

Celebrating **10 years** of your  
Cancer Support Centre  
Westside, Galway

**2009 - 2019**



**Our Vision**  
... is that no one will  
go through Cancer alone.





## *To have our support centre in Galway referred to nationally as “Gold Standard” is very gratifying*

**Richard Flaherty – CEO**

**WHEN Cancer Care West Chief Executive, Richie Flaherty, looks back over the past decade, he still marvels at how rapidly the organisation has grown.**

‘It doesn’t seem so long ago since Inis Aoibhinn, Cancer Care West’s residential lodge on the grounds of University Hospital Galway was our entire service offering’ Flaherty says. ‘In the past five years alone, we have doubled the numbers of people we support from 1,600 to 3,400 in 2018; the charity is almost unrecognisable now in terms of where it started out’.

The development of two Cancer Support Centres for cancer patients and their families, firstly in Galway and, more recently in Donegal, as well as a range of other services has demonstrated the Cancer Care West’s strategy for continuous improvement and progression towards new goals.

It costs €1.8 million annually to run Cancer Care West’s services. Over two thirds of that must come from fundraising and voluntary donations, and it is Mr Flaherty’s responsibility, along with the Board of Directors and a very dedicated fundraising team, to ensure that amount of money is raised every year. ‘The only state funding received by Cancer Care West is by way of a Service Level Agreement with University Hospital and we are fortunate to have received very consistent and loyal

support from individuals, communities and local businesses in our region who value and appreciate the work that we do’, Mr Flaherty says.

Mr Flaherty is also a member of The Psychological and Support Services subcommittee along with Dr Helen Grealley, John Bogue and Evelyn O’Toole. The committee is chaired by Cancer Care West Director Dr Annmarie Groarke and it oversees the development and expansion of the support services of the charity. ‘The committee has overseen many milestones over the past ten years, and each key decision is carefully planned and based on research,’ he emphasises. ‘When you read the other contributions to this newsletter you can see the rapid expansion of our services particularly over the last five years’

‘To have our support centre in Galway referred to nationally as “Gold Standard” is very gratifying and something we are very proud of. It took a lot of hard work and dedication by our staff, volunteers and our Board during the last ten years to achieve this’.

According to Mr Flaherty, it is important that the charity keeps evolving. All the data regarding the predicted increased incidence of cancer will mean more and more people will need our support. ‘Our vision’, he says, ‘is that no one should go through their cancer alone and this provides the driving force behind everything we do. We want people in the West of Ireland to get the best possible support - in fact better than the best...’



# “Always a Smiling Face Here, and a Cup of Tea.”

a client's view

## Ann Reddington comes from a place of knowledge when she meets people who have just had a cancer diagnosis.

In August 2012, doctors informed her that she had breast cancer. Though she had spent much of her working life in the health sector, it still came as a shock. ‘I was feeling great at the time, I had been exercising, walking, and was at my fittest level ever when I was told I was ill,’ she remembers.



After working in the hospital for years she had then started to work for Cancer Care West in the lodge, Inis Aoibhinn ‘On my night duty, I might talk with patients who needed a chat, a cup of tea, a bit of reassurance, and so I knew how important having information was and is’.

Ann was able to tap into the supports offered by Cancer Care West when she began her own treatment. ‘Then I started coming into the support centre at Seamus Quirke Road in Galway straight away, and had a chat with the nurses, and began reflexology and massage before my surgery’, she says. ‘I also got really great advice on my entitlements while ill, including qualifying for a medical card, and how to manage financially’, she remembers. ‘Of course I started losing my hair, but I got great advice to have it all cut so I wouldn’t be watching it falling out’, she says.



‘I took up yoga, massage and reflexology at the centre and I think what was also great about visiting the support centre was meeting other people in a similar position’, she says. ‘There is always someone to talk to up there, and then if you don’t feel like talking that is also respected’.

Ann also received assistance at the centre for lymphoedema or swelling in her arm, which can be a side effect of cancer treatment. It is a ‘wonderful service’, she says, and she availed of it periodically.

‘I went back to work after eight months in 2013, and retired in 2016, but during those years back at work I was able to relate to clients, particularly those with breast cancer, in a way that I might not have been able to before’, she says.

When the cancer rehabilitation gym opened at Cancer Care West, she enlisted for sessions several times a week and says it was one of the best things that ever happened to her. ‘I was a walker, and still do walk, and wouldn’t have been a gym person’ she says. ‘The fact that you are there with other people who have cancer really helps’. With Cancer Care West physiotherapist Emma Houlihan’s encouragement, she also began participating in monthly five kilometre walks in Rinvile, Oranmore.

‘I think the combination of counselling, moral support, therapies and the practical help with finances all really helped me through and remember this all came from the one centre’ she says. ‘There is life after cancer, and knowing that support is there is just wonderful. I would just hope that everyone would also know it is there, and know that there is always a smiling face here at the centre and a cup of tea’.

# What's psycho-oncology?

**LIKE any illness, cancer can shake the very ground people walk on, creating a sense of uncertainty that is often very hard to articulate. The earth can feel as if it has shifted on its axis. At some point, the impact of a 'new reality' may hit, and the Cancer Care West Support Centre team are at hand at any point along the journey with invaluable psychological support.**

With a keen and long-standing interest in working with clients with physical health difficulties and illness, Dr. Murphy joined the Cancer Care West Support Centre team in 2017. Dr. Murphy, who studied at Maynooth University, Trinity College Dublin and NUI Galway took up a new position with the charity when it became clear that dedicated psychological support for cancer patients at University Hospital Galway (GUH) was required. 'My role involves providing a Psycho-Oncology support service to inpatients being treated for cancer at UHG and their family members', she explains. 'Coping with the impact of a cancer diagnosis or its treatment can be challenging for many. In addition, coping with a hospital admission can also bring its own stress for some, such as adjusting to being in an unfamiliar setting, or being temporarily away from their typical day-to-day environment, activities, comforts or supports at a stressful time in their lives'.

Dr. Murphy has experience with a number of psychological approaches, including cognitive-behavioural therapy and compassion-focused therapy interventions. 'Inpatients are referred to the Psycho-Oncology service by nursing and medical staff at the hospital and typically can be seen within two to three working days' she explains. 'Sometimes patients may minimise or dismiss their distress or feel that they need to be really struggling before they ask for support'. Being able to provide psychological support to patients and their families and assist them in coping at a very challenging point in their lives is a privilege' she says. In addition to providing input to patients and their families, Dr. Murphy also offers support to nursing and medical staff at the hospital working with patients with a cancer diagnosis, such as debriefing sessions and advice on self-care. When patients are discharged from hospital, they can continue to receive support by linking with the Cancer Care West Support Centre in the community.

Dr Damien Connolly joined the team at Cancer Care West in October 2018. One of the main roles fulfilled by Dr Connolly



involves the provision of individual psychotherapy with cancer patients, those living beyond cancer and their family members. 'Therapy is all about growing awareness of thoughts and emotions and how they interact to influence behaviour, developing this awareness is a central part of the therapeutic process' he explains. Dr Connolly, who undertook his clinical psychology studies at NUI Galway, says cancer taps into a 'whole spectrum of emotions'. 'Patients often feel sadness for the symbolic loss of a previous life, they can feel anger, hopelessness, guilt, and fear for the future', he says.

'Everyone is different, the emotional impact of a cancer diagnosis can be felt immediately, it could be one or two months later for some or one or two years later for others' he says. Dr Connolly highlights that the physical implications of cancer treatment have been found to influence mood and mental health. 'Cancer related fatigue is a common symptom reported by those living with and beyond cancer, it is a hidden ailment and can be difficult for other people who have never experienced that type of fatigue, to understand how all-encompassing it is. It can negatively impact an individual's functioning with respect to activities of daily living, cognitive performance, and quality of life'.

All clinical psychology services and therapy are available free of charge to both patients and family members. Dr Connolly emphasises the value of this not only for patients but family members also 'A cancer diagnosis can have a significant impact on partners, spouses and children. Research indicates that family members often feel a similar level of psychological distress to that of the cancer patient, therefore it is important that family members are supported if required'. Dr Connolly says he knew of Cancer Care West's positive reputation when he was still in training, 'I was aware that Cancer Care West is a leading light in the provision of psychosocial cancer care in Ireland, the centre strives for high standards of professionalism, in addition, it is imbued with a strong community spirit and is very much part of the community in Galway and the west of Ireland.



## Cancer Support Specialists



*Our Contractors at the Support Centre all have had specific training in working in the cancer support field and are from left to right, Bridie Hogan Hackett, Yoga Instructor: Claire O'Grady, Reflexologist: Maureen Rabbitte, Tai-Chi Instructor: Justina McElligott, Massage Therapist: Mary O'Dwyer, Benefits Advice: Ann Buckley, Brain Tumour Support: and Elaine Grehan, Manual Lymphatic Drainage Therapist*

## The friendly face at the door

Volunteering – vital to the work of Cancer Care



**TOM Gilmore probably knows the byways and highways of north-east Galway better than most. When he joined his family business, one of his tasks involved calling to homes with the travelling shop.**

Back then, the chat was as important as the delivery. Similarly he spent much of his time talking to customers back at base in Gilmore's of Moylough. Now, he deploys his finely tuned communication skills to equally good effect as a volunteer with Cancer Care West in Galway city. 'That wasn't actually the main reason I got involved here, though', Tom says. 'I just wanted to do something worthwhile after I retired from the family business and I'm glad I was directed towards Cancer Care West starting in May 2010. I'm supposed to be the friendly face when people come in the door, and I know a few people have told me that getting past that door on their first visit is the difficult bit, psychologically, I'm there to make a cup of tea, and talk to people while they are waiting for an appointment', he says. 'Sometimes people come straight from the hospital after a diagnosis and can be very upset, so we try to get one of the nurses to see them straight away in the drop-in room', he says. The nurses are just brilliant, as they know so much about every aspect, and can reassure people. That is what is great about Cancer Care West's location', he says. 'Every day is different, and we have a good team of volunteers', he says. Tom thinks his volunteer colleagues are an invaluable asset to the centre. My volunteer colleagues, Mary R, Nora, Assumpta and Mary N. are here on other days with a welcoming smile and a cup of tea. 'They smooth the entry for clients who don't see them as therapists and who can meet them on their own level. When you come in the door you walk straight into the kitchen and it is our job to make you feel at home. I'd miss my Tuesdays here if I wasn't coming in', Tom says. 'It is great to see people who have come through a lot and are out the other side. They are so appreciative of the support they get here, and the staff are so professional. That's what makes it all so rewarding.'

# Support through and beyond cancer

WHEN Clinical Psychologist Dr Helen Greally first began working with Cancer Care West, she had spent many years supporting people living with chronic physical and psychological health issues. She was particularly interested in how people manage a diagnosis of cancer, having spent a number of years delivering a stress management course to women with breast cancer through her association with Professor Ruth Curtis and Dr Annmarie Groarke at the Department of Psychology at the National University of Ireland Galway. In fact it was this pioneering work by these two psychologists which provided some of the impetus.

She had also been following developments abroad, including a concept of care realised by a Scottish woman named Maggie Keswick Jencks, now internationally known as the Maggie centres. A young nurse named Laura Lee offered to become involved, and the result is a network of centres across Britain which provide a warm and welcoming space for those facing into, being treated for and recovering from cancer. Cancer Care West's network across the west coast from north Donegal to south Clare offers a similarly supportive model to that of the 'Maggie centres' and its expansion was at a pace which surprises Dr Greally, even as she thinks about it.

'Very quickly we realised that to develop comprehensive cancer support services for cancer patients and their families, we had to think about delivering it to all ages and in the many different situations that people find themselves in'. This led to a very inspired decision by the Board of Cancer Care West to locate the support centre in the building where we are now, a dedicated space, very near the main cancer treating hospital in the West of Ireland yet in the community and very easily accessible.

Psychological support for cancer patients and their families is still a relatively new concept, although it is well developed in Canada and Australia. 'Put simply we want to offer people diagnosed with cancer the same level of psychological and social support that they receive in their medical treatment'.

When the last National Cancer Strategy 2017 – 2026 was published, everyone working in the cancer support area was delighted to see the recognition that psychological support and survivorship programmes received. For the first time, specific recommendations have been made to develop and enhance these services nationally. Dr Greally has been appointed National Clinical Lead in Psycho-Oncology at the National Cancer Control Programme and her twelve years' experience at Cancer Care West is hugely beneficial her remit is to oversee the development of a comprehensive and coordinated psychosocial support service across the acute hospital, community and voluntary sectors in Ireland. 'There are many



services already well developed and I am excited and privileged to be in a position to hopefully build on that'.

Dr Greally is very clear that Cancer Care West offers only evidence based services, i.e. interventions that have been proven through research and clinical trials to offer effective and beneficial treatments for cancer patients and their families. The core services are oncology information and advice delivered by the oncology nurses, psychological support offered by their clinical and counselling psychologists and survivorship and fitness programmes offered by their senior cancer rehabilitation physiotherapist.

Cancer Care West also provides training for nurses and allied health professionals in assessing and treating distress caused by a cancer diagnosis, communication skills, support for patients and self-care. This three day course is hugely popular and takes place twice per year. It is delivered in collaboration with the support of Saolta and is open to all staff that work with cancer patients.

Around 2011, evidence began to emerge about the benefits of exercise in cancer recovery and survivorship, she says. Cancer Care West started with a once per week exercise classes, now the cancer rehabilitation gym is open every day. This is well described later by Senior Physiotherapist Emma Houlihan.

'We now have a comprehensive suite of services for patients at all points of their journey, which dovetails well with our mission statement' Dr Greally says.



Marian Cox our Admin Assistant – a vital cog in the wheel that keeps the centre running smoothly. With 1400 people visiting us last year over 6,000 times there are lots of different aspects to be taken care of. Marion makes sure we are all wherever we are supposed to be when we're supposed to be there.

# “And what do our nurses do?”

**CANCER Care West has many experienced ‘healing hands’, not least those extended by nursing staff Elaine Corcoran and Martina Hickey. ‘Every day is different, and that’s what is great about this service’, Martina Hickey says. ‘No one has to wait too long, no one has to have an appointment to see one of us, or talk to one of us on the phone.’**

‘There’s a burden around the positivity that people are expected to have when diagnosed with cancer’, Elaine Corcoran says. ‘We are here to deal with the fact that, that’s an unreal expectation for most people’.

Both nurses are involved in the programmes run at Cancer Care West, including the CLIMB programme for children whose parents have had cancer, and the Thrive and Survive programme for recovering patients, developed by Stanford University which is now being rolled out nationally through the National Cancer Control Programme. ‘The Survivorship programme takes place one morning a week over six weeks, with topics including techniques to deal with fatigue, frustration, pain, isolation and poor sleep, living with uncertainty and exercise.’, Martina Hickey says.

A very big component of this programme is the importance of physical activity for somebody diagnosed with cancer and we are lucky to have the expertise of a senior cancer rehabilitation physiotherapist to support us in delivering the course. It also deals with decisions on treatment and complementary therapies, communicating with family, and diet and nutrition.

As both explain, they spend time with people at every stage of cancer, and are also available to advise relatives ‘Some people may come here for the first time long after their treatment, because cancer affects everyone in many different ways.’, Elaine Corcoran says. ‘It is the illness that changes you, and so we are here to help devise strategies to cope, whether it is with side effects of treatment, or concerns about what treatment will involve, or adjusting to return to work, and getting back to life. We try to make sure one of us is here over lunchtime – I remember one lady who told me it took her a year to walk up the stairs, so we know the psychological effort involved in just making it here’, Martina Hickey says.

As both nurses agree, the ‘simple things’ are often the cause of most anxiety – such as how treatment works. People also worry about how they will manage their finances, and other day to day needs. ‘We offer counselling here, but not everyone wants that, or may not need it till later’ they say. ‘We can arrange financial advice. We can provide interpreters when a patient’s first language is not English’.

‘Even if you have a large circle of friends, and supportive family, you may not want to discuss certain things about your illness. It can be easier to come in and talk to a stranger, have a cup of tea and even a laugh...’ ‘We want patients to know it is their time to talk’, they say. ‘Everyone can park their worries here for a while...’



Elaine Corcoran above with Martina Hickey below. Both have completed a specialist oncology nursing diploma and have worked with Cancer Care West since 2007



The Cancer Support Centre is open Monday to Friday, 9am-5pm

#### Services also include:

- Massage Therapy Reflexology
- Benefits & Financial Advice
- Tai Chi • Lymphoedema Drainage
- Yoga • Our Support Groups include Brain Tumour and Prostate cancer

*If you or any of your family are affected by cancer and need support we are only a phone call away. Call 091 540040.*





## “How we help children and adolescents”

‘I’ve always loved working with children. It has been a wonderful opportunity to develop a psychology service to help children affected by cancer in Galway’, says Dr Mairead Brennan, Cancer Care West Senior clinical psychologist. Dr Brennan sees children who are cancer patients, their siblings and of course their parents. In the last year Crumlin Children’s Hospital, Dublin also referred children and teenagers to the service. With patients coming from a number of counties from Limerick to Donegal, if multiple family members wish to avail of psychological support, every effort is made to schedule appointments so that they can attend at the same time. Early support is the ideal, but families are juggling many competing demands and needs, including treatment and possible side effects of treatment, that may make it difficult to attend early on. ‘However, any time in the cancer journey is appropriate’, she says.

She says that a major milestone was the opening of Cancer Care West’s play therapy room in 2018. It is filled with toys, puppets, books and art supplies, all therapeutic tools that can help children to explore emotions and to develop coping skills. As it is not possible to be there on every occasion that children experience upset or worry, we are hoping to teach them coping skills for life. How we support children through this stressful time in their family can help shape this.

Older children experience their own set of concerns and needs, including adjustment to missing school, body image issues, and side effects of treatment and medication. These side effects may include concentration and memory difficulties that may make school work more demanding.

One of the initiatives she runs with colleagues is the Climb® Support Programme. This is a North American standardised programme, for children aged 5-12 years old who have a parent with a cancer diagnosis. It is run over a six-week period and explores different feelings each week, including being happy, sad, and being worried. ‘We use a combination of play, arts and crafts to talk about feelings that can occur at this time, and to learn ways to deal with these feelings’.

Often parents struggle with sharing a family member’s cancer diagnosis with children. However, it is important that they do not get inaccurate information from others and also we do not want to take for granted that children know what cancer is. Children are very perceptive, and they will pick up on cues such as sensing worried, distracted parents and witnessing increased hospital visits. Therefore parents are the best source of this information. Parents are encouraged to be age-appropriately honest, as with any other issue, in answering children’s questions. Children have very powerful imaginations and what they imagine may often be worse than the reality, minimising misunderstandings can help.

We so want to protect children from bad news and in the worst case scenario families are presented with a great dilemma, ‘we need children to trust us, to be confident that we will be the ones that will tell them the truth in an age appropriate way, even when the conversation is a difficult one to have...’ Mairead says.

*All of our services are offered free of charge to cancer patients and their families.*



# Brian Thornton on his role as a Board member of Cancer Care West



**Brian was invited to become a board member of Cancer Care West in February, 2010 and later became chair of its Finance, Audit & Risk committee. The main board meet six times a year with the various sub committees also convening at numerous intervals during the year. The board comprises of a broad mix of professionals from various backgrounds including medical, legal and business all of whom freely donate their time, skill and expertise to the work of the charity.**

Brian and his colleagues have overseen the growth of the organisation, with investment in Inis Aoibhinn, along with expansion of the support centre at Seamus Quirke Road in Galway, and the opening of the support centre in Letterkenny. The Board's last strategic plan made three key recommendations, all of which have been successfully implemented, Brian explains. The plan recommended expansion of the Galway city facilities to provide a children's play therapy space and gym; employment of an extra clinical psychologist at University Hospital, Galway; and provision of a support centre with a clinical psychologist in Letterkenny.

"Similarly", says Brian "it was clear we needed to extend support to those who would find it more difficult to travel from the north-west for their treatment so we helped fund a new Mayo bus which takes patients between Mayo and Galway."

In 2006 The Thornton Family revived The Annual Galway Bay Swim as a fundraising event and Cancer Care West was the chosen beneficiary for the extraordinary effort, as Frances, Brian's wife, had been diagnosed with cancer two years before. She was keen that the organisation which had given so much support to her and to fellow patients be the beneficiary of the swim.

Brian's son Kevin and two of his friends took part in 2006. By 2007, Kevin had eight more swimmers, and their parents were central to the shore support team. 'Greeting son Kevin on the shore that July 2007 would be Frances's last time appearing at the finish line of the event though,' Brian says. Frances passed away on April 21st, 2008. The swim was renamed in her memory.

The event has continued on through the efforts of her family and friends, and has now grown into a large national and international fixture, with over 130 people participants in 2018. Brian is a key member of the voluntary event management with their extended family also on the team. 'It has become Cancer Care West's biggest fundraiser', Brian explains further that the event would not happen without the huge support of the maritime community in Galway, he explains.

"There are also approximately 500 volunteers involved. Over the years, we have had over 100 boats on the water at any one time, so the view from the "Prom" of the flotilla of boats crossing the bay on the third Saturday in July each year is certainly a sight to behold." Meanwhile, the swim in Frances Thornton's name has become so popular that there is now a waiting list. The 2020 swim will take part on July 18th and it is scheduled to break through the €1million mark for the total raised for the past 15years.

*If you would like to fundraise for Cancer Care West please contact us on 091 545000.*

# *“How exercise can boost the immune system and restore trust.”*

**Exercise before, during and after treatment has a central role to play in restoring this trust. International studies also confirm that exercise can help in physical and mental recovery, while boosting the immune system.**

Senior cancer rehabilitation physiotherapist, Emma Houlihan and her colleagues at Cancer Care West are acutely sensitive to how difficult that challenge can be. Surgery may have left scars, treatment has its side effects, but there can also be an acute sense of distrust and betrayal. As one patient put it, ‘I look in the mirror and see a body that let me down’.

The scientific evidence for the benefits of exercise after cancer is in the management of cancer related fatigue and physical function, as well as helping with psychological distress, she says. It also reports that being active may help reduce risk of cancer recurrence. Emma is a physiotherapist with specialist training and experience in the area of rehab after cancer.

Hence an inspired decision by Cancer Care West to lease another floor and equip a gym at its Westside premises in Galway, where Emma supervises tailored programmes. The gym has a range of equipment which is free to use for the centre’s clients, but Emma also assesses and advises those who would prefer other forms of exercise. ‘This is where the assessment becomes really important. We want people to feel more confident to engage in activity whether that is in the gym here or whether that is people continuing with their own activity at home. We know the guidelines of 150 minutes per week are there, but often people won’t be doing that straight away and it can take some time to reach those levels of



activity. The main thing is that people are starting to move and build some confidence with this at the same time’, she says.

‘While we do want people to come here and use the gym, and get all the benefits of being more active, we are also often told by our patients that the best thing about the gym is meeting other people, and feeling less isolated. For many this is the main draw!’ she says. Within one year of the gym’s opening, Emma had assessed about 150 people. She sees people individually and she runs several different exercise groups – for participants on the survivorship programme, for those having chemotherapy, and there are also groups specific to men and to women, open gym sessions, and a gentle exercise group. ‘We also try to encourage people to get involved in very social activities outside of the centre here if they wish to. These include the ‘5K Your Way’ initiative that started in Britain. This is in conjunction with ‘Park Run’ in Rinville Park in Oranmore on the last Saturday each month’, Emma says.

There is close liaison with medical staff in the hospital including joint research projects. GUH oncologist Dr Gregory Leonard cites the benefits of exercise for the immune system. We know that certain medicines that enhance the immune system are having extraordinary results in some patients with cancer, and exercise is another strategy that can improve the immune system,’ he says.

*If you or any of your family are affected by cancer and need support we are only a phone call away. Call 091 540040.*



# A tribute to John Walsh

When we considered marking the ten year anniversary of cancer support services in Galway, we knew that we wanted to include the wonderful story of John in this reflection. John first came to us before we moved to our current centre and from the time the staff of Cancer Care West met him, he was a constant inspiration to us. He had an attitude that nothing was impossible and that hope belief and sheer stubbornness could conquer all.

Those who knew him best recognise that John Walsh had a unique ability to find and share the humour in every situation, not least during the many hours and days and weeks he bore a shadow on his shoulder from the time he received a diagnosis of Liponeurocytoma, a rare brain tumour at the age of 23. From that day, he never let his diagnosis define him, and although there were many challenges both physical and psychological, he went on to live a very fulfilled life. He was lucky to meet Edel, the love of his life, his soul mate and biggest fan. They went on to have three children together. All through that time John continued to have more surgery, radiation treatment and repeated hospital admissions, both in Galway and Dublin.

'Living in the shadow of an incurable disease", as John put it, takes a heavy toll. "When I see people talking and laughing, I often envy their carefree existence and the life that people have when they can take good health for granted. John published his autobiography *Headcase* in 2016. As a very selfless gesture, John donated some of the proceeds to support the services at Cancer Care West.

The support offered by Cancer Care West to John, Edel and their family is a central theme of his book, where he wrote with acute sensitivity and insight about the psychological toll and the practical difficulties of a long-term illness – securing life insurance for a mortgage, for instance, and the day to day costs which are outside any insurance plan.

'The medical profession largely ignores the psychological needs of patients' John pointed out. 'If I'd been warned about the psychological side-effects to having a life-threatening condition,

my initial years of living with cancer would have been far less traumatic'.

For Edel, the support became particularly invaluable when she needed to know how to explain to their three children, Firinne (8), Ríain (5) and Saorla (3) why their dad was more frequently ill. Firinne was with her in hospital one day when the subject came up after a little girl ran over and gave her a book.

'I can still see her face in the mirror, and her reaction to the fact that I hadn't told her before' Edel says. 'Although it is difficult to have these conversations with the children, I have learned they are so important'.

The two older children have had regular time with Cancer Care West Clinical Psychologist Dr Mairead Brennan. She has also been able to advise their primary school on how to make time and space if and when questions come up.

It was our privilege to support John and his family through his illness, whether dropping in for a cup of tea and a chat, attending a yoga or Tai-Chi class or going to a mindfulness or stress management course. But we didn't just support John, he also helped us

with his ability to get through even the darkest days. As he often said 'one of the things I've learned over the years is that sometimes you have to give yourself permission to say: 'I'll be OK, just not today'.

For us who supported him, we learned that it is not how long we live but how we live that is important and never more so than when we are faced with the challenge of cancer.

John sadly passed away on June 10th this year. It was a privilege to know you John and you have left an enormous legacy to all those who knew and loved you.

**Headcase** by John Walsh is available in selected book stores and via Amazon priced at €14.99, and a contribution from the sale is donated to Cancer Care West.

*All of our services are offered free of charge to cancer patients and their families.*

*Help us continue to provide our support services, so no one has to face cancer alone...*

- All of our services are offered free of charge to cancer patients and their families
- There are many ways in which you can have a lasting impact on someone impacted by cancer
- See below some examples of fundraising support from people who wanted to give back

### Connemara Man undertakes sponsored currach row in aid of Cancer Care West

Mairtín Griffin successfully rowed 17 kilometres from An Sruthán in An Cheathrú Rua to Inis Mór on the Aran islands. Mairtín's wife Bridie received support from Cancer Care West Support Centre when recovering from her illness in 2018, and her husband was determined to raise money for the organisation. He decided that he wanted to give something back to Cancer Care West for the wonderful support his wife received. In total Mairtín raised €37,000. This reflects not just the Griffin family's effort but all the wonderfully generous people who helped and donated to his effort.



Cancer Care West would like to sincerely thank Ms Zara Sweeney (Aged 9) for her kind-hearted and generous donation of €1,051. Zara raised the money from a sponsored haircut. Zara presented a cheque in the Cancer Support Centre to Oncology Nurse Martina Hickey.

**Marion Browne** from Tuam has organised church gate collections for Cancer Care West for the past number of years. A number of years ago, Marion's son, Ryan was diagnosed with cancer. After many months of gruelling treatment, we are delighted to say he made a full recovery and is now living his life to the full. Marion had the idea of organising a church gate collection in Tuam and this year she extended it to eight other churches in North Galway. 'These kinds of events allow us to consolidate and expand our patient services both in the hospital and the community', says Dave O'Donnell, Cancer Care West fundraising manager 'and of course we are indebted to all who support any of our fundraising events'.

**If you would like to organise a Churchgate collection in your parish for Cancer Care West please contact our fundraising Dept below.**

### *Become a Friend of Cancer Care West*

One of the best ways to give to Cancer Care West is through a regular monthly donation. This type of giving is of great importance to us as it allows us to make longer-term plans to support cancer patients as we know there's a reliable source of income to count on. These monthly contributions can be as big or small as you like. To sign up and become a friend of Cancer Care West please visit [www.cancercarewest.ie](http://www.cancercarewest.ie)

If you would like to support the fundraising efforts of Cancer Care West our Fundraising team will be happy to advise and assist you. Please contact our team at **091 545000** or visit us on [www.cancercarewest.ie](http://www.cancercarewest.ie)

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