

Niamh does the May 50K for MS

AN INISHOWEN woman who suffers from multiple sclerosis has walked at least 50 kilometres this month to raise awareness of the disease.

SHANE SCARRY

Niamh McCarron, (pictured right) from Clonmany, has been living with multiple sclerosis (MS) for more than a decade.

Niamh, who now lives in Dublin, was diagnosed with MS in July 2010, three months before her 30th birthday, although she believes that she had it for quite a while before then.

"When I was diagnosed, I lost power in my right arm mainly but had other things as well," she said. "I lost feeling and had numbness in my arm, through an MRI scan I was found to have lesions on the brain which highlights MS."

Niamh took part in the May 50K, where she walked 50 kilometres this month in return for sponsorship.

The event is a global fitness and fundraising challenge to raise money for MS research worldwide and also support MS Ireland projects and services, and is timed to coincide with World MS Day, which falls today, Tuesday.

"You can do a cycle or swim instead, which is good for you anyway, and it's raising funds for some research," Niamh says.

Niamh visits home often but has to be careful not to take too much out of

herself. "I have to be a little bit careful cause fatigue is one of my symptoms," she says. "Obviously the travelling up and down would wipe me out more, but I'd be home regularly because my parents and most of my family are still up in Inishowen.

"This year I was planning on doing the Ballyliffin coastal challenge at Easter as a kind of warm up for the 50K in May

"But I wasn't well enough on the day to do Ballyliffin – I had a built up of fatigue and I knew if I did that walk it would knock me out for the next week.

"I do have to be mindful of that and I haven't done the 50K in Donegal as I usually do a bit after work down here in Dublin.

Supports

THERE ARE over 9,000 people in Ireland living with multiple sclerosis who need varying level of supports. A total of 30% of all funds raised from events like the May 50K go towards funding life-changing MS research and 70% goes to local services and supports.

Niamh reveals how MS Ireland has been a huge support over the years and she's now keen to repay that kindness by participating in the May 50K.

"There is an MS regional office in Ballybofey now and when I was living at home they sent one of their team out

to meet me at the house, to go through stuff with me and help me navigate the things I'm meant to be doing.

"There is also a MS voluntary branch in Donegal which do events and raise awareness."

There are only two community neurorehabilitation teams in Ireland, despite nine teams being required. The Northwest is one of the two that has been set up with the other being Limerick. "It is actually a surprise that there is stuff up at home that we don't have access here," Niamh notes, a rare example of services being better up there than in the capital.

Currently, Niamh attends the MS clinic at St Vincent's Hospital in Dublin, but while living at home she travelled to the clinic in Sligo as Letterkenny didn't have the option at the time. "Where I'm living in Dublin everything is closer to me and easier to get to, but the journey from Clonmany to Sligo was a trek."

Niamh hopes talking about her condition will be beneficial for other people as she feels sometimes when you see or read things about MS it can be very negative.

"I volunteered with MS Ireland not long after I got diagnosed they set up a blogging group and that is when I started writing for them," she recalled. "With where I was living, I didn't know anyone else with MS in my immediate area of Clonmany at the time.

"It gave me an outlet to meet people



my own age group because it tended to be older people who had it."

Niamh is quick to praise her family for the support they've been to her but she knows it can be tough on them too.

"They leave me to it and get on with things, but they'd be quick enough as well – if I need a kick in the ass they would give you one, they won't let me

mope too much," she laughed.

"But they're fantastic. It's easier for me having it than watching someone in the family having it.

"They don't know how to help, because other than being supportive there is nothing they can do to help." ■

www.MS-society.ie



■ Rose Ann Mc Kinney (Fullerton) with Gerry Adams at the Eddie Fullerton book launch in the Lake of Shadows. For more photos from the launch see pages 2&23.

iCare fundraiser at North Pole Bar on Sunday

NWCD TO HOLD CHARITY CONCERT FOR LOCAL AUTISM CHARITY

NORTHWEST COMMUNITY Development group is holding a family fun day this Sunday, 4 June, at the North Pole Bar in Drumfries to raise funds for local autism support charity ICARE.

The event gets under way in the North Pole Bar from 3pm with Martin Cuffe headlining and the day of music, song and craic will also feature AJ Country, Bernard Doherty and Joe Meenan. Admission is free. Donations are welcome with all proceeds going to ICARE.

"The fundraising is all needed, and we're very grateful to the Northwest Community Development group for supporting ICARE with this fun family event," ICARE chairperson Doreen Friel said.

"We get a limited amount of funding for children's services from the HSE, and yet demand for support is ever increasing. "Most concerning are

the difficulties parents are experiencing in getting an autism diagnosis and then accessing the appropriate services.

"Increasingly, families are struggling to know where their child can access the service they need.

"Waiting lists are one thing, but clear signposting is another. Parents who are already overwhelmed are encountering a situation where they face a battle to know where to turn to access what their child needs.

"This lack of access to appropriate services puts added pressure on ICARE

"We continue to do what we can to support families and couldn't do so without ongoing fundraising by the community.

"We would encourage everyone to come out to The North Pole bar on Sunday 4 June to support the Northwest Community Development

Group in their efforts to support iCARE."

NWCD's work

THE NORTHWEST Community Development (NWCD) group is primarily involved in the developing walking and cycling trails around Inishowen. Through its efforts, more than 40km of trails have already been developed with another 10km expected to come on stream before the summer is out.

Many of the routes, such from Mamore Gap to Drumfries and at Cruckahenny between the Illies and Quigley's Point, follow old bog roads that have long fallen into disuse.

"We have got great support from local landowners and indeed council roads engineers in bringing these trails back into use," Kevin Doherty, chair of the NWCD group said.

"First and foremost, these will be used by the local community, but there's also great potential to attract visitors to Inishowen and generate income for the local economy."

The NWCD also involves itself in fundraising activities to support local charities.

Last summer, it raised over €5,000 for the Cashel na Cor centre when Seamus Moore performed in the North Pole Bar, and in October Patsy O'Hagan was the attraction in a fundraiser from the local Drumfries National School.

"This year, we've chosen to support iCare as we're always looking to give back to the community," Mr Doherty said.

"We had a fantastic day last summer, and the generosity of the people was outstanding," he concluded, "and are hoping for a good turnout – and kind weather again – this year." ■