

# Pulse

Issue 1 2025

**Remembering NICHHS supporter  
and friend Sean Patterson**

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**Top tips for a healthy heart**

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**Real life survivor and  
supporter stories**

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**Care Services Advisory  
Group - how we are  
working with people  
affected by chest, heart  
and stroke conditions  
to improve services**



Chest  
Heart &  
Stroke

# Survivor Story



## Alice Cinnamond STROKE

**Alice Cinnamond, from Belfast, had a sudden stroke at just 29 years old and she is sharing her story to raise awareness that stroke is not something that only affects older people, it can happen to anyone, at any age.**

Alice recalls, "It was a very normal day. When I came home from an evening out, I suddenly couldn't see properly. I thought I had something in my eye but it was late so I went to bed and hoped it would be better in the morning."

"The next morning, I felt exhausted, but I had a wedding to attend. I had a lovely day even though I still couldn't see properly and had a slight headache. I didn't think too much about that, I was more worried about my vision as it wasn't showing any signs of getting better."

"On the third day, I had an emergency appointment with an optician, and they then booked an appointment for me at the Eye Casualty clinic at the Royal Victoria Hospital in Belfast. The clinic is closed over the weekend, so I was going to have to wait until the Monday morning for that appointment, but I knew something wasn't right and I visited A&E on the Saturday. The A&E doctor couldn't find anything wrong, but I wasn't convinced so I went to the Eye Casualty clinic as planned on the Monday. There, I was checked, tested, and scanned as quickly as possible, and was then told I had suffered a stroke which was a complete shock."

"Overall, it took around five days for my stroke to be diagnosed. The diagnosis was a big surprise for me and even for some of the staff. The medical staff at the Royal Victoria Hospital were fantastic however and I can't thank the doctors and nurses enough."

**"I didn't know you could have a stroke in your twenties. I didn't really understand what a stroke was, how it happened, and what impact it might have on my future. It was all very worrying."**

Back at home Alice started her recovery journey, but the impact of the stroke was life changing. She explains, "Post stroke, my lifestyle completely changed. I was 29 years old, just recently married. I loved my job as a designer. I was working hard in my career, and I had just completed the Dublin Marathon two weeks before my stroke. I was the healthiest I have ever been. I was doing what the doctors always recommend - regular exercise, eating healthily, not smoking, and not drinking too much alcohol. After more investigation it was discovered that I have a Patent Foramen Ovale (PFO). This is a hole in the heart, and it is likely this caused my stroke."



**“After my stroke I suffered from very bad fatigue and vision issues. I have tried my best to be respectful of the recovery that my brain injury needs. Rest and sleep have been my top priorities. Some days were easier than others as I tried to get back to my normal schedule. Socialising and active days were very overstimulating and exhausting. It was important for me to rest. I was worried about not feeling normal again but after 11 months of recovery, I’m feeling grateful that I’m back living a full and youthful life.”**

“For my recovery I implemented small tasks each week. To help my eyesight I was advised to put my phone down and to pick up reading a book instead which I fell in love with. Keeping active is very important to me as it’s great for your body but also your mental health. I worked on my endurance again from short walks around the block to progressively longer walks. Then gently introducing 5km jogs and park runs back into my routine. I did have to balance it with rest days as stroke fatigue is very much a real thing. It’s no joke.”

“My stroke didn’t present with the most common symptoms such as facial drooping, arm weakness, and slurred speech difficulties. After my stroke, my ability to visually process information was impacted. It was difficult to see, and this affected my ability to do daily tasks like reading, watching TV, going to the shops, and crossing roads when I was out walking.”



“Throughout my recovery I have suffered from a lot of fatigue and migraines, and it impacted my day-to-day routine. However, I am feeling extremely positive as my vision is 99% back to normal and I am feeling less tired each day. I am confident I will make a full recovery as I’m mostly back to my usual self after 11 months.”

After returning home from hospital, Alice received a visit from Northern Ireland Chest Heart & Stroke as part of our Family Support service. Alice says, “The NICHs Care Services team were very positive and supportive of my recovery. They called me to check in and I attended one of their Young Stroke Support groups. It is reassuring talking to someone who understands what you are going through. To support the charity’s work my husband and I walked their Red Dress Fun Run event in February last year which was a great day out. I am taking part again this year and plan to run it this time!”

What advice would Alice share with others who are in a similar situation?

**“It is important to be kind and patient with yourself. This is easier said than done, some days will be tricky. You will see progress, but it takes time. It is important to have good friends and family who you can talk to. You are not alone in this. Reach out to NICHs to see which of their support services might be of benefit to you.”**

“Pre-stroke I completely undervalued the power of rest. Sleep is a magical healer for your brain, get as much of it as you can. You are not being lazy! You are actually being proactive and helping your recovery. Rest your eyes, lie down, take a 20-minute nap, whatever you can. It all helps!”

**For more information on NICHs stroke services, visit [nichs.org.uk/strokesupport](https://nichs.org.uk/strokesupport)**

**Chest  
Heart &  
Stroke**

# Supporters

## A TRIBUTE TO SEAN PATTERSON

**It was with a very heavy heart that in 2024 we said goodbye to a special supporter and great friend of NICHS, Sean Patterson.**



Sean, who was the co-founder and Chairperson of Dungannon Friends of NICHS, very sadly passed away in August from heart-related issues. From his family-run business in Dungannon, Ace Coaches, he dedicated over a decade to passionately fundraising to support not only our cause but also many other local charities and his local community.

Sean lost his beloved wife Geraldine to a heart attack in 2011 when she was just 54 years old and was inspired to start fundraising for our charity in her memory. A simple car boot sale back in 2013 soon grew over the years into a weekend festival, Hooley At The Lough, which has raised an outstanding amount of over £60,000 to support our work.

Sean spoke many times about his commitment to our cause, saying it was an honour to lend his support to NICHS and how he hoped that he had also encouraged others to join the fight against heart disease in Northern Ireland. He explained;



**We can see clearly how another family like ours would gain so much support from this organisation during a difficult time, so now we feel inspired to help others going through a similar experience by raising money and awareness for the charity. Although both mine and Geraldine's parents had heart problems, and we were aware of the genetic links, I never imagined that I would also then be diagnosed with heart failure. I think that every person, whether they have a family history or not, should get into the habit of having regular health checks. They are so important, and these last few years have really opened my eyes to that.**



Described as 'a mentor', 'a friend', 'a rock' and 'a father-like figure to all' who had time for everyone, Sean was very family-orientated and loved nothing more than spending time with his grandchildren and great-grandchildren. He was admired and respected by not only the local community in Dungannon but also throughout the Mid-Ulster, Armagh and Monaghan areas, and was well-known for his charity work for NICHS as well as Cancer Research, Kidney Research, First Responders, Eagles Special Olympics Club and many others.

The Annual Hooley At The Lough was a great source of pride for Sean as it brought many popular country music performers to the area who were only too willing to donate their time to help with his fundraising efforts. The festival also featured Sean's other great passion, a vintage and classic car run. Sean was instrumental in the formation of Dungannon Classic Car & Vehicle Club of which he was Chairperson. Other elements of the show include a strongman show, pipe bands, amusements and stalls, live animal farm, raffle and much more. A very special occasion for Sean was the day a defibrillator was installed at Ace Coaches for the benefit of the local community – one of his ambitions from all their fundraising efforts.



Sean will always be fondly remembered and greatly missed by all his friends at NICHS. His selfless legacy of wanting to give back and support others will live on long in the hearts of his family and friends who will be hosting one final Hooley on 11th May 2025 in his honour – The Last Dance For Sean.

**For more information on supporting or attending the Final Hooley At The Lough – In Memory of Sean, contact Ace Coaches on 028 8775 3535 or email [acecoaches@msn.com](mailto:acecoaches@msn.com)**





**Work Well Live Well is a free workplace health and wellbeing support programme delivered by NICHS and funded by the Public Health Agency (PHA). The aim of Work Well Live Well is to help local workplaces to improve the health and wellbeing of their employees through personalised support.**

In November 2024, our Work Well Live Well team held their annual Health Champion celebration event for Work Well Live Well workplaces at Titanic Belfast and it was an incredible success. Gilfresh Produce from Armagh, the CARD Group from Belfast, Beechvale Nursing Home from Newtownards, and the JAQ Group from Randalstown, were just some of the local organisations who attended in recognition of their commitment to workplace wellbeing.

The event kicked off with the R.H.U.B.A.R.B Ukes, a local ukulele band who kindly volunteered their musical talents for the event, welcoming guests with festive tunes. Declan Cunnane, NICHS Chief Executive, started proceedings with a presentation about the impact the Work Well Live Well programme has had over the last year. Gary Milligan from Fitness Belfast had everyone up on their feet, highlighting the importance of movement throughout the working day. Gary Gates from SPARK spoke about championing neurodiversity in the workplace and closing comments were made by Kevin McSorley from the Public Health Agency.

The Work Well Live Well team also facilitated a session for workplaces to learn from each other and inspire new ideas to keep momentum going in 2025. All workplaces were presented with their programme participation award, before having the opportunity to hear from other organisations, including Aware NI, Kith and Kin and Diabetes UK,

who showcased how they are supporting their workplace health and wellbeing action plans.

We were delighted to receive lots of wonderful feedback from the workplaces who attended the event, like the comments below. We are looking forward to another great year of the Work Well Live Well programme in 2025.



*“Thank you for such a lovely morning yesterday, it was brilliant! You all should be so proud; it is an amazing programme and yesterday was fabulous.”*

*“I wanted to email to say a huge thanks for yesterday's event. It was spectacular and such a treat to attend. The speakers, atmosphere, and awards were fantastic, and I know how much effort you must have had to go to, to organise it all.”*

**To find out more about Work Well Live Well, or to register your workplace, visit [nichs.org.uk/workwelllivewell](https://nichs.org.uk/workwelllivewell)**

# Supporters

## A SPECIAL THANK YOU

**Specialist Group's festive fundraising extravaganza, Project Santa, has raised an extraordinary amount of money for many good causes over the years. In 2024, NICHs was one of thirty local and UK-wide charities to benefit from the £250,000 raised, receiving an amazing £10,000. Representatives from each charity were invited to join employees at the Specialist Christmas lunch to receive their generous gifts in person.**



To date, Specialist Group, who are based in Maghera, have donated an incredible £44,600 to NICHs from the proceeds of Project Santa. This magical event includes a mulled wine reception with characters experience, a full entertainment programme, fairground attractions, a bouncy castle land, food village, Santa Claus, and the ever-popular raffle – the top prize of which is having your mortgage paid for a year!\*

Group Managing Director, Ciarán O'Hagan, commented; "At Specialist, supporting our community is a core value and something we're truly passionate about. The charities that benefit from our events are carefully chosen by our team, reflecting causes close to their hearts. We're proud to be in a position to make a meaningful impact across a wide range of sectors."

The continued support of Specialist Group is vital in helping us continue our work caring for local people impacted by chest, heart and stroke illnesses and we are very grateful for their support.

\*Up to a value of £12,000.

## EVERY LITTLE DONATION HELPED ON WORLD STROKE DAY

**World Stroke Day was recognised on 29th October 2024, and we were delighted to be able to spend the day collecting donations in 16 Tesco stores across Northern Ireland. Tesco customers and staff raised a fabulous £6,570 to support local people affected by stroke.**

Nadia Duncan, NICHs Donor Development Manager says; "We are extremely grateful to Tesco customers! Tesco's motto of 'every little helps' couldn't be truer, and this brilliant donation will really help make a difference in supporting our stroke rehab programmes in local communities here."

"On the day, our health promotion team also delivered free blood pressure checks to customers in Tesco's Lisburn and Ballymena stores. 1 in 2 heart attacks and strokes are linked to high blood pressure, but many people have no idea theirs is elevated as there are often no symptoms. At our checks, there were a few urgent GP referrals made."

Ian Danton, Tesco Enniskillen Store Manager and Community Champion, says; "At Tesco, we are incredibly proud of the generosity shown by our customers across Northern Ireland. This incredible effort truly demonstrates the power of community. We are delighted to work alongside NICHs and would like to thank everyone who helped make a real difference to support stroke survivors."

Last May, staff at Tesco Carrickfergus fundraised £4,721 in memory of their much-loved colleague Linda Owens by walking from Carrickfergus to Belfast and back. Two Christmas collections at Tesco contributed £1,335, bringing the grand Tesco 2024 fundraising total to an incredible £12,626. Thank you to everyone, customers and staff, who donated.







**Research is vital to the work we do and every year, we fund local universities to carry out world class chest, heart and stroke research. To help us pick the strongest applications, we have a committee of experienced researchers, clinicians, and people living with chest, heart and stroke conditions, known as the Scientific Research Committee (SRC). Here, we focus on Professor Martin McKee, CBE, who is the Chair of the SRC.**

Martin was born in Belfast and qualified in medicine from Queen's University Belfast. After a spell working in internal medicine at local hospitals, he moved to London to focus on public health. Martin has worked at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine for over 35 years, where he is Professor of European Public Health.

Martin brings a wealth of expertise to the SRC. He has published over 1,500 papers in peer-reviewed journals and has written, or edited, 50 books. He has received many international awards in recognition of his contributions to health research.

Martin's research focuses on health in societies undergoing major social, political, and economic change. In the 1990's he helped create what was then the largest team of researchers studying the health impact of social and economic change in countries which were formerly part of the Soviet Union. One of the issues he studied was the spike in sudden cardiac deaths in Russia. Many of those dying did not show signs of clogged arteries, as would be expected with heart disease, which was puzzling. Martin's pioneering research showed that these deaths were a result of damage caused by drinking products like aftershave which contain high concentrations of alcohol. Why were people drinking aftershave? The short answer was that they had lost hope.

Martin studied the health effects of the global financial crisis which hit the world in 2008. Previous research typically compared rich and poor, or employed and unemployed, whereas Martin's research focused on the idea of 'precariousness' - even if you seem to be coping,

your health can suffer if you are not sure from one week to the next that you will have a job, food, or a roof over your head.

Everywhere, people are moving from the countryside into cities. They are changing how they travel, where they live, what they eat, and much more. For the last 15 years, Martin has researched the impact these changes have on health. He is a lead researcher on the PURE study, which is examining the impact of these changes on the health of communities, including heart health, across 27 countries.

Martin's research also explores what governments and health systems can do to protect their citizen's health. Martin and his colleagues successfully developed new ways of treating and managing hypertension in people living in some of the poorest communities in Colombia, Malaysia, and the Philippines. More recently, Martin focused on COVID research looking at what helps communities become and stay resilient when faced with this type of crisis.

For more than 25 years Martin has been Co-Director of the European Observatory on Health Systems and Policies. The Observatory, hosted by the World Health Organisation, provides the evidence that Europe's decision-makers need to create effective health systems and policies. He has also served as a President of the British Medical Association and European Public Health Association.

**We would like to thank Martin, and the other members of the SRC, for all they do to ensure that our research programme is world class.**

**To find out more about how the research we fund is chosen, visit [nichs.org.uk/grants](https://nichs.org.uk/grants)**

# Health

## TOP TIPS FOR A HEALTHY HEART

Small changes to your lifestyle can make a big difference to your health, but we know breaking old habits is not easy. Choose one area of your lifestyle that you want to improve and use these tips, as well as the information on our website, to support you in taking the first steps to a healthier lifestyle.

### 1. Eat well

**Top tip:** Choose leaner meats such as chicken instead of processed red meats to reduce saturated fat intake and bad cholesterol.

#### Recipe idea- spicy chicken and salad wrap (serves 1)

##### Ingredients

- 1 tablespoon low-fat Greek style yoghurt
- ¼ teaspoon of curry powder, to taste
- Large pinch of chilli powder, to taste
- 85g cooked chicken breast, chopped into small pieces
- 1 large wholemeal wrap
- Small wedge of lettuce, to give 2 tablespoons when shredded
- 3 slices of cucumber, chopped
- 1 slice of pepper, chopped

##### Method





1. Mix the yoghurt and spices to taste and add the chicken.
2. Spread the chicken mixture on the wrap, then sprinkle on the lettuce, cucumber and pepper.
3. Fold opposite edges of the wrap, to keep the filling in, then roll up and cut in half.





**For more advice on healthy eating and to read the Eatwell Guide, visit [nichs.org.uk/healthyeating](https://nichs.org.uk/healthyeating)**



### 2. Move more, sit less

**Top tip:** Move more and sit less to reduce periods of physical inactivity throughout the day. Exercise helps reduce cholesterol, blood pressure, maintain a healthy weight and is good for your mental health.

- Walk up the stairs – don't take the lift. 
- Pace up and down while talking on the phone. 
- Walk to the local shops or to leave the kids to school. 
- Instead of dozing in front of the TV, get up and walk around the room when you feel sleepy. 

- Have a quick walk during your lunch hour or after dinner in the evening. 
- Get off the bus one or two stops early and walk from there. 
- If you have a dog start to walk further or faster, or more regularly. 
- If you have a car, wash it by hand instead of going to a carwash. 

**Make a start today, it's never too late. Remember any activity is better than none.**



### 3. Manage stress levels

**Top tip:** Find healthy coping mechanisms to manage stress such as going for a walk, writing down what is on your mind, yoga or breathing exercises, rather than using unhealthy habits, such as smoking or alcohol use. Managing stress

can help reduce blood pressure and improve sleep, which is important for a healthy heart.

**Find out more about managing stress at [nichi.org.uk/stress](https://nichi.org.uk/stress)**

### 4. Improve your sleep

**Top tip:** Switch off devices one hour before going to bed to reduce blue light exposure which can disrupt sleep. Reading a book or journaling is a great alternative.



**Did you know that what you do during the day can also improve the quality of your sleep?**

1. Exercise during the day or early evening.
2. Set a regular bedtime and waking-up time, including the weekend.
3. Try some foods that promote sleep such as bananas, cherries, oats and nuts.



4. Ensure your sleeping environment is comfortable including the temperature, having the room dark and tidy.



5. Avoid caffeine, technology and eating big meals late at night. Also avoid alcohol.



**Chest  
Heart &  
Stroke**

## 5. Quit smoking and vaping

**Top tip:** Try to quit using smoking cessation services which are available from your GP or local pharmacy. You are four times more likely to quit successfully with professional help.

Stopping smoking has proven to reduce the risk of heart attacks and strokes, no matter your age or smoking duration.

### Practical Tips for Quitting

- Set a quit date and stick to it.



- Tell family and friends.



- Get rid of all your cigarettes, lighters and ashtrays.



- Consider possible triggers, such as a stressful situation or going out with friends, and plan ways to deal with them.



- Snack on healthy foods and drinks.



- Change your routine.



- Keep your hands busy, do a puzzle or craft.



- A craving only lasts for 3 minutes so try and distract yourself.



## 6. Reduce alcohol intake

**Top tip:** Alternating with alcohol free drinks such as non-alcoholic beers is a good way to reduce alcohol intake to 14 units, or less, a week. Excessive alcohol intake can cause high blood pressure and increase the risk of atrial fibrillation.

**If you are concerned about your alcohol intake or that of a friend or family member, please visit [drugsandalcoholni.info](https://www.drugsandalcoholni.info)**

## 7. Know the signs and symptoms

**Top tip:** Being aware of the symptoms of a heart attack and stroke allows you to get help sooner rather than later. The symptoms vary from person to person but can be characterised by the acronyms **STOP** for heart attack and **FAST** for stroke.

**For more information about making healthy lifestyle changes, visit [nichs.org.uk/riskfactors](https://www.nichs.org.uk/riskfactors)**

### KNOW THE SYMPTOMS OF A HEART ATTACK...

- S** Something's not right - symptoms can start slowly
- T** Tightness or pain in the chest, pain in the neck, arm or jaw
- O** Other symptoms like shortness of breath, nausea or sweating
- P** Phone 999 immediately - the ambulance crew will do an ECG.

### KNOW THE SYMPTOMS OF A STROKE...

- F** **FACE** - has their face fallen on one side? Can they smile?
- A** **ARMS** - can they raise both arms and keep them there?
- S** **SPEECH** - is their speech slurred?
- T** **TIME** to call 999 if you see any single one of these signs.



# Leave a lasting legacy.

A gift in your will is a **gift of hope to future generations.**

We've been at the heart of ground-breaking local research since the 1970s. But there's still so much to be done. That's why we need your help today to fund the life-saving discoveries of tomorrow.

Please consider leaving a gift to NICHS in your will. After you have taken care of family and friends you could make a profound difference, helping us to continue funding vital research that holds the promise of a brighter, healthier future for all.

Visit [nichs.org.uk/giftsinwills](https://nichs.org.uk/giftsinwills) to find out more, call us on **028 90 266 743** or email [supportercare@nichs.org.uk](mailto:supportercare@nichs.org.uk)



## Supporters



### NOEL'S BIG BIRTHDAY BASH FOR NICHS

When Noel Poots from Bangor celebrated his 70th birthday with friends and family he decided to make the occasion extra special by generously telling them to donate the money they would have spent on presents to our charity instead.

Noel's wife Anne explains; "When we decided to have a 70th birthday celebration for Noel, we didn't have to think twice about charitable donations. Many years ago, we had a close family member who suffered from a stroke and know of the great work carried out by NICHS. We didn't hesitate in contacting NICHS to see if they could

provide an online donation page to which our guests could contribute."

"The NICHS fundraising team made everything very simple. All we had to do was provide a photograph for the page and a little bit of information and they did the rest, creating a link for Noel's birthday celebration page which we were able to share with our guests. It was so easy for them to donate if they wished to do so – and donate they did! We raised almost £500 to support the charity and we are absolutely thrilled. These funds will be so much more beneficial to those who need support from NICHS and anyway, who needs presents at 70? Noel definitely doesn't!"

Our heartfelt thanks go to Anne and Noel and all their friends and family who kindly donated. A NICHS bespoke celebration page can be used to collect donations online for any special occasion, wedding, anniversary or retirement.

**For more information, visit [nichs.org.uk/celebration](https://nichs.org.uk/celebration)**

# Supporters

## CORPORATE CHALLENGE CHAMPIONS

We are always overwhelmed by the generosity of our supporters, particularly those who are fundraising in memory of loved ones. President of Warrenpoint Golf Club, Eugene Byrne, organised a corporate two-day golf event in August 2024 in tribute to his brothers, Edward and James, who both sadly lost their lives to chest, heart and stroke illnesses. Eugene worked tirelessly for six months to secure players, sponsors, and auction prizes, including a Nike Driver signed by Rory McIlroy. Over 80 teams took part in the event resulting in something even better than a hole in one – a phenomenal donation of £48,340 which will ‘par’ up our work for some time to come.



Pictured are Nadia Duncan, Donor Development Manager, Gareth McGleenon, NICHs Deputy Chief Executive, Eugene and his wife Mary, and our local Community Ambassador, Jack Donnan.

A massive well done and thank you to Nicki, David, Meabh and Matt from Specsavers Portadown who took on the ultimate challenge with Skydive Ireland to support our work - jumping out of a plane! In honour of David's mum, who had a stroke two years ago, the fearsome foursome was motivated to act and decided to pick this high-adrenaline activity to encourage others to be brave and get inspired to contribute to our cause. The team raised a phenomenal £4,626 for our charity.

Thank you to everyone who donated, family, friends, and Specsavers customers to help the team reach this incredible achievement.



We were delighted to be chosen as Fane Valley Group's charity partner as part of their Happy Hearts Charity Fund which is supporting NICHs and the Irish Heart Foundation in 2024/25. Staff across Fane Valley Group have been great NICHs supporters, taking the plunge and braving an Omagh Tower abseil challenge and hosting coffee lunches. Almost £3,000 has been raised so far through their Go Fund Me page which will enable us to continue to support local communities and provide life-changing services for people living with chest, heart and stroke conditions and their families.

As we look forward to another exciting year of adventures with our corporate partners, we would like to thank everyone who got out of their comfort zone and took on a challenge to support us.



1. The team from Ivan Wilson **MACE** Coleraine enjoyed their third Red Dress Fun Run.
2. **IQ-EQ**, **Wellington IT**, and **Barclays** joined our Twilight Hearty Hike.
3. **PGR Accountants** took on the Run In The Dark challenge.
4. Teams from **Drinksology** and **Tarasis** braved the Europa Abseil.
5. **NI Judicial Appointments Commission (NIJAC)** completed our Summer Olympic Challenge walking 750 miles virtually to Paris.



# Are you up for a challenge?



















Whether you want to run, walk, jump, row, bike or hike, we would love you to join #TeamNICHS and help us continue the fight against chest, heart and stroke conditions in Northern Ireland.

If you don't see anything you like below, get in touch and we can talk about some other ideas. Download a copy of our fundraising guide at [www.nichs.org.uk/fundraisingguide](http://www.nichs.org.uk/fundraisingguide)

**Almost 90%** of our income comes from donations

## Check out our events below and get signed up!

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| London Landmarks Half Marathon     | Skydive    |
| Europa Abseil                     | Zipline Challenge                               |
| Belfast Half Marathon            | Run to Remember                                |
| Mourne Seven Sevens              | Her Heart 5k Your Way                          |
| Dublin Marathon                  | Workplace Ultimate Sports Day                  |
| Christmas Fundraising            | Belfast City Marathon                          |
| Twilight Hearty Hike             | International Treks, Marathons and Challenges  |
| Red Dress Fun Run                |   |
| Heartfelt Healthy Morning Break  |   |

**For more information or to sign up:**

[www.nichs.org.uk/events](http://www.nichs.org.uk/events)  
E: [events@nichs.org.uk](mailto:events@nichs.org.uk)  
T: +44 (0)28 9032 0184

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# Survivor Story



## Chris Boyd and Mark Oliver STROKE

**Chris Boyd and Mark Oliver, from Belfast, have been busy clocking up the miles over recent months in training for a 'Walk the Country' fundraiser for NICHs which will see them walk over 400 miles across Northern Ireland. What makes the challenge even more amazing is the fact that both friends have had life-changing strokes in the last 15 months - at just 43 and 45 years old.**

Chris explains; "I had my stroke on the 25th of October 2023. I went from working as an electrician and DJ to having to learn to walk and talk again at 43 years old."

**"I have had two kidney transplants and have been told my stroke was most likely due to long term dialysis which calcified arteries, however the lifestyle I was leading didn't help either. I was doing too much work wise - 5 days a week as an electrician plus 3 days as a DJ. I was shattered all the time, eating poorly, and drinking lots of energy drinks to keep going. I had just done my first day of an eleven-day event at Halloween and that night I had my stroke. Everything just stopped."**

"I had physical side effects from my stroke. I am lefthanded and that side was worst affected and is now my weaker side. My left arm has constant pins and needles from my shoulder to my fingertips. I can grip and lift things, but I can't feel things like I used to. The mental impact of the stroke has also been massive. I was very down, to the point I didn't feel able to do anything really. Then my friend Sonia phoned and told me her partner, Mark, had also had a stroke and was eager to get out and start exercising again to help his recovery and would I like to join him. Right away I said yes as I needed to do something to help me start moving on."

Recalling his stroke Mark says; "I had my stroke in July at just 45 years old. It was a big shock as I have always been very fit and healthy. When I had my stroke, it went on for about 40 minutes which was extremely scary."

"I was taken to hospital, but once I came out of the stroke, I had made a full recovery. I think that was probably due to the years of fitness I had behind me. I had a tear in an artery which caused the stroke. I was kept in hospital for a few days and prescribed medications. I was very lucky, but everything was turned upside down."



"I didn't have any physical side effects, but the mental impact was hard for me. I was left with bad vertigo after my stroke. I felt really dizzy before my stroke happened, so every time the vertigo started, I thought I was having another stroke which was scary and that took its toll on me. Also, I was conscious throughout my stroke which has left me with trauma."

Mark continues; "For the first three to four weeks I couldn't really do anything. Once I was able to, I started getting out walking. From the first walk I had this idea of not letting the stroke define me. I didn't know what the future held, how things would turn out, if there could be another tear in my arteries, but I wasn't giving up. I wanted to do something positive from it all. I mentioned this to Sonia, and she told me about Chris. I asked her to reach out to him as I knew what he was going through and how having a stroke can be a bit of a lonely experience. The people around you are so supportive, but they can't fully understand what is going on in your head and the questions you have. My idea was Chris and I could talk because I was sure he was in the same boat as me."

The pair went for their first walk in August and immediately clicked. After the second outing the idea of a fundraising walk around Northern Ireland came up as Chris recalls; "Mark mentioned the idea of the walk and at first, I wasn't sure, but after a few weeks I could see I was getting fitter and thought there was a chance I could do it, so I was onboard."

**"We decided on NICHS as one of the beneficiaries because I attended their Post Rehab Exercise Programme (PREP) to try and help with the physical rehab side of things after my stroke. We want to do what we can to help make sure this, and other services, are available to all the stroke survivors who need them."**

Talking about the fundraising walk Mark explains; "We will be starting the walk on Saturday 14th of June at Belfast City Hall and are planning a circle of Northern Ireland which will take us mainly along the coast, finishing at Stormont 14 days, and 400 odd miles, later."

"We have been doing a lot of training. We started off trying a walk of about 17 miles and after that we both knew we had it in us to do this challenge. We will keep building things up and the week before the event we will do three or four 30-mile walks in a row."

"The challenge itself will be around 30 miles per day for 14 days. That would be intense for anyone, never mind having had a stroke, but it's a challenge we want to do for ourselves, as well as to raise funds for NICHS and get the message about stroke awareness out. We know it will be hard, but we are determined to do it! Mindset will play a big part, and we have that fighting spirit."

"Stroke can affect anybody at any age, and we want to highlight that. We want to help dispel the myth that stroke is something that only affects older people."

Chris adds; "Stroke, and in particular stroke at a young age, isn't talked about enough. Also, at no matter what age you have a stroke, the mental impact is huge. Our main aim is to let people know stroke doesn't have to be the end of your life. It can be a huge wakeup call, however. You might have to make some lifestyle changes, but small, positive changes all count, like taking up walking. I felt so much better once I started the walking and chatting with Mark, it made my mental outlook turn from negative to positive. There have been so many positive changes from this challenge for me."

Mark continues; "We want to bring some hope and inspiration to people. Maybe people who have just had a stroke, who are at the early stages of their recovery and aren't sure what the future holds. This will hopefully help them see it's not necessarily the end of everything as it was before, and they can try to fight back to better health and fitness and to the life like they had prior to stroke. That's one of our main motivations."

Chris concludes; "We will be celebrating all stroke survivors and their recoveries in every city, town and village we go through. This walk is for all stroke survivors in Northern Ireland, and we hope people will really get behind us and support us on our journey."

**For more information on NICHS stroke services, visit [nichs.org.uk/strokesupport](https://nichs.org.uk/strokesupport)**

**Chest  
Heart &  
Stroke**

# Care Services

## CARE SERVICES ADVISORY GROUP

**One of the main goals of NICHS's 2023-26 strategy is to involve and listen to people who are living with chest, heart and stroke conditions, as well as the carers of someone living with these illnesses. As a result, our Care Services Advisory Group was established and is led by NICHS Service Improvement Lead for the Care Department, Amy Coey.**

The group meets once a quarter and currently has 13 members, 7 women and 6 men, each with a chest, heart or stroke condition and/or care for someone with one of these conditions. An outcomes-based accountability grid for the group is currently being developed.

Some of the main outcomes we hope the group will achieve are listening to the voice of the service user to improve NICHS services, increasing collaboration with healthcare professionals, raising awareness of our services, and improving awareness of chest, heart and stroke conditions.

The group follows a co-production framework which aims to create a piece of work in four areas: co-commission, co-design, co-deliver and co-assess. The Care Services Advisory Group shares their thoughts and experiences and are actively involved in making decisions to support NICHS in improving our services and delivering a better experience for our service users.

A co-assess project has already been completed which involved the group reviewing NICHS's core service, family support, and providing feedback and suggested improvements to this service. After discussion with NICHS Director of Care, Ursula Ferguson, most of the suggested changes have been, or are currently being, actioned. One example of this is that the group discussed how we use the term 'carer' in NICHS resources and how this may not always be relevant to those caring for someone living with a chest, heart or stroke condition. From this feedback, we made the decision to use the term 'caregiver' in the development of our new programme for caregivers. This new terminology will also be adopted by our staff and future NICHS materials will also reflect this update.

We are looking forward to seeing what the Care Services Advisory Group can achieve in 2025.

Below we are delighted to share feedback from some of the members of the Care Services Advisory Group:

**Nikki Goode,**  
49, from  
Randalstown.



**Having a stroke is a life altering event. It has been excellent to be involved in the group to turn a bad event into something positive and help shape the work of NICHS going forward. It's been great to meet the other group members as well and form relationships and friendships. That has been really beneficial too."**

**Andrew Godden,**  
36, from  
Newtownabbey.



**NICHS provided lifesaving support to my family when I was diagnosed with chronic asthma as a child. Thankfully, I am now in a position to give something back. I hope to make a difference through the Care Services Advisory Group by helping to shape future resources for families who are struggling with asthma and similar conditions, especially those families who have young children. It has been a great experience so far and I have met so many inspiring people."**



## Joanna McGlaughlin,

66, from  
Dungannon.



I have recently joined the Care Services Advisory Group. As a stroke client, I wanted to add what I could to the service. What impressed me most was listening to other people in the group who did not have a stroke but had either respiratory or heart issues, and how they have overcome these challenges with some remarkable stories. Being a stroke patient, I could talk about my situation and what adjustments we could suggest that may make the journey a lot smoother."

## John Meikleham,

65, from  
Belfast.



Working with the NICHS Care Services Advisory Group has given me great insight into the wonderful services provided by NICHS and allows me to influence the future shape of those services. A very rewarding experience."

## Nicola Shaw,

46, from  
Ballygowan.



As a young stroke survivor, I want to be part of improving services and informing the discussions around services and support for patients and their families. Being part of a strategic group, comprised of people who have had chest, heart, or stroke conditions is so rewarding. I'm excited to get involved and add value."

## Pauline Toner,

60, from  
Newtownards.



I feel very privileged to be a part of this group, giving something back to NICHS. We come from all walks of life and each of our individual experiences relate to the ethos of the group. It's great we are involved in helping to improve and refine the services within NICHS."

If you are interested in joining the Care Services Advisory Group, an opportunity may open up later this year. Please contact Amy Coey to find out more - [acoey@nichs.org.uk](mailto:acoey@nichs.org.uk) or 07825027064.

Chest  
Heart &  
Stroke

# Supporters

## MAGNIFICENT MILESTONES

### STORMONT SCHOOL OF SINGING

Stormont School of Singing have been supporting NICHS with their annual summer and Christmas concerts since 2012. The 2024 Christmas Charity Concert, A Christmas Carol, was held at the stunning location of the Harbour Commissioners Office in Belfast and was thoroughly enjoyed by all who attended. A massive thank you to all the talented performers and the audiences who have now fundraised an amazing £26,000 to support our work.



### NORTH DOWN FARM & CONSTRUCTION MODEL SHOW

Sam Snellin is the organiser of the North Down Farm & Construction Model Show which has been held annually in November for the past 18 years, and for the last 12 years at La Mon Hotel & Country Club, Castlereagh. Thanks to the hard work of Sam and his wife Sylvia, the shows have raised an incredible £12,000 to date for our charity. Sam has already started fundraising for next year's show, organising raffles throughout the year. Our sincere thanks also to all the dedicated exhibitors who have supported this event for so many years.



Photo credit: Coleraine Chronicle

### IN MEMORY OF WILLIAM WALKER

Priscilla Walker, husband Stephen, and daughter Claire have been dedicated to raising funds to support our work for the past 13 years in memory of their son and brother, William.

William was born with a heart defect and was due to have an aortic valve replacement when he tragically collapsed and died at the age of just 23. After his death, a memorial fundraising evening was held at Kelly's Night Club in Portrush and since then many other events have been organised by the family and local Young Farmers Clubs, in particular Moycraig YFC where William had been an active member. The William Walker Tribute Fund has now fundraised a phenomenal amount of £37,000 in William's memory.

### BARNEY, ALWAYS IN OUR HEARTS

We are always delighted to see so many of our supporters who return year after year to take part in our annual Red Dress Fun Run at Stormont Estate. Amanda Ross from Derry/Londonderry has been taking part with her family and friends since 2022, and despite now having her own heart health issues, will be aiming for four years in a row on Sunday 23rd February 2025. Amanda wanted to support our work after sadly losing her beloved husband Barney in 2021. Barney's NICHS Always In Our Hearts Tribute Page now displays an outstanding amount of over £17,000 fundraised for our charity.

In addition to the Red Dress Fun Run, Amanda and family have also signed up for abseil and marathon challenges, and give regular in memory gifts, honouring Barney through their desire to help others.







# A monthly gift can make a life-changing difference...

A monthly gift of:

**Regular gifts will ensure people across Northern Ireland get the support they need to return to living life to the fullest, after a stroke, respiratory or heart illness.**

**£5**

**will help pay for life-changing support** from a special neuro physiotherapist

**£10**

**will help pay for a home visit** after a heart attack, stroke or following a respiratory diagnosis

**£20**

**will help fund a researcher** working to prevent and treat chest, heart & stroke illnesses

Our support and rehab services **rely almost exclusively on public donations.**

Scan the QR code, or visit our website for more information:

**[www.nichs.org.uk/regulardonation](http://www.nichs.org.uk/regulardonation)**



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**Almost 90%** of our income comes from public donations.

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