learn the difference between cardiac arrest and heart attack, how to respond to an unconscious person and make an emergency call, how to use a defibrillator and how to perform CPR safely.

The local heart charity has launched the free digital tool during Heart Month in February, to encourage pupils to be prepared in the event of an emergency.

Around fifty schools in Northern Ireland are already successfully using Classroom RevivR and BHF NI hopes the launch of this tool will help save many lives.

Fearghal McKinney, Head of BHF Northern Ireland, said: "The launch of Classroom RevivR today will set children up with an invaluable lifesaving skill at an early age. A cardiac arrest can affect anyone, at any time, so we want as many people to learn CPR as possible."

"Tragically, of the 1,400 out-of-hospital cardiac arrests that happen every year in Northern Ireland, less than one in ten people will survive. We are determined to change this by giving everyone the opportunity to learn CPR. By equipping our young people today with these

lifesaving skills, more lives could be saved in the future."

Fearghal added: "There is no need for an external trainer or lots of specialist equipment and Classroom RevivR has been designed with busy teachers in mind. All pupils need is a digital device and something to perform compressions on, like a cushion. And the best part is - it's completely free to use."

"We are urging all teachers to sign up to our free Classroom RevivR training so that every child leaves school knowing how to save a life."

Education Minister, Paul Givan said: "I am delighted to support the official Northern Ireland launch of Classroom RevivR, developed by the British Heart Foundation. We know that providing CPR



Pictured at the launch are; Catherine McGourty, Head of PE/Sport (girls) at Our Lady and St Patrick's College Knock with year 8 pupils Phoebe Deazley and Torin Deeney and Fearghal McKinney, Head of BHF Northern Ireland.

and training in how to use a defibrillator can have a clear and measurable impact on survival rates. This is a great addition to the life-saving skills which have been

mandatory elements of the school curriculum at Key Stage 3 since 2022."

Michael Allen, Community Resuscitation Team Manager at Northern Ireland Ambulance Service (NIAS) said: "In the event of a cardiac arrest, every minute that passes without CPR and defibrillation reduces the chances of survival by 10%. Classroom

RevivR can help equip young people with these life-saving skills in school and give their family, friends and wider community the chance to survive a sudden cardiac arrest."

Classroom RevivR has been supported by Royal Mail in partnership with British Heart Foundation. For further information search Classroom RevivR

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Victoria Prep competitor races towards the final in penultimate round of Flahavan's Cross Country League

Showcasing impressive talent and determination, young athletes from schools across County Antrim competed in the latest round of the Flahavan's Primary School Cross Country League.

Held at Sixmile Water Park, athletes were competing for a place in the final, set to take place on Friday 28th of February at Mallusk Playing Fields.

Taking the top spot in the first boys' race of the day was Charlie McCann from Moneynick Primary School, Randalstown, followed by pupils from Ballymacrickett Primary School, Glenavy, Dermot Doran and Kye Connere, finishing in second and third place respectively.

Meanwhile, in the first girls' race of the day, athletes from Victoria Prep School, Belfast took the top spots, with Esme Falls and Olivia Johnston finishing in first and second place, followed by Stranmillis Primary School, Belfast, pupil Emma Wylie in third.

The second boys' race of the day saw Hugo Lowry and Eimhin Bourke from Stranmillis Primary School, Belfast, come in first and third place respectively, whilst Isaac Mooney from Our Lady of Lourdes Primary School, Belfast, finished in second.

Kiyomi Tosh from Templepatrick Primary School was first to

cross the finish line in the second girls' race, followed by Sarah Jackson from St Bride's Primary School, Belfast, in second and Rose Millar from St Mary's Primary School, Draperstown, in third.

The competition also featured team races, with the top performing schools earning valuable points ahead of the final. The top boys' teams from Round Three included Stranmillis Primary School, Belfast, St Bride's Primary School, Belfast and Antrim Primary School, with St Bride's Primary School, Belfast, St Mary's Primary School, Draperstown, and Victoria Prep School, Belfast leading the way for the girls.

With the third round now complete, the successful athletes, alongside the winners from the previous two rounds will progress to the final. Competing at Mallusk Playing Fields, the top 20 boys and top 20 girls from the league will also earn a place on the prestigious Flahavan's Athletics Northern Ireland Junior Endurance Squad. The programme provides young athletes with a year-long opportunity to refine their skills through



(L-R) Callum Baird, Athletics NI and Flahavan's League Ambassador, Olivia Johnston from Victoria Prep (2nd), Esme Falls from Victoria Prep (1st), and Emma Wylie from Stranmillis 3rd.

specialised training sessions and expert guidance.

Supporting this year's league as ambassador is Callum Baird from Antrim. As the current NI and Ulster 100m champion and U23 Irish Indoor 200m champion, Callum has been sharing his expertise, offering

encouragement, and inspiring the young competitors with insights from his own athletic journey and inspiring them ahead of an exciting next chapter.

For more information about the league, please contact Athletics NI at info@athleticsni.org or call 028 9060 2707.

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It costs £2.5 Million annually to sustain and maintain this service. Air Ambulance NI is asking you to support the charity at the Moy Park Belfast City Marathon and fundraise or donate to keep the life-saving service operational while taking on this heart racing challenge!



Air Ambulance NI works in partnership with the Northern Ireland Ambulance Service which continues to be a lifeline for communities across the province, offering critical Helicopter Emergency Medical Service (HEMS).



The HEMS team attend patients who are seriously ill or injured on average twice per day, bringing emergency pre-hospital care directly to the scene of an incident with the aim of saving lives, brains, and limbs.

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Air Ambulance NI is the official charity partner for Belfast City Marathon 2023 - 2025



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“You can really change someone’s life through their smile. Seeing their reaction after showing them their finished result in the mirror is priceless. The change you see in a patient, giving them their smile and confidence, it is not just an aesthetic change but also gives a psychological change which is so rewarding!”

Morrison Dental Clinic is primarily a Denplan practice. The practice ethos is that prevention is better than cure, and that seeing the hygienist every six months or more is the best

starting point to maintain a healthy dentition for life. As a Denplan practice, the practice plan includes twice yearly check-ups and hygiene appointments, any x-rays required, and also gives discount off routine treatment. Preventative care, such as routine exams, cleaning, x-rays and oral hygiene instruction can help catch problems early and avoid the need for costly treatment later on.

Significant investment has already been made to ensure that the practice remains at the forefront of technology to improve the patient



experience. This includes an intra-oral scanner, which uses 3D photo imaging to scan the mouth, avoiding the need for taking moulds of your teeth. Treatment can then be planned digitally and with greater accuracy than ever, achieve perfectly fitting labwork such as crowns, veneers, bleaching trays etc. Another addition is a recently-installed CBCT scanner, used when there is a need for more information than what traditional 2D x-rays can offer, such as 3D visualisation of jaw bone for optimal planning for implant placement.

Dr Morrison is a member of the Irish Academy of Aesthetic Dentistry and the Association of Dental Implantology, and is always reading articles and attending courses to stay up to date with the latest

advancements!

He says:
"I believe that we are at an exciting time in dentistry, with more and more technological advances which can improve what is possible for our patients. I feel as a dentist in the modern age we must continually learn and improve our practices otherwise we will be left behind!"

The growing team (so far!) consists of five dentists, five nurses, dental hygienist Claire, receptionist Shauna, Yuko (Richard's wife) who does a lot of the work behind the scenes!

Morrison Dental Clinic is conveniently located at 95 Saintfield Road (not far from Forestside), and offers free parking available on site! For your appointment Tel: 028 9070 3215

WINTER WILDLIFE IN THE WOODLAND

JV Allister spots the first green shoots of spring on a winter woodland walk.

I park at the roadside, hopefully leaving room for cars or tractors to pass, but this place is a bit off the beaten track, so it should be OK. Although the snow has mostly disappeared from the road, it's still heaped on the grass verges, one more than the other, indicating the wind direction, and it's on the least affected one that I spot the wild garlic coming into bloom, and chew a stalk. While I know they're native plants which happen to bloom early, I don't remember them from my childhood days, so possibly they're good colonisers.

The wood which I intend to explore is mostly deciduous, although adjoined by a larger plantation, more like a forest, of Sitka spruce, aliens in regimented rows, shadowing needle-covered ground, providing habitat mostly unsuited to native creatures and plants, although I suppose crossbills and coal tits might be attracted to the seed cones and reclusive sparrowhawks to it as a nesting site from which they can emerge at speed to predate the birds of the nearby native woodland edge and hedgerows.

A robin sings, then another further along the woodland edge, territorial competitors, and, as I stand to listen, typically one flutters down



to say hello. The woodland edge rather than the darker barer interior attracts most wildlife, whether birds such as robins or blackbirds, and warblers in spring, and field mice, bees and butterflies in season, to feed and nest because the sunlight, particularly along this south face, encourages trees such as hawthorn, hazel and mountain ash, and wildflowers such as daisies, dandelions and honeysuckle.

The slight path I follow up the hill might have been made by badgers or humans, or both, weaving between grey trunked beech, gnarled oak and smooth elegant ash,

along ditches and over small hills, at least one of which looks like it might contain a badger family. It is still and silent other than the sound of my laboured breathing and uncertain footsteps, breaking twigs and crushing dead leaves, but I stop to allow my senses to settle, to see and listen, and am rewarded by a sharp call 'tsurp', frequently repeated, and watch a family party of long-tailed tits, siblings, parents, cousins, maybe in-laws, pass by above, flying quickly from twig to twig, tree to tree, searching for minuscule invertebrates.

After they pass, I relish the silence and the company

of the trees, already budded, ready for spring, before making my way back down. A magpie cackles nearby, up to mischief no doubt, and the robins are still singing, joined by foraging blue tits excitedly calling to each other.

I will visit again during the year to enjoy this place, to look, listen, smell, touch and feel woodland and its inhabitants, and, when the leaves are back, to breathe in the oxygenated air. But even today, as it becomes chilly and there are snow clouds gathering, I feel refreshed in body, mind and spirit, and am grateful.

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DON'T MISS THE FINANCIAL SUPPORT YOU ARE ENTITLED TO WITH CHILDCARE COSTS – CHECK NOW WHAT'S AVAILABLE FOR YOUR FAMILY

I Parents often find it difficult to remain in work after having children, due to the challenges of finding and paying for the childcare they need. ntro

Employers For Childcare

This can be especially difficult when children are very young and requiring full-time childcare, but is also an issue for families of older children requiring 'wraparound' childcare outside of school hours and during holidays.

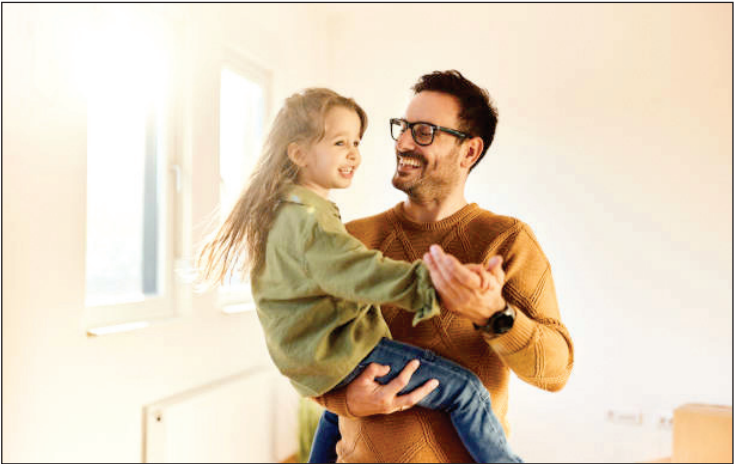
There is help available with the cost of registered childcare for most working parents. This includes registered childminders, day nurseries and out of school clubs. Details of registered childcare in your area can be found on the Family Support NI website www.familysupportni.gov.uk.

Support with registered childcare for working parents includes

Universal Tax-Free Childcare, Childcare Vouchers or Tax Credits. For parents with children below primary school age who are using Tax-Free Childcare, additional support is currently available through the Northern Ireland Childcare Subsidy Scheme. It has been confirmed by the Education Minister that funding for this scheme will continue into the next financial year.

Northern Ireland Childcare Subsidy Scheme

Parents who are using Tax-Free Childcare can make a saving of 20% towards their registered childcare costs up to



a maximum of £2,000 per year per child. However, if these parents have children under primary school age, they can also receive a 15% reduction in their childcare costs, up to a monthly maximum of £167 per child, through the Northern Ireland Childcare Subsidy Scheme. This is not available for older

children (at primary school) and is only for families using Tax-Free Childcare.

Get the right childcare support for your family

It can be difficult for parents to work out what childcare support is best for their family. We would encourage anyone applying for childcare support for the first time or whose circumstances

have changed (eg moving into work or working more hours) to call the Family Benefits Advice Service on 028 9267 8200 or email hello@employersforchildcare.org for free, impartial and confidential advice.

HOW CAN DUNDONALD CREDIT UNION MAKE YOUR 2025 BETTER?

What is a Credit Union?

Dundonald Credit Union is a not-for-profit financial cooperative owned and operated by its members. We're here to help our members achieve their financial goals by offering affordable loans and encouraging responsible saving habits!

Our Aims:

- Provide affordable loans: We offer loans at competitive interest rates, making it easier for our members to achieve their financial aspirations, whether it's home improvements, a new car, or consolidating debt.
- Encourage saving: We provide a safe and secure place for our members to save, helping them build

financial stability for the future.

Who Can Join?

Everyone within 'the common bond' is welcome to join Dundonald Credit Union! This includes Dundonald Village and the surrounding area. We welcome members from all walks of life, including:

- Employed individuals
- Unemployed individuals
- Young people
- Retired people

Can I Borrow From the Credit Union?

Yes, you can! However, to be eligible for a loan, you must have been a member of the Credit Union for at least 13 consecutive weeks.

What Happens to the

Credit Union's Profits?

As a not-for-profit organization, any surplus generated by the Credit Union is returned to our members in the form of dividends on their savings.

What Interest Rates Do You Charge?

By law, the maximum interest rate we can charge on a reducing balance loan is 1% per month. This equates to an Annual Percentage Rate (APR) of 12.68%.

How Can I Join?

You can join Dundonald Credit Union if you live or work within our Common Bond Area.

It only takes minutes to join. Call at our office and a friendly member of staff will be happy to

assist.

For more information see www.dundonaldcreditunion.co.uk

TEL 028 9041 9830

EMAIL info@dundonaldcreditunion.co.uk

ADDRESS 1005 Upper Newtownards Road, Dundonald, Belfast, BT16 1RN

OUR OPENING HOURS are:

Tuesday - Saturday: 9:00am - 12:30pm

Thursday evening: 6.30pm - 8.00pm

Dundonald Credit Union is Regulated by the Financial Conduct Authority and the Prudential Regulation Authority, protected by the Financial Services Compensation Scheme.

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Celebrating Excellence: Eastside Awards Honours Local Woman for Outstanding Contribution

The annual Eastside Awards, an event dedicated to honouring the businesses, individuals, and organisations shaping East Belfast for the better took place recently.

This year's awards, in association with Belfast City Airport, were the most successful to date, filling the ballroom at Hastings Stormont Hotel with people who share a deep commitment to excellence. Among the many inspiring winners, one individual stood out for her unwavering dedication to community service: Bernie McConnell, recipient of the Eastside Award for Outstanding Contribution.

A Life Dedicated to Community

For 35 years, Bernie has worked tirelessly to create opportunities and support networks for those in need. Her vision led to the creation of the Short Strand Community Centre, a hub of resources and empowerment that has positively impacted countless lives in East Belfast.

Beyond this, Bernie has played a pivotal role in EastSide Partnership and East Belfast Sure Start, fostering collaboration across organisations to drive progress and create sustainable change. Her influence has extended to high-profile events with global figures, including President Bill Clinton, King Charles, and two Presidents of Ireland – a testament to the impact of her work.



Recognising Local Champions

Presenting the award, Jonathan McAlpin, Chief Executive of East Belfast Enterprise and Chair of the Eastside Awards committee, expressed his admiration for Bernie's legacy:

To present the award for Outstanding Contribution to someone who has shared platforms with presidents is a real honour. Bernie is the epitome of hope, a shining light who has created a lasting legacy for future generations in East Belfast.

Jonathan also took the opportunity to commend all finalists and winners, as well as acknowledge the overwhelming support for the awards, with over 20,000 public votes cast this year – an incredible reflection of how much the community values these local champions.

Looking Ahead to a Milestone Year

With the 10th anniversary of the Eastside Awards approaching in 2026, excitement is already building for what promises to be a landmark year. Jonathan emphasised the importance of continued support from sponsors and the community, ensuring that the awards continue to shine a spotlight on the people and organisations making a difference.

Michelle Hatfield, Chief People and Marketing Officer at Belfast City Airport, also reflected on the significance of the event:

"As the principal sponsor for the ninth consecutive year, we are honoured to celebrate the individuals, businesses, charities, schools, and community groups that make East Belfast such a fantastic

place to live, work, and grow."

A Community United in Celebration

The Eastside Awards is more than just a ceremony – it is a reflection of the passion, dedication, and resilience that define East Belfast. Every year, we are inspired by the stories of those who go above and beyond to make our community stronger.

As we look ahead to another year of innovation, enterprise, and community spirit, East Belfast Enterprise remains committed to supporting and empowering the people who are shaping the future of our city.

Congratulations to all the winners and finalists – your impact is truly remarkable!

Eastside Award for Best Company To Work For sponsored by Fleet Financial; John Minnis

Estate Agents; Eastside Award for Business Growth sponsored by We're sure Insurance Services; Refresh NI: Eastside Award for Business Startup sponsored by Belfast City Council; Eden Consultancy NI: Eastside Award for Community Impact sponsored by Belfast Harbour, EastSide Learning: Eastside Award for Contribution to the Arts sponsored by EastSide Partnership, Fighting Words NI: Eastside Award for Environmental Project of the Year sponsored by Translink; Encom Energy: Eastside Award for Excellence in Health and Wellbeing sponsored by Phoenix Energy; Dundonald Primary School & Nursery Unit: Eastside Award for Favourite Beauty Business in East Belfast sponsored by Belfast Live; Beauty Culture; Eastside

Award for Favourite Food Destination in East Belfast sponsored by Finlay Wealth Management; Wing It Ballyhack: Eastside Award for Favourite Hairdresser/Barber in East Belfast sponsored by Solv; Urban Roots: Eastside Award for Favourite Primary Classroom Assistant of the Year sponsored by Open College Network; Rebecca Hanna, Stranstown Primary School: Eastside Award for Favourite Sports Coach / Trainer sponsored by Better; Darren Baine, DB Fitness: Eastside Award for Favourite Tourist Attraction in East Belfast sponsored by Reid Black Solicitors; Titanic Belfast: Eastside Award for Post-Primary School Hero of the Year sponsored by The Open University; Joanne Porte, Our Lady and St Patrick's College: Eastside Award for Trainee / Apprentice of the Year sponsored by Plumb Centre Lenin Stevenson; Thales UK Ltd: Eastside Award for Volunteer of the Year sponsored by East Belfast Mission Eastside: Rebecca James, Ashfield Girls' High School: Eastside Award for Outstanding Contribution sponsored by East Belfast Enterprise; Bernie McConnell.

Wyse Byse: A Belfast Institution

Wyse Byse is a beloved department store with three locations in Northern Ireland, two of which are in Belfast.

This family-owned business has been serving the community for over 50 years, offering a wide range of products at affordable prices.

Brand new to Belfast is a NEW dedicated Bedroom show room on Bloomfield Avenue BT4 (adjacent to the main store!). Here you'll find huge range of German gliding door wardrobes, beds, mattresses and bedroom furniture and accessories.

A Belfast Staple

Wyse Byse has become a go-to destination for shoppers in Belfast, known for its friendly atmosphere and diverse selection. Whether you're looking for furniture, homeware, gifts, or everyday essentials, you're likely to find it here. The store prides itself on offering quality products at competitive prices, making it a popular choice for families and bargain hunters alike.

What to Expect
When you step into a Wyse Byse store, you'll be greeted by a warm and inviting atmosphere. The staff are known for their helpfulness and knowledge, always ready to assist you in

finding what you need. The stores are well-organized, making it easy to browse the various departments. You'll find everything from furniture and home decor to kitchenware, toiletries, and seasonal items.

A Local Treasure
Wyse Byse is more than just a department store; it's a part of the Belfast community. Its long-standing presence and commitment to customer service have earned it a loyal following. Many locals appreciate the store's traditional values and the personal touch that comes with shopping at a family-owned business.

Visiting Wyse Byse
If you're in Belfast and looking for a unique shopping experience, be sure to visit Wyse Byse. With its wide selection, friendly staff, and affordable prices, it's a must-visit for locals and tourists alike.

Belfast Store Locations:
• Newtownards Road: 387-389 Newtownards Road, Belfast BT4 1AJ
• Cregagh Road: 29-35 Cregagh Road, Belfast BT6 8PX
Website: www.wysebyse.com



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Specsavers Connswater experts will help you get the right UV protection for your eyes

Specsavers Connswater is helping customers to protect their eyes from harmful UV rays thanks to the range of UV protection lenses available in store.

While we are aware of the importance of protecting our skin from UV rays, it's just as crucial to safeguard our eyes as prolonged exposure to UV radiation can lead to long-term damage.

Paula Cunningham, ophthalmic director at Specsavers says, 'UV protection is not just for sunny days. Even on cloudy or overcast days, UV rays can still cause harm to our eyes. That's why we offer a range of lenses for prescription glasses and sunglasses that can suit our customers' lifestyles.'

Tinted lenses is one option, and not only do they protect eyes against UV damage, but can also help enhance vision.

'Tinted lenses can relieve eye strain and soften harsh lights, which help you see clearly in bright weather conditions',



says Paula.

Reaction lenses offer UV protection whether you're inside or outside, changing to reflect the conditions, meaning you only need one pair of glasses and you're protected in all conditions.

Paula continues, 'Finally, we have our polarising lenses

which offer UV protection if you're affected by glare or driving during the day. These lenses reduce that harsh light glare reflected from flat surfaces, such as water on the road.'

In addition to these UV protection lenses options, Specsavers Connswater offers a variety of stylish

frames and lenses to suit every taste and budget. In store now are new ranges including Specsavers' winter sun frames.

To book an appointment at Specsavers Connswater, visit: <https://www.specsavers.co.uk/stores/belfastconnswater>

Campaign urges people to talk about their true feelings

The Public Health Agency (PHA) is highlighting the importance of having conversations about our true feelings in a campaign that shows people that 'Talking really helps'.

The campaign aims to encourage anyone with feelings of anxiety or distress, or who is in crisis, to start the conversation about their thoughts and feelings.

The 'Talking really helps' campaign shows people putting on a brave face when talking to others but then reveals their true feelings when they are on their own and that they are not fine or they are struggling to cope. The messages then show how through speaking to someone, they can start to feel better.

The campaign also promotes Lifeline, the free 24/7 crisis helpline

and encourages anyone in distress or despair to call the helpline and speak to one of Lifeline's qualified counsellors by calling Lifeline on 0808 808 8000.

For more information on Lifeline visit www.LifelineHelpline.info

It is important for all of us to know the signs that someone is having difficulty coping. When someone is having difficulty coping, often a change in behaviour is what you will notice first.

Some things to look out for are:

- They may be more irritable than normal, with the smallest thing caus-

ing them to get annoyed with themselves or others around them.

- They may be spending more time alone and not want to go out and do the things they normally enjoy doing.

- They may complain of feeling tired and have disturbed sleep patterns.

- They may be skipping meals or eating more than normal.

- You may notice that they are misusing alcohol or drugs, or taking days off work, school or college.

- Remember, we are all different and not everyone will display all or any of

these early warning signs.

If you see these signs or you are concerned that someone might be having thoughts of suicide, you should ask them directly if they are thinking about suicide or ending their own life. If they say yes, it is essential to get them support. Lifeline can help guide you and the person with thoughts of suicide.

For more information on the campaign, which runs throughout February and March, and to see the TV adverts and other campaign materials, visit www.pha.site/TalkingReallyHelps

Keeping a Roof Over Your Head: Gibb Roofing

In Belfast and the surrounding areas, one family-run business has been diligently ensuring the safety and security of homes for over three decades.

Gibb Roofing, established in 1982, has become a trusted name in roofing and chimney services, offering a comprehensive range of solutions to homeowners across the region.

A Legacy of Excellence
Gibb Roofing isn't just a company; it's a family tradition. With Valerie at the helm of the office, the business exudes a personal touch that's often lost in larger corporations. Valerie's extensive knowledge of roofing needs ensures that every client receives expert advice and tailored solutions, making the process of home maintenance less daunting and more manageable.

Comprehensive Services for Every Need

Specializing in both roofing and chimney services, Gibb Roofing offers a complete suite of solutions to protect your home from the elements. Their services include:

- Domestic Roofing: From repairs to full re-roofing, Gibb Roofing handles every aspect of your home's first line of defense against the weather.
- Chimney Repairs and Rebuilds: With expertise in chimney maintenance, they tackle everything from minor repairs to complete rebuilds, ensuring the safe and efficient functioning of your chimney.
- Chimney Removals and

Repointing: Gibb Roofing also offers chimney removal services and repointing to maintain the structural integrity of your chimney.

- uPVC Fascias, Soffits & Guttering: Beyond roofing and chimneys, they also provide installation and maintenance of uPVC fascias, soffits, and guttering, ensuring the complete protection of your home's exterior.

More Than Just a Service, It's a Partnership

Gibb Roofing understands that home maintenance can be stressful. That's

why they strive to make the process as smooth and hassle-free as possible. They offer no-obligation quotations, providing homeowners with a clear understanding of the work required and the associated costs. Their team of skilled professionals is committed to delivering high-quality workmanship, ensuring that every project is completed to the highest standards.

A Local Business with a Heart

As a family-run business, Gibb Roofing is deeply rooted in the local community. They take pride

in serving their neighbors and building long-lasting relationships with their clients. Their dedication to quality and customer satisfaction has earned them a stellar reputation, making them a name that homeowners can trust.

Telephone: 028 93372839 or 078 6050 1376; Website: www.belfastchimneyspecialists.co.uk; Email: contactus@djgibbandsons.co.uk

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Oasis Caring in Action: Empowering Lives in Belfast

Located on Castlereagh Street, Belfast – Oasis Caring in Action (OCIA), a non-profit registered charity which is making a tangible difference in the lives of individuals and families across the city.

OCIA offers a diverse range of services designed to empower people within their personal, family, and community lives.

From mental health support to early years development, OCIA caters to a wide spectrum of needs.

Their services include:

- **IMAGO:** A mental health and befriending service providing one-to-one structured weekly support for adults with mild to moderate mental ill health. IMAGO helps individuals understand

and cope with life's challenges.

- **Good Morning Oasis:** A friendly telephone service designed to combat loneliness and isolation. Referrals can be made for individuals who would benefit from a regular



chat.

- **NXTGEN@OASIS:** A new youth development programme focused on building confidence, resilience, and self-esteem while improving mental health and life skills.

- **Early Years:** A f f o r d a b l e daycare, pre-school playgroup, and family support. The Early Years centre provides a secure and friendly environment where children are valued and

encouraged to express themselves. After-school programs are also available.

OCIA is committed to its clients and strives to create a sense of belonging for everyone they serve. They operate Monday to Friday from 8:00 am to 6:00 pm.

Contact:
Oasis Caring in Action
81-83a Castlereagh Street
Belfast, BT5 4NF
Tel: 028 9087 2277

East Belfast Tenants urged to know their rights and responsibilities

Belfast City Council is reminding prospective tenants about the importance of knowing their rights and responsibilities when renting a house of multiple occupancy (HMO).

An HMO is defined as living accommodation which is the main residence for three or more people from more than two different households, where at least one person pays the rent.

Under current regulations, all HMOs in the Belfast area must be licensed by the council to make sure they are safe, good quality and well managed.

Since 2019, all landlords who operate an HMO must have a licence from their local council, for each HMO they own, to continue renting it to multiple tenants (unless a temporary exemption notice is in effect).

Tenants can check if a property is licensed by visiting belfastcity.gov.uk/checkhmo and entering the address in the HMO licence register.

Alderman Rodgers is also encouraging landlords to be aware of their own responsibilities, including making sure that all reasonable and practical steps are taken to respond to any repair and



maintenance issues.

Any works needed to deal with repairs should be done as soon as is reasonably practicable, once notified. Emergency repairs should be actioned within 24 hours, urgent repairs within four working days and routine repairs within four weeks.

Deposits from tenants at the start of a new lease cannot exceed more than one month's rent and must be registered, by landlords, with an

approved scheme with 28 days of receipt.

Tenants who don't receive notification that their deposit has been secured within 35 days of payment can contact the council at envhealth@belfastcity.gov.uk or call 028 9027 0428

Landlords and tenants seeking further advice around HMOs can contact the council's NIHMO Unit directly on 028 9027 0414 or email nihmo@belfastcity.gov.uk

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OASIS CARING IN ACTION
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Located at 81-83a Castlereagh Street, Oasis Caring in Action is a non-profit independent registered charity. We are committed to our clients in Imago, Nxt Gen Youth Project, Family Support, Early Years, Befriending and Good Morning Oasis South and East.

GOOD MORNING OASIS
If you feel lonely or isolated and perhaps not everyone has the time to chat please do not worry - life is peculiar at the moment - but Good Morning Oasis are here through thick and thin. You can contact us to make a referral for yourself, a relative or a friend and we will add you to our friendly telephone service.

IMAGO
IMAGO OASIS Caring in Action provide a mental health and befriending service. This service helps adults who have mild to moderate mental ill health to understand and cope with life by offering practical one to one structured weekly support.

NXTGEN@OASIS
OCIA's new youth development programme aimed at building confidence, resilience and self-esteem, whilst focussing on improving mental health and building life skills.

EARLY YEARS
Oasis early years centre provides highly affordable daycare, pre-school playgroup and family support. Oasis Early Years exists to provide children with a secure place to play to be able to express themselves in a safe and friendly environment. It is a place where children are valued, listened to, and can develop a sense of belonging

AFTER SCHOOLS
Oasis early years centre provides highly affordable after schools programmes. Oasis Early Years exists to provide children with a secure place to play to be able to express themselves in a safe and friendly environment. It is a place where children are valued, listened to, and can develop a sense of belonging

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Adelaide's Story

Adelaide's room looks over the beautiful new garden in Bell Rotary House. It is very much her own space and feels warm and welcoming, like Adelaide herself. With her beautiful smile she tells me;

Last year I went into a residential care home for respite, and I really didn't like it. I came to see Bell Rotary House and I thought it was beautiful.

I really enjoyed getting to know the other residents and join in with the activities. There are some lovely people living here and I enjoy their company but it's also good that I can come into my own room, when I want some quiet time and enjoy my own company.

My grandchildren love to

visit me here; they think it's all my house. They'll say, "I love your garden Gigi" or "let's go to the blue room"

I've been attending kidney dialysis 3 times a week for 6 years now.

It's exhausting. When I lived at home, I used to try to prepare something to eat before I left for dialysis, then when I got back, I would just sit for a while until I felt I could get up to heat it.

Here the staff have dinner on the table for me when I get in the door. I am so well looked after, and the food and the staff are lovely. I couldn't ask for more.

For more information about living with Abbeyfield Belfast

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Melville Morgan Funeral Directors: A Legacy of Compassionate Service

NI's largest independent funeral service Melville Morgan Funeral Directors is a revered institution in Northern Ireland, boasting a rich history spanning over three centuries.

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A locally-owned independent family business, owned and run by the Morgan family, Melville Morgan offers a wide range of funeral services tailored to meet the diverse needs and preferences of families. From traditional funerals to more contemporary celebrations of life, they provide expert guidance and assistance throughout the entire process.

These services include:

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- Funeral arrangements: Personalised planning to honour the life of your loved one.
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Ongoing counselling and resources to help families cope with loss.

Their experienced and professional staff are available to guide you at any point, many of whom have been working for the company for many years. Melville & Company Limited is a Member of the National Association of Funeral Directors and abides by its strict Code of Practice.

The company's team of dedicated professionals work tirelessly to ensure that each family receives personalized support and guidance during their time of grief.

Melville Morgan Funeral Directors is widely recognized as a trusted and respected name in the funeral industry. Their reputation for professionalism, compassion, and personalized service has earned them the loyalty of countless families throughout Northern Ireland.

The funeral home at 114 Holywood Road provides a comforting and tranquil environment for families to gather and pay their respects.

For more information about Melville Morgan Funeral Directors, please visit their website at melvillemorgan.com or contact them directly Tel (028) 9077 9252

Buying a home in East Belfast?

Aspiring homebuyers are being urged to look out for signs a property could be plagued with problems.

Home insurance experts from CompareNI.com have researched ten warning signs a property has been poorly constructed or has hidden threats which might end up costing new homeowners a fortune.

The rush to build new developments, poor installation and a shortage of qualified tradespeople has led to a rising trend of badly built new homes.

Buying an older property also comes with its drawbacks as it is more likely to have problems with ageing such as damp, mould and even subsidence. Key signs which indicate there could be serious issues with a house include strong odours, small holes and uneven floors.

A report has predicted that by 2070, more than four million UK properties (10% of the national total) risk being highly or extremely likely to face subsidence.*

The National House Building Council recommend getting a structural survey done, especially if the house is more than a couple of years old and outside the initial two year period of the Buildmark cover.**

Thorough research and background checks are also vital for any buyer contemplating a new property. In August 2024 it was reported that an outdated sewage network was stalling the construction of new homes in 23 towns across Northern Ireland.

The first time buyers' market can be particularly challenging and fast paced but it's vital not to rush or overlook these initial property checks. The Northern Ireland Quarterly House Price Index report in November 2024 highlighted a strong buyer demand against a limited supply, driving up the average house price to £219,110, a quarterly increase of 3.4% and a 5.7% rise compared to Q3 2023.***

CompareNI.com has revealed 10 warning signs to look out for when considering a new property:

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Get your Stunning New Greenhouse at Woodstoc

Calling all green thumbs! Woodstoc, Bangor's premier outdoor living destination, is thrilled to announce the arrival of their absolutely stunning new range of greenhouses.

Developed and meticulously improved over the last 60 years, Juliana Danish greenhouses represent the pinnacle of quality greenhouse construction.

These exceptional greenhouses boast a sleek design and an impressive 12-year warranty, giving you complete peace of mind. Imagine nurturing your seedlings in a light-filled haven, cultivating exotic fruits and vegetables, or simply creating a tranquil haven for your favourite plants. With Juliana greenhouses, the possibilities are endless.

But Woodstoc isn't just about greenhouses! They offer a comprehensive range of products and services to transform your outdoor space into a haven you'll love. Here's just a taste of what awaits you:

- Timber & Garden Supplies: From wooden or composite fencing and decking to sheds and log cabins, Woodstoc has everything you need to build your dream



outdoor living space.

- Playgrounds & Accessories: Create a magical space for your children with top-quality play equipment and accessories.

- Hardware & Landscaping Supplies: Find all the essentials to complete your landscaping projects, from tools and aggregates to decorative elements.

- Essential Garden Products: Discover a wide selection

of pots, planters, DIY containers, and gardening tools to nurture your green thumb.

- Design & Build Services: Turn your outdoor vision into reality with expert design consultants and recommended professional landscapers, just ask the Woodstoc team.

Browse the Woodstoc website for detailed information on Juliana greenhouses and their

introductory offer: <https://www.woodstoc.com/products/buildings-sheds-greenhouses-logstores>

Visit the Woodstoc showroom at 2A Balloo Park, Bangor, County Down, Northern Ireland, BT19 7PP.

Give them a call at 028 9147 7133 to speak with a friendly and knowledgeable member of staff.

With Woodstoc, your dream outdoor space is just a step away!

HANNON COACH & SAIL IS PERFECT FOR A CITY BREAK IN GLASGOW!

Direct Belfast – Glasgow Express now departing from the new Belfast Grand Central Station.

An award-winning service offering hassle-free travel, HANNON Coach & Sail is ideal for a city break in Glasgow and the perfect antidote to flying and airport stress! Already hugely popular with those in the know, the Belfast – Glasgow Express Coach Service is rated 5-Star on TripAdvisor.

A shopper's paradise, Glasgow is recognised as having the best retail therapy in the UK outside of London. Consistently voted 'top of the shops', the city is Scotland's premier shopping destination.

Not just shopping, Glasgow is also famous for its fantastic nightlife, and great choice of restaurants and bars. Glasgow is the perfect choice for your next city break away.

With a simple flat fare of £47 which includes the cost of the ferry and your bag, our Belfast – Glasgow Express



offers a really attractive, convenient and low-cost alternative to flying.

The service is operated by HANNON Coach and leaves twice a day from Belfast, Grand Central Station (Stand 18) and drops visitors right in the heart of Glasgow's 'Style Mile'. The simple flat fare allows passengers to pick and mix dates and times of travel to suit and with no luggage charges it

makes a perfect travel option for a shopping trip.

There are also a great range of hotels just minutes from Glasgow Buchanan Bus Station.

Company director Aodh Hannon says people seem to really love the convenience of the service as we take you right into the heart of the city centre.

"People love the fact that it's so hassle-free

compared to flying, no airport transfers and with no extra charge for luggage it is a massive help with keeping the cost of a break down," said Mr Hannon.

The service can be booked online at www.hannoncoach.com up to 1 hour before departure or by phone using the very friendly telephone booking service.

Call 028 9265 0700 (Mon – Fri) or visit www.hannoncoach.com

WoodStoc Outside made better.

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Fun places to visit this spring

County Down is a beautiful region in Northern Ireland that offers a wide range of activities for families.

From exploring historic castles to hiking in the Mourne Mountains, there is something for everyone to enjoy. Here are a few ideas for fun family activities to do in County Down:

Mourne Mountains: The Mourne Mountains are a stunning mountain range that offers a variety of hiking trails for all levels of experience. Families can enjoy a leisurely stroll along the lower slopes or challenge themselves with a more strenuous hike to the summit of Slieve Donard, the highest peak in Northern Ireland.

Castellwellan Forest Park: This beautiful park offers a variety of activities for families, including walking and cycling trails, a lake for boating, and a play park for children. The park

also has a visitor centre where you can learn about the local flora and fauna.

Tollymore Forest Park: Another great option for families is Tollymore Forest Park, which is known for its beautiful scenery and its role as a filming location for the popular TV series "Game of Thrones". The park offers a variety of walking trails, a river walk, and a picnic area.

Strangford Lough: This large sea lough is a great place for families to enjoy a variety of water activities, such as kayaking, canoeing, and paddle-boarding. Families can also take a boat tour of the lough to see the seals and other wildlife that live there.

Exploris Aquarium: This popular aquarium is home to a variety of



marine life, including sharks, rays, and seals. Families can learn about the different species that live in the Irish Sea and participate in interactive exhibits.

Down County Museum: This museum tells the

story of County Down from prehistoric times to the present day. Families can learn about the history of the region and see artifacts from different periods.

Saint Patrick Centre: This centre tells the story of Saint Patrick, the patron saint of Ireland. Families can learn about his life and his impact on Irish culture.

No matter what your family enjoys, you are sure to find plenty of fun activities to do in County Down. With its beautiful scenery, rich history, and variety of attractions, County Down is the perfect place to create lasting memories with your loved ones.

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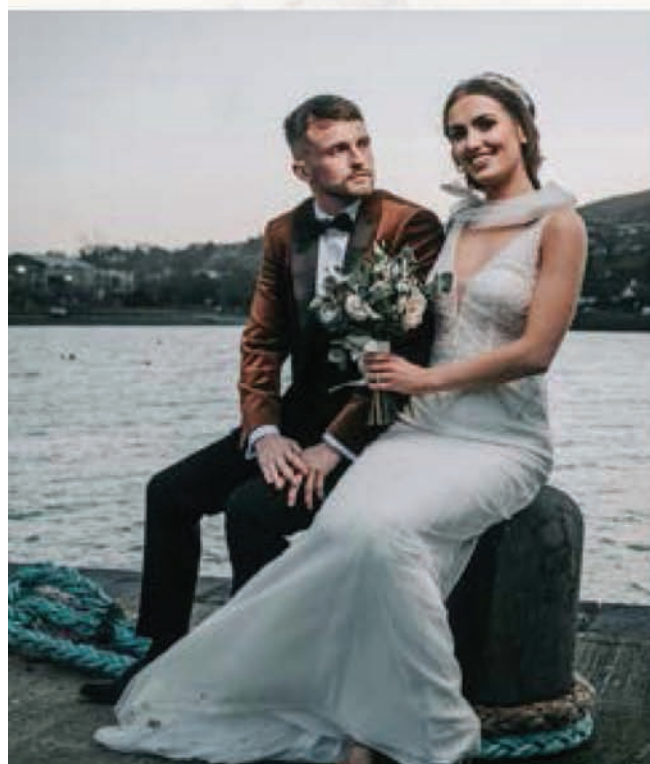
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RUAS banking on another successful Balmoral Show

Ulster Bank announced as principal sponsor of 2025 Balmoral Show

Ulster Bank and the Royal Ulster Agriculture Society (RUAS) have kickstarted the countdown to the 156th Balmoral Show.

With a few months to go until the 2025 event, representatives from both organisations met to announce some new attractions for this year's event and to confirm Ulster Bank will remain as principal sponsor of the show – marking a sixteen-year partnership between the two organisations.

Returning to Balmoral Park from 14-17 May, this year's Balmoral Show in partnership with Ulster Bank will once again feature a kids' farm, a mini-Land Rover experience, the return of the Sustainability Village, along with the usual mix of machinery displays, food exhibitions and funfair attractions.

Some new livestock classes have been added to the 2025 programme including a Breeding Heifer class which will recognise excellence in the beef industry and additional qualifiers for the Performing Irish Draught, Connemara Ridden and Working Hunter horse classes,

due to their growing popularity and high standard of competitors.

Show organisers are keen to consider the needs of all visitors this year and have introduced a designated wellbeing area for those with additional need and enhanced the sensory space for younger showgoers.

Group Operations Director at the Royal Ulster Agricultural Society, Rhonda Geary, said it is important to RUAS that everyone attending the 2025 Balmoral Show has an enjoyable experience.

"The Balmoral Show in partnership with Ulster Bank attracts over one hundred thousand visitors across the four days and as show organisers, it's our responsibility to ensure that everyone can access and enjoy the event. We have been working with our partners to introduce a new children's sensory area and an enhanced wellbeing area for anyone wishing to find a quiet spot at the Show following a successful pilot in 2024.

"As an agricultural show, food and farming has always be the core



of our activity, and this year will be no different. Thanks to the support from our principal partners at Ulster Bank, we have been able to add more exciting attractions to the programme and we are confident that this year's Show will be a fantastic showcase of agriculture in Northern Ireland.

Cormac McKervey, Senior Agriculture Manager, Ulster Bank said he was looking forward to working with the RUAS once again to deliver this year's Balmoral Show.

"2025 marks the

sixteenth year of Ulster Bank's title sponsorship of the Balmoral Show, and we are proud of the role we have played in the show's development.

"Ulster Bank's support for this sector extends well beyond the Balmoral Show and year-round, we support farming businesses and have a range of solutions available to meet their financial needs.

"Balmoral is always a great opportunity to meet with and learn from others across the supply chain and our teams of Relationship Managers will be on the ground

throughout the show to engage with farmers about the future of farming and how we can better support the local industry here."

Early bird tickets for this year's event are already available to purchase online and the details of livestock competition entries, show opening hours, and the full programme of events will be available on the Balmoral Show website in the coming weeks.

For more information about how Ulster Bank can support your business needs, visit www.ulsterbank.co.uk/business

NI Water volunteers help at Crosskennan Lane Animal Sanctuary

An enthusiastic team of NI Water volunteers recently helped at Crosskennan Lane Animal Sanctuary near Antrim.

The volunteers helped this fantastic local charity in a number of ways including painting new dog kennels, feeding and clearing out the animals and general farm tasks.

The volunteering day is part of NI Water's 'Cares Challenge' project which has been operating successfully for over ten years and is one of the largest corporate volunteering schemes in the province.

To date over 1,700 staff have volunteered in over 120 challenges, equating to more than 12,000 hours of volunteering to help support communities across Northern Ireland. In the latest project, volunteers from across the organisation made a valuable contribution to Crosskennan Lane Animal Sanctuary.

NI Water volunteer Debbie Mitchell commented: "It was a wonderful day, spending time helping out at the sanctuary and getting to know and work with other members of NIW. It was a very therapeutic day and I would definitely visit again and highly recommend."

As part of the programme, activities are planned for various groups throughout Northern Ireland each year and are set up in partnership with Business in



the Community's NI Cares Programme. The programme identifies organisations and charities within the local community who need a helping hand with physical tasks such as gardening and painting.

Rose Kelly, Director of People and Learning, explained: "Our handy helpers have undertaken everything from gardening, painting and maintenance to environmental and fundraising days. It is often the extra support that these

groups require to enhance their facilities, improve the lives of their members and operate their centres successfully.

"Volunteering has also proved to be a key part of our health and wellbeing toolkit. Our teams gain so much from the experience, not only by helping the community, but also having the chance to spend time with colleagues from around the business that they might not otherwise have a chance to meet."

Peanut Gets His Sparkle Back



Written by
Kate Russell

Illustrated by
Faye Hobson

County Down author Kate launches her first pony book for children!

County Down horsewoman turned author Kate Russell has launched her first equestrian themed children's book.

Kate, a well known figure in the NI world of equestrianism and equine therapy has published 'Peanut gets his sparkle back'.

Kate says: "I have always wanted to write a children's book from an early age. I have stories whirling in my head and usually inspired by the ponies dogs and cat. My friend had two young boys who would listen to my stories – they encouraged me to write a book and what's more – asked if they could be in it!

Working with children and the ponies through equine facilitated learning I could see the very real benefits of the interaction with the different pony personalities."

The book is based on the main characters Peanut an 8hh Falabella cross pony and Tobi a 27 yr old rescue pony. In real life this odd couple have struck a very strong friendship and became pretty much inseparable! Peanut is young, curious and cute and everyone who meets him falls in love with him. Tobi is older, a little bit stiff but calm with the kindest nature. They are both very much loved for being themselves! In real life Tobi & Peanut are also fully qualified therapy ponies who like nothing better than helping others!

The story aims to help children with anxiety and worries and show that that it is ok to have worries but not to let them build up. 'Peanut, gets his sparkle back' is a heart-warming children's book about overcoming fear and finding the courage within oneself.

With charming colour illustrations by the talented Faye Hobson, and a relatable story, young readers will be inspired to face their own worries and become brave little ponies themselves!

'Peanut gets his Sparkle Back' is ideal for children 3-9 with coloured text suitable for children with dyslexia, teaches valuable lessons about perseverance, self-confidence and the power of friendship.

It's a must read for parents, teachers and children alike and is sure to become a beloved addition to any child's bookshelf! Join Peanut and his friends on their journey to bravery and show your little ones that they too can conquer their worries and be the courageous heroes they've always dreamed of being.

You can find out more about Tobi, Peanut and friends and also purchase a copy of the book direct online at
<http://www.tobiandpeanut-therapyponies.com/product-page/peanut-finds-his-sparkle-children-s-story>
Book priced £10, (postage fees apply).



Double success for the MG HS

The new MG HS SUV has achieved a double win at the 2025 What Car? Car of the Year Awards.

The MG HS PHEV was judged 'Plug-in Hybrid of the Year' by the What Car? team whilst the petrol HS SE was crowned 'Best Family SUV for Value'.

Continuing MG's reputation for offering customers outstanding value in the SUV marketplace, the petrol HS SE 1.5T, recognised as the 'Best Family SUV for Value', is available from just £24,995.

David Allison, Head of Product and Planning at MG Motor UK, commented:

"The new MG HS models were designed to raise the bar even higher with more equipment and functionality, distinctive MG styling setting them apart from other SUVs, as well as a choice of advanced petrol or plug-in hybrid powertrains. Two awards from the What Car? experts are a great endorsement for our best-selling MG, and we're confident



that this accolade will attract even more new customers to our brand, as well as impressing existing owners looking for an upgrade. The Plug-in Hybrid version offers a real alternative for families who love their SUVs but are put off by high running costs. A range of 75 miles due to the high-capacity battery means most daily commutes can easily be covered

by one charge, and for longer journeys, the added security of an efficient petrol engine and large fuel tank makes it a compelling choice." MG HS SUV models secured 30,207 sales in 2024 making this MG the 8th best-selling car in the UK. MG was also ranked 10th in terms of UK vehicle registrations, a first for the brand. The new generation of the HS range

offers customers the best possible overall value in the SUV marketplace. The petrol HS SE 1.5T is available from just £24,995 with the range-topping HS Trophy PHEV priced from £33,995. And, like all MGs, there is a generous 7-year/80,000-mile manufacturer's warranty supported by a 160 strong dealer network.

MAZDA CX-80 NAMED BEST IN CLASS LARGE SUV BY EURO NCAP

The all-new Mazda CX-80 has been named Best in Class Large SUV by Euro NCAP in its latest series of tests.

This prestigious recognition underscores Mazda's commitment to safety and innovation. In 2024, Euro NCAP tested a total of 44 cars, with the Mazda CX-80 emerging as the top performer in the Large SUV category and achieving a close victory over the Audi Q6 e-tron. This recognition is a testament to Mazda's dedication to providing the highest level of safety for its customers.

The Mazda CX-80 achieved an outstanding 92% score in Adult Occupancy, with full marks in both the Lateral and Rear Impact tests. It scored an impressive 88% in Child Occupancy, ensuring the highest level of protection for younger passengers. The vehicle secured an 84% score for Vulnerable Road Users, highlighting Mazda's dedication to pedestrian and cyclist safety. Additionally, it achieved a 79% score in Safety Assist, demonstrating Mazda's commitment to equipping its vehicles with the latest safety technologies.

The Mazda CX-80's superior safety performance is complemented by its comfort, convenience, and

versatility, making it a standout in the seven-seat SUV segment. Crafted in Japan, this flagship model embodies Mazda's design and engineering excellence. Its exceptional safety ratings reflect Mazda's dedication to customer safety. The five-star rating is supported by Mazda's Skyactiv Multi-Solution Scalable Architecture, enhancing driving dynamics with a front-engine, rear-wheel-drive layout and rear-biased all-wheel drive. With three rows of seating, the CX-80 is the most spacious vehicle in Mazda's European range, offering comfort, versatility, advanced technology, and Mazda's driving performance.

Established in 1996 with the aim of improving vehicle safety, Euro NCAP annually awards the best-scoring cars with the "Best in Class" title, helping consumers choose the safest vehicles for their needs. To determine the 'Best in Class' rating, Euro NCAP calculates a weighted sum of scores in four safety evaluation areas: Adult Occupant, Child Occupant, Pedestrian and Safety Assist. This total is used to

compare cars. Cars qualify for 'Best in Class' based on their ratings with standard safety equipment. Arriving in the UK this month, the all-new Mazda CX-80 is the new flagship of the Mazda line-up in Europe, sitting above the CX-60 in Mazda's award-winning SUV range. Featuring three-row seating it's the most spacious SUV ever offered by Mazda in Europe and with its high-quality cabin, technically advanced drivetrains and elegant design is created to challenge established premium brands in the European market. Based on Mazda's safety philosophy, 'Mazda

Proactive Safety', the all-new Mazda CX-80 provides a comfortable driving environment with outstanding visibility. It's comprehensive range of advanced i-Activsense driver assistance systems – including Cruising & Traffic Support (CTS) with new Unresponsive Driver Support; Smart Brake Support with new Head-on collision mitigation; and Emergency Lane Keeping with new Head-on traffic avoidance assist – ensure active safety at the highest level, cementing the model's five-star Euro NCAP safety rating and Best in Class Large SUV achievement.



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Leaking roof – What to do and how to fix it

Think you may have a leaking roof? You're probably worried about the damage it could be doing.

A leaking roof can be caused by age and general wear and tear, as tiles come loose, or roofing felt gets damaged. Sometimes the worst happens, and your roof can leak due to damage from bad weather such as storm damage or a falling tree.

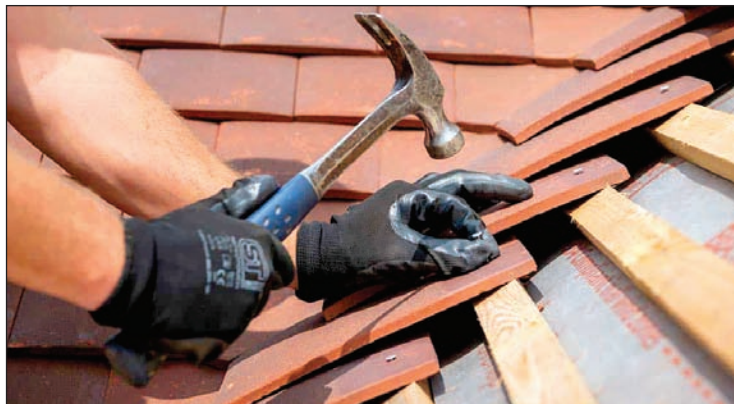
First steps: If you find yourself facing a leaking roof, what are the important things to action first? Move anything you can out of the way of the leak.

A leaking roof is bad enough, so move any possessions or furniture out of the way of the leak. Contain the water. If you can, try to collect the water in buckets to reduce the damage to the surrounding area of your home.

Take photos in case you need them for an insurance claim.

If your roof has been damaged severely and it makes your home uninhabitable, or the structure is exposed to the elements, this is classed as an emergency situation. You should contact a roofing expert immediately.

If you spot a leak in your roof, the best course of action is always to call a professional roofer. They'll be able to identify the cause of the leak, carry



out the necessary repairs, and ensure that the leak doesn't reappear in the future (which could lead to bigger and more expensive damage further down the line).

The first step in resolving a leaking roof is knowing how to find the source of the roof leak. The main things to look out for are whether you can see signs of a leak internally. Roof leak detection is like being a detective – check your ceilings and walls for signs of water or watermarks and stains, as well as checking for damp patches on the floor. Look at the loft space. Whether or not you find any clues in the rooms of your home, if you're trying to detect a roof leak it's also

important to get up in your loft or roof space. Signs of a leaking roof include damp timbers and a strong, musty smell. Mark and measure any damage. Don't forget to take a torch with you and a pencil or piece of chalk. If you do detect the signs of a leaking roof, circle the area and take measurements from key marker points such as chimney stacks or vents so you can pinpoint the leak from the outside. A good time for detecting a roof leak is after some consistent rainfall, as it will be easier to see the signs of whether your roof leaks in heavy rain. On a rainy day or after heavy rainfall you may see water coming in or dripping, which will help you to pinpoint the leak.

Other ways to detect a roof leak are to conduct a water test with a hosepipe. This is best done after a dry weather spell. By directing water onto your roof with a hosepipe and then checking inside your roof space, you should be able to locate any roof leaks. Also, head outside to see if tiles are missing from the outside (top of your roof tiles), if the roof surface is torn or damaged, or covered in moss. Do not attempt to climb onto your roof to inspect it. This should only be done by a professional with the right safety equipment.

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HOW MUCH DOES A NEW KITCHEN COST?

It's no surprise that a new kitchen is one of the most popular home improvement jobs. Here, we'll break down the typical new kitchen cost to help you budget.

This cost guide was written in partnership with our professional estimators here at Checkatrade. Our estimators are Chartered Members (MRICS) of the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors and Members of the Chartered Institute of Building (CIOB).

Before you start tearing out your current kitchen and ordering your new one, it's essential to consider how much a new kitchen could cost you. Knowing the rough new kitchen costs allows you to budget sensibly for your new kitchen design and fittings.

The cost of a new kitchen. On the one hand, a very small budget kitchen could cost under £7,000. On the other hand, a large, bespoke kitchen could cost up to £100,000.

The cost of a new kitchen can vary hugely depending on a number of factors, including: It's size; The brand of appliances you choose; The quality of the fixtures and fittings; The scope of the project (eg. are you also updating your kitchen floor and lighting?); These costs include the labour involved in removing your existing kitchen and installing your new one. They also include new flooring, plumbing, decorating and a few key appliances such as a built-in cooker, hob and hood.

Of course, this is a huge price range. So, it's important to be really clear on the scope of your project



and how much you have to spend before you start your kitchen revamp. How much does it cost to install a new kitchen? It's estimated that the UK average someone pays for their new kitchen to be fitted is around £3,500 (not including the cost of the kitchen itself).

New kitchen items Low cost (small kitchen) High cost (large kitchen) Average cost Units £1,500 £10,000 £3,000 Worktops £100 £5,000 £1,000 Appliances £450 £5,200 £2,000 Kitchen installation £2,200 £4,600 £3,000 Plumbing £200 £600 £300 Electrics £300 £1,000 £500 Flooring £500 £2,000 £750 Total cost £5,250 £28,400 £10,550 Last updated: August 2024.

Our costs are ballpark averages so the cost of your new kitchen will differ to these based on several factors, including location.

The low estimates here are based on a small kitchen with one wall of eight budget units, a laminate worktop, cooker, hob and hood (all budget brands). The high estimates are based on a large kitchen with 20 premium units plus an island, quartz worktop, cooker, hob, hood, fridge/freezer, dishwasher and microwave (all premium brands). As a rough guide, you could expect to pay in the region of £2,200 to have a small kitchen installed, or £4,600 to have a large kitchen installed. However, just like the cost of the kitchen itself, installation costs will vary hugely depending on the size of your kitchen, its spec and the scope of the project.

Some kitchen companies will include installation when they provide you with a new kitchen. Other times,

you'll need to find a kitchen fitter yourself. Don't forget, as well as a kitchen fitter, you'll need the expertise of other tradespeople to complete the job too. This usually includes a plumber, electrician, Gas Safe registered engineer, plasterer and painter and decorator.

They will also have the knowledge to help you choose the right layout for your needs and ensure that you remember everything that must be considered. We have a kitchen fitting cost calculator that could help you consider what you want in your kitchen and the cost to have it. Plus, check out our kitchen design cost guide for kitchen island, kitchen tile, and kitchen extension costs.

<https://www.checkatrade.com/blog/cost-guides/new-kitchen-cost/>

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PREPARING YOUR HOME FOR SALE: A SELLER'S GUIDE

Selling your home can be stressful, but proper preparation can significantly increase its appeal to potential buyers and ultimately fetch a higher price.

To begin, de-clutter and depersonalise. Remove excess furniture, knick-knacks, and any items that make rooms feel cramped. Put away family photos, collections, and religious items, as you want buyers to envision themselves living in the space. Consider repainting walls in neutral colours like white, beige, or light gray to make rooms appear larger and brighter.

Next, deep clean and stage your home. Thoroughly clean every room, including the driveway and walkways. Repair any broken fences, loose shingles, or peeling paint.

Eliminate any lingering odours with air fresheners or by baking something delicious. Arrange furniture to maximize space and create a welcoming atmosphere. Consider adding tasteful décor like fresh flowers or plants.

Curb appeal matters significantly. Keep the lawn neatly trimmed and edged.



Add colourful flowers to your garden or planters. Pressure wash the exterior of your home, including the driveway and walkways. Repair any broken fences, loose shingles, or peeling paint.

Highlight key features by opening blinds and curtains to let in natural light. If you've recently renovated, showcase those features, such as new kitchen countertops or updated bathrooms. Ensure easy movement throughout the house by de-cluttering

hallways and entryways.

Consider professional help from home staging professionals who can help you arrange furniture and décor to maximize appeal, and real estate photographers who can capture high-quality photos and videos that showcase your home's best features.

Small touches can make a big difference. A fresh coat of paint can do wonders for the overall appearance of your home. Replace old doorknobs and

cabinet hardware for a modern look. Enhance curb appeal with well-maintained landscaping.

Be patient and flexible. Be prepared to accommodate showings on short notice and be receptive to feedback from potential buyers and your real estate agent.

By following these tips, you can increase your home's marketability and increase the chances of a quick and successful sale. Remember, presentation is key!

The Enduring Appeal of Antique and Vintage Furniture

In a world of mass-produced, disposable goods, antique and vintage furniture offer a refreshing alternative.

These pieces, with their rich history and unique character, bring a sense of warmth, authenticity, and sustainability to any home. But their appeal goes beyond mere aesthetics. Let's delve into the numerous benefits of incorporating these timeless treasures into your living space.

Unlike much of today's mass-produced furniture, antique and vintage pieces were often handcrafted with meticulous attention to detail. They were built to last, using high-quality materials and time-honoured techniques. This translates to exceptional durability and longevity, ensuring your investment will stand the test of time.

In a world where everyone seems to have the same furniture from big-box stores, antique and vintage pieces offer a chance to express your individuality. Each piece has its own story and history, making it a unique addition to your home. You're unlikely to find the exact same piece anywhere else, adding a touch of exclusivity to your décor.

Choosing antique and vintage furniture is a sustainable choice that benefits the environment. By repurposing existing pieces, you're reducing the demand for new production, which in turn conserves resources and reduces waste. It's a conscious way to furnish your home while minimizing your environmental footprint.

Antique and vintage furniture encompasses a wide range of styles, from classic to mid-century modern, ensuring there's something to suit every taste. These pieces



have a timeless quality that transcends fleeting trends, adding a touch of elegance and sophistication to any space. They can be seamlessly integrated into various décor styles, from traditional to contemporary, creating a unique and eclectic look.

Antique and vintage furniture carries with it a sense of history and heritage. Each piece has a story to tell, connecting you to the past and adding depth and character to your home. Owning a piece of history can be a truly enriching experience, sparking conversations and adding a unique dimension to your living space.

While not the primary reason to buy antique and vintage furniture, some pieces can appreciate in value over time. As they become rarer and more sought-after, their value can increase, making them a potentially sound investment.

However, it's essential to do your research and

consult with experts before making any investment decisions.

Contrary to popular belief, antique and vintage furniture can be quite affordable, especially if you're willing to hunt for it. Flea markets, antique shops,

and online marketplaces offer a treasure trove of unique finds at reasonable prices. With a little patience and perseverance, you can furnish your home with beautiful, high-quality pieces without breaking the bank.

Tasks to Do Around the Home for Spring 2025

With the arrival of spring, it's time to start thinking about freshening up your home.

After a long winter, your home may be in need of some TLC. Here are some essential tasks to do around the home for spring 2025:

Deep clean your home. This is a great time to do a deep clean of your entire home. Pay special attention to areas that may have been neglected during the winter, such as windows, carpets, and bathrooms.

Declutter your

home. Get rid of any unwanted items that are cluttering up your home. This will help you to feel more organized and less stressed.

Freshen up your décor. Add some new spring-themed décor to your home. This could include things like fresh flowers, new throw pillows, or a new tablecloth.

Get your garden ready for spring. Start

preparing your garden for the warmer months by cleaning up any debris and planting new flowers and plants.

Inspect your home for any damage. Check your home for any damage that may have occurred during the winter, such as leaky roofs or cracked windows.

Make sure your home is energy efficient. Take steps to make sure your home

is energy efficient, such as sealing any drafts and replacing old light bulbs with energy-efficient ones.

Schedule any necessary repairs. If you find any damage to your home, schedule any necessary repairs as soon as possible.

Get your home ready for summer. Start thinking about how you can prepare your home for the summer months.

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