

8

**Maurice
O'Connor**



14

**Zooming
Online**



15

**Information
Webinars**

Friends



Welcome to the Winter edition of MS News.

2020 has been difficult in many ways. As we come towards the end of the year, we feel it's important to acknowledge the challenges we have all faced and to think about some of the things we have to celebrate. In this edition, we will highlight some of the positive things that have happened over the past number of months. Access to Ocrevus has been extended. We have received funding through Rethink Ireland to support the development of tailored physiotherapy programmes. Budget 2021 had some promising announcements which may benefit some of the MS community. Details of these developments can be found in our News section which begins on **page 4**.

In May, to mark World MS Day, we took a step into the digital world with our first-ever Virtual Balloon Race. This was a very positive activity which saw our supporters track their virtual balloons over the course of a week – stirring-up friendly competitive spirits online. Read more about this on **page 6**.

At a time that was challenging for everyone, we were humbled to have so many wonderful supporters take on challenges to support us. Details of some of the wonderful support we have received can be found in our Fundraising section on **page 24**.

This edition includes My Story pieces from two people living with MS. In the first, Katie highlights her experiences being openly part of the MS community as one of our MS and Me bloggers – **page 8**. The second, was written by someone who wishes to remain anonymous. We felt it was important to include this as some people make the decision not to disclose their diagnosis and we respect each person's individual decision – **page 17**.

Recognising that 2020 has brought challenges for everyone, we have shared some practical tools for resilience and mindfulness. These can be found on **page 9** and **10**.

We have also included a piece which outlines some of the positive things you have experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic. From spending more time with loved ones to embracing technology to stay connected – we have loved reading about the positive things you have experienced and discovered during this time – **page 19**.

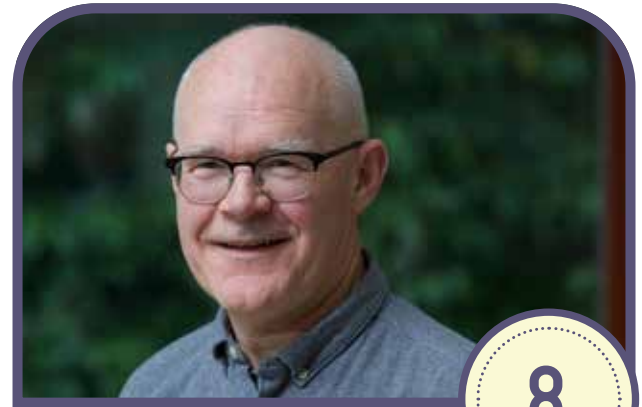
We hope you enjoy reading this issue of MS News! If you have any feedback on MS News or have suggestions on what you might like to see in future editions, please contact the editor Aoife Kirwan – aoifek@ms-society.ie

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ava Battles'.

Ava Battles
Chief Executive

CONTENTS

News	4
Maurice O'Connor	7
My MS Story	8
Mindfulness In Difficult Times	9
Be Wellbeing Wise	10
Be Winter Ready	11
Zooming Online	14
Information Webinars	15
My MS Story	17
A Radiographers Guide to MRI	18
Silver Linings In A Pandemic	19
MS Information Line	21
Community News	23
Fundraising	25



8

Maurice O'Connor



14

Zooming Online



15

Information Webinars

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'MS News' is the magazine of MS Ireland. It exists to foster informed debate and comment about all issues relating to MS. The view of contributors are not necessarily those of the Society. No treatments or therapies should be attempted or products used without qualified medical or professional advice.

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Ocrevus



Deputy Mark Ward, Aoife Kirwan (MS Ireland), Karen Hynes and Ava Battles (MS Ireland) at the MSunderstood Café

In October, MS Ireland were delighted to share with our community that access to Ocrevus has been extended to include people living with relapsing-remitting MS and early primary progressive MS. This news was very welcome as Ocrevus is currently the only licensed treatment for primary progressive MS. We wish to extend our many thanks to all who engaged with our advocacy activities calling for this medication to be publicly reimbursed for all those it would benefit. This includes supporting the MSunderstood Café and the MSunderstood Café Roadshow, both of which aimed to highlight extreme delays in access to new and innovative medications in Ireland. The experiential pop-up Café, supported by Roche, was located on Exchequer Street and opened for one day only – to give unknowing coffee connoisseurs the opportunity to experience some of the symptoms of MS. Check out our video of the MSunderstood Café here -

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0s3E2dJWCQU&feature=emb_logo

With the success of the Café we were keen to bring this project on a roadtrip to allow even more people to engage with it. Our MSunderstood Café Roadshow video is available here - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rEgosuKfRIU>

Thanks to all who showed their support and helped make access to this medication a reality.

Budget 2021



Minister Paschal Donoghue made some promising announcements for health in Budget 2021. These included additional funding to support day services; €5 million towards home care hours to reduce community waiting lists; €50 million to be made available for new drugs; €58 million investment in eHealth.

Income measures were also announced including an increase in the earnings disregard for Disability Allowance from €120 per week to €140 per week (from June 2021); Carers Support Grant increase of €150 per year (from June 2021); an additional €5 per week for Living Alone Allowance recipients and a €3.50 increase in fuel allowance.

Full details of Budget 2021 can be found here: <http://www.budget.gov.ie/Budgets/2021/2021.aspx>

The Disability Action Coalition



Over the past year, MS Ireland engaged with The Disability Action Coalition (TDAC), a group of organisations providing services to people living with disabilities. These organisations receive funding under Section 39 of the Health Act. The formation of this group came about as a result of increasing financial burdens on these organisations, including MS Ireland.

Our organisations worked in partnership to highlight a funding crisis that threatened our sustainability and the services we provide to our communities. We called for €20 million in additional funding to meet a deficit and maintain the sustainability of our organisations and services.

MS Ireland were delighted that this additional funding was announced in Budget 2021.

We wish to thank all of our community members who supported our advocacy activities. The emails, letters, phone calls and social media support all made a massive difference and helped MS Ireland and our fellow TDAC members to achieve our goals.

Move Smart MS



MS Ireland were thrilled to be awarded a grant of €130,000 from Rethink Ireland to support the provision of online, specialist, physiotherapy programmes on a national level. This grant, which was provided with the support of the Department of Rural and Community Development will support a total of 36 programmes. This will allow for tailored programmes to be developed and delivered. MS Ireland have been in consultation with our Regions through online participant forums. This consultation has shown that our community value and require programmes that focus on fitness, strength, balance and fatigue which are tailored to suit varying levels of ability. We are delighted to have secured this grant which will help to make this a reality.

MS Wellness



The MS Wellness Section

Taking care of yourself is important and to help with this, MS Ireland have introduced a new MS Wellness section on our website. This information on MS and

wellness aims to provide people living with multiple sclerosis, their families and carers access to information, tips and tricks to support wellbeing. It includes information on relaxation and mental health as well as providing some handy life hacks. The information was developed by Novartis on behalf of MS Ireland. You can check out the MS Wellness section here: <https://www.ms-society.ie/ms-wellness>



NAI meeting with Minister for State Anne Rabbitte



Minister of State for Disability Anne Rabbitte

MS Ireland, as part of the Neurological Alliance of Ireland (NAI) recently took part in a meeting with Minister of State for Disabilities Anne Rabbitte. During this meeting, NAI Executive Director, Mags Rogers, with the support of NAI Board members discussed the issue of access to neurorehabilitation in Ireland. Last

year, the Health Service Executive (HSE) published an implementation plan for the National Neurorehabilitation Strategy. This came over 8 years after the launch of the original policy document. The implementation framework is a three-year, ten step plan aiming to develop neurorehabilitation services across the country. Minister Rabbitte committed to supporting this and will further engage with NAI and members, including MS Ireland to progress this issue.

Primary Medical Certificates



Deputy Mark Ward raising a question on Primary Medical Certificates with Tánaiste, Leo Varadkar

A Supreme Court decision in June resulted in uncertainty about the legality of the assessment process for Primary Medical Certificates. Due to this, the processing of applications was suspended. This created significant challenges for those who required a Primary Medical Certificate. MS Ireland raised this issue with a number of representatives including Deputy Mark Ward. Deputy Ward asked Tánaiste Leo Varadkar a parliamentary question on this and called for swift action should changes to legislation be required.

The Government have recently confirmed that interim legislation has been put in place to allow processing to recommence. Processing is due to resume in January.

MS Cards

MS Ireland is now providing free credit-card style cards which can help to communicate that you live with MS and may require help - including access to a toilet. These cards are available upon request from your MS Ireland Community Worker. Contact details for MS Ireland Community Workers can be found here - <https://www.ms-society.ie/what-we-do/regional-services>

MS Cards



World MS Day Virtual Balloon Race goes off with a 'Bang'

This year's World MS Day was certainly one to remember. We came up with the idea of having a virtual balloon race, as we knew we wouldn't be able to fundraise for or promote World MS Day as we had in previous years.

With over 9,000 people living with MS in Ireland we thought 9,000 virtual balloons would be a fitting way to recognise the MS Community, and so the 9,000 Balloons For MS Day campaign was born. Using algorithms, live weather systems and Google maps our virtual balloon racing platform allowed balloons to behave, fly and burst just like real balloons.

Skilfully designing their balloons, choosing their name and then waiting patiently for launch day, 9pm on Sat 30th May.

In the midst of the restrictions and home-schooling, our virtual balloon race was a fun way to bring distanced families together for a great cause. Households up and down the country and as far afield as New Zealand took part!

Unlike traditional balloon races that litter the countryside and endanger wildlife, our virtual balloon race was completely environmentally sound.

An incredible 9,104 balloons were purchased - raising over €45k. The balloon that flew the farthest was aptly named 'You are not Alone'. It travelled 1217.89km and virtually popped half way between Toulouse and



Montpellier. We were delighted with how well the campaign went. Watch this space for 2021!

We are delighted to introduce you to the Chairperson of the Board of MS Ireland

Maurice O'Connor



I'm thinking of my late brother, Kieran, as I write this. Kieran was diagnosed with MS in the early 1990s. Although he was living in the USA at that time and did so for the rest of his life, while I was here in Ireland, my recollection is that he possibly had Primary Progressive MS.

Did the neurologists make the distinctions between types of MS that many of us are now familiar with? I don't know.

Would Kieran have got excited at possibly being treated with a new drug like Ocrevus, if it had been available at the time? I think so; he would have been interested in the science behind it. He did have medical insurance in the USA, but without that, I doubt if he'd have been able to access an Ocrevus treatment. Not like here, where we've had a great result from a huge advocacy effort in association with Roche Pharmaceuticals.

If he was living in Ireland, would Kieran have got involved with his local Branch of MS Ireland? I don't know, because he was quite private and might just have preferred to get on with his own life, living with MS. I don't think he had the option of reaching out in New Jersey to a local community of people with MS, their families and carers as he could do here. Dublin South could have been his local Branch if he had lived near the parental home.

Would Kieran have signed up for a Getting The Balance Right physio class? I doubt it, though I know it would definitely have been great for him on several levels if he could have.

If Kieran was still here to experience Covid-19 lockdown, travel and visiting restrictions and social distancing, how would he cope? This I do know for sure, he would have embraced the technologies that can keep us all connected, Whatsapp video or Facetime calls, Zoom or Teams meetings. He did get to experience the early days of Skype, and despite increasingly impaired hand mobility and speech difficulties, he made great use of that.

Might Kieran's enthusiasm for how his PC kept him connected with the world outside his apartment have tempted him to join in on one of the online physio sessions that MS Ireland's Susan Coote has pioneered? Maybe, just maybe....

And finally, what would my brother Kieran have thought about his eldest brother being elected Chairperson of MS Ireland after our AGM on September 19th last? I'll have to think about that one.

It's a great honour for me to serve in this role for the next three years. I'm hugely aware of the trust that my fellow Board members are placing in me, and enormously grateful for the work that my predecessor, Marcella Flood, did in leading the Board for the last three years.

It's a very challenging time to be taking on my new role, but, as you can see from this edition of MS News, there are a lot of very positive developments happening for people with MS, particularly in the world of disease-modifying therapies and rehabilitation.

It's a privilege to be a part of the MS Ireland community, the staff, the volunteers and all the people living with MS, the families, carers, friends and supporters. I hope I can make a positive difference in many ways while I am Chairperson. My brother Kieran wouldn't be shy about telling me what he thought I needed to do!

I look forward to being invited to contribute to future editions of MS News and to sharing my thoughts on how the MS Ireland community is doing with supporting, enabling and empowering people with MS, their families and carers here in Ireland.

In the meantime, let's all stay connected, stay safe and stay well.

My MS Story

By Katie St Lawrence



I believe my journey with MS began when I was 21. I was in college doing my dream course and was almost fully trained as a baker. I woke up one morning and realised that one of my legs was numb. Over the days that followed, this spread to the other leg, to an arm and my torso. I spent the night in A&E but was sent home and told to wait to be referred for an MRI. Eventually, I did get the feeling back but over the year that followed, it came and went. I now know these attacks as relapses but didn't know what they were at the time.

During that year I had multiple appointments with many different types of doctors. It was on April 6th 2016 - a whole 13 months after my first relapse - that my neurologist said to me that I had relapsing-remitting multiple sclerosis.

After meeting with the neurologist that day, she had me go to meet with the MS nurse in the hospital. I remember sitting in front of the MS nurse for the first time and breaking down, crying. Finally I had the answer to what was going on. In a way, it was such a complete shock to me as I honestly thought it didn't happen to anyone my age. I was only 22.

The nurse was wonderful. She was so caring and kind, didn't rush me at all and had the tissues to hand. She sat me down and explained that the most common age for MS diagnosis is between 20 – 40 years old. The nurse also gave me a list of websites to check out this included of course the wonderful MS Ireland.

I got in touch with them and began following them on social media to stay up to date with all things MS related. I also eventually became a member of their blogging team who writes the weekly MS and Me blogs. I have met so many amazing people both from the blogging team, MS Ireland themselves and people at different MS Ireland events.

I would be lying if I said I prefer having MS to a life without it. Thankfully, my treatment plan is holding my MS steady and I have been relapse-free for 4 years now. While I do have some bad days where I am sick and have different MS problems, I try to not let it get me down and lead the best life I can. I am a believer that everything happens for a reason and that maybe the reason I have MS is to help raise awareness on this disease and hopefully one day a cure will be found. All I do know is that through having MS I have met some of the most amazing people and have been given some of the most amazing opportunities that I wouldn't have gotten to do beforehand.

MS has made me a stronger person. I have MS and I choose not to let it define me.



By Patricia Lucey, MS Ireland Community Worker

The pandemic has brought with it unrivalled challenges for us all. Many of us have experienced increased feelings of anxiety or fear during this time. Mindfulness provides us with an opportunity to bring ourselves into the present and offers us techniques to deal with negative emotions. As human beings, we are often caught up in the past or the future. Mindfulness puts us into the moment. At this moment, here and now, most of us are okay. If we can put ourselves in the present we can handle challenging emotions and difficult thinking. Mindfulness meditation has been proven to alleviate depression, stress, and anxiety. It can offer us a way to cope in challenging times, such as these.

Over the past number of months, many of us have been noticing that we are experiencing feelings of fear. It is important to remind ourselves that fear is natural and appropriate. It is nature's protector. It is okay to notice that we are feeling fear at this time. Self-soothing is important as we do not want to allow ourselves to be hijacked by the fear as when we allow this to happen, we can feel disconnected. We can lose our sense of perspective on things as well as our humour and compassion for self and others. What can we do to deal with our fear and soothe ourselves?

Breathing

When fear is very strong, we need to bring down the nervous system and breathe. A simple technique is to breathe in for the count of 5 and breathe out for the count of 5. If you feel comfortable enough with this perhaps try to hold the in-breath for 6 and extend the out-breath to the count of 7 as this can soothe the nervous system and bring the parasympathetic or relaxation and soothing response into play.

Grounding

Bring your attention to your feet or use this as an additional technique to breathing outlined above. Bringing our attention to the feet can help to soothe and ground us by simply noticing the points of connection of our feet with the ground. If we can imagine that our feet root us to the earth as the roots of a tree serve to root it to the soil, we can feel a sense of steadiness and solidity. Noticing the feeling of the feet as they make contact with the ground or our bodies making contact with the cushion or back of the chair

that we are sitting on - this helps bring our selves into the here and now.

Self-compassion

Offer comforting phrases to ourselves, using phrases like - 'It's okay.' - 'I can be with this' and 'This too shall pass'. If you find it easier, think of the words you might use to comfort a dear friend if they were in distress. We are often wonderful at comforting other people but sometimes neglect to offer that same comfort to ourselves.

Movement

Do some free movement, if that is possible for you. Simple stretching can be beneficial, even if chair-based. If possible, it can be helpful to get out in nature - feel the fresh air on our faces. Utilising our gardens, outdoor spaces or even opening a patio door or window can allow us to connect with nature. Some other techniques that Mindfulness offers which can help us to cope with challenging times including;

STOP STOP STOP STOP STOP

S STOP – Stop what you are doing and take a pause. Allow yourself to tune into where you are right now.

T Take a breath – Take a deep, slow breath. In doing so, you are coming back to the present. Allow yourself to feel your feet on the ground.

O Observe - Notice what is going on inside of you. Do you notice that your heart is racing or that you feel tension elsewhere in the body? Ask your self how am I right now in this moment?

P Proceed - Proceed mindfully and act with awareness of yourself and what will help you. In considering this perhaps you feel it might be helpful to take an action such as calling a friend for a chat or getting out into the outdoors.

It is great to see that companies are feeling altruistic at this time and many are offering some free access to their mindfulness and meditation apps to non paying customers, these include:

Headspace - <https://www.headspace.com/headspace-meditation-app>

Calm - https://www.calm.com/?gclid=EAlalQobChMIsKjijptuO7QI-V1bLVCh105wQFEAAAYASAAEgIH5PD_BwE

Balance - <https://www.balanceapp.com/>

Simple Habit - <https://www.simplehabit.com/>

Patricia Lucey

MS Ireland Community Worker

Many of us are staying home at this time, with some of us self-isolating or cocoon. As social beings, this is alien to many of us but is necessary at this time. As the pandemic continues, it is important to ensure we taking action to support ourselves. Some of these points may help you to take positive steps to maintain wellbeing.

Practice gratitude

What am I grateful for today? Gratitude is powerful. It loosens the power that negative and difficult emotions have on us and allows us to focus on what is good in our lives, right now. It brings us into the present moment. Take time each day to notice 3 – 5 good things that you are grateful for.



Perhaps it's a warm cup of tea, a pet, a ray of sunshine, daffodil in the garden phone call from a loved one. If you can, use a notebook to record these 3-5 good things as it helps to cement it in our minds by writing it down.

Have a daily routine

Try to establish and maintain a daily routine. It can be beneficial to go to bed at the same time each night and get up at a similar time each morning. Regular routines for the likes of mealtimes, exercise and work helps to reduce stress. We are creatures of habit and our bodies and brains like routine. Of course, there may be days where things change unexpectedly and we have to be flexible and adapt as necessary. A good motto around this is - **'as normal as possible, as flexible as necessary'**.



Manage your exposure to news

Choose where you focus your attention – think about limiting the amount of news you watch or listen to.



Consider turning off news reports or if you feel you need to, tuning into a news update just once per day is probably enough to keep updated. Doing this allows you to claim back some control.

Connect with others

We have limited opportunities to physically see our friends and family. We can utilize technology to allow us to connect with each other via telephones and devices. Feelings of isolation are common at this time and we can sometimes feel as though we are the only ones feeling this way. It is important to remember that we are not alone. One of the mottos being promoted by our Government is 'We are in this together' – it promotes this sense of compassion for self and others during this time.



Do things you enjoy

Deliberately seek out activities and that bring you some happiness. We need resilience to get through these times and research has shown that positive experiences help in this regard. Make a list of what brings you joy and think of ways you can introduce these into your daily life.



Perhaps you enjoy comedy movies, listening to music, doing a jigsaw or spending time with a pet. You could consider this time as an opportunity to rekindle old interests.

Give yourself a break

Give yourself and others a break. Everyone is doing the best they can. This is not an easy time and we need to give each other space and treat each other with patience and kindness.

Remember that as we continue to navigate the pandemic, together we are stronger.



For information and resources on Wellness – please visit MS Ireland's dedicated Wellness Centre <https://www.ms-society.ie/ms-wellness>

Be Winter Ready

This year, we have some additional challenges over the winter months, so it's especially important to be prepared. MS can be exacerbated by temperature highs or lows so with frosty weather setting in, symptoms can present themselves. Here we outline some things that might be useful to know in the coming months.

Preparation is key

- Have a supply of non perishable, easy-to-prepare foods such as tinned soup.
- Keep extra supplies of essential medication.
- Have a supply of batteries and alternative light sources such as torches handy. Keep them in a place that's easy to find and access if the lights go out!
- Have a water container for drinking water.
- Keep phones charged. It's also a good idea to have local emergency numbers in your phone. Be sure to bring your phone with you if you are heading out and about.
- Have to hand a list of phone numbers for family and friends which you can use if you need help.
- Know your EIRCODE.



Falls prevention

- Use a low energy light at night time.
- Non-slip shower / bath mat's can be very useful in preventing falls.
- Make sure there are no trailing wires or cords where you walk.
- Have furniture arranged so that you can move around easily and carefully.
- Using non-slip tape or backing on rugs will help prevent a fall.
- Wear well-fitted shoes with non-slip soles for icy conditions.
- Installing hand rails can be very useful. These can be fitted in bathrooms to help prevent falls when getting in and out of the bath/shower. Handrails can be fitted two sides of steps or stairs.
- If you have a ramp, be sure it is gritted for frosty weather.

If you do have a fall, be sure to contact your healthcare provider.

Keep warm (or cool down)

- Ensure you have an adequate heating supply. Support is available through the Fuel Allowance for those eligible. Information on this support including eligibility criteria and an application form are available here: <https://www.gov.ie/en/service/00aa38-fuel-allowance/>
- Maintaining a comfortable temperature is important. Wearing layers can help as the thermal insulation assists in keeping your core warm and if you begin to feel overheated you can peel back a layer or two.
- Hot drinks can be useful in keeping you warm from the inside, quickly warming your core.

- It is important to keep your hands and feet warm. Some people living with MS have sensory issues or another condition called Raynaud's phenomenon, in which the extremities including fingers and toes are affected by the cold.
- Some people can experience the onset or worsening of spasticity or stiffness as a result of the cold. If this happens, it is worth flagging with your healthcare team as there are some interventions available to help treat this or there may be actions you can take at home including stretching exercises.

Think of your aids and devices

- Ensure your mobility device can grip an icy surface.
- Make sure your ramp is well gritted in icy weather.
- Ensure that you have access to a power supply if you use medical equipment or powered mobility devices on a daily basis.

Useful Contacts

MS Ireland

MS Ireland Community Workers are available to provide information and support. Contact details for the MS Ireland Community Worker in your area can be found here: <https://www.ms-society.ie/what-we-do/regional-services>

The MS Information Line can be contacted Monday to Friday on **1850 233 233**

HSE Map Centre

You can use this facility to locate health services in your area. Just enter your address and choose an option to find your nearest hospital, pharmacy, doctor, Garda station, nursing home or dentist. Directions are provided from your home to the required service.

This can be found here: <https://www.hse.ie/eng/services/maps/>

Emergency Services

If you have an emergency please phone the emergency services at **112** or **999**.

In the event of any emergency on water, including offshore, along the coastline, on inland waterways, lakes or rivers call 112 or 999 and ask for the Coast Guard.

Remember to have phone numbers for your doctor, chemist, children's schools, local authority, Garda station, service providers and family members conveniently to hand so that you can locate them easily should an emergency arise.

Services

ESB Networks LoCall **1850 372 999**

Gas Networks Ireland LoCall **1850 20 50 50**

Irish Water LoCall **1890 278 278**

Further Information:

The HSE has published 'Keep Well and Warm' – a booklet with information and advice on staying well this winter. This can be found here: <https://www.hse.ie/eng/services/publications/olderpeople/wellandwarm.pdf>



Safety and Security this Christmas

With Christmas fast approaching, it is important to think of the safety measures we need to take in order to keep our homes safe and secure – allowing us to make the most of Christmas 2020. Here, we share with you advice from An Garda Síochána and the Fire Service which will help to ensure you have a safe and enjoyable Christmas

Home Security

- Turn on lights, use timer switches, sensor lights even when not home.
- Use your house alarm if you have one.
- Store keys in a secure location; away from windows and letterboxes not easily visible.
- Record details of valuables (serial numbers on bikes etc) and take pictures of each.
- Do not keep large amounts of cash at home.
- Do not advertise that you're away for the holidays (social media etc) or have a visible build up of post.
- Do not leave doors/windows open for Christmas

- decorations/lights.
- Safely store away ladders, tools, anything that could assist a break in.
- Use quality locks on garden sheds and side doors, chain valuable property such as bikes and tools. Consider marking these valuable items.
- Don't leave a key outside - even if you think you have a good hiding spot for it.

For more helpful tips see: <https://www.garda.ie/en/crime-prevention/-lock-up-light-up-campaign/>

Fire Prevention

- Do not overload your plug sockets.
- Don't plug an extension lead into another extension lead.
- Don't leave lamps and electrical appliances plugged in overnight. If a light is necessary to aid the prevention of falls, use a low-power nightlight.
- If you have a chimney, be sure to have it cleaned annually.
- Ensure you have had your boiler serviced.
- If using candles, make sure they fit securely into candleholders and keep them well away from anything flammable and at least 4 inches away from other candles. **Never leave the house or go to bed with candles lighting.**
- Where possible, use LED Christmas lights rather than traditional lights for decoration around your home.
- If the wires on the lights are frayed, worn or damaged, discontinue use.
- Never leave your Christmas tree lights plugged in overnight or when you are leaving the house.
- If you have a real Christmas tree, keep it in a pot of water to avoid it drying out and becoming highly flammable.
- If you use an electric blanket, switch it off before you go to bed. **Never leave it on overnight. If the wires seem worn or damaged you should replace the product.**

For more safety tips please visit <https://www.dublincity.ie/residential/dublin-fire-brigade/fire-prevention-and-community-fire-safety/fire-safety-home/fire-safety-tips-christmas-time>



Zooming online with MS Ireland exercise classes Dr Susan Coote



As the word of the spread of COVID-19 started the week of 9th March many of MS Ireland's group exercise programmes were in full swing and the Active Neuro programme in the Mid-West was just starting its mixed neurological classes in the region. After the Taoiseach's speech on 12th March, it was clear that we would be putting people with MS at risk if we continued the in-person classes and so they were postponed in all regions. In the office in Tara house in Limerick, we were chatting about our concerns if people stopped exercising altogether – reduced physical activity leads to decreased strength and balance, worsening walking ability and increasing falls risk, also the social aspect of the classes are so important for people. What are we going to do? Let's move them online to telehealth I said – I had been working on an MS Project with Novartis since July and could already see the benefits of physio by video link. Having had several months to prepare procedures and documentation for the MS Moves project and had had the luxury of having time to read all of the clinical guidelines and research evidence I could see how this could be done safely and quickly.

The first thing we did was to set up a "community of practice", for approximately 40 physios around the country who delivered classes, on Microsoft Teams. This meant we could chat about the issues, share information, make suggestions – in essence, we created a space to have a "living document" that evolved as we learned and a place to share information and ideas. Our main concern was safety – safety for people who had balance problems as they exercised

away from the physio or yoga instructor in their own home. We thought about what we would do if someone had a fall (which I am glad to say hasn't happened, touch wood) and what information we would need in terms of contact details and the exercise environment. This led to everyone having an individual call by phone and then Zoom to ensure their safety as they exercised and to tease out any technical issues. We piloted it in the mid-west getting feedback from class participants about the systems and the online environment and then rolled the system out nationally. As of today, 31 classes took part up to August and a further 38 will take part up to Christmas. 95% of those participants agreed or strongly agreed that they would recommend the online programmes to someone else with MS, and 87.5% agreed that they had

the help they needed from their regional workers or physios to get set up with Zoom. Importantly for me, 92.5% felt physically safe as they exercised at home, and 70% agreed or strongly agreed that they had benefited physically from the programme, in the comments many people added to that how the classes had helped their mental health during the lockdown.

An unexpected learning was that we were able to offer much more specialised classes by combining people from different counties and regions into groups – for example, a specific tailored class for wheelchair users, or a balance class specifically for those who don't yet use an aid. Watch this space for our new project in 2021 – Move Smart MS, where we learn from this and offer very tailored, expert physio led programmes.

If you haven't yet tried Zoom classes I would encourage you to do so as it will be a long time before it is safe for us all to come together in groups indoors, if you're unsure about the technology please do talk to your regional office.

Move More, Sit Less, stay active for your physical and mental health

**Dr Susan Coote, Clinical specialist Physiotherapist,
MS Ireland and Active Neuro Project, Mid West.**

Information Webinars

While we have not been able to organise any physical events over the past number of months, we have been keen to ensure we are providing our community with access to medical professionals who can provide up to date, accurate information and answer your questions. By providing information in this format, it can be accessed at a time that suits you. Recordings of webinars are added to our YouTube channel <https://www.youtube.com/user/MSSocietyIRELAND> Subscribe to receive notifications when new videos are added.

Information Sessions 2021

Our Regional and National staff have been hard at work planning for information provision in 2021. We have an exciting calendar in the making with information webinars on topics including MS treatments, Pregnancy & MS, MS and Cognition, Relationships and MS and Neurorehabilitation. Details of upcoming events can be found on our website www.ms-society.ie/events and are shared on our social media channels.

Covid-19 Information

COVID-19 AND MS CLINICAL NURSE SPECIALIST MAIRE HAYES

MS Ireland ask Clinical Nurse Specialist Maire Hayes questions about MS and COVID-19.

If you have any questions you would like to submit for future videos, please comment below or email them to soifek@ms-society.ie

MAIRE HAYES VIDEO 1

Clinical Nurse Specialist Maire Hayes answers your questions about MS and COVID-19.



MAIRE HAYES VIDEO 2

Maire Hayes Clinical Nurse Specialist Maire Hayes answers your questions about MS and COVID-19.



Q&A videos with Nurse Máire Hayes

Our COVID-19 Information Centre has lots of useful information

Since the beginning of the pandemic, MS Ireland have been working tirelessly to ensure we provide our community with information and tools that will provide support. In our last issue, we informed you that we had enlisted the support of Clinical Nurse Specialist Máire Hayes to answer community generated questions, these videos can be found on the dedicated COVID-19 Information Centre on our website. As the pandemic progresses, we have continued adding additional information to the COVID-19 Information Centre, ensuring that we keep our community up-to-date. The COVID-19 Information Centre can be found here: <https://www.ms-society.ie/coronavirus-covid-19>

Coping with COVID-19 related anxiety in MS



The pandemic has presented everyone with challenges. Whether it's being separated from family, cocooning or the impact of restrictions – it's natural to feel some level of anxiety. In this session, Dr Rebecca Maguire discusses COVID-19 related anxiety for people living with MS and

provides some practical tools for managing feeling of anxiety that arise. The video is available to watch here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=le7teGs0uy8&t=8s>

COVID-19 Immunity, Vaccines and Risk for People Living with MS



KINGSTON MILLS WEBINAR

Prof. Kingston Mills of Trinity College Dublin School of Immunology and Biochemistry discusses COVID-19, Immunity, Vaccines and Risks for people living with MS.

In August, we invited Prof Kingston Mills, Immunologist to present his thoughts on COVID-19 in relation to the MS community. In this session, he discussed immunity and risks for those living with MS as well as COVID-19 vaccines. This video is available to watch here:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UpGZO_0Tvxg&t=2097s

MS and COVID-19 – What we have learned so far



Our annual National Conference may not have been able to go ahead in a physical setting this year, but we still wanted to provide our members with access to high quality information

straight from an expert source. We were delighted to have Prof Gavin Giovannoni join us for a webinar to discuss what we have learned so far about MS and COVID-19. This video is available to watch here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rpbCAadjOBBI&t=1299s>

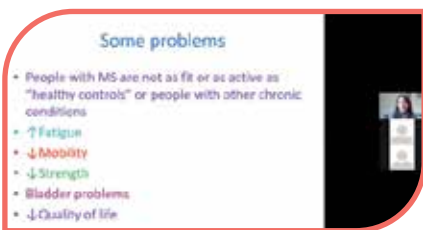
Newly Diagnosed Programme



**Dee Hennessey –
Wellness Coach and
Mindfulness Teacher**



**Dr Mark
Mulrooney, Clinical
Neuropsychologist**



**Maria Keogh
delivering her
presentation on
Exercise for people
living with MS**

The North Dublin & Fingal Region recently held a Newly Diagnosed Programme. This programme was delivered via Zoom over two Saturdays. The first session saw Maria Keogh, Chartered Physiotherapist discuss ‘Exercise for people living with MS’. After Maria’s session, Dr Mark Mulrooney, Clinical Neuropsychologist delivered a presentation on ‘Coping with a new diagnosis.’ The second day of this programme started off with an ‘Overview of MS’ by Dr Roisín Lonergan, Consultant Neurologist. This was followed by a session with Mindfulness Teacher and Wellness Coach, Dee Hennessey.

Videos of these sessions are available here:

Maria Keogh Link: <https://youtu.be/27VNsRs2vhQ>

Dee Hennessey Link: <https://youtu.be/ZXqWf1viPzU>

Mark Mulrooney Link: <https://youtu.be/ftiA9LZFQ9o>

The video of the presentation by Dr Roisín Lonergan is available upon request. Please contact aoifek@ms-society.ie

While MS Ireland was delighted that a Newly Diagnosed Programme could go ahead, it was disappointing that those taking part did not have the opportunity to meet each other or meet their MS Ireland Community Worker. Our network of Regional Community Workers engage with people impacted by MS across the country, offering information and support to people living with MS, their families and supporters. Information on the role of the Community Worker can be found here: <https://www.ms-society.ie/about-ms/healthcare-team/community-worker>

Contact details for Community Workers can be found here: <https://www.ms-society.ie/what-we-do/regional-services>

Secondary Progressive MS Videos



MS Ireland in collaboration with Novartis recently released a video series with information on secondary progressive MS (SPMS). Aimed at supporting those with SPMS, the video series has been developed in close collaboration with leading specialists including Professor Gavin Giovannoni, Professor of Neurology, Blizard Institute, Barts and the London School of Medicine and Dentistry, and Professor Niall Pender, Head of Department of Psychology,

**The video series is
available on the MS
Ireland website**

Beaumont Hospital and Associate Professor in Neuropsychology, Trinity College Dublin. The series addresses topics including; key signs and symptoms, the impact on cognitive ability, bladder and bowel issues and how to access support services. The video series is available to watch on our website and can be found here: <https://www.ms-society.ie/spms-explained>

By: Anonymous

In each edition of MS News, we allow people impacted by MS to share their story. This time, the author has requested to remain anonymous. Disclosing a diagnosis is very personal and we recognise and respect that each person makes a decision that is right for them about whether or not, when and with whom to disclose their diagnosis.

I've been kindly given the opportunity to share my MS story. I think the best place to start is at the beginning, or so I believe a great headmaster once said (well done if you got that Harry Potter reference). I suppose the beginning of my MS story is the diagnosis, particularly as I was quite lucky that I had my first onset of symptoms and diagnosis withing a few short months of each other. So I will set the scene; it was late summer a few years ago, I had completed 33 of a 39 week internship as a healthcare worker, I had a contract signed with the NHS and a one way flight booked to London that coming January. I was BUZZING with excitement and anticipation and just couldn't wait for the time to pass. I had just finished a week of annual leave where I had flown to London to sign said contract and was preparing for my final leg of placement when I woke up and discovered the vision in my right eye was really blurry. I was rather impatient with the idea of a problem and decided to just ignore it and hope it went away. I worked three 13 hours shifts not telling anyone about this blurring, but started getting pain when I moved my eye. Finally by the end of the week I reluctantly accepted I needed to get the eye checked out. That was the beginning.

Fast forward through an optician appointment that led to an Emergency Department referral that lead to a couple of Out-patient Department appointments with many scans and blood tests and investigations along the way and I arrived to a diagnosis of relapse-remitting multiple sclerosis. I cancelled the flight to London the same day as my diagnosis.

The following three years were tough, I was finding accepting the diagnosis difficult as I was struggling with shift work and the side effects of my medication. Eventually however, I found a job with more social hours and linked in with my team to try a different medication. That sounds so simple but it was a timely process however it was all so worth it and my only regret is that I didn't do it sooner.

I now find my MS so much more manageable day by day. I have been stable since diagnosis and am currently embarking on a Masters while working full time - during a global pandemic. That sentence alone is certainly something I would not have believed I would be writing a few years ago! I did gain a lot of weight in the first few years of diagnosis however I have now discovered a special love of the gym and have found a wonderful personal trainer to facilitate this and am losing weight slowly but safely. I am so lucky I have an incredible partner who has been with me through this MS journey so far.

I chose not to share my diagnosis outside of my incredible circle of family and friends. I really admire and respect any fellow MSer who bravely share their story. Although I am aware there are a lot of advantages to sharing the diagnosis it is just something I'm not sure I am comfortable with yet - and that's okay as MS is a personal journey which means there's no right or wrong way to do this. There is power in owning your journey privately as well as publicly.

Throughout my journey I have tried to keep in mind the advice of the aforementioned headmaster; "Happiness can be found even in the darkest of times if one only remembers to turn on the light".



A Radiographers Guide to MRI

By C oil n   M ille



Working as a radiographer in a neurology centre, I have gained experience in imaging for a whole range of ailments affecting the central nervous system, and one that affects a large cohort of our patients is Multiple Sclerosis (MS). Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI) has been the gold standard in imaging of MS from as early as the 1980s. Before this, Computed Tomography (CT) contrast enhanced scans were used, however, they were not very sensitive. This is because MS lesions do not differ greatly in atomic density to surrounding healthy brain tissue. Where I work, for MS baseline imaging, both the brain and spinal cord are imaged with gadolinium injection and this examination typically lasts for forty five minutes. Follow up imaging is a lot quicker, lasting around ten minutes, because only non-enhanced scans of the brain are performed. Practically, it would be difficult to schedule a follow up scan lasting forty five minutes every six months due to the limited availability of MRI. Also, the occurrence of new MS lesions in the brain and cord is recognised as a random process. However, it is also useful to identify MS activity when symptoms point to a

problem in the spinal cord. What might come as a surprise to some of you is that there is no national standardisation in MR MS imaging, as different sequences and set protocols are used depending on what radiology department you attend.

The multi-disciplinary team involved with imaging starts with your neurologist making a request for a scan, which then needs to be routed to a senior radiographer or radiologist to be vetted. The vetted request is then scheduled by the appointments team. The radiographer performing the scan will go through a safety questionnaire with you prior to your examination. To best prepare for your appointment remove all necklaces, chains, watches and belts, as metal objects can become dangerous projectiles in the MR room due to the magnetic field. Another safety measure we do is to ensure hearing protection is provided, as the scanner can get quite loud. The radiographer will also ask you about any surgeries, whether you've had joint replacements or metallic implants, such as plates and/or screws. These are usually fine as today titanium and ceramics are mainly used, which don't interact with the magnet field. You'll also be asked if you have any tattoos, as MRI is known to cause a heating effect on tattoos that contain ferrous pigments, such as iron oxides. This is because ferrous materials are magnetic and when you get into a highly magnetised scanner with ferromagnetic particles under your skin it can cause a current leading to burning of the skin. No stone is left unturned in MRI, safety is paramount!

Once your scan is finished, it will be assigned to a radiologist for reporting. When reporting MS scans, the radiologist is primarily looking for any new lesions but they will make a general comment on any other intracranial appearances. Clinically, this is sufficient to help guide treatment and monitor disease progression. If gadolinium was used for your scan, it can show areas of active inflammation. As gadolinium is a big molecule, it cannot travel past specialized cells lining blood vessels in the brain and spinal cord. However, when there is active inflammation, this blood brain barrier is broken down allowing for gadolinium to enter. This process is seen on T-1 weighted sequences. Other sequences that are used in MS imaging are T-2 weighted - showing overall disease burden or lesion load (meaning the total number of lesions, both old and new) and FLAIR (fluid attenuated inversion recovery) - showing MS activity by reducing interference from the spinal fluid.



9 months have passed since COVID-19 restrictions were introduced in Ireland. Each person has had their own struggles and challenges during this time. There have been plenty of negatives but here – people living with MS discuss the positives they have found during the pandemic. From embracing technology to appreciating more time to ourselves, here we look on the bright side.

“ I think being able to slow down and just spend time enjoying the little things with my family was a very definite positive for me ”

“ ... less travel = less fatigued. I find doing things at our pace is great and not being against the clock all the time is a big positive, especially when in work ”

“ I have gotten rid of the guilt that my house was messy because I didn't have the time to clean it. Now I have the time and it's still messy...so it's not me, it's the house ”

“ I am loving online exercise classes, I get the motivation from the group but can adapt easily to what I am able to do i.e. hold onto things for balance and then don't have to drive home after ”

“ I got the perfect work from home job offer! That would never have happened. No more boring a** long commutes into Dublin ”

“ I used to cram lots of after work stuff into my day – like choir, giving piano lessons, singing lessons, taking kids to choir sessions. All things I enjoyed, but probably took on too much of it. I enjoy more time to relax & breathe in the evenings now :) ”

“ ...a new understanding from others about what it's like to spend prolonged periods at home ”

“ Myself and my partner have to keep 6 feet between us at all times when we do get to see each other. It's so hard but honestly, seeing the lengths they are willing to go to in order to get to see me from 6 feet away at all times has been really touching. It's just about adapting and persevering for the moment ”

“ I used to love painting but never had the time to do it. I've rediscovered this and I'm loving it ”

“ ... enjoyed early morning outdoor Pilates classes before the mornings got too cold for them! ”

“ I find my work life balance is greatly improved. My job is flexible so I can work from home during the pandemic. I felt before that I was never giving things in any aspect of my life 100% because one section would eat into the time of another and it was a vicious circle. Now, I have a lot more balance – because I’m not spending hours in the car going to and from work ”

“ A positive for me is getting to make more homecooked meals. Being at home more means I can pop dinner on every day. We were guilty of eating lots of processed dinners because by the time we would be home in the evening, it would be too late or I would be too tired to cook ”

“ Home-schooling and working full-time was an experience!! I think I might have coddled my child in relation to homework in the past but working while home-schooling forced me to make sure she was a bit more independent. It’s been great for her ”

“ I really miss visiting with my family but we have been having online games night once a week which has been great. I think even when we go back to some normality, we might keep it going ”

“ I have found it really heart-warming to see communities come together to support people during this pandemic. Neighbours collecting groceries for the elderly, people taking on online fundraising for charities, people sharing information, even those out clapping to show their appreciation of the healthcare workers. I struggle to think of another time when people have come together collectively to make sure we are there for one another ”

“ I didn’t realise it at the time but life was so busy. While I am not enjoying being so restricted, necessary as it may be, I am definitely enjoying the slower pace of life. My mood is better, my fatigue levels are better and my concentration has improved ”

“ There is more time to do the things I want to do now. I used to always feel like I had to do this or go there. I have no choice now but to slow down a bit and I am finally getting around to doing things for myself I haven’t felt I had the time to do before ”

“ I have painted practically everything in sight – the house has finally been given the TLC it needed and there’s a great sense of achievement with it ”

“ The pandemic has really propelled me to embrace technology a bit more ”

Hello from the MS Information Line

The MS Information Line is a confidential service which responds to information requests by providing people with accurate and reliable information on a range of MS related topics. Last year, due to a retirement, MS Ireland said goodbye to a much-loved colleague who was the voice of the MS Information Line since 1999. Recently, we welcomed the new MS Information Line Worker, Pauline. Here, Pauline introduces herself and briefly discusses the Information Line Service.

My name is Pauline. I have recently taken over the role of MS Information Line Worker. My role involves the provision of one to one information to individual enquiries through a variety of information platforms including our telephone Information Line on **1850 233 233**, email queries to **info@ms-society.ie** and to queries relating to MS through social media platforms including Facebook and Twitter.

The MS Information platforms provide trusted, confidential spaces to access one-2-one information tailored to the individual information request regarding any aspect of living with MS. The Information platforms are open to information requests from anyone with an MS query including people with MS, their families, friends and colleagues and also to professionals involved in providing services to people with MS.

MS Ireland firmly believes that having the option to avail of reliable, accurate and useful information through various information platforms is paramount to improving the lives of the MS Community at the different stages of living with a diagnosis of MS. MS Ireland also believes that Information platforms are at the frontline of our service delivery. It is often the case that contact through the Information platforms is the first step to further help from MS Ireland as well as ongoing one to one support to the person with MS from our MS Regional Community Worker Service. However, MS Ireland fully respects and supports the rights of callers to remain anonymous and still benefit from the provision of accurate, reliable and up-to-date information regarding their information requests.

The Information platforms are also here to listen to anyone concerned about MS, so please do not hesitate to get in touch if you would like to share your concerns.

I will endeavour to answer all information requests thoroughly in a confidential and sensitive manner.

I look forward to hearing from you.





Charity
Research

Ball

Sat 29th May 2021

The Morrison Hotel, Dublin

7pm until late

www.ms-society.ie

[E:sallys@ms-society.ie](mailto:sallys@ms-society.ie)

P: 01 6781624

RCN: 20007867

 **MSIreland**
THE MULTIPLE SCLEROSIS SOCIETY OF IRELAND

Community News

As a result of the pandemic and activities being curtailed or cancelled, our Community News is a little smaller this edition. MS Ireland would like to acknowledge the wonderful support the Branches have provided in sharing information over the past number of months. Sharing our information with Branch members is a positive action that be made during a time that has presented our Branches with unprecedented challenges. Fundraising and social activities have been cancelled and as restriction levels rise and fall, it is difficult to plan how best to move forward. Some Branches may be struggling with how best to support their members at this time. We want our Branches to know that MS Ireland is here. Any Branch in need of support during this time can reach out to our Branch Development Officer, Triona - trionaNR@ms-society.ie

MS Ireland is always happy to include the activities of Branches in MS News. Whether they are big or small, we love to hear about what's happening around the country at Branch level. If any Branch wishes to include activities in MS News or discuss challenges they have to include their activities in the publication, we would be happy to chat about it - please email aoifek@ms-society.ie

Fermoy Branch



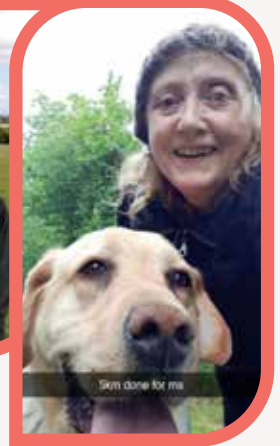
John Lonergan, Fermoy



Pat Bowes, Betty Moore and Joe Tobin, Chairperson



Lonergan-Curran Family on the Hill of Tara



Anne Fogarty and her travelling companion



Eleanor and Declan Duggan

Like all Branches around the country all fundraising ceased for us in mid-March. We had just started our preparations for our 39th Annual Galtee Walk. We had to look at an alternative way to make this happen, so the Virtual Walk was born, with the help of our good friend Kevin Mc Cormack who compiled a montage of pictures capturing previous walks for a promotional video which we used on social media to advertise the event. A huge thanks to Kevin for helping the Branch to make the virtual walk possible.

A far cry from the usual Father's Day trip up the Galtee Mountains on Summer Solstice to fundraise for the provision of services and supports for the MS community.

Different times require different solutions and as this PRO, like many others across the charity sector grappled with technology, from Facebook Apps, to going Live, to hash tags we got it done and had great fun along the way.

A sincere "Thank You" to everyone who engaged with our new way of doing things.

From the highways and the byways of the Irish countryside to the city of the Beatles & the Parisian cycle routes people joined the Fermoy Multiple Sclerosis Society Virtual Galtee Walk on Live on Facebook Sunday 21st June.

We had a wonderful additional element to this year's walk as Sarah (from MS Ireland) provided the "indoor walkers" with a Visualisation Forest Walk which provided a soothing, relaxing space for the participants.

We were also joined live on the morning by our Chairperson Joe Tobin and some of our committee as they walked to support each other in a different way during this health emergency, adhering to social distancing in the countryside, enjoying a cuppa as they helped to make our Virtual walk memorable. We thank most sincerely all those who have supported & donated.

We continue to hold our monthly branch committee meetings online.

The only other fundraising activity planned for this year is to promote the Multiple Sclerosis Society locally by the sale of our Christmas Cards in local shops & businesses in the Branch area of North & East Cork.

We are planning for our AGM in February 2021 & we hope as we progress through the year that things will improve & we can return to fundraising with all our events.

South Mayo

The South Mayo Branch has continued communicating with their members through the pandemic via their newsletter. This newsletter included details of online physiotherapy and yoga classes as well as a note from Tony Candon, PRO of the South Mayo Branch.

Artist Seamus Burke



Seamus Burke is an artist who lives in Partry, Co. Mayo, with his wife, Maureen. His two sons, Pdraig and Cormac, study in Dublin. Seamus also lives with multiple sclerosis, having been diagnosed with MS in 2001. Art is something that Seamus was always interested in. When he finished working for Western Care after 32 years, he took the opportunity to study art in

GMIT Castlebar, where he attended one day a week for six years. "I always felt that there was something in art that tells stories," Seamus tells me. "When I was studying I was regarded as the storyteller of our class."

Seamus says, "Art helps me express my feelings." Earlier this year he began a series of paintings, each accompanied by a short poem, that expressed how he felt about the way MS affected him. This became especially important to him when COVID-19 sent him into lockdown. One day, he was chatting to Thomas McCarthy in the MS office in Dublin. He told Thomas what he was doing and Thomas asked him if he could post one of Seamus' paintings with its poem on the MS Ireland Facebook page. Seamus agreed and each Friday, since June, a new Seamus Burke painting and its poem has appeared there. And – there are more to come!

Some paintings by Seamus



It is with regret that we inform you of the passing of Branch members, Pat McCann on 28th January 2020, Maureen Feeney on 30th June 2020, Deirdre Dolly on 22nd September 2020 and June Martin more recently on 19th November 2020.

Pat was a Committee member of the Galway Branch. Maureen was a Committee member of the South Mayo Branch, Council Delegate, former Board member as well as an Ambassador for the Readathon programme. Deirdre was Branch Secretary and Delegate for the Galway Branch and was a former Board member while June was Chairperson and Branch Delegate for the Offaly Branch. We would like to acknowledge Pat, Maureen, Deirdre and June's hard work and commitment to their branches and for their long standing support to people with MS in their regions. They will all be missed.

Ar dheis Dé go raibh a n-anamacha dílse

Fundraising



Third Time's a Charm - Kiss Goodbye to MS Research Ball – Postponed to May 2021

Sadly, with regulations for indoor gatherings still capped due to COVID- 19, we had no choice but to postpone our Kiss Goodbye to MS Research Ball.

Our new date is Saturday, May 29th. All other details the same.

To purchase a ticket or enquire about corporate sponsorship please contact Sally
sallys@ms-society.ie



The All-New MS READaTHON 1st – 30th Nov 2020

This year is different for everyone. We've all had to adapt to our new reality. But out of adversity is born innovation and this year MS Ireland is embracing the challenges that face us.

After 33 years we have decided to bring our MS READaTHON online

The MS READaTHON is our biggest fundraising campaign each year and we simply cannot keep our services running without it.

We know that teachers' priorities are different this year. We know that schools are focussing on implementing new safety measures and procedures. It's going to take a bit of getting used to and take a bit of time until they find their groove.

However, we've yet to find a teacher who doesn't want to inspire more reading, but we know how busy they are. It's why our new MS READaTHON website is designed to enrich a school's reading culture without taking away from teachers' precious time.

And it's not just for schools, as ever children are more than welcome to take part as individuals rather than with their schools.

By bringing our READaTHON online we are addressing several issues:

- Less physical touchpoints. We spoke to teachers, we spoke to parents and one major concern was that they didn't feel comfortable with how many physical pieces of sponsorship kit there has been traditionally. We're doing away with sponsorship cards, all sponsorship is now online.
- Environmental concerns. Traditionally the MS READaTHON has been quite paper-heavy. To give you an idea, in 2019 we sent out 40,000 sponsorship packs. Bringing it all online completely does away with this.



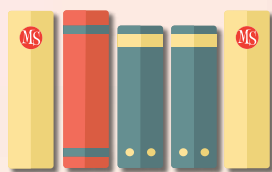
Putting the Fun into Fundraising

The concept hasn't changed. Students read whatever they like, as much as they can for 4 weeks from 1st -30th Nov. Students can earn virtual Reward Badges and Stars for the goals they achieve, they can build their avatars, share their campaign on social media and rate and review the books they read.

There are lots of amazing prizes up for grabs too, we have 20 iPads, 60 sets of wireless headphones, book tokens, family days out, toy vouchers, book bundles...we even have prizes for the teachers!



Grown-Up Readathon For Big Kids who want to get involved



This year we have decided to let the grown-ups get involved. Our new website will have a Big Kids section as well as a Clubs/Groups section where adults and groups can get in on the READaTHON action.

Adults can either participate as individuals or as part of a group and there are resources available on the website to help with fundraising and even hosting your own virtual book club event.

We'd like to see parents get involved along with their children, the Readalongathon encourages parents to read with their children.

The Author Anna McPartlin has very kindly offered to be an ambassador for us and as such has offered to do a reading from her children's book with a school and take part in the winning grown-up book group.

We are excited to see where the new online MS READaTHON will take us.

Check out the new site www.msreadathon.ie for any enquiries email Sally at read@msreadathon.ie

UPCOMING EVENTS

New Year – New Challenge

Check out our website for ideas of challenges that you can take up to support MS Ireland.

Abseil in Croke Park 19th November 2021



Skydive

Clonbullogue - register via our website <https://www.ms-society.ie/get-involved/fundraise-us/skydive-ms-ireland>



And contact melanie@ms-society.ie for dates that suit you.



Virtual Golf



If your club is hosting a Charity Day you could put MS Ireland forward as the beneficiary or if you are a keen golfer you could enter our virtual golf tournament in the spring of 2021- more details to follow in the new year.

Runamuck Challenge

Naas - 6th March - <http://runamuckchallenge.ie/>

Kinvara Half Marathon and 10k

6th March - <https://www.rockandroad.ie/enter-now/>

Great Ireland Run – date to be confirmed – if you have a 2020 place it is deferred to 2021

Don't forget to register for the **Women's Mini Marathon** – check our website for updates.

Challenge yourself

Join Team MS Ireland and try something different - why not register for one of the many challenges or come up with your own. Contact melaniec@ms-society.ie for ideas.

Thank You Mini-Marathon

This year's Mini Marathon was not only a virtual event it was also run over 10 days in October instead of the June Bank Holiday weekend. Despite all the changes we had a wonderful group of ladies join Team MS Ireland.



Virtual Walk

A huge 'Thank You' to all who participated in our first Virtual Walk. It was a huge success! Our intrepid walkers took on the challenge of doing a 'Camino' of 100km over 10 days in September 2020. Over the 10 days, they sent us wonderful photos from all the locations they were walking, reminding us of the beautiful country we live in.



Nuala Barr and her son, Jamie



Irene Hayes on the virtual walk

Challenges

'Thank You' to the many people who undertook challenges for us this year including - Mick Quinn, Keith Naughton, the Keogh triplets, Mick Donoghue and Ellen Sadler who all took on amazing challenges and raised much needed funds for MS Ireland.

THANK YOU!



Mick Quinn supporting MS Ireland

Adam's 32 hour sponsored silence



Thank you to Adam Kirwan who completed a 32 hour sponsored silence for MS Ireland!!

Adam raised over €600 in this wonderful challenge.

Dublin Marathon

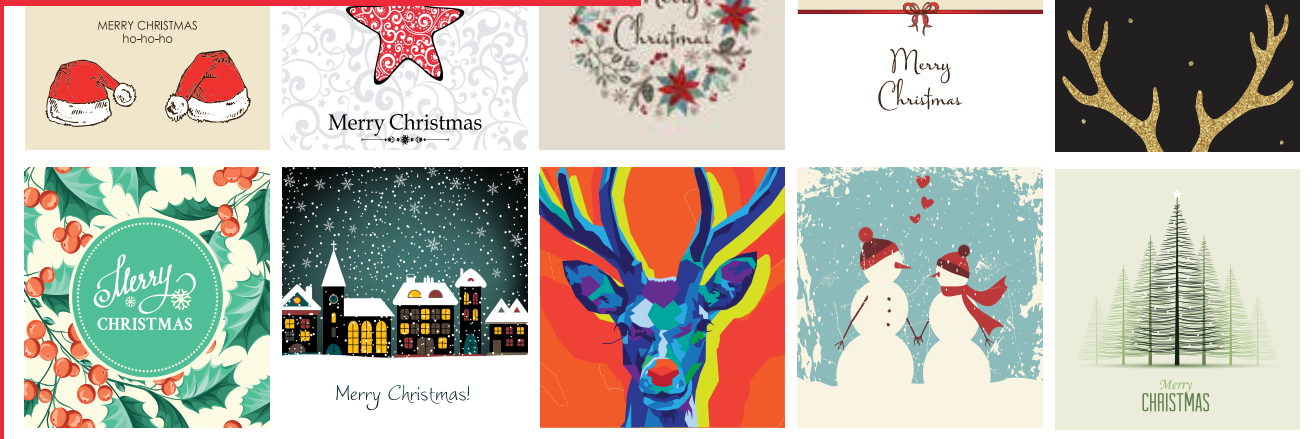
Many thanks to all who took part in the Dublin City Marathon in support of MS Ireland. Your effort is greatly appreciated!



Christmas Cards *and* Gifts

ms-society.ie/shop

Christmas Cards: €9



Pack of 10 is €9 including postage. If you would like a particular design of cards please contact jessicac@ms-society.ie

MS Ireland Masks: €7.50



Blue Bird Design-Polyester Microfibre 250gsm with elastic ear loops. Price for one is €7.50 including postage.

Support MS Ireland this Christmas