

FROM THE HEART

October 2021

NICHS Family Support

The wonders of walking

Real life stories

Recipes



Chest
Heart &
Stroke

75
YEARS
ON YOUR SIDE



HELLO AND WELCOME

Hello everyone and welcome to this autumn edition of From the Heart. There's definitely a feel of the changing seasons in the air and we hope the stories and tips here will help you through the coming weeks.

We hope you enjoy reading our staff profiles. I am so proud of the work that our Care team do, they really embrace our charity values and care so much about our clients, volunteers and supporters.

We're also delighted to share our NICHS walk challenge, including the winning story from our Chief Executive. As a charity we recognise and support the benefits of physical activity- any movement, no matter how small, can have huge benefits to our health and wellbeing (always check with your GP what exercise plan is right for you).

As we move through the pandemic, we are sharing a story from a lady with Long COVID who accessed our COVID Recovery Programme. This is currently the first and only support programme to help Long COVID sufferers in Northern Ireland.

Also included in this edition are healthy autumn recipes, good comfort food to keep us energised and stronger ahead of the winter months.

Keep safe and well everyone, thank you!

Catherine Murnin

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Head of Care Services

Northern Ireland Chest Heart & Stroke

NICHS Family Support

Family Support is our dedicated service which provides support to the whole family. This could be to the person living with a long-term health condition, to their loved ones, or both. As part of the Family Support service, one of our dedicated Care Co-ordinators will get in touch with you by phone, or they can arrange to meet you in the comfort of your own home. They will listen to your story, get to know your family and work with you to agree a plan of support. This support is both practical and emotional and there is no time limit to this service. Regardless of when you were diagnosed with a long-term health condition our Family Support team can help you to better understand your condition and overcome any barriers you are facing. We are on your side and just a phone call away.



Meet some of our team:



Emma Fallon

Breathing Better Service
Co-ordinator

Hello, my name is Emma and I am the Breathing Better and Family Support Co-ordinator for the Southern Trust area. I recently joined the team and I am absolutely loving my role at NICHs! My job involves providing support and help to people living with a respiratory condition and, more recently, also to those experiencing symptoms of Long COVID.

On a daily basis I have the privilege of speaking to clients new and old- I might be referring someone into our services or having a catch-up call with an existing service user. My favourite part of the job is seeing how people progress and improve through using our services. It really does bring such joy to see people becoming increasingly more confident, stronger and happier in themselves - it is the best feeling!



Kyle Farley

Heart Strong Service
Co-ordinator

Hi, my name is Kyle Farley and I am one of the Heart Strong Co-ordinators at NICHs. My role is to support people living with a heart condition by providing a listening ear and emotional support as well as inviting them to access our services which will support their mental and physical wellbeing along their road to recovery. I am very excited about the months ahead as our walking groups recommence and our Heart Strong online education programme launches.



Samantha Hanna

Stroke Family Support
Co-ordinator

I am relatively new to my role of providing support to those who have suffered from a stroke and I am thoroughly enjoying it. I particularly enjoy engaging with clients and building a rapport which will assist with their recovery journey. By listening carefully to an individual's specific needs, I am able to refer them on to suitable services which can help. It's so rewarding to see the progress made by the people we work with and I look forward to the future in my new role.

KEEPING ACTIVE

The Wonders of Walking

The lockdown periods throughout the COVID-19 pandemic meant many of us were isolated from family and friends- unable to meet up for a cup of tea or coffee, our weekly catch ups moved to online platforms like Zoom and hugs from our loved ones were exchanged through panes of glass. These difficult times took their toll on both our mental and physical health and we all tried to find ways to help ourselves cope. Many took to their gardens, embracing their inner Alan Titchmarsh, others expressed themselves artistically, whilst others simply walked.

For many, a daily walk was the highlight of lockdown. We had

more time to embrace our surroundings and appreciate the wonder of things which we might have previously taken for granted like the bloom of spring and the fall of the first autumn leaf. Exercising can help us both mentally and physically. A brisk, daily 10-minute walk provides our bodies with a range of health benefits including burning calories and strengthening our hearts, however, it is not always easy to find the motivation to get up and get moving. Why not try listening to your favourite music, anything from Daniel O'Donnell to Taylor Swift, planning a new route to keep things interesting, taking a stroll to the shops, or even joining a walking group?

Walking can be very enjoyable and it's all about finding the balance and locations that are right for you! Before heading out in the colder months remember to wear a good waterproof jacket, comfortable footwear with strong soles, bring your mobile phone in case of emergencies and don't forget to pop the kettle on once you get home!

Read on to hear from our NICHS staff about their love of walking as well as to find out about the biggest competition of the year, the NICHS Step Challenge!



Fancy a trip to Cranfield? Sure, "Alpaca" bag!

Emma Fallon Breathing Better Service Co-ordinator

When you look around the countryside you will usually see fields with a flock of sheep or a herd of cattle. In some areas however, there is a new addition to the landscape; a very friendly, quite hairy one to be exact... the alpaca!

Alpacas originate from South America but if you don't fancy the 5,933-mile trip to see them in their natural habitat, not to worry, just head to County Down! Cranfield in Kilkeel offers one-to-one sessions with an alpaca so why not take the opportunity to walk through the beautiful green fields of Kilkeel or take a stroll on the beach with one of these amazing animals? This is Humphrey and I enjoying a walk on the beach together!

Overall, I had a great day out walking with Humphrey however I am still trying to persuade my Mum and Dad that an alpaca would make a great new addition to our house!



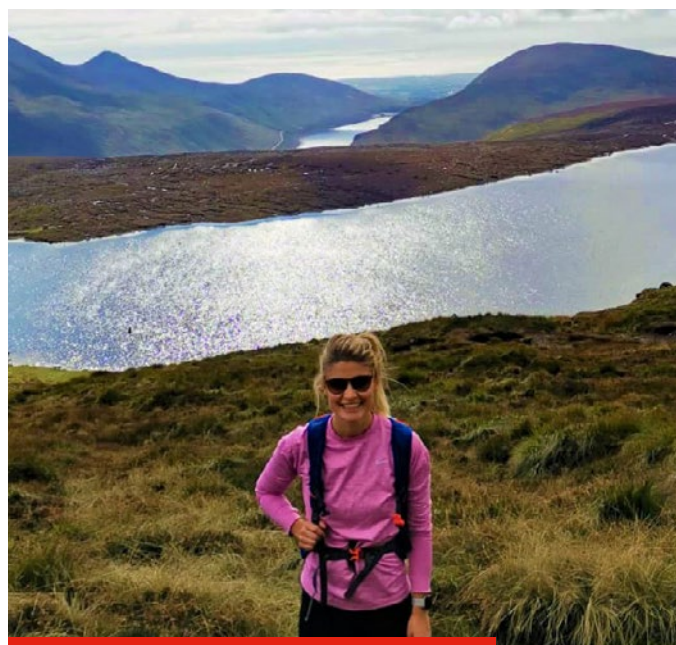
Ain't No Mountain High Enough for Mona and Zoe!

Mona Duddy

Care Services Co-ordinator

My name is Mona and I have been a Stroke Scheme Co-ordinator with NICHs for twenty years. During lockdown I started walking as a means of exercise to become healthier and hopefully maintain strong bones. My walking helped both physically and mentally and I really enjoyed it.

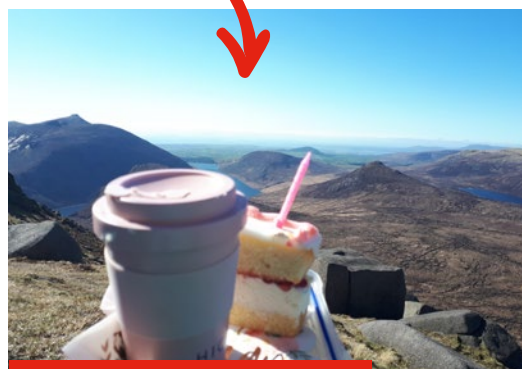
I liked it so much that I took up the challenge of climbing Scalp Mountain in Donegal with my son Mark. The mountain stands 484m high with a prominence of 298 miles. The initial ascent was very steep and momentarily I thought "NO!" but I was determined so on I plodded. It took one hour to get to the summit and it was well worth every step when I took in the beautiful panoramic view. It was breath-taking and the sense of achievement I felt was wonderful.



Zoe Campbell

Senior Care Services Co-ordinator

I have always loved walking and being outdoors-hiking and rambling through the Mourne Mountains is a firm favourite. Regardless of the season, there is always a treat in store – spring with bright yellow gorse flowers; summer with its long days, purple heather and blue skies; autumn with its golden light; and a snowy day in winter can be very special indeed. One of my favourite parts of hiking in the Mournes is getting to the top of a peak and enjoying a cup of tea with a view. In fact, that's how I celebrated my 30th birthday in April, on the top of Slieve Bearnagh along with a well-earned slice of cake!



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The NICHS Step Challenge

June 2021 marked a month filled with competition, determination and rivalry for the staff at NICHS. It was once again time for the NICHS Step Challenge – cue the dusting off of trainers and the firm placement of sweatbands!

NICHS staff were divided into six groups, all determined to be crowned the winning team. Throughout the month of June, members of staff took to the roads, football pitches, parks, gardens and backyards to build up their step count which ranged from 5,000 to 35,000 steps per day! Every team had their eyes on the prize but the winners were Team South, captained by Noelene Hughes our Head of Service (Stroke). An all-woman team, comprising of NICHS staff from both the Southern and Western Trust areas, Team South raced into first place and achieved an amazing 5,252,269 steps!

The staff at NICHS gained so much from completing the step challenge- it provided motivation, routine and a shared goal. Emma, one of the members of the winning team, said:

“I was excited about the step challenge! I wanted to push myself out of my comfort zone and build up my step count each day. Over the weeks I could see myself improving, getting stronger and enjoying my surroundings more and more.”





“The NICHS Step Challenge was so enjoyable, great for my health and very addictive. I am grateful to the team for opening my eyes to the joys of walking.”

Declan Cunnane
NICHS Chief Executive steps up to the challenge

I am a very competitive person so when I heard the NICHS Health Champions were organising a Step Challenge I signed up immediately. I was pleased to discover that my mobile phone measured my steps automatically so I didn't need to purchase any new equipment, however, I was less than pleased when I looked back at previous months to discover I only averaged 3,000 steps per day! I keep fit by cycling but his wouldn't count so drastic changes were required.

The first thing I did was ditch the car. I discovered I was able to walk to work through the beautiful and quiet Lagan Meadows Country Park and this only took 45 minutes. More importantly, it meant I had my first 6,000 steps done before I arrived at work each morning. At lunchtime I would head for Botanic Gardens and enjoy a

casual dander looking at the amazing scenery and people watching! By the time I had walked home each evening I had usually recorded at least 15,000 steps.

Initially I was quite pleased with myself until I realised that many of my colleagues were also taking this challenge very seriously and racking up more steps than me. I invested in earphones for my phone, originally to listen to music, but I soon discovered podcasts. This was a revelation- I soon became hooked on celebrity interviews and got drawn into the worlds of Joe Rogan, Adam Buxton, Alan Carr, Louis Theroux, Grace Dent, Ed Gamble and many others. All of a sudden, I didn't notice the time passing as I became engrossed in different podcasts. Soon I was taking the long route home, going out again in the evenings, walking miles simply to buy an ice cream.....I was managing 25,000 steps a day, then 30,000 then 35,000!

The NICHS Step Challenge was so enjoyable, great for my health and very addictive. I quickly forgot about the blisters and the shin splints. It was also very fortuitous that June was such a dry and sunny month- I only got rained on once.

I am grateful to the team for opening my eyes to the joys of walking, especially in the good weather. I have now returned to a normal routine- walking more than my previous 3,000 steps but much less than during June. I am driving to work again and have blown the cobwebs off my bike. However, I still have thousands of podcasts that I would like to listen to, so I suspect walking will continue to be a part of my routine for many years to come.

PREP (Post Rehab Exercise Programme) Walking Groups

Over the past 18 months many stroke survivors have taken part in our online education programme, PREP. This has been a great opportunity to learn more about stroke, the associated risk factors and lifestyle choices and gain support from peers who have faced a similar situation.

Prior to the pandemic PREP included a circuit-based exercise programme which sadly had to be suspended for many months due to government restrictions. In August we were delighted to be able to run a pilot PREP walking group for those who had completed the online programme in the Southern Trust area. It has been wonderful for the programme participants to meet the faces they had been used to seeing online and exercise in a safe environment.

The pilot has been such a success we plan to roll it out across all Trust areas.

One participant describes her experience:

“The thing I enjoy the most is meeting up with other people. I usually walk on my own and I’m afraid of going too far but I feel safe in the walking group and enjoy the company. I actually walk further with the group than I would on my own. I would recommend the walking group to anyone – it’s not just for the physical benefits but the social aspect of it too.”

Tracy:

“I’m usually quite quiet and on my own. Connecting with people on Zoom and in the walking group was really helpful for

chatting to others in the same position as me. Meeting the others and the group leaders in person was lovely because I hadn’t seen new faces in so long. We built up the walking distance over the weeks and we now walk 2 miles which I’m delighted about! My sisters walk faster than me so it’s hard to keep up but the pace in the walking group is right for me and you forget the distance you’ve completed because you’re chatting away to each other. The fatigue is still there but it isn’t as bad- you feel better about the fatigue because the walk and fresh air have contributed to it. Getting out in the fresh air has helped my mental health and the walking group has given me the confidence to walk more, as long as someone is there with me.”

**If you
get tired,
learn
to rest,
not quit.**



Stephen:

“Well, I’m still here, I’m walking and talking. I’ve been very lucky!” This has become my stock response to any kind enquiry as to my state of health post stroke.

I was lucky that when my wife found me early one morning on the bedroom floor unable to stand up that she called my son-in-law for help. He quickly noticed my slurred speech and the twist that was forming at the corner of my mouth and immediately called 999.

Thereafter my good luck has come from the training, the experience and the expertise of those who have cared for me- the paramedics who swiftly and efficiently transferred me to the Royal Victoria Hospital; the Stroke Team who were waiting for me to arrive; and the seemingly endless stream of health professionals who appeared at my bedside in the Stroke Ward to speed up my recovery. Then there was the Community Stroke Team who took over this invaluable work once I was back home.

“Throughout this journey Northern Ireland Chest Heart & Stroke were recommended to me on a

number of occasions and I contacted them at the earliest opportunity. Since then I have completed PREP and Taking Control, both extremely beneficial programmes, and for the last number of weeks I have been a member of the PREP Walking Group.”

Even though I am retired, Monday mornings still leave me wondering where the weekend went. Recently however, I have been immediately cheered by the thought that tomorrow is Tuesday which is the day I meet up with fellow participants and NICHS leaders at the South Lake Leisure Centre in Craigavon to go walking.

It has been a real pleasure to meet everyone in person having spent so many weeks only seeing them on screen in Zoom meetings. The walk takes us around the South Lake- we all go at our own pace with the leaders in close attendance, keeping an eye on the group which usually consists of 8-12 people.

We are privileged to be the first NICHS walking group to get back up and running since the pandemic started and we

have been joined each week by NICHS staff from other areas so they can observe us before setting up their own walking groups. They have come from as far afield as the North Coast and the Fermanagh Lakes - wonderful places to go walking. Given that we are guinea pigs, we have luckily been untroubled by the numerous dogs we see out walking with their owners!

There can be little doubt as to the benefits of fresh air and exercise. To do this in a beautiful location and in the company of fellow travellers who understand what everyone else in the group has gone through in a way that family and friends, with the best of intentions, cannot, leaves you feeling that you are not unique, not alone. Early on one walker said that she had so enjoyed the walk because up until that point she had lacked the confidence to go out walking on her own, unsure of how she would manage and what would happen if anything went wrong. There is safety in numbers.

It’s good to walk, to talk and then go for a coffee (sometimes along with something the dietician would not approve of) and then to chat some more.”



Stroke Survivor Craig's 50km Challenge

Craig Shilliday, 49 from Portadown, suffered a stroke in March 2019 when on holiday in Toronto, Canada. He and his wife Alison had popped back to their apartment when he noticed weakness in his arms, his face drooped on one side and his speech started to slur.

"I felt perfectly fine and then, without any warning, BANG! I'm lucky that my wife knew straight away what it was," explains Craig. Alison knew that his symptoms matched the FAST advertisement and rushed Craig to hospital.

Craig then pledged to walk 50km in one week ahead of his 50th birthday to raise money for our work. 50km might not seem much to some, but for stroke-survivor Craig, it was truly a challenge.

"When they say the quicker you act, the more you save, they are right! I was at hospital within 25 minutes and that's why I was even capable of walking this 50km."

Craig was treated in Toronto and upon returning to Northern Ireland was visited at home by Lynn, a member of our Care Team.

"Very early on I wasn't in work, I wasn't allowed to drive, I was enormously frustrated. Lynn signed me up for PREP (Post Rehab Exercise Programme) in Lurgan. In the end, I did it twice! It opened my eyes as to how bad it all could have been."

"PREP put me in touch with others who had been through the same thing. The course was full of good information - it connected the dots. I can still

phone or text the NICHHS team whenever I need them. They are always on hand with support and advice."

Most of Craig's symptoms aren't immediately obvious but they have had a profound impact on this life;

"Physically I recovered quite quickly, in terms of day to day movements. If you saw me on the street, you wouldn't know I had had a stroke. But the stroke fatigue has been debilitating and I've had to build back fitness step by step."

"I now have a bit of stutter and when I'm tired or stressed, two words just won't come together. Part of my job used to be writing complex instructions as an ICT service analyst, now I'd be lucky to follow them, never mind write them!"



"The NICHS team taught me how to pace myself, how to manage my symptoms and how to set goals."

Keen to give something back, Craig organised a walking fundraiser;

"I am so grateful for the support I received from NICHS. With COVID, charities haven't been able to fundraise to the same extent, so I just thought, "why

don't I help - there's nothing stopping me." The challenge also gave me something to focus on, improved my fitness, challenged me and even helped with my mental health."

Jackie Trainor, Director of Income Generation at NICHS, says, "It might surprise you but almost 90% of our care services here at NICHS are funded by donations from the general public.

Fundraising efforts like Craig's "50 for 50" make an enormous difference and help us to continue to care for local people who have suffered from a stroke, heart attack or respiratory illness."

Craig adds, "There are stroke survivors that NICHS look after who couldn't walk 5km, never mind 50km. I walked this for them."



RECIPES

A Sense of the Season

As the autumn leaves turn and the chill of October sets in, thoughts turn to a glowing fire and the smell and taste of comforting, warm, wholesome food. Here are some great recipes to make the change from the summer sun to the autumn wind and rain a little easier.



Apple and Blackberry Crumble

This crumble recipe is sure to be a family favourite and uses delicious seasonal fruits.

For the crumble:

- 50g / 2oz wholemeal self-raising flour
- 50g / 2oz porridge oats
- 25g / 1oz All Bran flakes, crushed
- 50g / 2oz margarine
- 50g / 2oz soft brown sugar

For the filling:

- 250g / 10oz Granny Smith apples, peeled and thinly sliced
- 150g / 6oz blackberries
- 25ml / 1floz honey

Preheat the oven to 180°C / gas mark 4.

Place the wholemeal flour and porridge oats in a bowl and rub in the margarine using your fingertips. Add in brown sugar and crushed All Bran flakes and mix.

Place the apples in a 1.2 litre non-stick dish and sprinkle over the blackberries. Pour the honey over the apples and blackberries. Finally, sprinkle the crumble on top.

Bake for 30- 35 minutes and serve warm with reduced fat plain yoghurt.



TOP HEALTHY TIP!

Including oats in your diet offers many health benefits. They are high in both soluble and insoluble fibre- soluble fibre helps lower cholesterol levels and insoluble fibre helps to support good gastrointestinal health.

Creative Craft

Who remembers doing potato prints at school?

Why not try this autumnal twist using apples and pears:

- Halve an apple or pear and dry off any excess moisture on kitchen paper.
- Dip the piece of fruit into acrylic paint and print onto a paper bag or gift card- perfect for little gifts and treats!



Sweet Potato and Butternut Squash Soup

This soup uses seasonal ingredients with beautiful flavours. Unlike other soups, this is made in a casserole dish in the oven! It freezes well so it's great to double up on the ingredients in this recipe so you have a spare lunch/dinner.

- 1 large butternut squash
- 2 large sweet potatoes
- 1 red onion
- 1 carrot
- 1 tbsp olive oil
- 1 tsp chilli powder
- ½ tsp cinnamon
- 3 slices of smoked bacon (with fat trimmed off)
- 750ml / 1 ¼ pints ham stock or vegetable stock
- 200ml / approx. ½ pint semi-skimmed milk

Set oven to 200°C / 180°C fan.

Roughly chop all the vegetables into chunks and place in a roasting tin or dish. Drizzle over the olive oil, chilli powder, cinnamon and a few grinds of black pepper and mix through.

Roughly chop the bacon and place on top of the vegetables. Roast in the oven for 45 minutes, tossing the mixture occasionally to ensure nothing becomes over-browned.

Once the vegetables are cooked, add the stock, stir and return to the oven for a few minutes. Finally, puree the soup in a blender until smooth adding the milk to achieve the desired consistency.



TOP HEALTHY TIP! Sweet potatoes are a root vegetable. They are buttery, soft and sweet and unlike potatoes, they count towards your five a day.

Pancakes

These little treats are quick and easy to make but be warned, they might not make it to the cooling tray as hungry fingers will want to eat them straight from the pan! These make a lovely treat for an autumnal picnic and can be eaten plain or with lemon or butter.

- 200g / 8oz self-raising flour
- 1 tsp baking powder
- 1 egg, lightly beaten
- 250ml semi-skimmed milk
- 1 tbsp cooking oil
- 50g / 2oz caster sugar

Sift the flour and baking powder into a bowl. Add sugar, oil and egg and mix together. Add milk slowly, mixing well- you may need less or more to get a "dropping" consistency.

Heat a frying pan or griddle and spray it lightly with cooking oil. Drop a tablespoon of batter into the pan. Approx. 4 pancakes should fit into the pan. Cook on a low heat for 1 minute or until the pancakes bubble and the underside is golden. Turn the pancake over with a spatula and cook the other side. Transfer to a cooling tray once cooked.

These pancakes can be served at any time of the day with a fruit compote and yogurt or stewed apples, blueberries or strawberries- a lovely breakfast or dessert!



Christina's Story

Long COVID

Around eighteen months ago I began to directly experience the effects of COVID-19. It was at the beginning of the pandemic in March 2020 when my family and I first contracted the virus. A few weeks prior to this I had just started a new job as a Staff Nurse within the Southern Trust for an extraordinary team, The Acute Care at Home Team, and prior to this had four years' experience in the Emergency Department. I considered myself a bit of a social butterfly, always up to something when I wasn't working and I was training for a charity Strictly Come Dancing competition. I was loving life and living it to the full. Little did I know that my life was about to significantly change and that eighteen months later I would be sharing my story with others.



In March 2020 my mother, father and I began to develop mild symptoms of the COVID-19 virus. I felt like I had a general flu like virus and that was nothing in comparison to my father. He rapidly deteriorated before our very eyes and spent ten days confined to the living room arm chair in agony from head to toe- struggling to breathe at times, completely fatigued, with a persistent high temperature, an angry red skin rash – these were just a few of his symptoms. As a family our attention was focused on him and, luckily, we were able to keep him at home with us with me using my nursing skills to care for him to the best of my ability. Despite this, there was an overwhelming feeling of fear and uncertainty at this time and I think those ten days have haunted us to some extent.

As I was a nurse on the frontline I was able to get a COVID-19 test and when the result came back as positive we weren't in the least surprised. I returned to work two weeks after this, full of fear and anxiety. It felt like going into combat with an invisible enemy. I lasted around six weeks at work before having to take a step back and reluctantly take a few weeks off.

Whilst I was working I began to feel progressively worse and although I didn't really understand what was happening I knew I had to take a break and rest.

After a few weeks off I decided to return to work again in July. I was adamant that I needed to get back to help my team and that's what I did, unaware it would be to the detriment of my long-term health.

From July until December I constantly pushed against what my body was trying to tell me. I knew something wasn't right but I refused to acknowledge it as I thought it would be admitting defeat. Many times my body tried to warn me to slow down but I ignored it. I began to suffer from digestive problems and even had to take a few days off again with what I thought at the time was just a stomach bug. However, I now see these episodes as alarm bells. In December I contracted COVID-19 again and was abruptly forced to stop in my tracks. Every week thereafter I would tell myself that I would be better the next week and that I would return to work but unfortunately those weeks turned into months and have amounted to nine months so far.

My symptoms have varied immensely, from severe fatigue, heart palpitations, shortness of breath, chest pains, muscle and joint pains, headaches, brain fog, visual disturbance, dizziness, nausea, digestive problems and sleep disturbance not to mention the psychological impact. My recovery has been up and down like a turbulent

rollercoaster. I thought I was acceptant of where I was at the start of the year but now when I look back, it has only been recently that I have truly accepted my situation and because of this I believe things have started to change for the better.

Towards the end of May this year I began to be more open and honest about how I was feeling, not only with my family and friends but also with myself which was a step in the right direction for me. I have found talking and writing about my feelings very helpful as well as things like meditation, mindfulness, yoga, cold water therapy and doing things that personally bring me joy.

In July I embarked on a six-week journey through the Northern Ireland Chest Heart & Stroke Taking Control programme and I cannot thank the Co-ordinators and all who are involved in this programme enough. From the very first conversation I had with Linzi, one of the Co-ordinators, to the very last Zoom session I had with the group, I couldn't have felt more at ease or comfortable. From explanations of the symptom cycle and how to self-manage, to action planning

and problem solving, I learnt a lot whilst also being part of a group and not feeling alone. I got so much out of the programme, not only as a participant, but as a person in general and these skills will definitely benefit me throughout the rest of my life. At present I am not where I want to be and I am still recovering but my goal moving forward is to live a better, higher quality of life that is true to myself. I can honestly say that the Taking Control programme has helped me to begin to make that happen.

“Your present circumstances don't determine where you can go; they merely determine where you start.”

Nido Qubein

21,000 local people are currently suffering with Long COVID, a life-altering illness.

There is no dedicated recovery service in Northern Ireland to help.

That's why we set up our Long COVID Recovery Service.

Our Long COVID Recovery Service is a one-of-a-kind programme- it is currently the first and only support programme to help Long COVID sufferers in Northern Ireland. With NO funding this service is only possible thanks to our supporters. Indeed, almost 90% of our services are funded exclusively by public donations and we rely greatly on our supporters to help us keep caring for and supporting our local community.

It costs £126 per week for someone suffering from Long COVID to attend our life-changing service. A donation of just £10, or whatever you can afford, will mean someone suffering with Long COVID will have the opportunity to receive the help and support they so desperately need.

To make a donation please visit:

<https://nichs.org.uk/make-a-donation>

Or call our Supporter Care team on 028 9026 6743



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