



Spinal  
Injuries  
Ireland  
Support at every stage



ANNUAL  
REPORT  
2022

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## CHAIRPERSON'S ADDRESS

Thank you to our staff and volunteers who continued to work tirelessly to provide services to our service users during 2022.

As the world reopened post Covid it was great to meet with our service users, staff, volunteers and directors during the year. It was fantastic to see the tremendous support that we received at our first Spring Lunch in over 2 years, which continued through the year at our barbecue, Q Ball and Cork Jazz Ball.

We have detailed these on the fundraising report in this document and I just want to reiterate how important the support of our loyal donors is to SII. We have finished the year with a €111,490 loss and over the next few years we have plans to reduce the losses so that we get to a break even basis annually. I want to thank Herman Wilmlink for completing three terms as a director. We very much appreciate your time and skills in managing the organisation through the last 10 years.

The board of SII maintains a high focus on complying with the Charities Regulator Governance 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. We could not do this without the commitment by the staff, volunteers and the board of directors and I am hugely thankful for their support.

**John C. Twomey**  
Chairman



## CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S REVIEW

2022 opened the world again for all of us and it was wonderful for the staff and directors to re-engage with our service users, supporters and volunteers.

In particular, our roadshow in September 2022, which was sponsored by Coloplast gave us the opportunity to re-engage with our service users face to face. We commissioned research by Dr Rosie Gowran from the School of Allied Health, University of Limerick and the research team attended all the meetings on the Roadshow to understand clearly the issues facing people living with a SCI in Ireland. This research will form the basis from which we will develop our next strategic plan.

During 2022, we continued to deliver services virtually but as the year progressed we were able to do some face to face meetings including pizza evenings in the NRH and our activities programme. The peer support sessions online facilitated by SII's peer volunteers continued to provide a platform for people with similar injuries to support one another and our online education programme provided much needed information to our service users in the community.

A huge thank you to Lester Cassidy for climbing Croagh Patrick and for raising a phenomenal €147,000 for the NRH and SII. Thank you also to Lester for speaking at our AGM and also at our annual barbecue. We have a number of great ambassadors who speak at different events and we are always truly appreciative of their time and commitment in these volunteer roles.

Well done to all the people who participated in our inaugural Algarve Cycle and Paris2Nice and other challenges such as the Tall Ships Challenge. We held our first 'A Day in my Wheels' campaign in Cork supported by Cork County Council and Cork Chamber and we are very grateful for their contribution.

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 from all of us.

**Fiona Bolger**  
CEO



# ANGELA LARKINS STORY



**My name is Angela Larkin and I have Cauda Equina Syndrome. I am a Mum of three with twins and my eldest son has high functioning autism.**

I worked all my life from the age of 16 right up to my diagnosis. I was a happy young Mum working as a PA for large multinational companies and loving the independence that afforded me in life. Like many young women I loved shopping and going on holidays and all the things that most young people enjoyed. I was fit and healthy from a young age and I was the Irish Open Kickboxing Champion in my teens and on the Irish Kickboxing Squad.

My spinal cord injury happened after a sustained period of extreme stress in a toxic workplace environment. I was standing in the kitchen one evening, cooking a meal for my family, when I got severe pain down my right leg. This lasted about five months. I was attending a surgeon who wrote me a letter advising me that I was at risk of developing Cauda Equina Syndrome and alerting me to the symptoms to watch out for as my herniated L5-S1 disc had become quite severe. I realised that I had started to display some of those symptoms the previous evening, so I contacted the surgeon who told me to get to A&E immediately.

At the hospital it was confirmed by MRI scan that I had 60% blockage of the Cauda Equina nerves. I was operated on immediately and they performed a lumbar discectomy to relieve the pressure that the herniated disc was causing on my spinal nerves. It's hard to believe that all of this happened as a result of the stress I was under.

***Since my diagnosis on the 9th October 2014 and the subsequent surgery my life has changed immeasurably.*** I suffer chronic neurological pain, both day and night. I have struggled with using intermittent catheters which are essential to empty my bladder due to the pain of the Cauda Equina nerve damage. I have not been able to work since and, having three dependant children, this puts significant financial pressure on the family, not to mention the ever-increasing medical costs.

***Life, as I knew it, had completely changed.*** I could no longer do many of the things I loved due to both the pain I was living with and the financial hardship brought on by my not being able to work and my increased medical expenses. It was fair to say I was struggling with life.

I joined the Cauda Equina Syndrome Ireland Facebook page and through that made connections with other

people suffering with the same condition. I found this a great support. A good friend I made through that group told me about Spinal Injuries Ireland. I didn't call SII straight away because I wasn't in a wheelchair and no one had explained to me that CES is actually a type of spinal cord injury. After taking to the bed with pain that had been getting worse for several months I was feeling incredibly low and decided to give them a call. I spoke to a lovely lady, Hilary, who is one of the Community Outreach Team there. She understood my condition well and it was great to talk to someone who really understood what I was going through.

***From then on Spinal Injuries Ireland supported me through a lot of hard times and further surgery.*** They assisted my recovery with both counselling and physiotherapy. They also facilitated a grant for a new mattress to support my back at night-time. I had to undergo a spinal fusion so was bedridden for a number of months. Following that, SII gave us a wonderful family day out to Tayto Park to visit Santa which we really enjoyed.

It will be 10 years since my diagnosis next year and even though I have come so far, I am still that girl in the Mater Hospital trying to understand what they were telling me and hearing about Cauda Equina Syndrome for the first time. It was a huge blow and all a bit of a blur when I think back to that time and I am still in disbelief that this happened to me.

However, I am no longer alone coping with my spinal cord injury. There is always someone there on the other end of the phone wanting to make my life easier. I can't thank SII enough for all the help they have given me and for the wonderful things they have done for me and my family.



I am really looking forward to my Caribbean adventure with SII on the Tallship Tenacious in Antigua in March 2023.

**SII would like to thank Angela for her participation in our Christmas Campaign with Marty Whelan and for being so open and honest in sharing her story with us, our supporters and other service users.**





# About SII

## THE YEAR IN NUMBERS....

COUNSELLING

70

LET'S GO  
PROGRAMME

71

TICKETS

2289

SERVICE USERS

105

NEW  
SIGNUPS

PEER SUPPORT  
(GROUP AND  
INDIVIDUAL SUPPORT)

142

SERVICES  
EZINES SENT

75

TO 44,551

EDUCATIONAL  
WEBINARS

23 ATTENDED  
BY 99

MAGAZINES ISSUED

2 EDITIONS  
TO 3,726

220

VOLUNTEER  
HOURS

NEW WEBSITE VISITORS

41,000

## New Hire

**Bairbre O'Sullivan – Head of Services**

Bairbre joined SII in August 2022. With a background in services with both Cheshire Ireland and St John of God, Bairbre has a great understanding of the challenges faced by those living with a disability and is committed to fostering an inclusive and supportive environment for our service users.



I joined the team of SII as Head of Services in August 2022. It was an interesting time to start the role, where the initial focus for me was to coordinate the Research Study and plan the SII roadshow with the team. The roadshow took us all around the country in September and October. This gave me an opportunity to connect with so many people who are part of the SII community and to get insight into how important and valuable the services that SII offer are. I am enjoying getting to know everyone involved with SII and have found the enthusiasm and unwavering focus of my colleagues and our group of volunteers to be really encouraging.

## My background

In my most recent role, I served as a Service Manager at Cheshire Ireland, a position that allowed me to oversee community residential services catering to individuals with a diverse range of physical and neurological disabilities. Covering a wide geographical area, from Dublin to Wexford, I was responsible for ensuring the highest quality of care and support for these individuals.

Prior to my time at Cheshire Ireland, I worked with St John of God Services. Within this organisation, I had the opportunity to contribute to both intellectual disability services and mental health services.

These experiences have enriched my understanding of the complexities and nuances of healthcare management, while also reinforcing my commitment to fostering an inclusive and supportive environment for individuals with diverse needs. I bring to the table a deep understanding of the challenges faced by those whose lives are affected by their disability, as well as a passion for promoting their overall well-being.

## What led you to work for Spinal Injuries Ireland?

SII's focus on empowering individuals who have sustained a spinal cord injury (SCI) to live independent and fulfilling lives deeply resonated with me and drew me to the role. It presented an opportunity to combine my professional experience in healthcare management and disability with my personal interest.

My personal interest in SCI arises from witnessing my mother's journey through the trauma of sustaining a spinal cord injury and navigating life afterwards. I observed her perseverance and adjustment during her time spent at the NRH and the Royal Hospital in Donnybrook, followed by her return home with the support of carers and alongside myself and my family. Through this first-hand experience, I gained profound insights into the impact of spinal injury on a person's life and the immense effort required to overcome the



limitations it presents. Witnessing her strength and determination left me with a renewed sense of respect and admiration for individuals living with this life-changing condition.

## What does your role involve?

In my role, I provide support to our dedicated team as they deliver key services, including community outreach officers, peer support volunteers, activities coordinators, counsellors, and advocacy ambassadors, on behalf of our 2340 service users and their families. Through my previous research on aging with a disability, I have gained a deep understanding of the challenges that individuals with a spinal cord injury (SCI) may face throughout their lives. This knowledge drives my advocacy for improved services and opportunities for all individuals with SCI, ensuring their needs are addressed at each stage of their journey.

Currently, I am reviewing the recent research that we undertook with Dr Rosie Gowran and her team in the University of Limerick and am collaborating with Fiona, our CEO, to shape our service goals for the next five years. I am filled with optimism and excitement for the future of SII as we enter a new strategic period.

Together with the dedicated SII team, I am fully committed to making a positive difference in the lives of individuals living with SCI where we aim to foster an inclusive and empowering community, where each person can lead a life of dignity and fulfilment.

I am energised by the potential impact we can create at SII as we work collectively to serve our community.

# SERVICES REVIEW

**As Covid restrictions gradually eased, we were relieved to resume delivering our services in a face-to-face format while further enhancing the virtual services we had developed during the lockdown period. This integrated approach allows us to cater to the diverse needs of our community effectively. Our unwavering commitment to providing evidence-based support and information remains at the core of our mission, and we continue to offer valuable peer-to-peer, education, and support programmes.**

As autumn arrived, we successfully relaunched our activities programme, offering a range of engaging opportunities for our community to participate in. Although some restrictions on accessing the NRH were still in place, we adapted and embraced new and innovative methods of connecting with newly injured patients and their families, ensuring they received the essential support they required during these challenging times.

We embarked on our SII roadshow across the country with our Townhall Meetings, a series of events that combined informative specialist talks with valuable research conducted by Dr Rosie Gowran and her team at the University of Limerick. It was an opportunity, not only for knowledge sharing but also, for our team to reconnect with people and for our service users to reunite after such a prolonged period of separation. These gatherings provided a platform for focused group discussions involving individuals with SCI, their families and caregivers, enabling us to gain invaluable insights and perspectives that will shape the SII Strategy for the next five years.

Through this collaborative effort, we not only delivered valuable information but actively engaged with our community to deeply understand their needs and aspirations. The resulting report, which stems from this research, will serve as a vital resource guiding our strategic planning to provide better support and empowerment to individuals living with SCI.

We are deeply grateful to Dr Rosie Gowran and her team for their expertise and dedication in conducting these focus groups and producing a report that will help us pave the way forward.

## Peer Support

Peer Support is at the core of Spinal Injuries Ireland. Our peer programme continued to grow through 2022 and its value is reflected in the positive feedback we received from our service users.



*“I found it lovely to speak with people who’ve had similar experiences.”*

Throughout the different seasons of the year, we held weekly online Zoom sessions catering to individuals with various levels of injury. These sessions brought together powerchair users, manual chair users, walkers, those with CES, and family groups. It was a space where participants could come together to share their experiences or simply listen in, fostering a sense of connection and support.

While we all acknowledge the difficulties faced during lockdown, the reopening phase has presented its own set of challenges, with many individuals still experiencing isolation due to the continued circulation of Covid. It has been a period of adjustment to a new normal, characterised by service delays, rising living costs, and the ongoing importance of infection control. These topics resonated strongly in our conversations during the meetings, reflecting the shared experiences of our community.

The peer sessions were not structured around agendas, themes, or guest speakers. Instead, they provided a safe and open space for individuals to share what they felt comfortable discussing or to simply listen and learn from others. Participants engaged in conversations spanning a wide range of topics, including challenges related to seating, equipment, clothing, work, pain,



exercise, further education, mental health, and the resurgence of travel discussions, encompassing both short and long-haul journeys.

These sessions have played a vital role in fostering connection, empathy, and a sense of belonging within our community. We recognise the value of these exchanges in providing support and guidance as we navigate the unique circumstances presented by life with SCI.

*“Thanks for the zoom last night, it was very informative and a good catch up too.”*

*“It was lovely to meet people in the same situation. It’s only now I realise how lucky I was!”*

*“I found it beneficial. On the whole I found it very engaging. Proof being, it absolutely didn’t feel like two hours.”*

*“I enjoyed it, it’s definitely nice to catch up with people who have similar injuries.”*

*“To know someone has the same issues as me doesn’t cure them but it does make me feel better if that makes sense!”*

As the year progressed, we resumed face-to-face interactions and our dedicated peer volunteers played a crucial role in supporting SII by participating in our Townhall Meetings across the country. In September, we introduced monthly pizza nights in the NRH Spinal Ward, creating a relaxed and informal environment for inpatients to engage in conversations with fellow patients and peer volunteers who shared their personal experiences of living with a spinal cord injury (SCI). Through our peer service, we established connections with the NRH, other acute and regional hospitals, and community healthcare teams. This allowed us to connect newly injured individuals with our peer volunteers who could empathise with their fears and concerns and offer them much needed hope and reassurance during the initial stages of their injury.

*“That was an interesting meeting with the other SII members, as always” TM.*

SII continued its commitment to providing personalised support, as we continued to offer one-on-one peer support, carefully matching individuals based on their unique queries, life circumstances, accidents or diagnoses. We recognise the immense value in connecting individuals with someone who has first-hand "lived experience" and our peer volunteers offer practical advice, helpful strategies, or simply lend a compassionate ear to listen.

*“It’s nice not to feel alone. It’s so good finding people who feel the same as you and understand.”*

Thanks to Hilary Keppel, our dedicated Outreach Officer, for her invaluable contributions in coordinating the Peer programme. Her tireless efforts and commitment have been instrumental in the programme's smooth operation.

Overall, 142 service users benefitted from peer support in 2022 through a combination of one to one and group zoom sessions.

We are sincerely grateful for the continued support of the National Lottery HSE Grant, which has provided us with funding for assistive technology (AT) equipment for over 20 individuals, with an average allocation of €1,000 per person. We warmly encourage individuals to contact us and explore the possibilities of accessing this invaluable funding source.

## Activities

After a prolonged pause due to the impact of Covid, our Let's Go Programme was revitalised. Concert tickets, match tickets and tickets to attractions such as Tayto Park and Dublin Zoo Wild Lights were sourced, allowing individuals and their families the opportunity to enjoy the thrill of live experiences once again.

Our Rib, Niamh, was launched after two years in storage just in time for the Watersport Inclusion Games run by Irish Sailing in Lough Derg Yacht Club on the last weekend of June. Despite a rather alarming forecast of extreme wind and rain, 87 participants turned up to enjoy a variety of watersports over the two days. Our crack team of volunteers, Eugene Power, Sue McGrath and Philip Scallan brought a wealth of experience, enthusiasm and good humour and we are so grateful to them for giving up their time to take part in this hugely important event.

We extended an invitation to the hardworking staff at the NRH to join us for some trips out on the RIB in Dublin Bay over a few weeks in September and October. Many of them enjoyed a well-deserved break and a taste of the excitement that the RIB trips offers so that they can give a first account to patients and their families.



We would like to extend our thanks to the management and staff of Dun Laoghaire Marina, MGM Boats, Killen Marine and Solas Marine for their generosity. We couldn't run this programme without their support.

Our dynamic team of Activities Volunteers provided invaluable support for our activities, and we are immensely grateful for their selfless commitment and dedication. Their time and effort made a significant difference, and we appreciate their ongoing contributions.



## Education Programme

Over 100 individuals enrolled in our range of online education programmes. These highly engaging workshops encompassed assorted topics, including:

- A six-week series of life skills sessions in collaboration with Aware, providing valuable insights into personal development.
- Tailored webinars on relationship, intimacy, and sexuality, conducted by Michelle Donald, an experienced psychosexual therapist, catering to diverse groups.
- Mind/body therapy workshops facilitated by holistic therapist, Seamus Murphy.
- Stress management workshops for families and friends, expertly guided by Mary Scarff.
- A dynamic panel discussion on vocational and employment opportunities, featuring Fiona Ryan, Vocational OT from NRH, Helen Forster from Southside Partnership, and Rachel Mulligan from IWA Ability program.
- An assistive technology online seminar presented by Enable Ireland, offering valuable insights into innovative technologies.
- An informative cyber security online seminar hosted by Paul O'Brien from Bank of Ireland (BOI), equipping participants with the knowledge required to navigate the digital world securely.

These diverse educational offerings provided our participants with knowledge and practical skills across various domains, empowering them to thrive in their personal and professional lives.

## Counselling

Adjusting to life with a spinal cord injury is a life-long process and the impact of coming to terms with the

trauma of a SCI is particularly strong for those people who sustained their injury during the pandemic. Community activities have been slow to return to normal and this has led to a feeling of isolation remaining a challenge for many people. Being mindful of the enormous stress that the Covid restrictions have had on our service users, SII extended their funding of one-to-one counselling sessions, doubling the number of complimentary sessions available.

As service users adapted to meeting online, the SII psychotherapy team offered counselling sessions over zoom, giving people who may have found it difficult to attend previously the opportunity to attend counselling.

Our psychotherapists, Mary Scarff (BSc MIAHIP) and Rhona Clarkin (BSc MIAHIP) provide our counselling services. With over 25 years in clinical practice both specialise in trauma, relationship counselling, conflict resolution and stress management.

## Counselling Facts and Figures

During 2022, SII provided 70 counselling sessions for our service users and their families.

In addition, our psychotherapist facilitated a 6-week stress management course by webinar for both service users and families.

Many referrals for counselling were from female service users with 2/3 of sessions attended by women, males only accounting for 1/3 of referrals.

Over 80% of those seeking counselling were over the age of 35.

Over half of our referrals for counselling identified as walkers with aid and over 80% were living with Cauda Equina Syndrome.

Of those seeking counselling, 66% sustained their injuries through a medical condition with 33.3% sustained from an accident.





## Collaboration

Bairbre O'Sullivan, our newly appointed Head of Services, has taken on the representation of SII in the National Office of Clinical Audit PPI (Public/Patient Involvement) committee. The implementation of Major Trauma Centres and Units aims to ensure that individuals with life-threatening injuries receive timely and appropriate care in the most suitable settings. SII is actively involved as a co-contributor in an HRB research application titled "Targeted Review and Amalgamation of Unmapped Major Trauma and Ambulance Data in Ireland: TRAUMA." This research is progressing well, focusing on merging the two datasets to establish a unified information framework.

Throughout 2022, our collaboration with the Christopher & Dana Reeve Foundation, the European Union of Spinal Cord Injury, and our global partners remained strong. Thanks to our UK colleagues, we were able to connect with specialists and host online Zoom education workshops. These workshops provided valuable knowledge and insights to our community.



Our peer ambassadors, including Gemma Willis, Jack Shannon-Cole, Jenna Fitzgerald, Angela Larkin, Ian O'Connell, Bernard Healy, Jack Kavanagh, and John Whelan continue to generously share their personal experiences. We express our heartfelt gratitude to them for dedicating their time, displaying enthusiasm, and maintaining a positive attitude while sharing their stories.

## Web/Media/Digital/Magazine

We sent 75 ezines to a total of 44,551 email addresses keeping them up to date with services information, webinar information, peer support Zoom meetings and upcoming events.

The Summer and Winter editions of our magazines were posted to 3,726 service users. Both are also available on our website

[https://spinalinjuries.ie/resource/magazines/.](https://spinalinjuries.ie/resource/magazines/)

Our website traffic increased by almost 135% with just over 41,000 new users in 2022. We worked with DEPT digital agency to create new campaigns and build brand awareness and connect with new service users. As a result, our online donations also increased from €1,753.00 in 2021 to €30,007 to 2022.



# FUNDRAISING REVIEW

2022 was a good year for fundraising. Firstly, we were absolutely delighted to be able to host our annual fundraising in person events once again after a long hiatus and meet with so many of our supporters face to face. Secondly, our spinal injuries community outdid themselves in taking on extraordinary challenges and raising fantastic funds for us.

## Events

Our first live in person event of the year was the hugely popular Spring Lunch hosted by Philip Quinlan in the Intercontinental Hotel, Dublin. Over 400 people got glammed up and attended the event on 2nd April. They enjoyed a delicious lunch and were inspired by our guest speaker Mark Pollock who received a standing ovation after this address.

The event was kindly sponsored once again by the Institute of Education and our guests were hugely generous with the auction raising a record breaking €26,000. We would like to say a huge thank you to all those businesses who donated raffle prizes and auction prizes. It is really appreciated and the auction performed well on the day under the professional direction of auctioneer Rob Hoban. Overall, the event raised over €120,000 and we are so grateful to everyone who came along and made it such a special event.

Our Summer BBQ took place on the 10th September in the Royal St George Yacht Club in Dun Laoghaire. Following a gin reception kindly sponsored by the Kinsale Spirit Company guests were treated to a delicious meal with a wide selection of barbecued meats and salads. The amazing Lester Cassidy blew everyone away when he told his incredible story of how he sustained his spinal cord injury, overcame a brain tumour and went on to climb Croagh Patrick with the help of his friends raising an incredible €147,000 to be divided between SII and the NRH Foundation. Guests then danced the night away to the fabulous Heebie BeeGees. The event raised over €10,000.



Next up, the following weekend, we hosted our inaugural London Lunch on a lovely sunny day in the prestigious Queen's Club. Despite the air of mourning that hung over the city due to the death of Queen Elizabeth II and her impending funeral 120 guests joined us for a drinks reception on the balcony followed by a lovely lunch in the President's Room. The beautiful Jenna Fitzgerald brought a tear to many eyes when she shared her personal story of sustaining a spinal cord injury at a friend's wedding. Her openness and honesty touched many hearts as she related the turbulent journey of her recovery, and we are truly grateful to this remarkable lady. Many generously donated prizes were raffled and auctioned off once again under the watchful eye of Rob Hoban who is very entertaining while he expertly persuades people to part with their hard-earned cash. I think it's fair to say the London set enjoyed themselves thoroughly and the event was a great success, raising over £30,000. London, we'll be back.



We were back on home soil for the popular Cork Jazz Ball on the 29th October. 160 guests attended the Cork International Hotel and enjoyed an evening of fabulous food and live music provided by the Underscore Orkestra and Gemma and the Jets. Massive thanks to our sponsors Christy's Wine and Spirits, Classic Drinks, the Kinsale Spirit Company and Fado. The event raised an impressive €30,000.







And finally, the Q Ball took place in a new venue, the Radisson Blue Royal in Dublin, on the 26th November. It was a glamorous affair hosted by the now legendary Philly Quinlan and a fun filled evening was enjoyed by all. Bernard Healy shared his story of his spinal cord injury and guests generously donated to the raffle and auction. The incredible Spring Break kept the dancefloor full into the early hours and the event raised €35,000.

Once again thank you to the service users who bravely shared their stories, to everyone who attended the events, donated prizes, sponsored elements or donated their time and expertise. It is hugely appreciated.

## Community Fundraising

Not only do we have a fantastic community who attend and support our events, but also a community of fundraisers who set themselves extraordinary challenges and 2022 was quite the year for this.

One of the highlights had to be the incredible achievement of Lester Cassidy who despite the many obstacles that were put in his way achieved his goal of climbing Croagh Patrick with an army of support. Even the yellow weather warning didn't put them off on the day and I think the day will be remembered by everyone involved for a long time. It was a truly amazing feat by a determined and resilient man and the staggering €147,000 raised is a tremendous injection to both SII and the NRH Foundation.

Lester wasn't the only one to take on a remarkable challenge on our behalf in 2022. Neil Norton took on a gruelling 20 week training regime before facing his opponent in his first ever cage fight. Neil plans to take on the Half Marathon des Sables in Fuerteventura in 2023 as a warm-up for the toughest ultra marathon in the world, the Marathon des Sables in the Sahara in 2024. While we do think he's a bit mad, we are incredibly grateful and wish him every success in these future challenges. Neil raised almost €2,000.

Huge congratulations and thanks to both Una Lynch and Tim Hurley who cycled the 750km from Paris2Nice raising €7,870.

## SII Fundraising Challenges

In addition to the individual challenges achieved above we had two adventure challenges in 2022 which were a great success.

On the bank holiday Monday, 2nd May, 16 people from all over Ireland headed off to the Algarve to take part in our first ever Algarve Cycle. Staying in the impressive Wyndham Grand in Quinta do Lago the guests enjoyed wonderful hospitality and some fantastic cycles under the guidance of double gold medal-winning Paralympian Mark Rohan. They fell into a pattern over the five days enjoying delicious breakfast buffet every morning before heading out along the back roads and hidden paths of the hills surrounding Quinta do Lago, taking in the sights and having great chats. They would stop for coffee in quiet little villages to rest their legs and soak up the Algarve atmosphere before setting off to return to the hotel. The afternoons were mainly free time to explore Quinta, lounge by the pool, visit the hotel spa or hit the beach. Dinner was served either in the hotel or one of the local restaurants and the group also enjoyed a visit to a local vineyard to sample a selection of wines and complementary tapas.

As well as enjoying the stunning weather, the breathtaking views, the activities and the wonderful food and wine, many of the group commented on the highlight being the camaraderie that evolved within the group and the friendships that had been forged. The event was a great success and raised over €50,000. Thank you to everyone who took part and to Vendici Properties for their support in terms of sponsorship and participation.



The following month, twenty-six adventure seekers (including 9 people with a spinal cord injury) headed off to the UK to take on the challenge of sailing the SV Tenacious, from Poole, along the south coast to Land's End and then up to Dublin. It was an incredible experience and again everyone got on brilliantly together. The sense of camaraderie and solidarity on these challenges is immense.

The team were split into four watches who took turns doing 4 hours shifts throughout the voyage. Everybody took part in all tasks such as hauling and flaking ropes, scrubbing the decks, climbing the mast or being hauled up to the crow's nest, bracing the yardarms, preparing and serving food and the never-ending washing up. It was pretty hard work but there was plenty of eating, drinking and singing to make up for that and everyone really enjoyed the experience. Unsurprisingly the weather changed as they approached Ireland and they got a good old "Failte Abhaile" in the lashing rain but that didn't dampen their spirits. It was a fantastic experience and many are already planning their next voyage (which just happens to be in the Caribbean!). The Tall Ships Adventure 2022 brought in €90,983.

## Monthly Prize Draw

Our monthly prize draw continued in 2022 with monthly prize-winners enjoying cash prizes of €1,000, €500 and

€250. Some were lucky enough to win more than once. There were over 350 tickets sold monthly raising €2,500 every month. We're delighted that some of our service users who support the raffle won cash prizes and thank you to all the winners who decided to donate their winnings back to the charity. We don't expect this and want people to enjoy their winnings, but this generosity of spirit is hugely appreciated. This type of consistent, regular funding is essential for us as it enables us to plan future services based on the income and it will be a goal in 2023 to increase the number of regular donations through this channel. Tickets are only €7 per month and can be purchased on a one-off basis or as a regular monthly donation which is what works best for us in terms of planning and predicting income. We need everyone to encourage friends and family to sign up and support our service users whilst giving themselves a real chance of a cash injection. Sign up at [spinalinjuries.ie/raffle](https://spinalinjuries.ie/raffle).

## Corporate Support

In relation to corporate support we would like to thank Niall Gunne for his significant support this year as well as Vistra, Dun Laoghaire Rathdown County Council and the Iris O'Brien Foundation for their generous and kind support. Also thank you to Coloplast who sponsored our Roadshow.

## Christmas Campaign

We wrapped up our fundraising for the year with our Christmas Campaign. Our lovely service user Angela Larkin joined the mighty Marty Whelan in his RTE Studio to promote our counselling service which she had found so valuable having been diagnosed with CES in 2014. We recognise the need to extend this free counselling service to both service users and their family members and we shared the footage featuring Angela and Marty across social media platforms raising €17,500.

Thanks to Angela, Marty and his production team of Ian McGlynn and Saibh Downes who facilitated everything for us.





# A DAY IN MY WHEELS



The inaugural A Day In My Wheels was hosted in Cork County Hall and had 6 participants and 6 ambassadors take part. The breakfast was opened by Fiona Bolger, who introduced SII Chairperson John Twomey to say a few words. This was followed by a talk on Diversity and Inclusion in the workplace by Disability Federation of Ireland representative, Kevin Dempsey.

After this talk, we broke out into a wheelchair skills training session (lead by new service user Mark Dalton), which lasted approx. 30 minutes. Participants and their ambassador “buddies” were then free to spend some time together to talk about the less well-known aspects of spinal cord injuries.

Overall, feedback has been very positive, with all participants saying they got a lot out of it.

The 6 participants and ambassadors who took part in ADIMW in Cork Thursday the 13th of October were:

- William O’Brien of O’Brien Storage, who met with service user Mary McGrath
- Colin Ross of Kinsale Gin, who met with service user Nathan Kirwan
- Cllr Deirdre O’Brien, who met with service user Paul McCarthy.
- Conor Healy, CEO of the Cork Chamber, who met with Chairperson John Twomey
- Anita Griffith, an anaesthetist, met with service user Gene O’Keefe

Deputy Mayor of the County of Cork, Cllr. Deirdre O’Brien, highlighted how, “This is an innovative

approach to raising awareness of spinal cord injuries and their consequences. After all, it is far more than being unable to walk. I have no doubt that the buddies have a greater understanding of the psychological, social and work-related problems the SII Ambassadors encounter daily. I expect the representatives from the business and public sector to raise awareness of inclusion, equal opportunities and accessibility and consequently offer hope to SII individuals, their family members and friends. We have far too little knowledge of spinal cord injury and its consequences. There is still a lot to learn. For all of us”.

On top of this we need to say a big thanks to Cork County Council for inviting us to use County Hall for the venue. Several of their team also gave huge support to the event, including Chief Executive Tim Lucey and from Corporate Services Patricia Liddy and Lisa O’Riordan.

Back in Dublin Google did their own version of ADIMW and we would like to thank VPs David Sneddon and Shane Holland for taking part and service user Jack Shannon Cole for facilitating the wheelchair skills training. Thanks to Aisling Kennedy for making this happen and her continuing support.

**Overall, ADIMW raised slightly over €30k.**

On Wednesday 31st August 2022, Spinal Injuries Ireland held its Annual General Meeting. For the third year running this meeting was held virtually.

Before the AGM started Lester Cassidy, our keynote speaker, addressed the attendees on a major fundraiser that he had run for the NRH and SII in June 2022. Service user, Lester Cassidy from Kilcock, Co Kildare spoke of how he had been paralysed from a workplace accident at only 19 years of age. The Kilcock native was working as an apprentice carpenter on the roof of a house in Leixlip at the time. Following rehabilitation, Lester and his girlfriend Rachel (now his wife) travelled the world before settling down and having a family. He said that he is a stay-at-home Dad now which is the most rewarding job in the world. Lester had been planning a climb of Croagh Patrick since before Covid. *“I wanted to thank the National Rehabilitation Hospital and Spinal Injuries Ireland for their support. The staff do the most amazing job to get the patient back to being as independent and healthy as possible. They are inspirational. SII also made a massive impact on my life”*.



To scale Croagh Patrick, a special buggy was designed which was pushed by teams of supporters working in shifts. “The whole of Kilcock got behind our campaign and fundraised and came along on the day although the weather was shocking” Lester recounted.

*“I have the most incredible friends who practiced with me in advance by climbing the Sugar Loaf. It was supposed to be a small group but over 50 people turned up”* stated Lester.

“I truly am thankful to everyone who supported me on this project. We raised almost €150,000 and the NRH Foundation and SII each received almost €75,000. I am overwhelmed and overjoyed by this figure. It's amazing what can be achieved when a community pull together” added Lester.

Lester finished his speech by thanking everyone, particularly his wife Rachel.

*“I'd like to finish up by thanking my wife Rachel. We have been together since we were 16. She has always been there for me when I needed her, right beside me after my accident in '98 and all through my rehabilitation process, right beside me when I was recovering from my brain tumour, and right beside me at the top of Croagh Patrick, even though she twisted her ankle two weeks previously. Nothing was going to stop her being at the top of that mountain with me.”*

Lester received a round of applause, which was followed by John Twomey, Chairperson, thanking Lester for his incredible achievement and, on behalf of our service users, acknowledging the funding that he had raised for the NRH and SII.

After Lester's keynote address, the AGM began with CEO Fiona Bolger outlining the work of the organisation during 2022. Following this the 2021 accounts were presented and approved and one of the directors, Mr Herman Wilmink, retired. He had both completed three terms and had to retire. John Twomey acknowledged the time and support that Herman had given to SII on a voluntary basis and thanked him for helping to transform the organisation.

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.



# PRE BUDGET SUBMISSION



## SII submitted a pre budget submission to Government in August 2022.

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 2023 from SII was 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.

Following the submission, In September 2022, SII ran a series of 8 townhall meetings around the country at which service users were invited to attend and to tell the local TDs and councillors of the issues facing them living with a life changing injury in Ireland including their concerns around their medical card. SII continued to engage with over 20 politicians who attended these meetings.

You can view our full Pre Budget Submission on our website at <https://spinalinjuries.ie/resource/otherpublications/>

# FINANCIAL STATEMENTS

## Income and Expenditure Account Year ended 31st December 2022

	2022	2021
<b>Income</b>	1,110,023	881,451
Interest receivable and similar income	90	93
Gross Income for reporting period	1,110,113	881,544
<b>Expenditure</b>	1,206,771	950,460
Depreciation and charges for impairment of fixed assets	14,832	18,410
total expenditure in the reporting period	1,221,603	968,870
<b>Net Income/ (Expenditure) before tax for the reporting period</b>	-111,490	-87,326

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 2022

	2022	2021
<b>Fixed Assets</b>		
Tangible Assets	24,922	38,355
<b>Current Assets</b>		
Debtors and prepayments	88,662	47,664
Cash at bank and in hand	1,166,126	1,319,537
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,254,788</b>	<b>1,367,201</b>
<b>Liabilities</b>		
Creditors: Amounts falling due within one year	(116,851)	(131,207)
Net Current Assets	1,137,937	1,235,994
<b>Net Assets</b>	<b>1,162,859</b>	<b>1,274,349</b>
<b>Funds of the charity:</b>		
Restricted Income Funds	9,392	11,090
Unrestricted Income Funds	1,153,467	1,263,259
<b>Total Charity Funds</b>	<b>1,162,859</b>	<b>1,274,349</b>



# YEAR END 31 DECEMBER 2022

## Directors/Trustees

John Twomey  
Herman Wilmink (retired August 2022)  
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

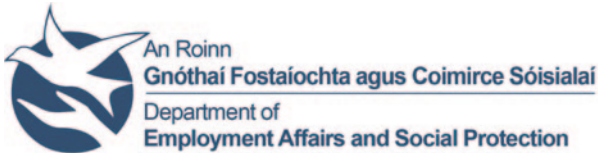
## Auditors

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



Comhairle Contae Chorcaí  
Cork County Council



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CHY: 11535

Registered Charity Number: 20031855

[www.spinalinjuries.ie](http://www.spinalinjuries.ie)

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