

BE INSPIRED!

Supporter Newsletter



**STILL CARING
THROUGH COVID**

**NICHS helped me cope with virus
Our "lifeline" of support
Step by Step to a new you**

*Chest
Heart &
Stroke*

Cover image: Ulster Rugby star and NICHs ambassador Craig Gilroy taking part in our Skip to the Beat challenge in partnership with Mace. See later in this issue for details of the 2021 event.



Welcome

I'm Declan Cunnane and I'm Chief Executive of Northern Ireland Chest Heart & Stroke. I'm writing this message because 2020 was perhaps our hardest year on record. As a result of the coronavirus crisis, our donations plummeted. Given the economic effects of the crisis, that's understandable. But thousands of people across Northern Ireland are still depending on our support. The need for our services hasn't diminished. In fact, it has become greater. As you'll read in the following pages, we are now offering support to COVID survivors – the only service of its kind in Northern Ireland.

As our logo says, we're on your side. That's why I'm appealing to you to be on our side in 2021. Please take part in a fundraising event, organise your own, or just go to our website (address below) to make a donation.

Almost 90%

of the income needed to fund our care and prevention services comes from public donations.

We need your support more than ever.

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For Supporter Care queries and feedback, or to update your personal information, please call us on **028 9026 6709** or supportercare@nichs.org.uk



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We invest in people Silver



Packed Agenda for 2021

We have ambitious plans for the coming year – but we need your help to achieve them.

For starters, we have our Step by Step campaign, designed to encourage everyone to lead a healthy life and avoid chest, heart and stroke illnesses – despite the restrictions imposed to control coronavirus. It's also designed to help people already affected by those conditions to regain a normal life, little by little.

We're here to offer support to people hit by COVID, through our innovative COVID Recovery Service, currently being piloted. And we'll continue to build on the success of

our virtual services, introduced because of social distancing, for as long as it takes until our face-to-face services get back to normal.

We'll be investing in lifesaving and life changing research, of course. And we'll be keeping the pressure on government to reduce waiting lists for treatment and to invest more in prevention of avoidable illness.

We can't do any of this without your support. Why not join Graham Ross (pictured with his wife Kerry and daughter Eva) in our annual Red Dress Run? Graham already has four Red Dress Runs under his belt! Or tackle the 2021 Belfast City Marathon?

We've also got Skip to the Beat, which you can read more about later in this magazine – or why not set up your own fundraising event? We'll give you all the help you need. Just visit our website www.nichs.org.uk for more information.

Together, we can tackle the illnesses that claim 16 lives every day in Northern Ireland.*



*Figure from
Registrar General
Annual Report 2018

Making a Difference

– Despite Difficulties

When you donate money to us, we believe it's only fair that you should know where that money goes, and what impact it's having. Every six months, we assess how we're doing.

In the last six-month period for which we have compiled figures (April – September 2020) we were hit hard by the coronavirus crisis. Donations fell dramatically and we had to stop face-to-face support. But we adapted and began delivering our services remotely, by phone and online. It turned out to be a lifeline for many, who found themselves isolated and anxious during lockdown.

Even though our income was down, we felt we needed to provide support for people who were recovering from COVID. That's why we started our COVID Recovery Service. Until September, the first phase of the service had supported 12 people. All said it enabled them to deal better with the anxiety their condition caused.

In those six months, we made more than 21,500 support calls to people with chest, heart or stroke illnesses. In total, we provided more than

152,000 minutes of support to just over 2,000 people.

In feedback, we scored top marks. 95% of people felt less anxious or lonely, while 98% felt we were there when they needed us most.

Those are the statistics. But there are some dramatic human stories behind the figures, which you can read in this issue of Be Inspired!

There's the story of Saskia Mulder, a nurse from Magherafelt, who suffers from Long COVID and tells how she used to wake up in fear that the illness was going to kill her.

And there's Ivan Black's story. Ivan, who has a serious lung condition, felt himself deteriorate during lockdown because he wasn't able to take his usual outdoor exercise.

In both these cases, we made a real difference – thanks to your support. We couldn't do what we do without the generosity of the people of Northern Ireland.

It's more important than ever that we see that generosity continue. Later in the magazine, you can find out how you can support us in a fundraising event – or even devise your own.

Our Impact April-September 2020

Care services

Telephone support service



21,543
SUPPORT CALLS



152,512
MINUTES OF
SUPPORT



2,073
PEOPLE
SUPPORTED

94%
RATED THE
SERVICE
PROVIDED AS
"EXCELLENT"

HOW WE MADE A DIFFERENCE:



Covid Recovery Service



12
PEOPLE SUPPORTED
(in first phase)

100%
RATED THE SERVICE
AS "EXCELLENT"

HOW WE MADE A DIFFERENCE:



Prevention services

Work Well Live Well

127 WORKPLACES SIGNED
UP TO THE MENTAL HEALTH
CHARTER

20 WEBINARS DELIVERED
TO WORKPLACES; 234 PEOPLE
TRAINED

Well Space

608 INFO PACKS/
RESOURCES SENT TO
HOSTELS

114 TELEPHONE
SUPPORT SESSIONS

Well Schools

60 SCHOOLS RECEIVED
"CHESTER" HEALTHY LIVING
RESOURCES

13 FAMILY HOSTELS
RECEIVED "CHESTER"
RESOURCES



Still caring through COVID Ivan's Story

Ivan Black and his wife Margaret were largely cut off from the outside world when coronavirus hit in 2020. But remote support from NICHS has eased their isolation.

Because of Ivan's serious respiratory condition, he has been fearful of leaving the house. Friends and family have been afraid to visit in case they bring the virus with them. The result has been that his health has suffered.

He says: "Due to my condition, my muscles can deteriorate quickly, and I have gone from being able to walk around the Stormont Estate to being lucky to walk to the garden gate.

"Living in fear is no way to live, but we understand that we live in

extraordinary times and there are so many more people like me who are trapped in their house, feeling lonely and isolated and scared to go out.

"But the pandemic has shown us the important role of the community and the kindness of local people. When we received a call from Gemma at NICHS we thought it was great that despite the loss of the local group, we had a friendly voice at the end of a phone that would talk to us and make sure we had information and support.

"Having that local support there at the end of a phone is so important and it's helped me to keep fighting."

My COVID Nightmare

COVID survivor Saskia Mulder credits our ground-breaking recovery service for helping her break out of a cycle of fear and isolation caused by the virus.

Psychiatric nurse Saskia (40) from Magherafelt, is still plagued by breathing difficulties and fatigue 10 months after contracting the virus. But she says the NICHS COVID Recovery Service – the only one of its kind in Northern Ireland – helped her take control of her illness at a time when she thought she was going to "lose her mind."

"I had an awful fear of death," she said, "and I was crying like a child. I live on my own and I woke up many nights wondering if I needed to call 999. One day during the summer, my GP rang me after I'd mentioned my breathing difficulties and suggested that I refer myself to NI Chest Heart & Stroke's new service.

"The first time I took part in a Zoom meeting with others living with COVID, people were breaking down in tears because it was their first opportunity to get real support."

The COVID Recovery Service was established by NI Chest Heart & Stroke in July. It offers support with breathing, fatigue, anxiety and isolation, and sleep patterns.

We have continued to run other online services for people with chest, heart and stroke illnesses throughout the COVID emergency, despite a huge drop in donations. Our 'Still Caring Through

COVID' campaign, supported by MACE aims to inspire hope and encourage local people to support the charity in any way they can.

Saskia said: "The COVID Recovery Service came along at just the right time for me. I was so overwhelmed by the illness and symptoms that were forever changing. But thanks to NI Chest Heart and Stroke I've learned how to manage my symptoms without panicking, as well as setting targets to achieve my long-term health goals."



I thought I would lose my mind



Celebrating our supporters – Corporate



The Skip to the Beat Challenge, developed by MACE to help put the heartbeat back into local communities, was a roaring success in 2020.

Now, we want to make it even bigger in summer 2021.

The fundraising campaign – fronted by Ulster and Ireland rugby star Craig Gilroy – is a chance to get fit while making a real difference to the lives of people with chest, heart or stroke illnesses.

To find out how your organisation, company or

school can get involved, email corporate@nichs.org.uk

You can even do it solo, or with friends and family. Skip to your favourite song or piece of music. Registration is only £10 and includes a free MACE and NICHs branded skipping rope.

Keep an eye out for more details closer to the time. Or you can register early at <https://nichs.org.uk/skiptothebeat> and we'll send you a fundraising pack.

However you plan to take part, have fun!

Our Link-Up with Mace Is Ace!

MACE

Our partnership with MACE is now entering its sixth year – and what a time it has been!

Not only have the company and its staff raised more than £250,000 for our vital work, but they have also provided their unwavering support to NICHs throughout the COVID pandemic.

As well as providing a vital lifeline to local communities during lockdowns, they have put huge effort and financial support behind

our fundraising initiatives – hug tokens for families who couldn't get together last year, reindeer food and Christmas tree decorations for the festive period, sponsorship of our flagship event the Red Dress Run, and sponsorship of our Still Caring Through COVID campaign.

We thank everyone from our favourite convenience retailer and look forward to another successful year in partnership.



ASM Accountants' Efforts Add Up!

The COVID crisis, lockdown and a home-based workforce have not stopped our corporate partner ASM Accountants raising money in the past year. Far from it!

The company and its staff organised a virtual trip along the Wild Atlantic Way, with employees completing walks, runs and cycles in their local area to cover the journey, uploading photographs and videos of their progress. Having completed the 2,600km in less than two weeks, they decided to tackle the return trip – a staggering overall total of 5,200km.

Other fundraising efforts in the past year included a twilight abseil at Belfast Castle.

Thank you to everyone who took part – you've certainly helped us balance our books!

Still caring through COVID Support Helped Magi Survive Isolation



Magi Hogg, from Glengormley, says she "went on a bit of a downer" when she was told she was one of those who would have to stay indoors for 12

weeks when the first coronavirus lockdown came into effect last year.

Magi, who lives alone, has bronchiectasis, which leaves her prone to chest infections and pneumonia.

But a weekly call from NI Chest Heart & Stroke's respiratory support service helped her get back on track. Within a short time, she was doing 3km a day on her treadmill, which lifted her mood and enabled her to see things differently.

"When I first received the shielding letter, I was devastated at the idea of not being able to go outside for three months. But Kerry from NI Chest Heart & Stroke encouraged me to get back on the treadmill and to think more positively. I started to think about the health workers and what they had to face," she said. "I was being asked to do nothing except

stay in a comfortable house. I knew then that I could cope."

Three of Magi's four children live in England. One son still lives in Northern Ireland but had to stay at the end of the garden when he came to visit. Friends placed groceries on the doorstep and then left.

That prompted Magi to have a chair set up at her gate for visitors to sit in. She was then able to hold socially distanced conversations. Other people left flowers or gifts. The chair even had its moment of fame on Facebook as Magi posted pictures of people sitting in it.

Magi said of her time isolating alone: "I've been very lucky to have a strong support network around me, including NI Chest Heart & Stroke."



How You Can Leave a Lasting Legacy

Would you be surprised to hear that four out of five people in Northern Ireland have not made a Will? In fact, we have one of the highest rates in the UK of people dying without having left one. There are many reasons we put off this important task. "I'm too young, it can wait until I'm older; "I don't want to think about dying"; "Everything will go to my partner/children anyway"; or "It's too expensive."

Without a Will, the state decides how your estate will be distributed. Very few people want that. Making your Will is usually straightforward and provides peace of mind for you and your loved ones.

As a member of Will to Give - a group of over 60 local charities that encourage Will-writing and charitable gifts in Wills - NICHs enables you to make a Will online at no cost. Anyone over the age of 18 can have one written for free with our Will-writing partner, Bequeathed. This free service should be sufficient for most

simple Wills, but if you need more detailed legal advice, Bequeathed provides options to access support through local law firm Cleaver Fulton Rankin.

Gifts in Wills are a huge part of our income and we rely on them to fund many aspects of our work. Without them, many of the services we provide and the research we fund simply wouldn't exist. There is no obligation to include a gift to NICHs, but many people like to. Whether or not you leave us a gift, making your Will is still free of charge.

It's a way to leave your lasting legacy, changing other people's lives for the better.

If you would like further information on leaving a gift in your Will to NICHs, or would like to access Bequeathed, please go to our website at <https://nichs.org.uk/how-you-can-help/gifts-in-wills>

Alternatively, please call Alison Vidamour on **07854 643266** or by email - avidamour@nichs.org.uk



TOP of the World!



Damien Hillen (Saval)

Damien Hillen had a personal mountain to climb while recovering from major heart surgery.

But a year later – in the middle of the coronavirus lockdown – he scaled the equivalent of the tallest peak in the world, five steps at a time, to raise money for NI Chest Heart & Stroke.

Damien completed his Everest Challenge – all 116,096 steps of it – in his back garden.

To show support, members of Saval Gaelic Athletic Club, where Damien is a coach, took to the roads near their homes. By adding all their steps together, they managed to circumnavigate the globe.

Damien said: "I've had some complications since undergoing surgery for an aortic aneurysm and to fit a mechanical valve to my heart, so I've been setting myself challenges for my physical and mental health. When lockdown came, I had the idea

of climbing Everest using the five steps in the garden. My father has taken part in a great rehabilitation and support programme operated by NI Chest Heart & Stroke since suffering a stroke three years ago, so I decided to raise money for the charity. Other members of the club, led by Jimmy McAloon, decided to support me and boost their own mental health, and it just snowballed from there."

Damien raised more than £12,000 for NI Chest Heart & Stroke and for the development of Saval's community walkway.

Marianne Beggs, NI Chest Heart & Stroke's Community Fundraising Manager, said: "We're delighted that Damien chose us to benefit from his superb fundraising event. It's a perfect illustration of how imagination and effort can help us change people's lives for the better."

Celebrating our supporters - Community

Gael Force Fundraising!

Kilrea Gaelic Athletic Club knocked it out of the park when they took part in a 1,000km running and walking challenge to raise money for us.

In 24 hours, members, family and friends clocked up a staggering 4,369km and collected an incredible £25,000.

In total, 558 people were involved, including members from as far away as London, New York, Canada and

Australia. The event was in memory of club coach Brian Calvert and prominent club member Tommy Donaghy.

Our Deputy Chief Executive, Gareth McGleenon, who took part, said: "This was an astounding fundraising event. On behalf of the people who will benefit, and everyone at NI Chest Heart & Stroke, I'd like to say a massive thank you."

Hero Graham Runs for Life

Firefighter Graham Ross is dressing as superhero The Flash to take part in this year's Red Dress Run with his wife Kerry and young daughter Eva.

Graham is a bit of a superhero himself when it comes to fundraising – this is his fifth Red Dress event. He also has two full marathons and a multitude of half marathons under his belt. The 39-year-old Watch Commander at Whitehead Fire Station does it in memory of his father, who lost his life to stroke in 2016.

"I run to remember my dad and also for my little daughter, Eva. Being fit and healthy for my family means everything to me. I'm also

passionate about helping people with chest, heart and stroke conditions across Northern Ireland to rebuild their lives."

Why not follow Graham's lead, by taking part in one of our fundraising events in 2021? Find out more on our website www.nichs.org.uk



Regular giving

One of the most valuable things you can do for a charity is to set up a regular monthly gift. It doesn't have to be large – every pound helps.

But why is a regular donation so important to us?

Quite simply, it allows us to plan ahead in providing services to change people's lives for the better.

We wouldn't have been able to consider setting up a COVID Recovery Service at short notice if it hadn't been for the 2,600 people who already give regularly to us. And we wouldn't have been able to adapt our services to cope with a world that changed out of all recognition in 2020.

But don't take our word for it.

Alison McElveen suffered a stroke at the age of 55. She says: "Until my stroke happened, I was Vice Principal of a school for young people in secure accommodation. I went from playing a valuable role in society to feeling useless and discarded. I felt as if I was in a tunnel with no escape. My friends gradually stopped making contact and I was left in that tunnel alone and isolated."

"Then NI Chest Heart & Stroke made contact. They are the people who have been of most benefit to me in rebuilding my life. Recovering from stroke is a long series of small victories. Chest Heart & Stroke have been there for me throughout. I've made new friends and I've been able to set goals and achieve them."

"If telling my story helps other people to benefit from the same support, I will have given something back in exchange for what it has given me."

Setting up your regular gift is easy!

All you need to do is complete a direct debit form to allow us to collect a regular amount from your bank account. You choose how much you would like to give for as long as you wish and can cancel at any time.

Complete a direct debit form online at <https://nichs.org.uk/make-a-donation> then select "regular gift." Or you can set up your Direct Debit by phone on the number below.

If you need any help or advice, call our friendly team on **028 90 266 6743**, or email supportercare@nichs.org.uk

Your legacy of hope and care - a gift in your Will.

A gift in your Will could not only help your loved ones but can leave a legacy of hope for generations to come.

In Northern Ireland four in ten adult deaths are caused by chest, heart and stroke illnesses. We're working hard to change this by funding life-changing research and caring for those who are affected by devastating health conditions every day.

We've been helping local people for almost 75 years, and with your help we can continue to be there for people who need us now, as well as those who will need us in the future.

Please visit nichs.org.uk/giftsinwills for further information on leaving a gift in your Will to NICHs or call us on 028 9032 0184.



**Preventing, Supporting,
Caring and Rebuilding
across Northern Ireland.**

**Chest
Heart &
Stroke**



STEP by STEP

**We will help get you
back on your feet.**

Re-building Lives across
Northern Ireland.

Find out more at www.nichs.org.uk

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