

Cork woman Emma helping to redefine the 'face of MS'

CONCUBHAR ÓLIATHÁIN

PROUD Cork woman Emma Valentine, who is living with multiple sclerosis since 2011, has been chosen as one of the "faces" for MS Ireland's World MS Day campaign this week.

The theme of the "Faces of MS" exhibition, featuring Emma Valentine from Cork in partnership with **Novartis**, is to highlight and challenge the perceptions of what people living with MS look like and are capable of.

MS Ireland is commemorating World MS Day with an exhibition of portraits of eight members of the MS community as part of MS Ireland's schedule of events marking the international MS awareness week all over Ireland.

The aim of the exhibition is to showcase a range of experiences so people will better understand that MS is a very individual condition. Multiple Sclerosis is different for each person impacted by it. They experience different symptoms, with different degrees of severity for different amounts of time. There is no one way to 'have' MS, there is no one way to live with MS.

"I was diagnosed with Multiple Sclerosis in September 2011, not long after going to the doctor with a collection of weird and wonderful symptoms I could no longer explain away," said Emma.

"I am 36 years old and live in Cork, in the town I grew up in, in the estate I grew up in with my husband Matt and our almost-nine-year-old daughter Rowan.

"I spent two years as a stay-at-home parent after leaving my job in corporate America and now I work as a "rúnaí scoile" (school secretary) at the Gaelscoil my daughter attends and so am currently re-learning all the Irish I knew at school and forgot.

"I knew very little about MS before experiencing it myself, but looking back, I had symptoms for a long time.

"Since diagnosis, I have been relatively lucky, symptom wise, my MS rarely impacts on my ability to live my ordinary, normal, chaotic yet boring life.

Ava Battles, Chief Executive of MS

Ireland said there was no singular experience of MS and that the society wanted to challenge misconceptions about the condition on this World MS Day by redefining the face of Multiple Sclerosis.

"The journey is unique to each individual," she said.

"We want to redefine the "face of MS" in public perception by shining a spotlight on the full and varied lives of those who live with it."

Caitriona Walsh, Managing Director Novartis Ireland said that this year's World MS Day 2023 was particularly significant

"It marks almost thirty years of scientific developments and progress in the field of MS in Ireland.

"Over the past three decades thousands of people's lives have been impacted by the developments in treatments, therapies and groundbreaking research and development that have changed the face of MS.

"At Novartis we are dedicated to harnessing the power of scientific research and development to ensure that the progress continues for many years to come and that we continue to support people living with MS in Ireland and worldwide."

MS Ireland is holding events and activities to raise awareness on World MS Day through its great network of local branches and regional offices throughout Ireland with all details of the events to be found on their dedicated webpage.