

BE INSPIRED!

Supporter Newsletter



**SPECIAL
HEART EDITION!**

**Meet our local Heart Heroes!
Our 'Eye as a Window' Research
Red Dress Run 2019**

*Chest
Heart &
Stroke*

Cover image: some of our local Heart Heroes assembled for the launch of our Heart Strong campaign.

Welcome

To the latest edition of our supporter newsletter.

We are the leading local health charity dedicated to the fight against chest, heart and stroke illnesses in Northern Ireland.

We're delighted to have the opportunity to update you on the work we do every day to bring our vision and values to life, on behalf of you, our amazing supporters.

Without your support, we couldn't be here making a difference.

Thank you.

The NI Chest Heart and Stroke Team

For queries, to update your personal information or to give feedback, please contact our **Supporter Care Team** on **028 9026 6709** or **supportercare@nichs.org.uk**

Over 80%

of our work relies on donations from the public.

Without your support we couldn't be here making a difference.

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6 Months in Figures

We need £3.5 million each year to fund our care, prevention, research and campaigning work. A huge thank you to everyone who supports us by donating, fundraising and volunteering. Without your support, we couldn't be here making a difference.

Here's how you have helped during the first half of 2019.

Health Promotion

6,141



Well Checks
delivered
across
Northern
Ireland

3,697

referrals were made to GPs as a result of our health checks

1,240

pupils received our health talks and programmes in schools

329

people benefited from our Health and Homeless service

Care Services

686

families were helped by our Stroke Family Support service

500

people were supported each week at our stroke groups

587

people attended our Breathing Better service

160

people attended our Taking Control Self-Management programme

18

carers attended our new Taking Care programme

Research



17

Ongoing projects



7

Respiratory projects



6

Cardiac projects



4

Stroke projects

Volunteers

365

volunteers helped us carry out our work

Fundraising

£2.282 m

raised in the first half of the year

Our Heart Strong Campaign

Heart disease is one of the biggest killers in Northern Ireland and has touched the lives of most of us in some way or another, with many of us having lost a loved one to the disease.

Many thousands are living with heart conditions across the country. This can have a huge impact on their life and health.

We understand the devastating impact that heart illness has on thousands of lives here. We only need look at the numbers to understand why it's so important for us to continue our fight against heart disease in Northern Ireland.

That's why we launched our **Heart Strong Campaign** at the end of October 2019, aiming to raise **£500,000** to fund two vital Heart Projects:

- Funding local ground-breaking Heart Research which aims to develop a simple eye test that can detect very early signs of heart disease.
- Developing our new Heart Strong pilot programme, a Heart Health and Recovery programme designed to improve the quality of life of people living with heart disease.

Heart Disease in Numbers

In Northern Ireland every day:

- **17** people have a heart attack
- **4** people die of heart disease
- **74,000** people are living with heart disease

One in ten people here die from heart disease.

How Can You Help?

If you'd like to get behind our heart strong campaign by making a donation or fundraising for us:

- Go to **www.nichs.org.uk/localhearts** or call **028 9032 0184** to find out more about the campaign.
- Text LOCAL HEARTS to 70085 to give £5.
- Follow us on social media to see all our latest fundraising updates first.



Meet Our Local Heart Heroes

We've brought together a team of local heart heroes who come from all walks of life; from those who are living with or have lost a loved one to heart disease, to those who simply want to join the fight. Their stories show just some of the ways local lives could benefit from our early-detection research and dedicated Heart Strong service.

1 Billy Doherty, member of rock band The Undertones, suffered a cardiac arrest.

2 Dr. Aaron Peace, lead cardiologist for the Western Trust, helped to treat Billy. Dr. Peace has seen a rise in the number of cardiology patients over the years and believes our work can help to tackle this.

3 Aly Harte, an artist, tragically lost her father to cardiomyopathy, a disease of the heart, and five years ago, Aly was diagnosed with the same condition.

4 Joe Degnan, aged six, was born with congenital heart disease and had to have heart surgery at just 6 days old.

5 Séan Patterson lost his beloved wife to a heart attack and was later diagnosed with heart failure himself.

6 Cathy McMullan received an NICHs health check at her work, which flagged up a problem. After

visiting her GP, she was told she had suffered a silent heart attack.

7 Ashleen Poland works at JMK Crash, one of our valued corporate partners, who are living out their corporate values by supporting our heart campaign.

8 Rowley Davidson was diagnosed with heart failure two years ago and struggled to see any future ahead of him until he received support from us.

9 Chloe Shaw and her aunt **Louise McGreevy** lost their beloved mum and sister Veronica to a cardiac arrest.

10 Dr. Carol Wilson, a Consultant Cardiologist and a member of our board, is dedicated to improving outcomes those living with heart conditions.

To watch our heart heroes telling their stories, go to www.nichs.org.uk/heartheheroes





Introducing... Our new Heart Strong Programme

Heart Strong is our new Heart Health and Recovery programme, being piloted this year. The programme aims to support people living with heart conditions to grow stronger, increase their fitness levels and build their confidence and self-belief.

Patrick Anderson (pictured above), our Head of Heart Services, has been working closely with heart patients, carers and health professionals to develop the programme and to ensure it meets the needs of real people living with heart conditions here in Northern Ireland.

Here, we've caught up with Patrick about the programme.

Patrick, why do you believe the Heart Strong programme is so needed?

Being diagnosed with a heart condition like heart failure or experiencing an event like a heart attack can have a huge impact on a person's wellbeing. Once they have completed the cardiac rehab provided by their local hospital's team, they may feel worried about leaving behind that support. We have identified the need to create a service which supports them in the longer term to continue to rebuild their life and confidence, and start thriving again

How will the Heart Strong programme aim to help?

Many people can get trapped in a cycle of negative thinking following their diagnosis. They may start to **think**, 'I can't do the things I used to do any more', which may make them **feel** anxious, worried, depressed and scared. These thoughts and feelings may affect how they **behave**: spending more time alone, not exercising, not sleeping, perhaps drinking or smoking more to cope. All of this leads to physical feelings of tiredness, weight gain and fatigue, and ultimately, worsened heart health. The Heart Strong programme aims to help them break free from this vicious cycle.

What will the programme involve?

The initial pilot will be 12 weeks with three phases. The first phase is **Head Strong**, which will focus on dealing with negative thoughts about living with a heart condition and exercise.

Then they will move on to **Heart**

Strong. This is a physical activity programme designed to build on the Cardiac Rehab delivered by the local hospital's cardiac rehab team. This will give participants an opportunity to exercise in a group with others of a similar ability at a level that's right for them.

Once participants complete their 12 weeks, they will have the option to continue with **Stay Strong**, a longer term maintenance programme that will provide guided and supervised exercise, tailored for those living with a heart condition.

What are your hopes for the service in the future?

Currently, in some areas there are follow-on programmes available to those who have completed cardiac rehab, to provide them with support for a little bit longer. However, these services aren't available everywhere. My hope is that our Heart Strong service will help close the gaps and ensure this ongoing support is available everywhere to everyone who needs it. The initial pilot will take place in the South Eastern Trust area, but in the future, we hope to roll it out right across Northern Ireland.

We aim to provide an encouraging environment for people living with heart disease and their loved ones, where they can feel supported to reach beyond their current abilities. Whether your aim is to be able to walk to the shop or go for a coffee on your own; or to do something you never thought you were capable of, like climbing a mountain, we want to help you reach that goal through Heart Strong. Most of all, we aim for it feel like a welcoming family, offering support, knowledge, positivity, energy, and fun.

'The Eye as a Window to the Heart' Research

Imagine if you could find out your risk of developing heart disease simply by taking an eye test in your local opticians? We might not have to imagine for long - as ground-breaking local research we are funding aims to make this a reality.

Assessing a person's heart health often involves invasive tests and high-tech scans. These require specialist heart clinicians and the use of expensive medical resources, which can be costly to the NHS.

Professor Tara Moore (pictured) and her team have been working to develop a new way of predicting our risk of heart disease, using the tiny blood vessels at the front of our eyes. This is the earliest place where problems to do with our heart and circulatory system can be seen. Back in 2015, we awarded an initial grant to her team to create a test which could look at these blood vessels. They found that this can be done very easily and cheaply - in fact, their technology is based on the camera from a mobile phone.

In 2018, we awarded further funding to the team to test the technology to see how reliably it can predict heart disease. They are doing this by comparing the blood vessels in the

Supported by

VALUE CABS



eyes of patients who have suffered heart attacks to those who have not, and so far, the results look promising.

Once the technology has been thoroughly trialled, the researchers hope to see it available in every High Street opticians, perhaps as soon as within the next 5 years. This new test could mean a much cheaper and easier way to monitor your heart health, which would be easily accessible to everyone.

Most importantly, this test could help detect much earlier if we are at risk of developing heart disease, or of having a heart attack or a stroke. This means that those at risk could receive treatment and support and make lifestyle changes sooner, to hopefully reduce their risk. Ultimately, this will mean more people surviving cardiovascular disease with a better quality of life, and fewer people becoming seriously ill in the first place.

We are investing **£250,000** into this project to make this simple eye test a reality.

Our valued corporate partner Value Cabs generously raised a fantastic **£125,000** towards this research.

We aim to raise the another **£125,000** through donations to our Heart Campaign.

Atrial Fibrillation: are you in the know?

Since launching our Atrial Fibrillation awareness campaign last year, awareness of the condition has risen from 30% to 37% across Northern Ireland.

Atrial Fibrillation, or AF, is one of the most common types of irregular heartbeat. It can also increase your risk of having a stroke by up to 5 times.

Our campaign used billboards, bus shelter ads, and posters in GP surgeries, pharmacies and libraries to raise awareness of this dangerous condition, and was kindly supported by our long-term corporate partner **Mace**.

However, while the results show that more people say they have heard of AF, many still don't understand that it can dramatically increase your risk of stroke.

Fidelma Carter, Director of Public Health at NICHHS says, "Strokes caused by AF are sometimes preventable. It's essential that anyone who has been diagnosed with AF makes sure they are receiving treatment and that they take any medication prescribed to them exactly as directed. This is vital to lower their risk of stroke."

Around **40,000** people in Northern Ireland are living with AF, and we believe that many more thousands may be undiagnosed.

Since January 2019, our health checks have included a simple 30 second finger touch test for AF. As a result, we have already referred over 100 people to their GP with suspected AF. This could have prevented as many as 4 strokes this year. That's four people and families saved from a possibly devastating stroke.

For more information on Atrial Fibrillation or our AF Campaign, go to www.nichs.org.uk/AF



**We have helped prevent
at least 4 strokes this year
through our AF checks**

Our Jolly Jump!

On the 25th of January, a bunch of our brave fundraisers will be taking on a huge challenge to raise funds to support our work, by jumping out of a plane at 13,000 feet in the air!



Brave Bronagh Donnelly

Here, we caught up with some of our thrill-seeking supporters to find out what inspired them to take a fall to fundraise for us...

Bronagh Donnelly, is jumping for her dad, Eammon.

“My daddy, Eammon, was diagnosed with COPD eight years ago. When I looked for support for him, NI Chest Heart and Stroke could not have done more. He attended a six week programme and it was a great help. He found it really reassuring to hear other’s stories about how they manage everyday life. It showed him he was not on his own.

He gained many new coping techniques which he now uses daily. He will be starting another rehabilitation programme very soon whenever he’s well enough. He fights so hard every day; he has recently been in and out of hospital with infections and has been started using oxygen at home. It’s

so good to know NICHs will be there waiting for him when he’s fit enough, to help make him as strong as possible again and to help make everyday life more manageable for him.

This charity is a lifeline for so many people and their families. Over 80 percent of the work they do relies on donations from the public. Which is why I decided to face my fear and take on the Jolly Jump from 13,000 feet! It means so much to me and will mean so much to my dad to be able to help NICHs with the funds we raise to continue to provide their services.

So when I jump, I am jumping for my amazing daddy - to show how proud I am of him and his ongoing battle with COPD.”

Staff from one of our charity partners, Lloyds Bank, are also taking on the Skydive.

“We’re really excited to take part in the Jolly Jump for NICHs and support local people affected by chest, heart and stroke illnesses. We are really enjoying the partnership and various activities and taking on the Jolly Jump has the added bonus of a very fun team building day!”

Amazing fundraisers from the local community like Bronagh and corporate partners like Lloyds are so important to us – without this support, we couldn’t be here making a difference.



Our brave Jolly Jumpers on a preparation day before their big jump in January.

If you’re interested in taking on a challenge to fundraise for us, either by yourself, with your family and friends or as a workplace, please get in touch!

Community Fundraising – please contact Conlraith Ni Raifeartaigh on 02890 266746 or email cniraifeartaigh@nichs.org.uk

Corporate Fundraising – please contact Steph Ellis on 028 902 66745 or email sellis@nichs.org.uk

Or visit www.nichs.org.uk/events



Our Annual Red Dress Run

Last September, our heart campaign kicked off with our annual flagship event, the **Red Dress Run**, supported by MACE, at Stormont Estate. Hundreds of men, women and children donning their best red outfits took part in the event. Participants came along to raise awareness and funds to support our heart campaign and the fight against heart disease in Northern Ireland. Everyone really got into the spirit of the day, dressing up in vibrant tutus, dresses and costumes, and with many wearing their 'heart on their sleeve' by proudly sporting the name of a loved one affected by heart disease.

Our compere for the day, Sarah Travers, was there to entertain the crowd before announcing the countdown and starting the race. Runners and walkers crossed the finish line with a sense of achievement and received a medal – and some even managed to catch a selfie with superhero 'The Flash', too!

Thanks to all the participants who took part, we raised an amazing £20,000!





Local Heroes taking on Belfast City Marathon 2020



Louise McGreevy and Chloe Shaw from Antrim are two of our brave local heart heroes who are backing our Heart Campaign this year. They got involved in fundraising for us after their lives were touched by heart disease.

Tragically last year, their beloved sister and mum Veronica suffered a cardiac arrest and passed away.

This year, they're both taking part in a relay team in the Belfast Marathon in memory of Veronica.

Louise says, "Since losing my sister, we have been involved with NICHS and have seen how vital their work is for those affected by a heart condition – whether personally or as the family of someone suffering or who has passed away. We can see clearly how another family like ours

would gain so much support from this charity during a difficult time, so now we feel inspired to help others going through a similar experience by running to remember Veronica and raising funds for NICHS."

This year's Belfast marathon is taking place on Sunday the 3rd of May. Why not join our 2020 team and be a local hero alongside others like Chloe and Louise in support of people living with chest, heart and stroke conditions?

Our friendly fundraising team are here to support you every hop, skip and step of the way, whether you set up a relay team or go it alone.

If you're interested in signing up, visit www.nichs.org.uk/belfastmarathon20 or email events@nichs.org.uk



Big Hearted local company Specialist Joinery Group gives back to their local community

Maghera company, Specialist Joinery Group, generously donated £10,000 to us earlier in 2019 to improve the health and wellbeing of their local community.

The family owned business is investing the funds into our Chester's Challenge schools programme to help educate local primary school children about the benefits of leading a healthy, active lifestyle. Thanks to the funds, we will also be able to launch our Post Rehabilitation Exercise Programme (PREP) into the Mid Ulster area, supporting those living with the devastating effects of stroke. This programme will commence in Moneymore in January 2020.

Company founder and Chairman, John O'Hagan, explained, "The health and well-being of our employees is core to our value system here at Specialist Joinery Group. The natural next step is to extend our concern

for health and well-being to the community in which our employees live.

"We are delighted to be working with Northern Ireland Chest Heart and Stroke to teach the young people of Mid Ulster about making healthy choices which will hopefully mean they have a reduced risk of chest, heart or stroke illness in the future. It is also very important to us to support those within our community who have become ill. PREP is a tried and tested programme and we are pleased to be able to provide this for local stroke survivors."

To find out more about our corporate partnerships, please call **028 902 66745** or email **corporate@nichs.org.uk**

For more information on our Chester's Challenge Schools Programme, call **028 9032 0184** or email **healthpromotion@nichs.org.uk**

The Power of

One



Did you know you can leave a gift in your Will to Northern Ireland Chest Heart & Stroke to support the services we provide or research we fund? Many people aren't aware that this is an option.

People in Northern Ireland are very generous and kind. Locally we have the highest rate of charitable giving in the UK with 79% of people here giving to a charity every year. However, we also have the lowest number of people writing a Will and therefore leaving a charitable gift in their Will.

A third of our annual income is from gifts left in Wills and they make a significant difference to the services we provide. Last year, for example, our Care Services Programmes helped 3,372 people living with a chest, heart, or stroke-related illness.

Recent statistics show that only one in four people in Northern Ireland have made a Will.

If an extra one per cent of Northern Ireland's population left just one per cent of their estate, it would equate to millions of pounds in vital income for local charities every year. It would

help transform our future services and the work we provide for people living with chest, heart or stroke conditions across the whole community for generations to come.

Today, we are all living longer, often with complex illnesses and with less 'traditional family' circumstances, so it is more important than ever to think about the future and what you want to happen when you die.

Making a Will is easy and usually not expensive; however, we urge people to seek legal advice to ensure everything is done correctly.

For further information on leaving a gift in your Will to NICHHS, please go to **www.nichs.org.uk/gifts-in-wills** or contact Alison Vidamour at avidamour@nichs.org.uk

over 80%

of our work relies on donations from the public.

Whether you have given the gift of your time and care through volunteering, got involved in a fundraiser or event, or made a donation towards our work, we would like to **Thank You** for your generosity.

Without your support we couldn't be here making a difference.

Help us lead the fight against chest, heart and stroke illnesses.

For more information about how you can support us, please get in touch.

Visit www.nichs.org.uk, email mail@nichs.org.uk or call **028 9032 0184**.

