

Pulse

Spring 2023

**Taking on the
Red Dress Fun Run
after a heart attack-
Ralph's story**

**How we're empowering
children to lead healthy
and active lives**

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Atrial Fibrillation be
on the horizon?**

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manage stress in
a more positive way**

**Chest
Heart &
Stroke**

Survivor Story



Ralph Magee HEART ATTACK

Ralph Magee from Comber didn't expect that occasional pains in his chest while exercising could be indicative of a heart attack. But aged 56, he found that was exactly what had happened to him.

Now, Ralph is participating in our Red Dress Fun Run 2023, supported by MACE and Musgrave MarketPlace. This will be his third time taking on the five-kilometre run or walk event which aims to raise funds for our care and prevention services and research as well as awareness of heart disease.

The father of three and Principal at Andrews Memorial Primary School became aware of potential problems with his health in 2020. Ralph says, "A colleague had organised for Northern Ireland Chest Heart & Stroke to come to the school and do health checks. At the time, I knew I was a bit heavier than I should be. I was exercising but not eating as healthily as I could have been. I also wanted to find out about my cholesterol, because it had been high a few years before and I had been on statins, before getting off them by reducing my cholesterol through exercise."

"I went along to the check and was told pretty much what I expected! The NICHs Health Promotion Officer confirmed my high cholesterol levels and advised me to take the next twelve weeks to look after my diet and exercise, then to go to my GP and get my cholesterol checked again. If it went down, it would show I was in control of it, and if not, then I would need statins again."

Ralph continues, "It was the beginning of lockdown, and the weather was great. I started going out on my bike and running but going uphill I had to stop because of chest discomfort. At that time, I didn't see it as pain. I didn't think I was having a heart attack. I was able to stop, take a drink and cycle on, so I thought I was fine. With running I was really struggling though. Overall, I knew something wasn't right. One day I was walking our dog up a little hill and felt the discomfort again and knew I needed to go to hospital."

It was in hospital that Ralph received a shock when he found out he needed to have a stent fitted, and that he had suffered a heart attack. Ralph says, "It was only when the doctor came around on the second day that he used the phrase heart attack. At the time I thought having the stent was precautionary. I was lucky as the heart attack didn't damage my heart muscle. I got off lightly, but it was the warning I needed to look after myself more carefully. My mum had a heart attack at 78 and died of heart failure, she didn't get a chance to have a stent. Hopefully with my stent I've been given a second chance."

Following his heart attack, Ralph got involved in supporting our charity through fundraising. He says, "I saw an advert for NICHs's Red Dress Fun Run. Due to the personal connection, I thought I should support the event. I had started to run

again as part of my recovery after my heart attack and I was enjoying it, so I decided to do a 10km run with my friends and two sons in the local area and raise money via a JustGiving page."

In February 2022 Ralph decided to get his pupils involved too. Ralph explains, "We registered the school for the Primary Schools' Red Dress Fun Run. Some classes do the Daily Mile which is designed to get kids outside for 15 minutes a day, and we just made it more fun. We jogged, walked and danced dressed in red. We also held a school assembly where I explained to the children a bit about what had happened to me. All of it helped raise funds for the charity."

But Ralph's fundraising streak wasn't over. "In 2022, I also decided to take part in the Belfast City Half Marathon supporting NICHs. I was running around 8 miles, so it was an achievable goal."

Now, Ralph is passionate about raising awareness and supporting education around heart health, which is why he's backing February's Red Dress Fun Run 2023. He says, "At the time of my heart attack, I said 'why me?' I was told 'you're in your fifties living in Northern Ireland, it's basically a target on your back'. It's so common here and it's not going away so education is something I feel strongly about."

What advice would he give to others? Ralph says, "If you've had something like a heart attack and you survive, you've got a second chance, so you need to do something about it. If you haven't had one, it's up to you to try to prevent it. I wasn't being as healthy as I should have been and I should have paid attention to the signs that it ran in my family, but I've got a second chance now. Listen to the doctors, exercise and take care of yourself because it will make a huge difference. Physically and mentally, running has reinvented me and helped me a huge amount. I was lucky I got over it and it's now up to me to do something about it and to prevent another one."

2022's Red Dress Fun Run saw over 500 participants turn Stormont into a sea of red as they walked, ran, skipped and wheeled 5k across the estate, raising a staggering £50,000. This year, our flagship event takes place once again at Stormont Estate, however the virtual element introduced due to previous COVID-19 restrictions remains, so if you can't make it to the main event, you can complete 5K your way during the month of February.

Tara Currie, NICHs Events & Marketing Manager is urging family members of every generation, age and ability to sign up saying, "Sadly, four people in Northern Ireland die every day from heart disease, and coronary heart disease is the biggest single cause of premature deaths of under 75s."

"So please come join us on Sunday 26th February at Stormont Estate, or if you can't make the live event, you can support us by doing 5k your way any day, or over days, in February. Dress red, wear your heart on your sleeve to remember a loved one and together we can help rebuild thousands of lives and make a lasting change towards heart health in Northern Ireland. Everyone is welcome to join in the fun - even the family pooch!"

We will once again partner with MACE for 2023 and are delighted to welcome sister company Musgrave MarketPlace which will also support the event. Diane Anthony from Musgrave says, "MACE and Musgrave MarketPlace are both backing NICHs's call for people to dress in red and wear their heart on their sleeve at this year's event, which is set to be fantastic. Whether you're taking part in memory of someone you have lost to heart disease, celebrating someone who is living with a heart condition, or to prevent heart disease happening to someone in the future - sign up and join us to support this worthy cause!"

If you've been inspired by Ralph's story, then why not step up to the challenge? Whether you are taking part in memory of a loved one or simply to get active, sign yourself, family and friends up to the Red Dress Fun Run on Sunday 26th February at 11am at nichs.org.uk/RedDressFunRun

We are also once again inviting primary school pupils to have a laugh while they raise funds for heart illness by hosting their own fun run anytime in February. Each school that takes part will receive a certificate of thanks to show how much they raised and there are some fantastic prizes up for grabs too! Find out more at nichs.org.uk/PSRedDressFunRun

Supported by

MACE

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Chest
Heart &
Stroke

Prevention Services



INVESTING IN OUR FUTURE GENERATION'S HEALTH

The NICHS Health Promotion team is dedicated to the prevention and early detection of chest, heart and stroke illnesses. The team do this by informing and educating people about the early warning signs of these conditions and empowering individuals to make healthy choices and lifestyle changes. Through their workplace, school and community programmes, everything the Health Promotion team do is focused on helping people to enjoy healthy and active lives and to reduce their risk of developing chest, heart or stroke illnesses in the future.



A particular area of concern for the team is the health status of young people in Northern Ireland. It might surprise you to learn that around a quarter of children aged 2-15 here are either overweight (20%) or obese (6%), and 25% of young people aged 16+ are obese and 37% are overweight.

Children in Northern Ireland are also the least active in the UK, with just 13% of children - 20% of primary school and 11% of post-primary pupils - meeting physical activity guidelines. In addition, children and young people growing up in poverty or the most deprived areas are at greater risk of poorer health outcomes than children from better-off families or more affluent areas.

The NICHS Well Schools Programme was developed to help tackle this growing public health issue amongst young people and it aims to empower and educate them to create healthy habits and lifestyles from an early age. As a result, we reached 3,924 pupils and 2,040 parents and guardians throughout the academic year 2021-2022, and we are well on our way to topping these figures in 2022-2023.

Chester's Challenge is our 3-week programme for primary schools with children with the greatest health needs. Chester's Challenge is aimed at P5 pupils (7-8-year-olds) and focuses on the benefits of a healthy lifestyle with messages around healthy eating and getting pupils more active. It is a fun, interactive and high-quality programme that supports the school in delivering its curriculum and encourages young people to choose healthier options and adopt healthier lifestyles. In addition, health promotion information is provided to children to bring home to their parents and carers.

“Thank you so much! The children loved the sessions and they gained important information. They already use what they learnt to make healthier choices during break time.”

For all primary schools, we offer Heartley’s Heroes which is a 40-minute interactive talk focusing on how to keep your heart healthy by eating well, being active and getting a good night’s sleep.

For post-primary schools, we offer 30 minute Well Talks and Webinars on various topics, covering nutrition, sleep, stress, physical activity, alcohol, and smoking/E-cigarettes.



Vaping is becoming an ever-bigger issue for children and young people in Northern Ireland. In 2016, NICHs funded the Ulster University’s research into vaping trends in Northern Ireland and they found that e-cig/vape use amongst 11-16-year-olds here appears to be higher than in the rest of the UK. They also found however, that young people had mixed knowledge about vaping and that teachers struggled to find accurate information on it. Our Well Schools team have also seen this on the ground, as vaping was the most requested health talk by schools last year. Furthermore, research evidence suggests that those who have vaped before the age of 14 are at three times the risk of becoming regular tobacco smokers by the age of 17¹.



In addition to the support delivered through our Well Schools Programme, NICHs is also active in lobbying the government for more action on tackling obesity amongst young people, including a ban on the marketing and promotion of high-fat and sugary food, increasing access to high quality PE and physical activity and ensuring access to healthy school meals. We are also funding research into ways to increase children’s activity levels in both primary and post-primary schools, which will help shape our future services and health policy work.



If you are interested in finding out more about any of our school services, please contact the team at healthpromotion@nichs.org.uk or visit nichs.org.uk/schools

**Chest
Heart &
Stroke**

Volunteering

GIVE SOMETHING BACK IN 2023

At NICHS we rely on the support of our team of committed and compassionate volunteers to allow us to deliver our charitable activities. We involve volunteers in our care services, public health activities, research committees, on our Governance Board, at our fundraising events and as community ambassadors. In short, we involve volunteers in everything we do.

Over the years we have been very fortunate to have the support of many longstanding and dedicated volunteers. People like Desmond O'Hara and Rebekah Rees.

For us, volunteers like 80-year-old Desmond from Lurgan are vital to being able to provide life-changing services for people affected by chest, heart and stroke illnesses in local communities across Northern Ireland. Desmond's dedication to giving back to others was recognised by the former Lord Mayor of Armagh, Banbridge and Craigavon earlier this year, when he and his family were invited to afternoon tea with Alderman Glen Barr.



"I think volunteering is great for your psyche. The people I work with are so grateful and it makes you take stock of how lucky you are."

Inspirational student Rebekah from Magherafelt actively sought a placement with NICHS, which went on to ignite a passion for volunteering that saw her commitment recognised when she won the prestigious Diana Award in 2019.



Rebekah became a regular volunteer at one of our Post Rehab Exercise Programmes for stroke survivors. The difference Rebekah has made cannot be underestimated, with one service user saying, "Rebekah wants to help and demonstrated empathy, compassion and kindness beyond her years by encouraging me to participate in the exercises and group discussions which meant I was able to participate fully in the group."

Her personal experience and first-hand involvement of volunteering with NICHS has led to Rebekah carrying out PhD research into the effects of exercise on stroke patient recovery.

As the pandemic hit, all of the NICHS volunteer team were stood down for their safety and wellbeing. Whilst many of the team have returned to their roles we are now in a position where we need more volunteers and are recruiting for opportunities across Northern Ireland.

Desmond says, "The COVID-19 pandemic sadly meant NICHS had to stop the group for a while, but I am now back helping out at their fortnightly Wellness Sessions and it's great we can all meet up once again. I help with quizzes, arts, crafts or simply have a chat with the people who attend the group."

If you are interested in volunteering with us, please contact 028 9032 0184, or visit nichs.org.uk/how-you-can-help/volunteering to view our current volunteer opportunities.

Supporters

REMEMBERING DAVID MAGILL

In this edition of Pulse, we wanted to pay a special tribute to David Magill who volunteered with our charity generously and selflessly for over 30 years. David sadly passed away on 11th November 2021 and here we remember some of the many ways David helped support our work.



David first volunteered with us when he agreed to chair the Glengormley Fundraising Support Group for one year as a favour to the outgoing Chair. This was the start of a volunteering relationship with our charity which lasted for over three decades. During this time and under his expert guidance, the Group fundraised a staggering £350,000 through a wide range of events including nights at the races, sponsored dog walks, ten pin bowling competitions, annual Christmas fairs and fashion shows. David participated enthusiastically in all the community events and saw them, not only as an opportunity to raise much needed funds, but to also make connections with the local community and to spread health promotion messages whilst having fun. He often spoke of his high regard for the many long-term volunteers in the Glengormley Fundraising Support Group.

David was a very successful businessman and hotelier. When he joined the Council of NICHS his commercial expertise was a great asset to us. He played a significant role in helping us secure our Head Office premises on the Dublin Road in Belfast. He approached his role on the Council with rigour and was the ideal critical friend to NICHS- committed and loyal but never afraid to challenge.

David took real delight in seeing our charity flourish. He particularly enjoyed supporting the work of the rehabilitation riding groups we previously facilitated in collaboration with the Riding for the Disabled Association.

In recent years the Magill Family Charitable Trust funded the purchase of new audio-visual equipment for our Head Office. This equipment was invaluable throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, enabling us to continue to deliver our care and prevention services remotely when face-to-face restrictions were in place.

In 2005 David was deservedly awarded the MBE for his community work with the Glengormley Fundraising Support Group as well as other local charities. He was adamant that he accepted the award on behalf of all the very committed Glengormley Fundraising Support Group volunteers.



David was an extremely generous gentleman who devoted so much of his time to helping others. He is sadly missed but very fondly remembered by his many friends at NICHS and the Glengormley Fundraising Support Group.

During his lifetime, David made such a positive contribution to the lives of so many suffering from serious health conditions and the legacy of his desire to help others will live on for years to come.

Research



IS A NEW TEST FOR ATRIAL FIBRILLATION ON THE HORIZON?

A Q&A with researcher Dr Claire Tonry from Queen's University Belfast.

NICHs: Why is your research project focusing on Atrial Fibrillation?

Dr Tonry: Atrial Fibrillation, or AF, is a heart condition that causes an irregular and often abnormally fast heart rate. Over 39,000 people in Northern Ireland are living with Atrial Fibrillation and a further 10,000 may be undiagnosed^{1 2}. AF can increase a person's stroke risk by up to five times if untreated and the stroke is more likely to be severe.

NICHs: What is your research specifically looking at?

Dr Tonry: We are looking for new blood-based biomarkers to help detect AF. Risk for AF is currently determined based on various clinical and lifestyle risk factors, such as age, sex and underlying vascular conditions. However, not all people with AF will have these risk factors. There are proteins in the blood that can be used to detect heart damage, but these are not specific to AF. AF can be quite a 'silent' condition so we are aiming to develop a test that can be used routinely to measure subtle changes in the blood before patients become very symptomatic of AF.

In people already diagnosed with AF, we want to see if there are biomarkers in their blood which indicate if they are at an increased risk of a future stroke or heart failure.

NICHs: What have you discovered so far?

Dr Tonry: From studying 10 years' worth of patient samples, we discovered lots of protein changes in the blood, with most happening years before any AF symptoms occurred. This validates our theory that there are changes in the blood that can be measured as indicators of AF risk.

NICHs: How do you hope your research will benefit patients / the NHS?

Dr Tonry: Knowing about and being able to test for these new proteins could facilitate earlier AF diagnosis and intervention with treatment plans by clinicians. For people with AF, easier routine monitoring could help reduce their risk of having a stroke which is important as an AF related stroke has very poor outcomes. Overall, it could really help improve patient prognosis and quality of life.

We hope an earlier stage blood test can be developed to allow routine AF testing in clinical settings. We believe that this could improve long term health and quality of life for patients with AF. This could ultimately help reduce demand and economic implications on the NHS through fewer AF related hospital admissions and surgeries.

Thanks to your support we have been able to fund Dr Tonry's research which is still ongoing.

¹ Disease Prevalence (Quality Outcomes Framework) (administrative geographies) <https://www.ninis2.nisra.gov.uk/public/ViewDataSet.aspx?ds=9882&lh=73&yn=2007-2019&sk=134&sn=Health%20and%20Social%20Care&yearfilter>

² Focus on Atrial Fibrillation in Northern Ireland. An independent AF Inquiry into the identification and management of AF to reduce stroke risk - EXECUTIVE SUMMARY. (NICHs 2020)



A SPOTLIGHT ON CARDIAC CONDITIONS

February is Heart Month and we wanted to take this opportunity to highlight the wide range of heart conditions people can be affected by:

ANGINA- is the pain or discomfort experienced when the heart muscle doesn't get as much oxygen as it needs, due to the build-up of fatty deposits (plaque) on the walls of the arteries. It is a common warning sign of coronary heart disease. Angina most frequently occurs during or immediately after physical exertion. It may also occur during times of stress or strong emotion like anger or excitement, which cause your heart rate to increase.

HEART ATTACK- occurs when an artery becomes blocked. Coronary heart disease is one of the leading causes of heart attack. It causes a build-up of fatty deposits (plaque) on the walls of the coronary arteries, which narrows them. These fatty deposits can then rupture and trigger the formation of a blood clot. A blockage may also result from a spasm or sudden narrowing of a coronary artery. As a result, the heart muscle is starved of oxygen and may be permanently damaged.

CARDIAC ARREST- is when the heart goes into spasm and stops beating. This can happen for a number of reasons. For example, during a heart attack, a complication called ventricular arrhythmia can cause the heart to go into spasm and then to stop beating. It can also be caused by a congenital heart defect or by an external event such as electrocution, choking or trauma.

HEART FAILURE- means that your heart is not able to pump blood in the way it should. The most common cause of heart failure is a heart attack, which causes damage to the muscle of the heart. Common causes of long-term heart failure include coronary heart disease, high blood pressure, cardiomyopathy (disease of the heart muscle), an irregular heartbeat, disease of the heart valves, thyroid gland disease and alcohol or substance abuse. All these conditions put extra strain on the heart over a long period of time. The heart initially tries to cope with the extra workload by getting bigger, developing more muscle or beating faster in an attempt to keep up with demand. But eventually it cannot cope and starts to fail.

ATRIAL FIBRILLATION- or AF, is a heart condition that causes an irregular and often abnormally fast heart rate. As a result of an irregular beat, the heart may not empty its chambers of blood at each beat, increasing the risk of a clot forming in the blood left behind which can then travel to the brain and cause a stroke. AF can increase a person's stroke risk by up to five times if untreated and the stroke is more likely to be severe.

For more information on heart conditions, their symptoms and how they can be treated, visit [nichs.org.uk/heartconditions](https://www.nichs.org.uk/heartconditions)

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.

Chest
Heart &
Stroke

Supporters

OUR HEARTFELT THANKS

Partnering with NICHS as a business is a fantastic way to help us continue our important work whilst showing your company's support for your employees, customers and the wider local community.



In October 2022 Peter Mark salons across NI took part in the 'Peter Markathon' to raise funds for our work. The focus of the event was women's health and 'Her Heart Matters' to raise awareness of heart conditions in women.

The teams at Peter Mark came up with lots of fun-filled fundraising ideas including Spinathons, pyjama parties, fancy dress days, raffles and competitions. A fantastic £5,000 was raised thanks to all the staff and customers who got involved and donated so generously.



Baloo Hire Centres is one of our corporate partners and every time one of their machines is hired 10% of the hire income is donated to help fund our care and prevention services and research. Last year, Baloo Hire Centres raised over £2,000 which was tremendous.

The company also supported their employee Tiyrone Weir with his fundraising efforts. Tiyrone raised over £400 through a car show event in Omagh, which Baloo Hire Centres then generously matched, bringing Tiyrone's total for NICHS to a brilliant £800.



McElmeel Mobility Services raised a staggering £6,817.50 in 2022 in memory of their much-loved colleague Oisín Fields. Oisín had a heart condition and was only 30 years old when he sadly passed away in January last year whilst at football training.

The team at McElmeel Mobility Services organised a number of fundraising initiatives including climbing Slieve Donard and Carrauntoohill, a charity football tournament, coffee mornings and car washes to raise these vital funds as a tribute to Oisín.

We are very thankful to McElmeel Mobility Services and Oisín's family and friends for all their efforts in raising this fantastic amount and are delighted that they are planning to continue to support our charity with an annual event in memory of Oisín.

To find out more about how your business or organisation can partner with us visit nichs.org.uk/fundraiseatwork



RunToRemember

If you would like to organise your own in-memory event, a run, walk, cycle, swim, abseil, hike, or any activity in tribute to a loved one or work colleague lost to a chest, heart or stroke illness, or in support of the 1 in 5 people in Northern Ireland living with one of these devastating health conditions, we are here to help and support you every step of the way.

Find out more at
www.nichs.org.uk/RunToRemember

Chest
Heart &
Stroke

Survivor Story



Michael Geoghegan STROKE

Michael Geoghegan from Lurgan is a busy father of six who enjoys keeping fit and active- so when Michael had a stroke in April last year at just 54 years old it was a massive shock.

Michael recalls; "I follow a lot of football matches as my children are all involved in the sport. The day I had my stroke was a typical, football-filled day. I went to a match in Armagh, came home and was then straight back out the door to football practice with one of my sons. I was sitting down to watch a match with three of my children later that evening when I started to hear noises inside my head. I would describe them as digital type noises, like beeps. At first, I thought I was sitting on one of the kid's toys but then I noticed my youngest son was looking at me strangely. When he ran behind a chair and started crying I knew something was wrong. My face must have dropped and when I spoke I could hear my speech was slurred."

"My wife Natalie came running in and all she could think about was the FAST (Face, Arms, Speech, Time) advert. She was sure I was having a stroke, so she rang an ambulance and went through the checks with them on the phone. To me it felt like this was all happening over a minute or two, but Natalie would say it was more like eight minutes."

"By the time the ambulance arrived my strength and speech had returned to normal and my face had lifted again. The paramedic thought I'd had a TIA (transient ischaemic attack) and I was taken to hospital."

Michael underwent tests at Craigavon Hospital which showed he had had a full stroke. Michael says; "It was a shock as I was as fit as a fiddle having played sport all my life and being involved with coaching. I was only in my early fifties."

"Thankfully I only had to stay in hospital for two nights before I was discharged to continue recovering at home and that's when Lynne from Northern Ireland Chest Heart & Stroke got in touch and asked if I'd like to come along to the Craigavon PREP group."

PREP (Post Rehab Exercise Programme) is our six-week programme aimed at helping people rebuild their lives and gain confidence following a stroke. PREP does this through a combination of education and physio-developed exercises. Of the programme Michael says; "I found it very useful to my recovery. I had a lot of questions which PREP helped with, for example, were there things I could do to help improve my memory? Also, after my stroke I had problems sleeping. I could get to sleep as I was so tired but after an hour or two I would wake up. That would be me until about 6am, when I would fall asleep again for an hour or so before I then had to get up for the day. PREP also helped with that."

"It was good to meet and talk to other people who were going through the same thing too. I met people who were of a similar age to me, if not younger, which was a surprise to me."

"I also like to think my positive recovery journey helped support and motivate others in the group to keep on trying to recover as best they could. Before my own personal experience, I would have thought of the worst-case scenario when I thought about a stroke and what that means. PREP showed me that's not always the case and every stroke is different."

Thankfully Michael made a full recovery after his stroke. Michael says; "I am self-employed, and I was back to work two weeks after I left hospital. I have a cleaning business and although at first I wasn't doing the physical side of the work, I was able to get someone to drive me and I was out overseeing jobs etc."

"I do think my memory has been affected by my stroke, but my physical capabilities are all fine and I am back enjoying going to the gym etc."

In October last year Michael put his physical endurance levels to the test by taking on the challenge of climbing Slieve Donard to raise vital funds for our charity. Michael explains; "I wanted to do something to give back to NICHS as I got a lot out of PREP. I had climbed Slieve Donard years ago as part of a fundraiser for another charity- it was fantastic and the feeling of achievement when I got to the top was great. I decided that would be the perfect fundraiser although I did that first climb on a lovely summer's day and the day we went in October we couldn't see 10 feet in front of us! Natalie and my four sons supported me and took part too, along with lots of family and friends. Over 30 of us did the climb which was fantastic, and I want to thank everyone who took part. I have twin girls, but they were a bit too young to join in as they are only 5!"

Michael raised an amazing £3,327 for our work. Michael says; "As a family we're involved with lots of clubs in our local community including football and GAA clubs, Irish dancing and hip-hop classes and we received such great support from everyone."



"I think part of the reason we raised so much money was because most families are affected by chest, heart or stroke conditions in some way. People were really generous, and it's great their donations will go towards helping more people like me."

On sharing his story Michael explains; "I hope telling my story helps raise awareness that a stroke can happen to anyone and we all need to be aware of the signs and symptoms. I really don't think I'd be as well off today if Natalie hadn't been aware of FAST and acted so quickly."

"I also want people to know that recovery is possible too- a stroke doesn't always end with the worst-case scenario and Northern Ireland Chest Heart & Stroke is there to help."

For more information on NICHS stroke services, visit nichs.org.uk/our-support-services/stroke

KNOW THE SYMPTOMS OF A STROKE

F
A
S
T

FACE - has their face fallen on one side? Can they smile?

ARMS - can they raise both arms and keep them there?

SPEECH - is their speech slurred?

TIME to call 999 if you see any single one of these signs.

**Chest
Heart &
Stroke**

Health



SUPPORTING MENTAL WELLBEING

NICHS is committed to promoting health and working to reduce health inequalities and we want to ensure more vulnerable members of society have access to advice, information and support to enable them to have good health.

We support people who are homeless because they are at greater risk of developing premature and preventable chest, heart and stroke illnesses. They face a number of unique challenges that have a negative effect on their health and access to medical care, medications and mental health care is often limited. Homeless people also tend to have a high prevalence of risk factors such as smoking, alcohol consumption, high blood pressure, diabetes and stress, putting them at a higher risk of developing chest, heart or stroke illnesses.

Thanks to funding from the Department of Health, we are able to deliver health promotion services to support the health and wellbeing of staff and homeless people in temporary accommodation in hostels within the Belfast and South Eastern Trust. With more funds, we could support more people who are homeless across Northern Ireland.

Through our Health and Homeless Programme, we offer a range of initiatives such as our Well Checks which assess and check for irregular heartbeat, blood pressure and cholesterol issues as well as Well Talks and Stress Awareness Sessions. We also collaborate with organisations such as Aware NI to provide Mental Health First Aid Training and Platinum Institute Training to run physical activity courses. We want to not only support everyone's physical health, but also their mental wellbeing, to empower them to be able to make healthier choices to reduce their risk of chest, heart and stroke conditions.

To fully support our hostel staff and residents in achieving long-term behaviour changes, and creating a healthy hostel environment, we also deliver our Well Space programme. Well Space is a long-term programme delivered over a one-year period. Both staff and residents complete a health survey which helps highlight the hostel's health and wellbeing priorities and areas where additional support is required. Supported by NICHS, a team of Health Champions are trained to create, develop and implement health initiatives based on these priorities, motivating individuals to achieve health goals.



Stress often features in the top three health priorities for hostel staff and residents. The 'A Picture of Health' research carried out by the Council for Homelessness in 2017 found that 78% of people who were homeless reported feeling stressed but that only 32% felt that they were receiving adequate support for their mental health. For those working in front line health and care services, their health issues are often more severe than everyday stress.

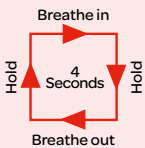
Stress is associated with increased blood pressure. The negative coping habits that we often use to manage stress such as comfort eating, smoking or drinking more alcohol can increase our risk of being overweight or obese and damage our arteries. In turn, this can affect blood flow to our vital organs such as our heart

and brain which can increase the risk of a heart attack or stroke. Helping staff and clients within homeless settings to support their mental wellbeing through positive coping strategies is therefore a vital part of our work.

We deliver Stress Awareness Sessions which aim to help individuals understand and cope with stress more positively through the use of breathing techniques, reframing and mindfulness. Massage therapy is also provided to further help reduce stress levels.

Our Health and Homeless Programme highlights how stress can affect everyone and how important it is to find healthy ways to deal with it. As April is Stress Awareness Month, we want to encourage you to support your mental wellbeing.

There are lots of things you can try to help you manage stress in a more positive way:



1. Squared Breathing

Breathing exercises keep your mind focused and help lower your heart rate and blood pressure.



2. Reframing

Reframing is a technique which helps you view things in a different, less stressful light.



3. Mindfulness

Helps us to live in the present moment by using the natural tools of our breath, our body and our senses as anchors.



4. 5, 4, 3, 2, 1

This mindfulness technique aims to distract your brain from the past or future by forcing it to focus on things in your present environment.

5 - things you see

4 - things you hear

3 - things you feel

2 - things you smell

1 - thing you taste



5. Physical Activity

Improves our physical health and also our mental wellbeing by releasing feel-good hormones in the brain.



6. Connect

Connect with the people around you to support and enrich your life: family, friends, colleagues and neighbours.



7. Give

Giving stimulates the reward system in the brain, making a person feel good and increasing their self-worth.



8. Keep Learning

Learning throughout our lives contributes to self-esteem, social interaction, competence and self-efficacy.



9. Talk

Talking about your feelings can really help identify what is causing the stress.



10. Good Mood Foods

Certain foods contain nutrients that can improve our mood: oily fish, dark green leafy vegetables, berries, bananas, nuts and seeds and small amounts of dark chocolate.

For more information and videos on positive coping strategies visit nichs.org.uk/information/risk-factors/stress

**Chest
Heart &
Stroke**

Care Services

HELPING PEOPLE RETURN TO WORK

Chest, heart and stroke related illnesses can have a huge impact on someone's day to day life. For people of working age, these conditions can also often mean a long-term absence from work which can lead to issues such as financial uncertainty, stress and a loss of confidence.

In April and September 2022, we delivered a pilot Return to Work Programme, specifically designed for people of working age (18-65 years) who have been off work for a sustained period due to a chest, heart or stroke condition but who now feel ready to start thinking about the process of returning to employment.



This free online programme aims to increase awareness of the support available to help people get back to the workplace as well as make them feel more confident about beginning this journey. The information and support delivered through the Return to Work Programme is designed to help participants feel empowered about making decisions around their future employment options.

Returning to work after illness can be daunting and often creates a lot of anxiety. To help people with their return to the workplace NICHS staff deliver a session on stress management and increasing confidence. This focuses on the causes of workplace anxiety and highlights tools and techniques which can be used to help overcome concerns. This session also encourages peer support amongst those attending the programme – sharing fears and recommending management tools to others can help further boost confidence and resilience surrounding returning to work.

Information sessions with other organisations who provide guidance on areas including employee rights, benefits advice, counselling and considering new employment options are also included as part of the programme. These organisations include the Labour Relations Agency, Ulster Supported Employment Solution, Disability Action and Advice Space.

The feedback we have received about the Return to Work Programme pilot has been extremely positive:

“The course was very informative. Stephanie and Samantha were extremely helpful and always try to find out information to help.”

“Well run from start to finish. Enjoyed the experience.”

“The Programme was beneficial. I took away information which may be useful to me when considering my return to work. Hearing the experiences of other attendees was also interesting and informative.”

Thanks to your generosity we are delighted to be able to run the pilot again this year, helping more people on their journey back to employment.

Supporters

DO SOMETHING AMAZING - FUNDRAISE FOR US IN 2023

Did you know that almost 90% of our work is funded by donations from the public?

It's only thanks to your support that we are able to continue being there for the thousands of local people living with chest, heart and stroke conditions who need our support. Your donations also help us keep leading the fight against these illnesses by funding ground-breaking research, life-saving prevention services and our influential campaigning work.

There are so many ways that you can get involved and help us continue the fight. Whether you choose to make a donation or take part in an event, or organise your own fundraiser at work, home or with friends, every little penny will help make a difference to local lives right here in Northern Ireland.



ARE YOU UP FOR A CHALLENGE?

Challenge yourself in 2023 for #TeamNICHS - run, cycle, walk, hike, swim, abseil, skydive - to help us continue to provide support and care in your community.

- **Sunday 30th April** - Belfast City Marathon
- **Sunday 21st May** - Europa Abseil
- **Saturday 11th June** - Tower Museum Abseil
- **Sunday 27th August** - Lap the Lough

Find out more and sign up to fundraise for us at nichs.org.uk/events



ORGANISE YOUR OWN FUNDRAISER

If you would like to organise your own unique event to raise funds for our work, you are very welcome to do so! Whether you're a baker, a crafter, a musician or you would prefer to do something more active, there are lots of ways you can get involved.

For more information and to get started, visit nichs.org.uk/fundraiseforus



FUNDRAISE AT WORK

Very few businesses in Northern Ireland are unaffected, whether directly or indirectly, by chest, heart and stroke illness. Partnering with us is a fantastic way to help us carry on our important work whilst showing your company's support for your employees, customers and the wider local community.

To find out more about how your business or organisation can partner with us, visit nichs.org.uk/fundraiseatwork

Chest
Heart &
Stroke

Lobbying



GIVING PATIENTS A VOICE

Part of our remit as a charity is to represent the views, and relay the experiences of, those experiencing chest, heart and stroke illness. We have launched a Respiratory Survey to enable patients, service users and carers to tell us about their experiences. We have sent the survey by email and post to all those who are registered with our respiratory services. In addition, we have publicised the survey via social media and other platforms.

To date, we have received over 300 replies, and they are continuing to come in. This feedback from people with lived experience of respiratory illness and of using respiratory services will inform what we ask politicians, key civil servants, and other key stakeholders to do to improve respiratory health care and its prevention. The responses will help inform our Respiratory Manifesto which we hope to launch in the coming months.

STROKE REFORM

The pace of stroke reform remains painfully slow. This means that people are dying, and people are being left with much higher levels of disability than would have been the case with reform. The Stroke Action Plan launched by the Department of Health in June 2022 set up a new Hyperacute Stroke Unit Project Board who were to:

“Commence further external analysis by Autumn 2022 to identify and evaluate options for the establishment of Hyperacute Stroke Care, with a preferred option identified by Summer 2023.”

We wrote to the Board recently to check on progress in this vital area only to be informed that the external contractor who is to carry out the analysis has not yet been appointed. We will continue to urge the Board to prioritise this work.

Northern Ireland cannot sustain adequate stroke care at eight hospitals - we need to provide specialised 24/7 care in fewer hospitals.

ASTHMA

Sadly, the basic asthma messages around using preventer inhalers regularly, using an aero chamber and mastering inhaler technique are still not well enough known, resulting in dozens of deaths each year. To improve awareness, we are working on developing two online courses – one aimed at health professionals and the other at school children. In addition, we hope to host seminars for community and prescribing pharmacists early this year.



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



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Find out More








Almost 90%

of our care and prevention services and research are funded exclusively by public donations.

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at www.nichs.org.uk**



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