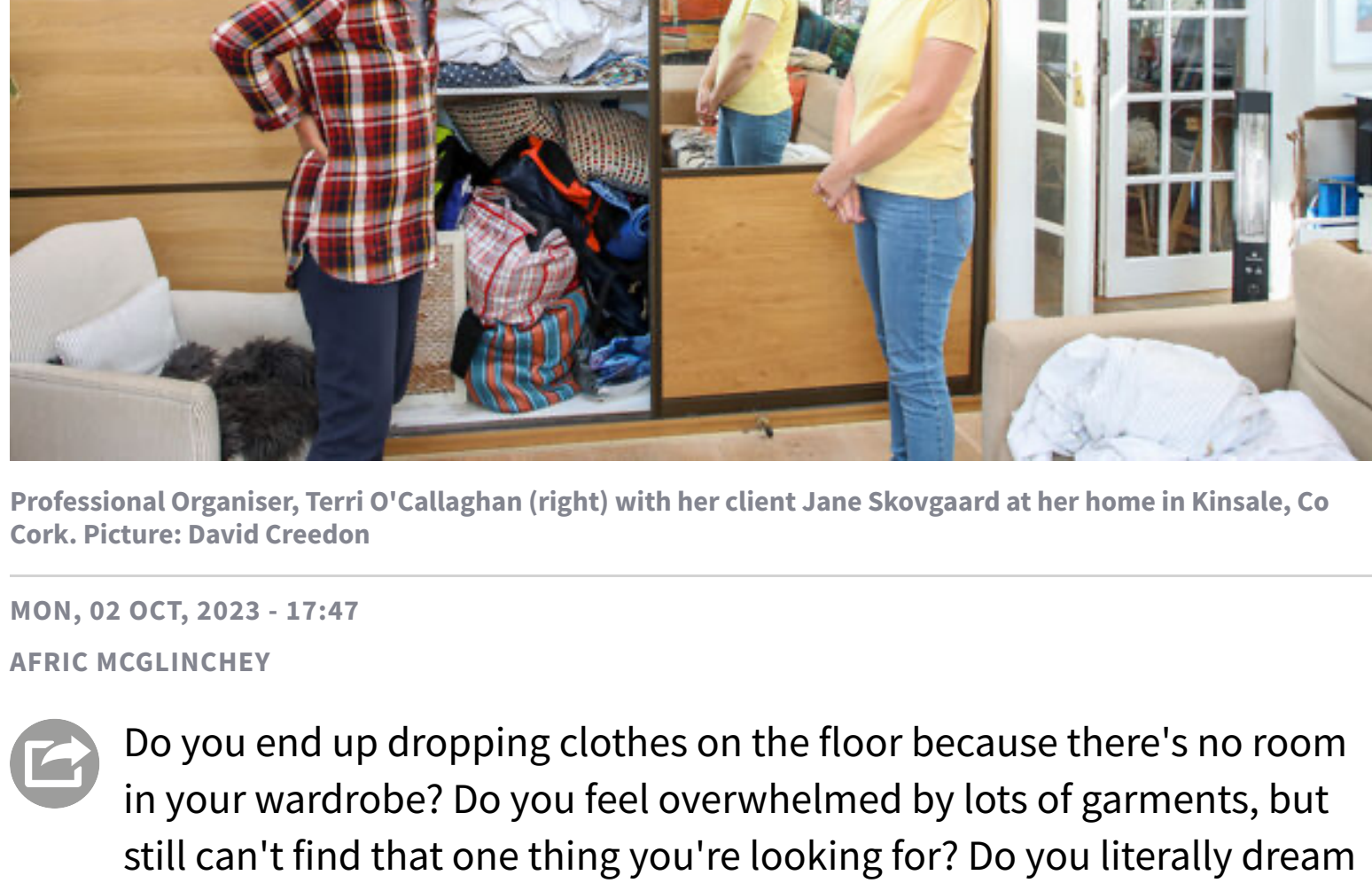


'Some people can't let go': Professional organiser on how to declutter your home and mind

Find out what happens when a busy mum, teacher, and self-confessed control freak enlists the help of a decluttering expert.



Professional Organiser, Terri O'Callaghan (right) with her client Jane Skovgaard at her home in Kinsale, Co Cork. Picture: David Creedon

MON, 02 OCT, 2023 - 17:47 AFRIC MCGILICHEY

Do you end up dropping clothes on the floor because there's no room in your wardrobe? Do you feel overwhelmed by lots of garments, but still can't find that one thing you're looking for? Do you literally dream about storage space?

Jane Skovgaard does. An artist who works from home, she's also a teacher, and in her spare time, she loves kayaking, walking the dogs and doing CrossFit. It's a busy house, with two dogs, two teenagers and their friends.

Also, Jane and her partner are both artists who work from converted rooms in the house. So, clutter has become an issue.

Enter Terri O'Callaghan who's here to help Jane tackle her wardrobe.

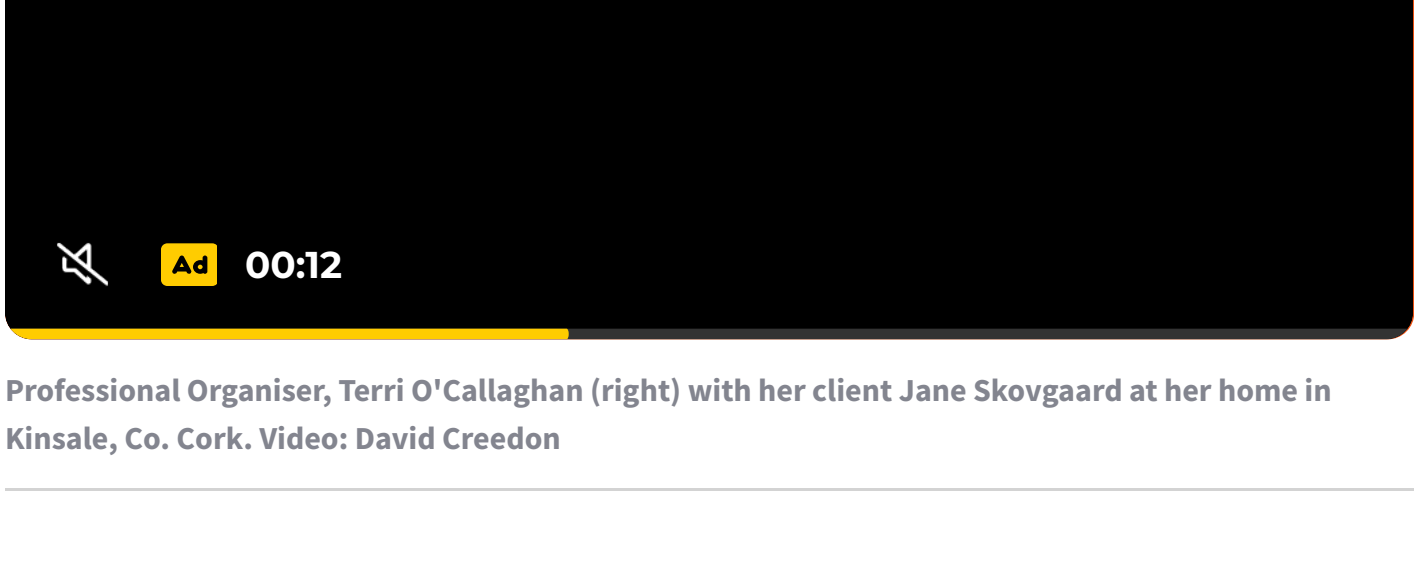
"It's amazing how much clutter people live with," says Terri. "My job is to help people declutter their homes and therefore their minds."

"I ask to see the space. I ask the client to talk about it. This works as an ice breaker, so I can get a sense of the person and their needs, and we take it from there. After we've chatted, we diagnose, and we put a system in place."

"When I'm at home, I'm cooking or painting, or collapsing in front of the TV," says Jane. "The idea of domesticity is as interesting to me as a leftover crust of bread. It's last on my list."

"So, decluttering and learning how to tidy more efficiently, would be great. Although I'm a bit of a control freak about my stuff, so I might resist Terri's suggestions. But maybe not."

Terri knows all about resistance.



Professional Organiser, Terri O'Callaghan (right) with her client Jane Skovgaard at her home in Kinsale, Co. Cork. Video: David Creedon

"A key part of the process is psychological," she says. "Some people can't let go. They might have inherited stuff that has sentimental value."

"They might be hoping that one day they'll be size 10 again so they can wear that special dress, even though it's been hanging in the wardrobe for ten years. They might have unused wedding presents still stashed in the back of a cupboard."

"With them, I go through the pros and cons of each item, and when they realise they can get their space back, it helps."



Space is important to Jane, particularly because their house is small enough, so every square inch they can gain back, she'll welcome.

"I'm hoping this decluttering experience will give me mind space," said Jane. "And I'm hoping Terri will also give me tips on how to keep things tidy. Once things are in order, you don't have to worry about the little things. That's really freeing, mentally."

"In my life, that doesn't happen. I do lots of things that require different kinds of clothing, and it would be calming to know where the right clothes are when I need them," she says.

We head upstairs to the small bedroom and consider the wardrobe that Jane shares with her partner. Terri asks her a few questions.

"Do you usually switch your wardrobe for the new season?" Jane laughs. "I have a whole bunch of jumpers stored in the shower tray in our en-suite! That bothers me."

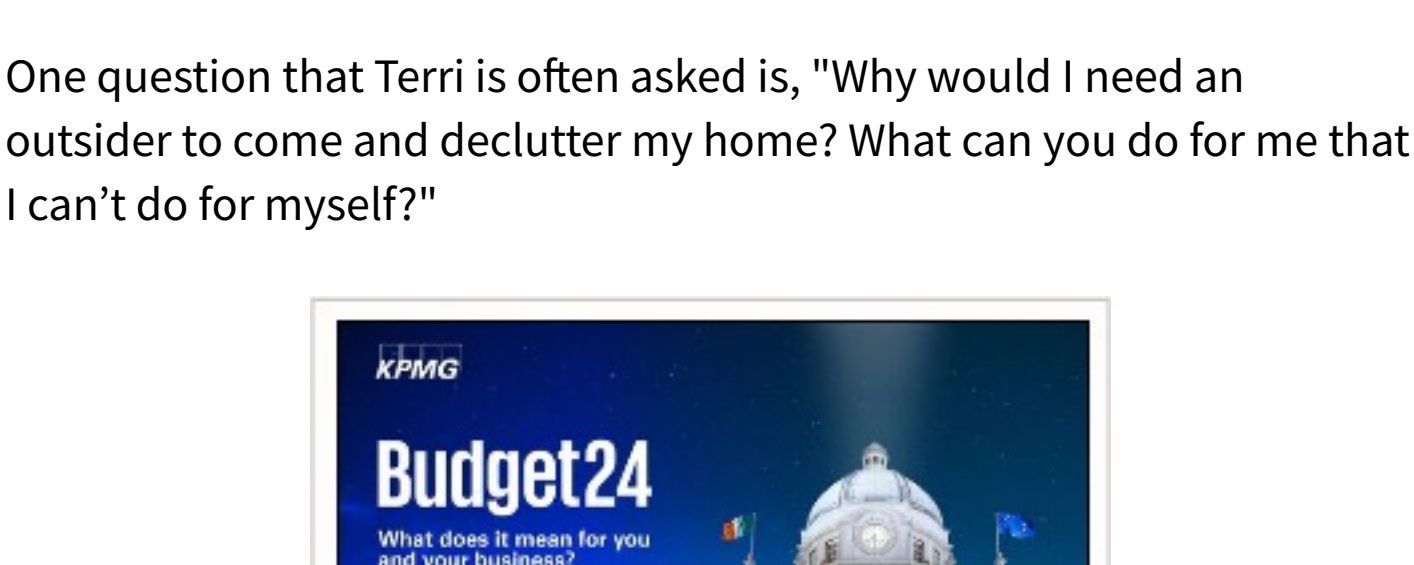
"Clutter can weigh on the mind and cause a lot of anxiety," says Terri. "People might even develop insomnia as a result. Or they might look at their overflowing wardrobes and say, 'I have nothing to wear'. Or they can't face cooking when they look at their kitchens."

"So, decluttering is as much psychological as it is physical. I've had so many people say, 'Terri, I had the best night's sleep last night', after our decluttering session."



Terri sorts through clothes watched on by her client Jane. Picture: David Creedon

One question that Terri is often asked is, "Why would I need an outsider to come and declutter my home? What can you do for me that I can't do for myself?"



Her short answer is "impartiality. Also, empathy is really important when dealing with people. So what I do is ask questions, and listen."

In Jane's case, there are many items in the house that remind the family of the children's mother, who died some years ago. There is the need to respect her memory and, also, to re-organise spaces so that the family can regain what Jane calls 'mind space'.

Terri agrees.

"People are often in denial about what they have," she says. "I offer a professional service. We might declutter a wardrobe, or a living room, a playroom or the kitchen. You'd be surprised at how many people still have pieces of equipment that don't work any more."

"And then there are all the impulse buys, say from the Lidl's special aisles. People can't resist a bargain. It's human nature. But then that stuff never gets used. Or when someone passes on, they leave stuff."

"People can be overwhelmed by religious items, ornaments, books, old comics and the like. It might have sentimental value, or people might just be reluctant to let it go because it represents a loved one's life."

"That's where it helps to be objective. I can ask questions, like does this item serve you in any way? Objects can make people feel burdened, anxious, guilty, overwhelmed, or embarrassed, without them even realising it."

Jane tells Terri that as she and her partner have a small room, with limited shared wardrobe space, she can never find what she's looking for.



"And when we come up to bed, exhausted after our day, we tend to drop our clothes on to the floorrobe," she laughs. "Honestly, you wouldn't believe it but I have dreams about finding more storage space."

Terri begins by emptying all the shelves and landing the clothes on the bed for sorting through, chatting as she does so.

"Nine times out of ten," she says, "people have way more storage areas than they realise. Let's see what we can do."

She starts by organising clothing according to type, season and colour. She folds and rolls each garment like a Swiss roll.

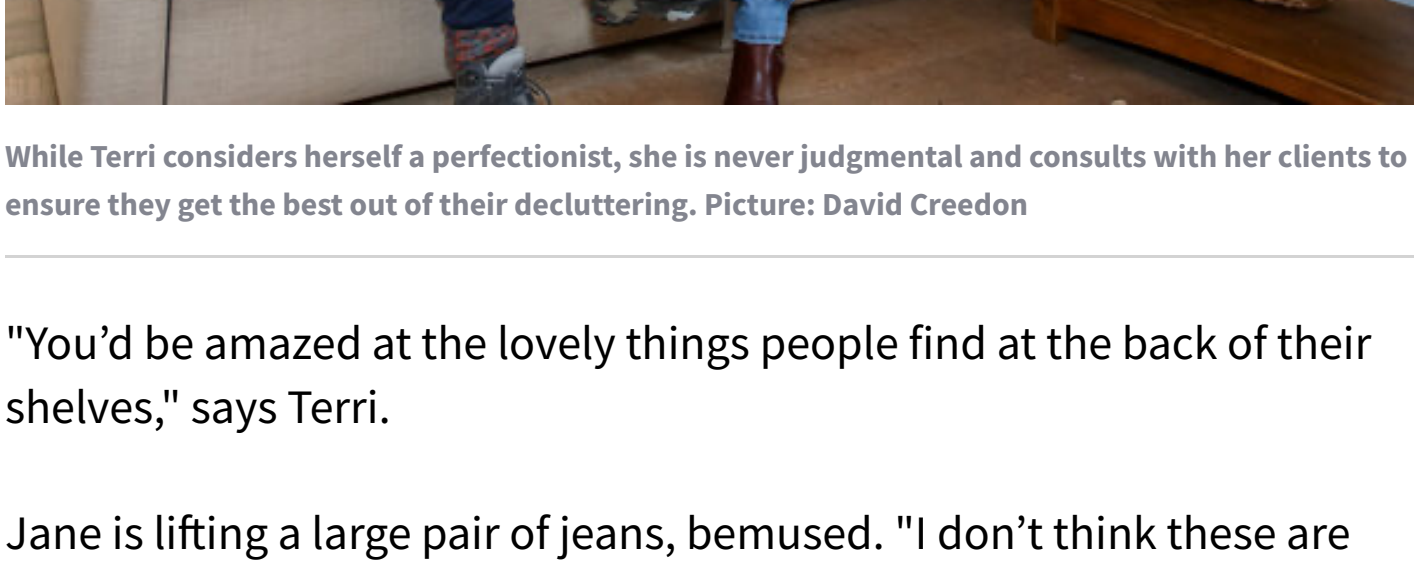
"This prevents wrinkles and saves you from ironing," she says. "And now you can see each item in your shelf without having to rummage and create a mess. And you can see colours. Look at this lovely bronze top, perfect for autumn."

Terri never encourages people to buy anything to replace the items.

"Decluttering goes hand in hand with sustainability. It's all about reusing and recycling," she says.

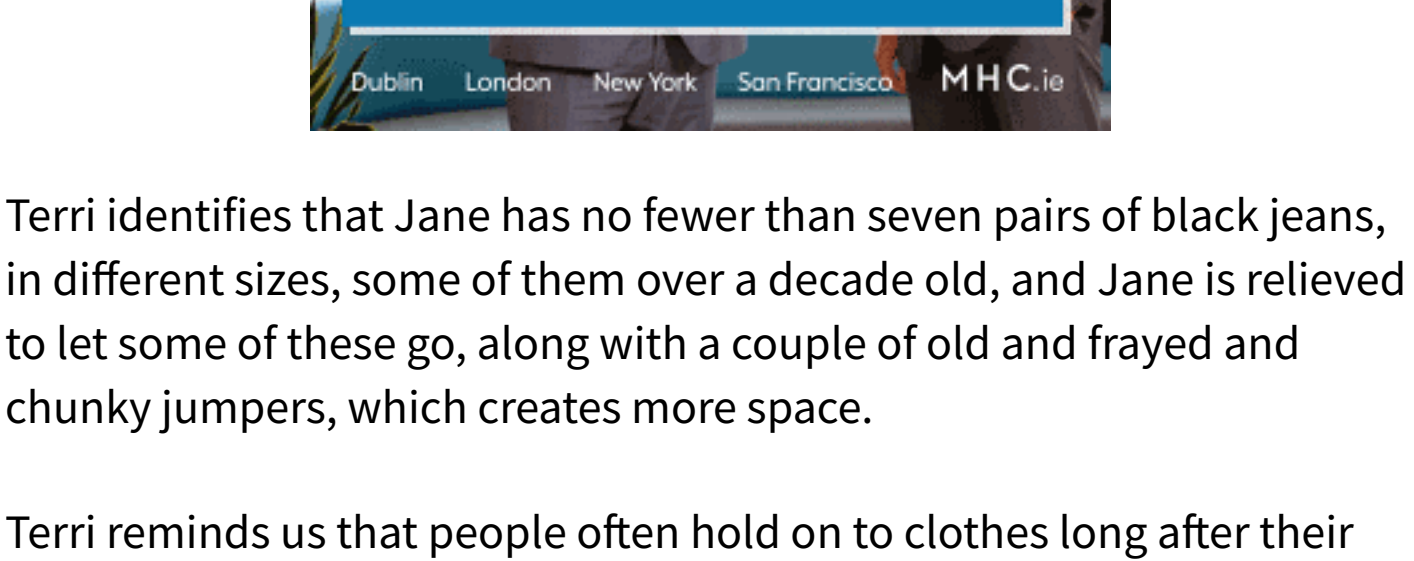
Jane realises that although one dress is no longer suitable to wear, she'd like to use it as a pattern.

"Oh, you've just found a pair of leggings that I thought one of the kids had stolen!" she says.



"You'd be amazed at the lovely things people find at the back of their shelves," says Terri.

Jane is lifting a large pair of jeans, bemused. "I don't think these are mine," she says.



Terri identifies that Jane has no fewer than seven pairs of black jeans, in different sizes, some of them over a decade old, and Jane is relieved to let some of these go, along with a couple of old and frayed and chunky jumpers, which creates more space.

Terri reminds us that people often hold on to clothes long after their usefulness.

"We get older, we change shape, we colour our hair, we leave that office job, and those clothes are no longer appropriate or needed," she says.

"But we might be attached, even though those clothes are taking up space and will never be used. This is when it's useful to have an impartial expert to give you perspective."

While Terri considers herself a perfectionist, she is never judgmental.

"I would be meticulous and organised," she says. "And I love to people. I've worked with people from all walks of life. I have been able to use my skills to help them put a better shape to their own lives and homes."

One thing that is essential for a good outcome is the right frame of mind.

"Mindset determines success," says Terri. "If it's positive, the results will reflect that."

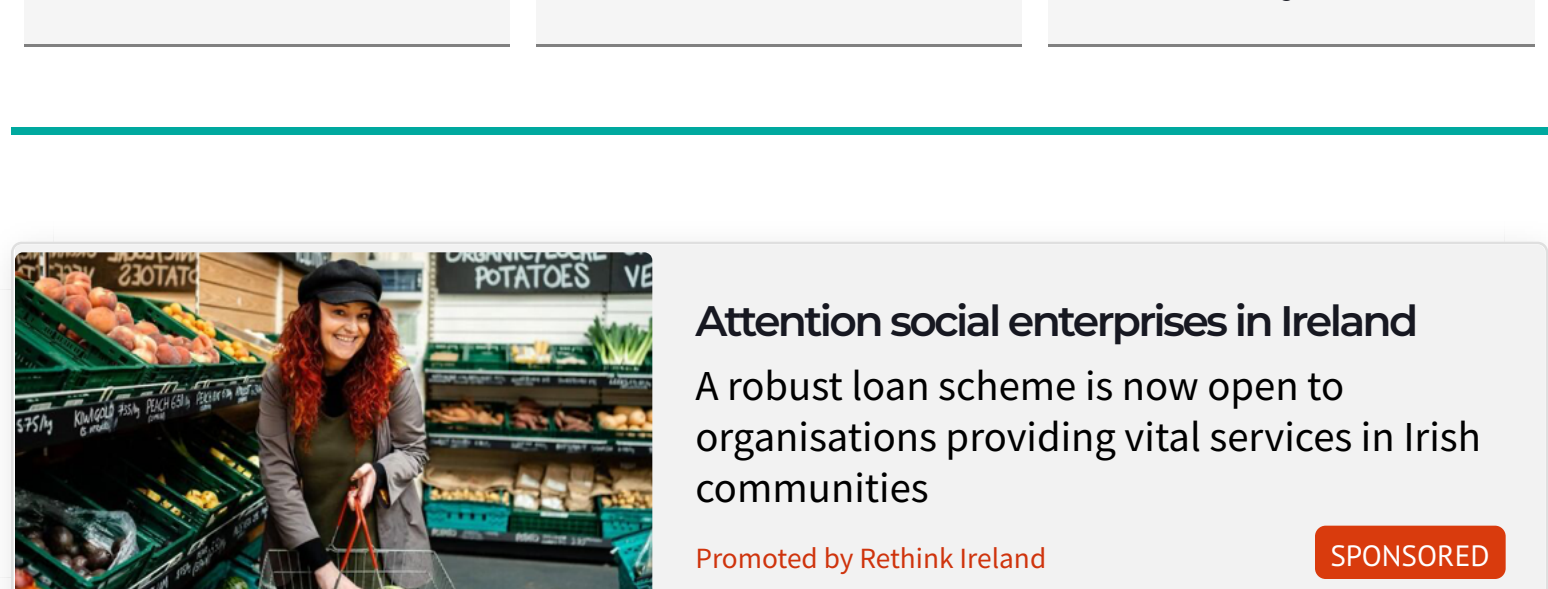
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Tips from Terri

- Toys can be sent on to preschools and hospitals.
Clothes, and even old bras can be taken to charity shops.
Good quality/designer clothing, shoes and accessories can be sold on Depop or Ebay.
Furniture, gardening gear and any domestic items can be offered on various swap sites, such as Clonakilty Swap and Free Recycling Group, Kinsale Zero Waste Swap Shop, or Cork Sell and Swap on Facebook.

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