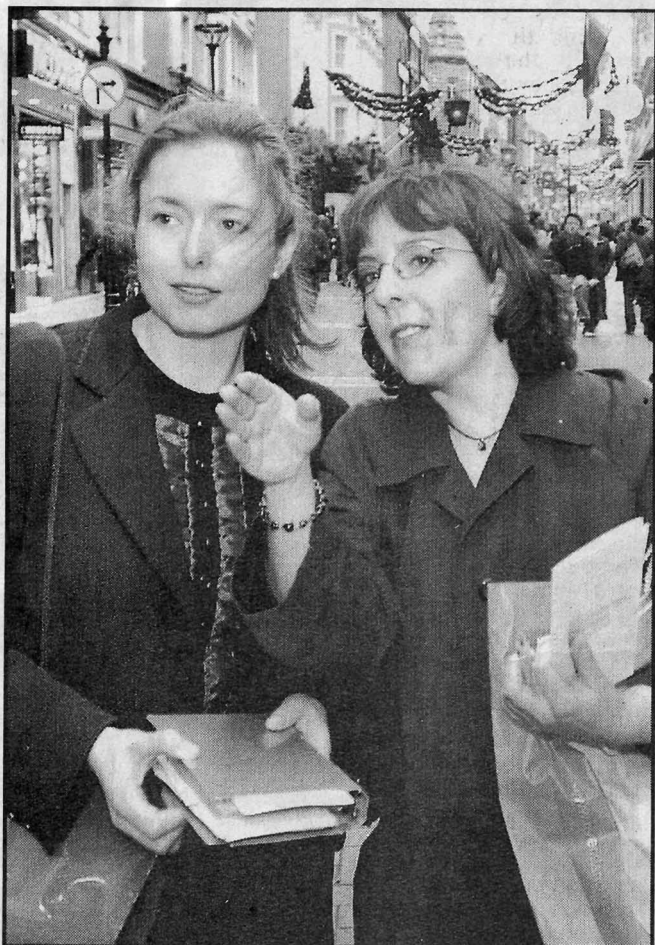


A Day in the Life



Aphria O'Brien (left) and colleague Emma Filgas at work in Grafton Street, Dublin. Photograph: Matt Kavanagh

Your own personal Jeeves

Aphria O'Brien works in an Internet-based 'concierge' service — fetching and carrying parcels, driving and generally organising things for clients

AT THE MOMENT, I'm trying to organise a wedding in Italy for a lady in Limerick. We have to find out about the rules and regulations of marriages in Italy, hotels, catering, flowers . . . With no Italian, it's a little difficult, but so far, so good.

I usually start my day by going through the e-mails, phone messages, and the website hits (www.conciergeireland.com) and planning what needs to be done. We offer personal assistance, errand-running and home-management services. Three of us work full-time — Emma Filgas, Maurice Deverell and me — and 50 part-time.

We started out in September and get business both by e-mail and by phone. It's very busy — we've had calls left on our answering machine at 4 a.m. — admittedly by slightly tipsy people who just remembered something they wanted done.

The job varies enormously. I might have to find the cheapest insurance quote for a woman who wants to get her 17-year-old son insured so he can learn to drive; or it might be the best holiday quote for a couple who don't have time to do their own research. It can be very time-consuming finding the best deal and we usually go back to the client with a few quotes.

Every week, I shop for a disabled UCD student, Averil Graham. She likes the food in Tesco, so I usually go to the Merrion centre with her list, get the shopping and have a cup of tea with her. We also organise drivers for Averil, who goes home by train to the northwest every week. She has to be taken to the station and collected and, if she goes out during the week, the same driver will take her. We didn't realise so many disabled people would be interested in our service.

We do a lot of personal shopping. Professional males really don't know what to buy their mothers. We'd ask them a series of questions, such as how much they want to spend and what they're interested in. Often they go for something safe like a gold bracelet or a silver picture frame. And, yes, we wrap it and choose a nice birthday card and will deliver it — after he has signed the card.

We work from home at the moment — two of our homes. We're surprised at how quickly it all took off — we thought it might be ahead of its time in Ireland.

There are quite a lot of conferences lined up and we are organising three Christmas parties this week. As a rule, we deal with restaurants, negotiate the best price, organise the menu and the wine, then go back to the people with quotes. We will also organise flowers and gifts (unusual ones) if they're required, and we can get drivers to make sure everyone gets home.

There's usually a couple of home-management jobs every day. We might have someone who wants a washing machine fixed: I'd find a repair man (or organise someone to do it), collect the keys, accompany the repair man and drop the keys back when the job is done.

And then there's relocation. We recently found a home for a Ukrainian man coming to Ireland to work for a computer company. We got him an apartment in Killiney, found a school for his son, showed him around Dalkey village and helped him buy a bike.

I came into this job by chance. One thing led to another. I started studying in the Sorbonne in Paris and then landed on my feet in the south of France, studying hotel management. Then I was in a car crash, and did my back and neck in, so I came back to Ireland and began work in publicity and public relations. I met Emma and Maurice to discuss publicity for *conciergeireland* and ended up working with them.

Now I work as many hours as are required. When I can take a few hours off I do.

● In an interview with **Anne Byrne**