



Spinal  
Injuries  
Ireland  
Support at every stage



**ANNUAL  
REPORT  
2021**

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## CHAIRPERSON'S ADDRESS

Thank you to our staff and volunteers who continued to work tirelessly to provide online services to our service users during 2021. Globally the world has changed significantly, and I am very proud that our organisation has adapted to this new digital world.

From a financial perspective the Board were very concerned yet again as many of our fundraising events had to be cancelled and there were less state supports than there were in 2020. Yet again we were astounded by the support of the community who took up challenges and fundraising initiatives to support SII and to the staff who managed to host a barbecue and run the inaugural awareness and fundraising campaign 'A Day In My Wheels'. We have detailed these on the fundraising report in this document and I just want to reiterate how important your support was to SII. I would like to thank the Staff and Board members for their dedication and hard work during 2021.

We finished the year with a €87,326 loss, which considering the impact of a global pandemic, could have been worse. We look forward to getting back to some normality in 2022 and the ability to meet face to face.

I want to thank James McCarthy and Keith Mangan for completing three terms as Directors and to Donal O'Flynn who stepped down from the Board due to work commitments. We very much appreciate your time and skills in managing the organisation through the last 10 years.

Thank you also to our Company Secretary, Louise Moore, who retired in September 2021 and welcome to our new Company Secretary, Ali Redden.

I sincerely hope that all our service users stayed well and safe during this year and that we supported you during a difficult year. If there is anything further, we can do for you please do not hesitate to contact us.

**John C. Twomey**  
Chairman



## CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S REVIEW

The second year of the COVID 19 pandemic brought further challenges for SII which the board and staff embraced and thanks to their tireless commitment we further developed our online programme of services.

In early 2021 we announced our affiliation with US based Christopher and Dana Reeve Foundation. The Board of SII approved this affiliation in order to advance SII's mission of providing the best care post injury in the community, sharing best practice in care and in the future fund research projects with Reeve and other partners.

During 2021, we continued to deliver services virtually with minimal opportunities to engage face to face. Particularly the peer support sessions facilitated by SII's peer volunteers provided a platform for people with similar injuries to support one another and our online education programme went from strength to strength.

In October we hosted our second annual virtual conference with presentations by healthcare professionals on practical and medical advice. Other presentations included travel and recreation, accessible homes and research. Brid Keenan, psychotherapist, gave a presentation on managing trauma for family members.

2021 was our second year of cancelled fundraising events with the exception of a barbecue in Merrion Cricket Club organised by our Event Manager Philip Quinlan. 2021 also saw our first 'A Day In My Wheels' challenge which illustrated the difficulties wheelchair users have in their day to day lives while also being a very significant fundraiser for SII.

Finally, we could not do what we do without the support of all the SCI community from service users to healthcare professionals in the NRH, Mater and CUH and other acute hospitals and also our donors, supporters, volunteers, staff and Board of Directors. A huge thank you and looking forward to seeing you all in person in 2022.

**Fiona Bolger**  
CEO

## GER GILL STORY

**Ger Gill has a fabulous attitude to life and was determined not to let a spinal cord injury get in his way. “Life is like a game cards and you must play with the hand you are dealt”.**

He was an active young man who swam competitively, raced motorbikes and walked his devoted dog for miles. Having spent a two-week holiday in Salou he returned to work in a call centre. Lunch break was only half an hour, so they literally ran out of the office this July day in 2017 to Subway to grab some lunch. Ger jumped down two steps and continued running, assuming his legs were with him, but due to the impact his legs didn't follow and he ended up “going flying”. He was pretty ripped up but didn't think much of it and hopped in his car and headed home. He also had a minor bump in the car when a lady hit him that week and he noticed that he had started to limp so went along to the GP to get checked out. Testing his reflexes, the GP immediately realised something was wrong and Ger was referred to a neurologist in Beaumont.

The next 11 months were somewhat confusing and chaotic with a series of tests, lost medical notes and a plethora of possible diagnoses such as Multiple Sclerosis, Motor Neuron Disease and spinal tumours. When I suggested that this must have been a terrifying time Ger replied, *“my head was wrecked but I didn't dwell on anything too much. I'm just not like that.”* During this time it was discovered that Ger had a condition called Myelomalacia, a medical condition when the spinal cord begins to soften which can lead to a loss of spinal cord volume. Surgery was recommended to remove the discs that were inhibiting the normal blood flow to the spinal cord and this was carried out in June 2018.

Following the surgery Ger's condition really deteriorated. He had a lot of pain in his arms and his walking was badly affected, *“I was walking like I was locked, like I had drunk a load of cans”* explained Ger. He was back and forward to physio in Beaumont but wasn't seeing much improvement. Eventually in 2020 Ger was referred to the NRH. Covid had hit and the hospital was in lockdown. He spent the first week or two in a ward in the old hospital and then moved to a lovely big private room in the brand new hospital as it opened.

Despite a bit of loneliness due to the lack of visitors Ger fully embraced his time in the NRH. He was determined that he would make the most of the opportunity that he felt lucky to have. He welcomed the routine and never



missed one appointment during his stay, and he talks about the staff there so fondly with their ‘magic hands’.

*“They are a different breed to those working in other hospitals. They are just fantastic. I liked it so much I would happily go back”.*

Ger made fabulous progress during the seven and a half weeks he was there and now walks pretty well. He uses hiking poles if he goes on long walks and admits to his legs “going a bit wonky” quite regularly but he concentrates to stop this happening.

Unfortunately, Ger still suffers with quite a lot of pain in his arms from his elbows to the tips of his fingers and in his big toes. He can't wear long sleeves because of the feeling of fabric on his skin which he describes as like being scraped with barbed wire or severe electric shocks. He hasn't been able to return to work because of the high level of medication he currently relies on – *“one minute you're there and the next minute you're not”.*

However, he has just had a very successful trial of a spinal cord stimulator and is hoping to have one fitted in the next couple of months. He is very hopeful that this will enable him to return to a more normal life including a return to employment. In the meantime, Ger keeps busy walking his dog and tending to his garden as much as he can. He also crochets fabulous items for his family.

He has also completed several fundraisers for us at SII for which we are very grateful and really wants to take on a skydive next! As I said, he is determined not to let a spinal cord injury get in the way of life!

# NEW CARE ALLIANCE DESIGNED TO FOSTER CONNECTIONS

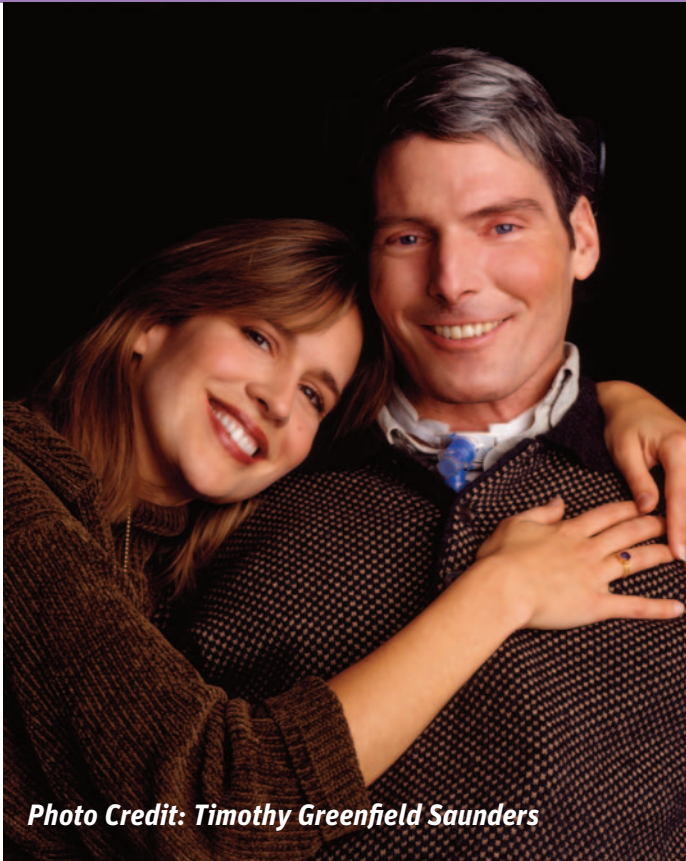


Photo Credit: Timothy Greenfield Saunders

## In April 2021 Spinal Injuries Ireland (SII) and the Christopher & Dana Reeve Foundation announced a new alliance to cultivate connections and expand support for the spinal cord injury community.

This collaboration will foster sharing of best practices, expand services and educational content, and enable joint fundraising opportunities in the U.S. and Ireland. As the alliance kicks off, the focus will be on peer mentoring, a flagship service of both organisations.

The Christopher & Dana Reeve Foundation is dedicated to curing spinal cord injury by advancing innovative research and improving quality of life for individuals and families impacted by paralysis. Their National Paralysis Resource Center (PRC), offers comprehensive information, resources, and referral services for the community to achieve a better quality of life. SII's mission is to engage people with a spinal cord injury, along with their family members and together, address barriers to full participation in society and empower their service users to work towards achieving personal, social and vocational goals once again.

*“Spinal Injuries Ireland is delighted to partner with the Christopher & Dana Reeve Foundation to advance the mission of providing the best care post injury in the community for people who have sustained a life changing injury. To date both organisations have shared best practice in a number of services and in addition our collaboration will allow SII to participate and fund future research projects with Reeve and other partners to accelerate research into therapies and a cure for spinal cord injury”* commented Fiona Bolger, CEO of SII.

*“The mission of our PRC is to foster involvement in the community, promote health and improve quality of life,” said Maggie Goldberg, President, and CEO, Reeve Foundation. “Our new alliance with SII will help our organizations cultivate and grow community connections while learning from each other about the best ways to care for and promote the independence of people living with paralysis, a spinal cord injury, or mobility impairment.”*

While the organisations missions in terms of providing care and support to those living with spinal cord injuries are very similar the Christopher & Dana Reeve Foundation is also dedicated to finding cures for spinal cord injury.

*“By uniting the brightest minds in the field, we’re developing and delivering real world treatments that will move us closer to cures for spinal cord injury”.*

Their approach to research is to pursue every opportunity to enhance the health and quality of life of individuals living with paralysis, by translating scientific breakthroughs into vital new therapies.

While the initial benefit of the affiliation is all about sharing of information and best practices it is envisaged that the alliance will launch joint fundraising campaigns in the future to fund important research in the area of spinal cord injury.



# About SII and New Hire

## THE YEAR IN NUMBERS....

### SERVICE USERS

2020 **2211**                      2021 **2223**

### PEER SUPPORT

2020                      2021



### ACTIVITIES

2020                      2021



### COUNSELLING

2020                      2021



### SERVICE USER GOALS ACHIEVED

2020                      2021



### ALL INTERACTIONS

2020                      2021

**97,021**                      **97,994**

## New Hire

### Denise Lennon – Community Outreach Officer

#### Moving jobs in the pandemic

I was offered the position with SII in December 2021. Looking back to when it all started seems so surreal. Meeting team members via zoom, phone calls and endless text messages. The support I received has been immense. I had previously worked for fifteen years within an organisation for adults with an intellectual disability based in Cork. I had recently completed my level 8 in social care in Munster Technology University and it had given me the drive for a new challenge, so I applied for the position with SII. I am the Community Outreach Officer for Cork, Kerry, Limerick, Clare and partially cover Tipperary. I am looking forward to connecting with the service users, their families and supporting them to the best of my ability.



# Virtual Conference 2021 Supported by Coloplast



# Coloplast

## Thanks to all who attended our virtual conference in October. We learnt so much on the complexities of different types of SCI.

**DAY 1** centered around healthcare with presentations including Pressure Wound Care from Lissy Augustine NRH Tissue Viability Nurse, Autonomic Dysreflexia with Paula Keane NRH Outreach Liaison Nurse, Bowel and Bladder care from Coloplast nurses Saragh Broe and Eileen Lim Joon. This was followed by a panel discussion with the presenters from the NRH and Coloplast.

We had a pain management and medication joint presentation and discussion from the NRH with John Lynch, Clinical Specialist Physiotherapist, Claire Keogh Senior Psychologist and Sheena Cheyne, Chief Pharmacist looking at how important it is for people to be aware of their prescribed medications and the effects they have.

**DAY 2** looked at the practicalities of disability. John Tiernan, Clinical Engineer, SeatTech division in Enable Ireland looked at posture management, pressure area management, different types of chairs and seating. The Right Wheelchair For You was from the NRH with Orla Friel, Senior Physiotherapist and Shangdar Maring Rhonglo, Senior Occupational Therapist who looked at the practicalities of choosing a wheelchair, cushions and attachments.

Travel and recreation presentations from service users Samantha Ryan @wheelreviews and Michael and Leona Hennessy Cullen @thestruggleiswheel regarding their experiences with travel in Ireland.

Let's talk about – making your house an accessible home was a collaborative discussion with service users Cathy Dunne, Tim Rice, Gemma Willis, Paula McCormack, Jenny Needham and Kate Nolan around their experiences of adapting their homes to make them more accessible for their needs.

**DAY 3** looked at Research, Aging and the Family. We started off with speaking with Dr James Guest from the University of Miami about current spinal cord research and then Interactive care with Prof Aine Carroll, UCD discussing the Irish research context.

We then looked at living and aging with a spinal cord

injury, with a discussion with service users Conor McGinn and Olivia Shiel alongside Triona McNamee and Mary Gowing from the Living Well programme. The Living Well Programme is a fantastic free resource delivered as an online programme by the HSE. Further details are available here

<https://www.hse.ie/eng/health/hl/selfmanagement/living-well-programme/>

Brid Keenan, Psychotherapist gave us a presentation on family trauma after a spinal cord injury. The conference ended after an overview of SII peer support with Hilary Keppel, Community Outreach officer

Thank you to the 180 people who participated and gave their feedback helping us improve for the next conference, which we hope will be face to face.

For recordings of the conference presentations please go to <https://spinalinjuries.ie/resource/conference-and-campaign-videos/>

Thank you to the Coloplast team for participating and sponsoring the event.

*"The Conference was so informative. I could relate to most talks. Thank you"*

*"Well done- it was very easy to attend virtually so hopefully you'll do a blended version in the coming years."*



# SERVICES REVIEW

**As we entered the second year of Covid restrictions and lockdown, we continued to deliver services virtually with minimal opportunities to engage with our service users face to face. We have remained committed to providing evidence-based support and information and meeting the variety of unique needs through our education and support programmes. The activities programme remained on hold due to Covid. Lack of access to the NRH caused great difficulty in connecting with newly injured patients and their families.**

The Services team delivered all our services virtually and contacted all services users by phone, email and text. We hosted education sessions based on the feedback from the survey we completed with service users in 2020. These included all aspects of living with a spinal cord injury both physical and mentally. Our service users adjusted to the virtual world and appreciated being able to connect to others from home and meet with people from all over the country. A review of services was undertaken by the Disability Manager in our funding agency HSE CHO6.

## Peer Programme

Our peer support programme has gone from strength to strength with weekly sessions for people with different levels of injury and stages of recovery. It has been a challenging and isolating year and it was easy to feel alone at times. These peer sessions were not about agendas, themes, or speakers, but an opportunity for people to share what they wanted to or just listen. The attendees chatted about a variety of topics – seating, equipment, clothing, work, short and long-haul travel, to name a few. As a result of our collaboration with UCD PPI and the focus group we held for families, we are developing vital supports for families and carers of people with a SCI including trained peer volunteers who are family members.

*“I found the webinar most helpful and I’m only sorry that I wasn’t aware of this group earlier in my Dad’s journey. I would certainly attend more of them. Any help at all during this difficult time would help me and, of course, my family.”*

We also linked in with the NRH and Regional Hospitals to connect newly injured people with people who could relate to their fears and concerns and provide the hope they need at the start of their injury.

*“It was my first time using the internet and talking with people who had a similar injury to me”.*

## Counselling

Looking after mental health is just as important as physical health. Isolation was a significant factor for those who were only able to have a few visits from family and friends while in hospital. This had a huge impact on coming to terms with the trauma of their injury and life after the hospital. We were able to provide free one to one professional counselling to help people cope with the trauma of a SCI. We also delivered a 4-week course to offer support to people who are living with spinal injuries to support an understanding of how trauma affects not just our bodies but how we live in the world.

## Education

Our virtual conference was delivered over 3 days from October 20– 22nd and you can read about it on page 7.

## Surveys

A Bowel and Bladder Survey was conducted to gain an insight into the issues which are a major concern for people aging with a SCI. We know this is a topic of great importance and we are working with Coloplast and the staff in the NRH to address the outcomes raised in the survey.

We also conducted a survey relating to living with a SCI during Covid to ensure our services were meeting your needs. Three quarters of those who responded to the survey said our services were meeting their needs when it came to social isolation, anxiety, and information about living with a SCI.





## Collaboration

As the strict visiting in hospitals persisted, we were unable to meet with our colleagues in the Spinal Unit in the Mater Hospital or the NRH. We connected with them regularly to ensure all family members were being given information about SII and that they were getting the support they needed in the first days of their loved one's injury. We also reached out to our colleagues in Cork University Hospital and Beaumont Hospital as well as our allied health care professionals in the community.

Naomi Fitzgibbon, our Head of Services, represents SII on the National Office of Clinical Audit PPI (Public/patient involvement) committee. SII supported the launch of the 1st Paediatric Major Trauma Report highlighting the key findings on how major trauma occurs in children and what can be done to prevent it. There are few paediatric SCI injuries, but SII supports the parents of these children as required. Naomi also participated in the announcement of the Trauma Centres and Units in Ireland by the Minister for Health. The introduction of the Major Trauma Centres and Units is to ensure anyone who sustains a life-threatening injury receives the right care, at the right time, in the right place. SII are a co-contributor on a HRB research application called "Targeted Review and Amalgamation of Unmapped Major trauma and Ambulance data in Ireland: TRAUMA". Engagement with Dr C Begley, Rehabilitation Project Facilitator, National Office for Trauma Services and Damien McGovern, Programme Manager, National Office for Trauma Services to participate in mapping the pathway of care for rehabilitation in Ireland.

We started our collaboration with the Christopher & Dana Reeve Foundation by hosting an Instagram takeover with three of our service users sharing their lives with a spinal cord injury with an amazing 4,307

views of their posts on the Reeve Foundation Instagram Page. Huge thanks to Gemma Willis, Ian O'Connell, and Jack Kavanagh for taking the time to share their stories, for their enthusiasm and positive attitudes, not to mention their technical expertise.

## Financial Assistance

Thanks to the HSE National Lottery Grants we received funding for assistive technology (AT) equipment for many people. This equipment assisted service users to keep in touch during the pandemic with family and friends in the community and avoid feeling isolated as well as AT for the home. Some of our service users who were lucky enough to win prizes in our monthly prize draw donated their winnings back to SII. Their generosity is gratefully appreciated, and the funds were allocated to 6 recipients who needed financial assistance. We were delighted to be featured with service users Tim Rice and Sandra Caffrey in the Good Cause Awards PR campaign, as a recipient of a grant from the National Lottery.



## Web/Media/Digital/Magazine

Huge thanks to all of you who gave your time to share your stories with us at our video shoots this year. You allowed us to use this footage for our pre-budget submission advocating for medical cards and to advertise our services for others living with a spinal cord injury. We thank you for your openness and honesty. We updated our website with the latest Covid updates, kept our events calendar up to date with upcoming webinars and enhanced our SII connect community with a 'Marketplace' where you can donate equipment to others in need.

We distributed our newsletter to over 1500 people fortnightly and 2 magazines to all our service users with features on every aspect of living with a SCI. Thanks to all those who contributed and shared their stories.

Over 550 of you attended our education sessions, weekly peer support meetings and updates from many key speakers.

Thank you for your feedback as this helps us improve the services for you.

# FUNDRAISING REVIEW

Covid continued to strangle our fundraising efforts in 2021 with the cancellation of our Spring Lunch, Summer BBQ, Q Ball, Cork Jazz Ball and Christmas Lunch (which we were hoping would temporarily replace our Spring Lunch). In addition to our annual events, our two fundraising challenges, the Algarve Cycle and the Tall Ships Challenge, also had to be postponed. Needless to say the cancellation of all the above was difficult from a fundraising point of view.

Determined not to go another entire year without an event, Philip Quinlan did manage to host one smaller event, the Q BBQ in October. 200 supporters attended the event in Merrion Cricket Club, bought auction items and raffle tickets and managed to make the most of the dry (if a little chilly) weather. There was a great atmosphere as people were delighted to get together and enjoy the delicious food supplied by Paul Quinlan and the inimitable Mundy got everyone dancing and singing late into the night. The BBQ raised almost €20,000 and the plan is to run this popular event again in 2022.

Philip also ran a small exclusive raffle amongst the supporters who were due to attend the Christmas Lunch and this raised €13,300. We would like to thank everyone who participated and those who donated prizes. We are very grateful.

2021 saw the launch of our Monthly Prize Draw where you have the option of buying a one-off ticket for €7, annual tickets for 12 draws for €84 or a recurring monthly ticket for €7 per month. Each month we gave away cash prizes of €1,000, €500 and €250 to three lucky winners and we would like to thank everyone who bought tickets and many of you who continue to support this draw. The total raised in this its first year was over €30,000.

Despite very late notice that the Paris2Nice Cycle Challenge was going ahead, Paul McClatchie, Tim Hurley and Ken Dooley raced into action fundraising well over the mandatory target and raising over €17,000 as they took on the considerable challenge cycling 750km over 5 days. We are extremely grateful for their collective effort and support.



One of our stalwart supporters Fiona D'Arcy, launched a brilliant campaign earlier in the year – Bank the Plank. She challenged people to do a 60 second plank, donate €6, post their video on social media and then challenge 6 friends to do the same. It was a great success with over 170 people donating over €7,500. A special thanks to all the team at Linesight too for their brilliant support.

Mark Walsh showed support for his friend who had recently sustained a spinal cord injury by doing a sky dive on the 27th August. He raised over €2,000 for our service users, an incredible (and brave!) achievement.

Service User Mary Pielage was delighted with her new wheelchair accessible vehicle which was kindly donated by Richard Considine of Evra Motors. The second-hand vehicle is in great condition and we wish Mary very happy motoring. Mary and her family made a very generous donation to SII as a thank you which was totally unnecessary, but very much appreciated.





For the first time this year we signed up with the Charities Institute and iDonate in a joint fundraising venture to virtually travel Around the World on the weekend of the 19th June. A huge thank you to everyone who participated, particularly Grainne Sugars, Geraldine O'Donnell, Eileen Goldup and Tom Cardas who together raised over €6k. We are happy to say that together all the charities did manage to make it around the world!

Claire Broderick also ran the Joe Duffy Half Marathon for us this November raising an incredible €6,600. On the 10th of August 2017 Claire's father suffered a spinal cord injury following a farming accident which resulted in paralysis from the neck down. As Claire puts it: *"His accident was one of the darkest moments my family has endured. They guided us during my father's two-year rollercoaster of a journey. From his time in Tallaght Hospital to the NRH and finally home. There are not enough words to express our appreciation for how Spinal Injuries Ireland helped my father and my family."* We are delighted to report that Claire's father is back running his farm.



## Major Donor and Corporate Donations

We are so grateful to Blackrock Investments who awarded us a grant of €5,000 for our counselling service, the demand for which has risen significantly since the start of the Covid pandemic. This has been hugely beneficial to many people. Here's what Alice had to say.

*"When my son had his spinal cord injury our world was turned upside down. We were living minute to minute, then hour by hour. Going from the initial trauma to ICU, to induced coma and ventilators, and to the spinal cord unit in the Mater Hospital, and eventually, months later, to the National Rehabilitation Hospital. My family and I were only existing - living on the edge all the time, daily routines were gone. We were very lucky having a lot of extended family and friends support and a community behind us, but we were in shock. I thought I was doing ok, trying to hold it together for my son and our family but clearly I wasn't. A few of my daughters said to ask SII For help.*

*When I spoke to Mary Scarff, specialist trauma Counsellor, I broke down. I hadn't voiced what my son was going through and what we were going through. Mary was a release - she helped me speak through it. Mary gave me coping mechanisms to help me manage so I wasn't spiralling out of control. Mary helped me move in a new direction to a new normal. It is still day to day, a learning curve. Thank you Mary for helping me when I truly needed it and to SII for facilitating this."*

Our thanks also to O'Brien Lynam Solicitors who kindly donated €8,000 in lieu of hosting a company celebration for their 21 year anniversary in business.

Our thanks also go to Derrinstown Stud and the Dun Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council HUG staff charity for their generous donation.

Our biggest fundraiser of the year was the A Day in My Wheels campaign which you can read about on page 12

**From all of us here at Spinal Injuries Ireland, to all our supporters, a huge THANK YOU. We are looking forward to a time when we can host our annual fundraising events once again and reconnect with you all in person.**

# A DAY IN MY WHEELS

After several false starts as a result of Covid, we finally managed to run our inaugural 'A Day in My Wheels' campaign on 30th September 2021. Twenty five people from the business, political and celebrity arena took on the challenge of spending a day in a wheelchair and we are hugely appreciative to each of them. Not only were they brave enough to be the first to take on the challenge, but they each donated or fundraised a minimum of €5,000. A total of €131,649 was raised which was a fantastic result for year 1.

The event kicked off with the participants enjoying a tasty breakfast from the comfort of their wheelchairs in the wonderfully accessible CHQ, Custom House Quay. Kieran Fitzgerald shared his story and some words of wisdom with them all before Barry Cooke and Jack Shannon Cole taught them some basic wheelchair skills, tips and tricks. Thankfully the crash course proved to be effective as all wheelchairs and participants returned in one piece the following day, albeit with some bruised hands and aching forearms.

Dublin's Q102 broadcast live from the venue with Aidan and Venetia interviewing a few of the apprehensive participants about how they were feeling and what they were expecting. Their own Andy Preston had already returned to studio to deliver his show from the wheelchair. We are very grateful for their support of the campaign.

Other well known faces who took on the challenge were actor and comedian Joe Rooney and broadcasters Lorraine Keane and Clare McKenna. Minister Josepha Madigan also took on the challenge, surprising colleagues as she addressed the chamber from the chair while Cathaoirleach Lettie McCarthy represented Dun Laoghaire Rathdown County Council.





It was also encouraging to see members of the business community support the campaign in its first year. Entrepreneurs Bobby Healy, CEO of Manna, and Devan Hughes, CEO and co-founder of Buymie were joined by Anna McHugh, Head of Corporate Communications with An Post, John Coroner of Ethos Engineering and David Kerr, Accessibility Ambassador and Disability Advocate with Microsoft. Bus Eireann was well represented with Allen Parker, Chief Customer Officer and Rory Leahy, Chief Safety and Sustainability Officer both taking on the challenge. Allen explains *“we were delighted to have had the opportunity to participate in Spinal Injuries Ireland 2021 ‘A Day in My Wheels’”* *Spending the day in a wheelchair provided the opportunity to gain a new, first-hand perspective on how wheelchair users deal with everyday situations such as opening doors, crossing roads, negotiating footpaths and of specific interest to us, how they use public transport. It was an eye-opening experience and the learnings gained will be used to assist in further improving both the accessibility of Bus Eireann services and our facilities for our customers and employees. We have already used the learnings from the day to put in place improvements to our booking system and to address issues with accessibility to our offices.”*

Ronan Murphy, Head of Customer Experience represented Irish Rail. Ronan admits, *“I was a little fearful taking part in Spinal Injuries Ireland’s ‘A Day In My Wheels’ fundraiser but I can honestly say that it was an experience I will never forget. I learnt so much which will be of huge benefit to me when making decisions that affect customers using wheelchairs accessing our stations and services.”*

Devan Hughes found that the challenge took an emotional toll on him which he wasn’t expecting. *“I had a spinal injury when I was 18 and the doctor said that an inch in the difference and he would have been fitting me for a pair of wheels. It makes me think about how different life could have been”.*

Jack Ryan carried out his role as an estate agent with Sherry Fitzgerald from the wheelchair and recounted, *“it was the small things that accumulated throughout the day that knocked my confidence. For example, I did a viewing and I wasn’t able to go upstairs so I was talking to the client in the attic from the ground floor. I found it a little bit demoralising. These added up and by the end of the day my confidence was rattled”.*

Renowned PR queen Valerie Roe knew that it would be a difficult challenge and enlisted the help of her friend Olan McGowan as a guide. Olan, a wheelchair user, sustained a spinal cord injury in 1995 in a diving accident. Together they negotiated their way around Dublin City.

By taking on the challenge, participants got a glimpse into what life in a wheelchair might be like, while also raising funds to provide support for people living with a spinal cord injury and their families. Ahead of the challenge Phil O’Kelly, Head of Fundraising with Spinal Injuries Ireland, explained, *“we call it a challenge for a reason. The participants will be challenged by accessibility issues in workplaces, shops, transport and facilities. They will learn a different way of dealing with everyday situations such as opening doors, crossing roads and even moving about their own homes. The experience will provide a whole new perspective on how people in wheelchairs are viewed and treated”.*



Having taken on the challenge himself Phil told us ***“I found it a challenging experience. Not the accessibility issues, I was expecting those, but I found my resilience being tested on a regular basis. I found the number of small decisions I had to make was draining and, on several occasions, I found myself shying away from doing something as I thought it would be too difficult. I gained a whole new level of respect for wheelchair users. I don’t think I ever properly appreciated the levels of resilience, determination and mental strength involved. I do now.”***

Carole Ann Clarke, Managing Director of I am Here, is right when she says ***“you shouldn’t actually have to get into a chair in order to make a statement to provide the right supports, the right infrastructure for people with disabilities, coz it could happen to any one of us. I think that this is key. When we listened to the stories yesterday, someone falling off a wall, someone having an injury through sport and I think as a society we need to be accepting that these things happen ..”***

Carole Ann took the Dart with Lorraine Keane to and from the CHQ, having been given the heads up that they needed to give four hours’ notice for a ramp to be available. In addition to the obvious physical side of the challenge it was the emotional element that took Carole Ann by surprise ***“Loneliness, entrapment, vulnerability, embarrassment, losing that feeling of spontaneity, but on the positive side, feeling really loved by my family, the kindness of strangers, the empathy of strangers. It was a real labyrinth of emotions.”***

We are hugely appreciative to each and every one of the participants. Not only were they brave enough to be the first to take on this challenge in its inaugural year but they each paid or fundraised a minimum of €5,000. We plan on making this an annual event which grows and expands nationwide but in the meantime to everyone who donated, took part or sponsored someone else to take part, we are really grateful. You raised a fabulous €131,649. The money is being allocated to our professional outreach and counselling programmes.

We would also like to thank our Service Users Barry Cooke, Jack Shannon Cole, Kieran Fitzgerald and Olan McGowan for their support and help with the campaign.



# THE CHARABANG HITS THE ROAD

## A MID-LOCKDOWN STAYCATION BY KIERAN FITZGERALD

**In the Summer of 2020, slap bang in the middle of the Covid pandemic, I took receipt of an adapted Volkswagen Caravelle, which I christened the Charabang.**

It came complete with loading ramp and docking bay for the wheelchair which meant that I could drive or swap over and be the passenger as needs arose. With my good friend David doubling as driver, carer, navigator and joint tour guide, we loaded enough spinal injury-related toiletries to last a lifetime and hit the road. After months and months of lockdown it was a good feeling to be out in the countryside for a change. We had one appointment- a wedding on Bere Island, County Cork. We decided to make a road trip that would take us from one end of the country to the other. On one point we were very lucky: the weather was gorgeous.

Our first port of call in Co Cork was to visit the shrine of St Gobnait in Ballyvourney. We had come across the shrine years before, pre my accident, when we were doing a long hike through the country. Whether you're of a religious persuasion or not, the ancient feeling of the shrine is inspiring. *The parish priest brought out the mediaeval carving of the Saint and allowed us to 'take her measure.'* That is where people wrap a piece of material around the statue and then keep the piece of fabric as a protective charm for the year. We hung the ribbon on the keys to the Charabang where it remains.

The Bere Island wedding was a very jolly affair. There was accessible accommodation in the village and there is something special about the feeling of being on an island. To say everybody knows and is related to everybody is an understatement! Rather than go straight home, we decided to visit Béal na mBláth, where Michael Collins was shot during the Civil War. By coincidence, it was the day after the annual commemoration. The Defence Forces had stationed some officers there and one explained the whole layout of the ambush from a military perspective. *It's that kind of friendly informality that brings tourists back to Ireland.* We also went to another famous ambush- Kilmichael. In 1920, the IRA ambushed a British army column and 17 British soldiers and three IRA men died. While Béal na mBláth is not really accessible, Kilmichael is well provided for with tar macadam paths through the ambush site and good signage explaining how the events unfolded.

It wasn't all plain sailing. It was my first time in five years in a vehicle that wasn't a taxi. I have to admit I was a shocking passenger, taking fright at every bend and pothole. It resulted in David, on some back road of County Cork, jamming on the brakes and announcing that henceforth he would adjust his driving if there was a medical emergency but otherwise, I was to shut up!

We detoured to Dublin for one overnight. There we collected fresh supplies, a hoist and turning mattress and away with us to the Inishowen Peninsula, to join family and friends in the Welcome House in Culdaff. I use a powerchair normally but we brought the manual chair which made getting onto beaches and old archaeological sites easier. There is much to explore and do in Inishowen. The highlights for us included visiting the famous hill-fort Grianán of Aileach- a hairy drive for a newcomer in an adapted vehicle, but worth it for a view that takes in mountains, rolling countryside, beaches and sea. We took a day trip to the deserted island of Inishtrahull. That was a magical day, looking at the deserted village with its national school and, further on, the old headstones in the island cemetery. *Mind you, getting on and off the island on a small boat was not for the faint of heart.*

After a week of jaunting around by day and carousing by night, we headed home where I took to the bed and slept for two whole days. Staycationing is tiring work.



# AGM

On Wednesday 1st September 2021, Spinal Injuries Ireland held its Annual General Meeting. For the second year running this meeting was held virtually.



Our keynote speaker for the AGM was Mr Keith Synnott, National Clinical Lead for Trauma Services and Orthopaedic & Spinal Surgeon who outlined the Major Trauma Strategy and how Spinal Injuries Ireland is positioned in the pathway of care. After Mr Synnott's presentation, the Chairman Mr John Twomey stated that SII very much welcomes this very important step in implementing the Major Trauma Strategy. Receiving the right care, at the right time in the right place is paramount to reduce the odds of severe disability and death caused by major trauma incidents. He added that investment in rehabilitation and community services must also be funded as part of this strategy.

After Mr Synnott's presentation, the AGM began with CEO Fiona Bolger outlining the work of the organisation during 2020 working within the constraints of a global pandemic. Following this the 2020 Accounts were presented and approved and two of the Directors retired, Mr James McCarthy and Mr Keith Mangan, who had both completed three terms and had to retire. We would like to thank both James and Keith for their tireless work on a voluntary basis in transforming SII into the organisation it is today. Dr Eimear Smith also had to retire as she had completed 3 terms however a special resolution was passed to re-elect Eimear as SII's medical advisor to the Board for a further term.

The AGM was concluded with a word of appreciation from the Chairman of the Board Mr John Twomey for all the hard work by the staff, peer volunteers and the Directors during a difficult year.

## DESIGNATION OF THE MATER HOSPITAL AS THE MAJOR TRAUMA CENTRE FOR THE CENTRAL TRAUMA NETWORK FOR DUBLIN – 27TH APRIL 2021

Our Head of Services, Naomi Fitzgibbon, was present at the announcement in her role as Patient and Public Representative on NOCA's Major Trauma Audit and welcomes this important development.

The government has approved the designation of the Mater Hospital as the Major Trauma Centre for the Central Trauma Network and St Vincent's University Hospital and Tallaght University Hospital as the Trauma Units for Dublin.

The decision, announced by Minister for Health Stephen Donnelly TD, is a crucial step in the development of a national trauma system for Ireland. The Major Trauma Centre will provide all major specialist services relevant to the care of major trauma, leading to better outcomes for severely injured patients. The Trauma Units will deliver trauma care for less complex cases or patients with injuries that are considered time critical and where direct transfer to the Major Trauma Centre is not possible within the necessary timeframe.

Minister Donnelly said:

*"Major trauma involves complex injuries that have the potential to be life changing or life ending – on average, around 1,600 patients in Ireland suffer major trauma injuries each year. Studies have consistently shown that severely injured patients are 15-20% less likely to die if admitted to a Major Trauma Centre than if admitted to other hospitals. Concentrating major trauma cases in high volume centres provides the necessary critical mass, clinical throughput, specialised infrastructure and specialist skills under one roof, leading to better outcomes for patients with major trauma."*

The National Trauma Strategy recommends the introduction of an inclusive trauma system for Ireland with one Major Trauma Centre based in Dublin servicing the Central Trauma Network and another based in Cork University Hospital servicing the South Trauma Network. It further recommends that each of these Major Trauma Centres will be linked to several Trauma Units throughout the country and that Dublin should have a maximum of two Trauma Units, in addition to the Major Trauma Centre.





# GOOD GOVERNANCE

The directors and staff of Spinal Injuries Ireland are committed to maintaining the highest standard of corporate governance and we believe that this is a key element in ensuring the most effective operation of our activities and retaining the support of our stakeholders, donors, volunteers and supporters.

As part of this commitment the Directors continually undertake reviews of policies and procedures. In addition, we launched our strategic plan in January 2019 which directs the business of Spinal Injuries Ireland for the next four years.

The Board manages its work through a number of committees – the Finance Committee and the Governance & Risk Committee. The Directors come from varying backgrounds, expertise and experience. Directors do not receive fees for their contribution to the organisation but out-of-pocket expenses may be claimed.

Spinal Injuries Ireland became accredited to the Voluntary Code of Practice for Good Governance of Community, Voluntary and Charitable Organisations in Ireland in 2018.

This voluntary code was replaced by the Charities Regulator Governance Code (The Code) in 2020 and the Board is committed to the principles as set out in The Code. The Board signed up to The Code in 2020, and continues to report on compliance to the Code on an annual basis to the Regulator.

The Board maintained a high focus on complying with The Code and the organisation's statutory and regulatory obligations, and applicable codes of practices such as the Charities Institute Triple Lock Standards, the Statement of Recommended Practices (SORP) and the Guidelines for Charitable Organisations on Fundraising from the Public, which demonstrates transparent reporting and strong fundraising and governance within the organisation.

## PRE BUDGET SUBMISSION

**In September 2021 SII submitted a pre budget submission to Government. Here is a summary of that submission:**

Unfortunately, in Ireland, there are many obstacles placed in the pathway for people with a SCI, and their families. Regrettably, one of these greatest obstacles is created by the agencies of the State in the manner in which eligibility for a medical card is determined and awarded. Without a doubt, a SCI is a permanent, life-long and life changing, condition. In spite of this, the granting of medical cards for those with a SCI in Ireland is based on an assessment of means, which can be arbitrary, and the maximum period for any card is three years.

The UN Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities commits state parties to “Provide those health services needed by persons with disabilities specifically because of their disabilities, including early identification and intervention as appropriate, and services designed to minimize and prevent further disabilities, including among children and older persons”.

The core message for budget 2022 from SII is for the Government to designate SCI as a long-term and permanent condition and to extend eligibility for the medical card to all of those with SCI on a permanent basis. We send this message to Government based on extensive engagement with our Service Users, whose direct perspectives are quoted in this submission, as well as their families, the health care professionals supporting them and their families, as well as our own board and medical advisers. The means not needs approach delays or denies treatment and the supply of necessary equipment to many with a SCI. It also contributes to significant stress, financial hardship, erosion of personal dignity and independence and additional physical and mental health challenges. It is an inhuman approach. It must change.

Budget 2022 provides an opportunity for such change.

# FINANCIAL STATEMENTS

## Income and Expenditure Account Year ended 31st December 2021

	2021	2020
<b>Income</b>	881,451	1,124,992
Interest receivable and similar income	93	411
Gross Income for reporting period	881,544	1,125,403
<b>Expenditure</b>	950,460	920,302
Depreciation and charges for impairment of fixed assets	18,410	18,211
Total expenditure in the reporting period	968,870	938,513
<b>Net Income/ (Expenditure) before tax for the reporting period</b>	-87,326	186,890

All income and expenditure arise from continuing operations.

There were no other recognised gains or losses during the period under review.

## Balance Sheet as at 31st December 2021

	2021	2020
<b>Fixed Assets</b>		
Tangible Assets	38,355	43,329
<b>Current Assets</b>		
Debtors and prepayments	47,664	18,452
Cash at bank and in hand	1,319,537	1,397,390
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,367,201</b>	<b>1,415,842</b>
<b>Liabilities</b>		
Creditors: Amounts falling due within one year	(131,207)	(97,496)
Net current assets	1,235,994	1,318,346
<b>Net assets</b>	<b>1,274,349</b>	<b>1,361,675</b>
<b>The funds of the charity:</b>		
Restricted Income Funds	11,090	56,996
Unrestricted Income Funds	1,263,259	1,304,679
<b>Total Charity Funds</b>	<b>1,274,349</b>	<b>1,361,675</b>

# YEAR END 31 DECEMBER 2021

## Directors/Trustees

John Twomey  
Herman Wilmink  
Eimear Smith  
Brian Dempsey  
Emma Cahill  
Michael Lynam  
Diarmuid Corry

## Company Secretary

Alison Redden

## Chief Executive Officer

Fiona Bolger

## Registered Office

G3, The Pottery, Bakers Point,  
Pottery Road,  
Dun Laoghaire  
Co Dublin  
A96 Y932

## Company Registration Number

225205

## Charity Regulatory Authority Number

20031855

## Charity Number

CHY 11535

## Principal Bankers

Bank of Ireland Plc  
371 – 373 North Circular Road  
Phibsborough  
Dublin 7  
D07 XF65

KBC Bank Ireland Plc  
Sandwith Street Upper  
Dublin 2  
D02 X489

## Solicitors

Augustus Cullen Law  
7 Wentworth Place  
Wicklow  
A67 FX59

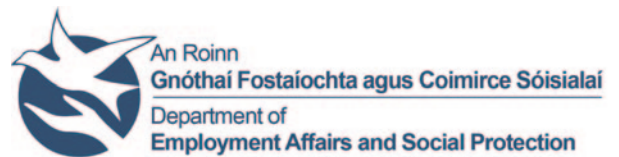
## Auditors

Power & Associates  
Chartered Certified Accountants  
Statutory Auditors  
1 Sussex Street  
Dun Laoghaire  
Co Dublin  
A96 C8N3

SUPPORTED BY:



Feidhmeannacht na Seirbhíse Sláinte  
Health Service Executive



CHY: 11535  
Registered Charity Number: 20031855  
[www.spinalinjuries.ie](http://www.spinalinjuries.ie)

