

Sean is a winner

Sean Harraghy joins a select group who have been recognised by their peers for their tireless work supporting, educating and motivating people with diabetes, writes **Sheila O'Kelly**

Sean Harraghy is the winner of the eleventh Diabetes Ireland Volunteer of the Year Award. Sean, who has type 1 diabetes, has been an active member of Diabetes Ireland and at the forefront of diabetes service developments in Mullingar and the Midland region since the late 1990s.

Through his determination to enhance local diabetes care, Sean was instrumental in the campaign to obtain a full time Consultant Endocrinologist and specialist diabetes team in Mullingar General Hospital. Most recently he initiated a fundraising campaign to buy a continuous glucose monitoring device for the local diabetes clinic and has now turned his attention to advocating for local podiatry and dietetic services for people with diabetes.

Kieran O'Leary, CEO of Diabetes Ireland said: "Sean's nomination was signed by 12 people including the local Consultant Endocrinologist, Dr Shu Hoashi, and current Branch Chairperson, Norman Dolan, which reflects the high esteem he is held in by healthcare professionals and patients alike."

Sean stepped down as Chairperson of the Westmeath Branch this year to become the Midlands representative on the Diabetes Ireland's Board of Directors.

Mr Norman Dolan, Chairperson of the Midlands branch said: "Everyone is truly grateful to Sean for his outstanding and successful work in the past number of

years. He is an inspiration to us all in making us realise that living with diabetes can enhance our lives and make us more determined to achieve our goals and ambitions in life. Sean is quite simply a fantastic advocate for diabetes."

Sean was completely taken by surprise by his nomination and he emphasises that his achievements were a credit to the entire committee.

"They're the force and help along the way. I think it's great that the Mullingar Branch has been recognised by this award," said Sean.

For the last 12 years Sean has taken on a variety of roles in his branch including Chairperson, Treasurer and Secretary.

Lobbying for services has been a big part of his work with the branch. Part of this involved leading a delegation to meet Mary Harney, who was Minister for Health at the time. Getting to that stage meant a hard slog of writing to TDs and generally raising awareness.

"This year I plan to take it a little bit easier. But there's a group of us who are having another public meeting in October. We'll have a fundraising in June again and there will be a church-gate collection. Some people are taking part in the St Patrick's Day Parade and other than that we might do a walk or something. We're still thinking about what we might do," said Sean

So much for taking it easier!

The Diabetes Ireland Volunteer of the Year Award, is sponsored by Roche Diagnostics. As well as receiving a crystal vase, Sean received €1,000 to nominate to an Irish diabetes project of his choice. There were five other nominees for Volunteer of the Year.

Niamh Monaghan and Emma Battigan

Niamh Monaghan and Emma Battigan were nominated for their work setting up a Dublin support group for people with type 1 diabetes. Grainne Flynn of the Clare Branch put Niamh and Emma in touch

with each other when she saw on Facebook that they were both asking if there was such a group. Emma and Niamh took it from there to set up their own group.

"Niamh admitted that she had never done anything like this before and naturally, seemed a bit apprehensive but she did not let that deter her," said Grainne.

Shortly afterwards, Niamh also set up a Facebook page to facilitate communication between meetings and provide continuity in peer-to-peer support for people with diabetes.

"It's important for people with diabetes to be able to find others and be able to communicate with them. Both Niamh and Emma are facilitating this. Niamh has started what could potentially be a national network of people with type 1 diabetes and she is bringing a community together," said Grainne.

At their first diabetes support group meeting in Dublin last February, 20 people came along.

"Since then we've had about 8-14 people at each meeting," said Niamh. "We have people who come consistently. We have also set up a Facebook group ['Type 1 Diabetic Dublin Support Group'] just for the Dublin Support Group and we have about 20 people on that and we're trying to build it up," Niamh said.

"We have meetings on the first Wednesday of the month and we have somebody different to chair each meeting. We pick a topic that we know is of interest and talk about it. In January it was insulin pumps. Next month we've a guy who's new to the group and he's going to talk about the raw food diet. It's something he had been interested in before he was diagnosed. At the end of that meeting we'll decide who's going to take the next one and what the topic's will be," said Niamh.

Niamh was not diagnosed with type 1 until she was 28 and says she has learnt an awful lot from Emma who was diagnosed at the age of seven.

VOLUNTEER OF THE YEAR

"There's an awful lot that she knows or is aware of that I am not. I hadn't heard about carb counting until I started talking to Emma," said Niamh.

Everybody attending these meetings learns something more about their condition and the latest developments in treatment. Before starting the group Niamh had had very little contact with other people with diabetes.

"I've met so many people who had nowhere to turn to and didn't know what to do. I think they find it handy to have somewhere to go to just go 'crap my sugars are high' or 'my sugars are low – what to do?'. "

With the help of Kate Moran, Diabetes Ireland PRO, Niamh and Emma have done quite a bit of work promoting diabetes awareness in the media. They are due to feature in the *Daily Star's Chic* magazine supplement; they got a note about the group put in the *Irish Times*; and they plan to approach TV3.

Gerard Gallagher

Gerard Gallagher, who has type 2 diabetes, is Treasurer of the Donegal Branch and was nominated for the huge amount of work he does on behalf of the branch.

Having regularly attended Branch meetings, Gerard was appointed Secretary to the branch Committee seven years ago and has remained on the Committee ever since. Throughout the past seven years Gerard has dedicated a tremendous amount of his time and energy to supporting the Diabetes Federation.

Gerard tirelessly represents the Branch at Regional Meetings, Public meetings and all the numerous fund-raising events run in Donegal. He has also taken on more and more responsibility for organising the Annual Family Weekend.

Throughout 2011, Gerard took on the added work of spearheading a very successful drive to raise funds for the purchase of an OCT machine for the eye clinic in Letterkenny hospital. This will greatly benefit anyone with diabetes in Donegal who needs treatment on their eyes.

"I didn't know anything about the nomination for the award at all until we got

the word. I felt great and honoured to be nominated, and it gave me a great spur for doing things," said Gerard.

To raise the funds for the OCT machine the branch raised about €62,000.

"We did various things to raise the funds. We had coffee mornings and I wrote a wee letter to a lot of people and told them what we were trying to do. The big thing was the Letterkenny 10K race where they raised just over €21,000 – directly for the OCT machine," said Gerard.

In 2012, their annual family weekend is on 11 May. "We get good feedback on that," said Gerard. "To see young children mixing with other children having a whale of a time and they can't wait until the next outing. One child shows another – 'look my monitor is different to yours'," said Gerard.

Aoife Cox

Aoife Cox, was nominated for her work volunteering with the Teen Activity day held in the Burren last July; and for starting a type 1 support group in Limerick.

Originally from Mayo, Aoife has been studying in Limerick for the past five years. She is currently completing an MA in Limerick school of Art and Design.

Aoife has had type 1 diabetes since she was two years old and attended many of the Diabetes Ireland camps growing up. She found them really beneficial and over the years made some great friends through them. Her ambition is to help provide the same great experiences for other young people with diabetes.

Aoife feels that it is really important for people with diabetes to realise they

they're not isolated but that they are part of a community.

Mary Carroll

Mary Carroll was nominated by the members of the committee of the Southern Regional Office for her work with the branch. In particular the branch wanted to recognise Mary's great achievement, setting up the Cork Annual Golf Classic.

This prestigious event started as a one-hour competition, then quickly grew to a half day event and in recent years to a day-long event with up to 40 teams of golfers taking part. To date it has raised more than €100,000 that goes towards running events in the Southern region.

Mary's association with the branch goes all the way back to 1977 when she was diagnosed with diabetes. Like many others, she needed the support of other people with the condition and contacted what was then the Southern Counties Association. Mary served in a variety of offices and as Chairperson saw a need for a Parent Support Group in Cork. This group is still in existence.

"Mary is always prepared to support any event and is endlessly willing to give her time and energy to the efforts of the Cork office," said Pauline Lynch, Regional Development Officer, South Diabetes Ireland.

Mary hopes that more people will volunteer, and says there is enormous satisfaction to be derived from it.

"Do what you can. Run a marathon, a card evening or take part in Tea for Diabetes. Diabetes Ireland needs the support of volunteers at every level," said Mary.

VOLUNTEER 2012

Nominate that special somebody for this year's award by simply telling us in 300 words why he or she should win. The winner will have dedicated time and commitment to creating awareness about diabetes in the community, volunteering for Diabetes Ireland initiatives and helping others living with diabetes.



Applications will be presented to a representative panel.

For more details log onto: www.diabetes.ie