



Spinal
Injuries
Ireland
Support at every stage



ANNUAL REPORT 2020

CONTENTS

2

Chairperson's Address

3

Chief Executive's Review

4-8

Service User's Story

9

Website Revamp

10-11

A.G.M.

12-13

Services Review

14

Peer Volunteer Programme

15

Virtual Conference

16-17

Fundraising Update

18

Financial Statements

19

Directors/Trustees
& Other Information



CHAIRPERSON'S ADDRESS

2020 was an unprecedented year for Spinal Injuries Ireland. The Covid-19 Pandemic and subsequent lockdowns put our great plans to expand our services and to secure the financial sustainability of the organisation into grave doubt. As a Board of Directors, we immediately insisted that our first priority should be to the community of people with a SCI in Ireland who were extremely vulnerable and for our loyal staff to continue the support of our service users during the lockdown by producing new online content from coffee mornings to education sessions, fitness and entertainment.

From a financial perspective the Board were very concerned as we knew our fundraising would be obliterated however thanks to the Government's support, we were able to avail of the Temporary Wage Subsidy Scheme. We were completely astounded by the support from the community of people with a SCI who took up challenges and fundraising initiatives to support us. 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 2020.

As the year went on, we were able to avail of other Government initiatives such as the Pobal Stability grant of which we were beneficiaries and also the Employment Wage Subsidy Scheme which we participated in. The outcome of all your support and Government support and particularly from the HSE meant that we finished the year with a healthy surplus. Unfortunately, we know the next few years may be difficult so we will need these funds to keep our services operating.

I sincerely hope that you all 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 Twomey
Chairman



CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S REVIEW

If there was ever a year that our community worked together it was 2020. It is hard to believe the fear and trepidation that we all lived through in the first lockdown, but by working together we got through it. Thank you to the Board of Directors and staff who worked tirelessly to secure the organisation and to continue to provide services virtually for the first time. We have missed over the year being able to host our peer programme in the NRH and our clinic in the Mater Hospital which enabled SII to engage early with family members post injury. However our team of Peer volunteers were always available for virtual coffee mornings and for meetings online with newly injured patients.

Our Services team provided a huge variation of online content to support all our service users during the year. We also managed to host our first virtual conference. Our education sessions were one of the biggest successes and feedback from service users shows that people prefer receiving this information online rather than having to travel to an education meeting.

Thank you to all the staff who worked to build a new website during the year. We very quickly realised that if we were to continue to provide our services online we needed a more robust platform. Our number of interactions increased from almost 20,871 in 2019 to 97,021 in 2020.

Our Fundraising team had a fairly stressful year in that all their plans, new events and challenges had to be cancelled due to Covid, rescheduled and cancelled again however they worked with our service users to bring in income from challenges, started a new monthly prize draw and appealed to our loyal donors. Thank you to everyone who contributed to our fundraising in 2020, every little donation counts and we are entirely grateful to you all.

One programme that we had to cancel completely was our activities programme from the NRH where by we bring newly injured patients out on our powerboat in Dun Laoghaire or to the cinema or shopping. This programme is a very important part of the rehabilitation process and we will reinstate it when Covid permits us to do so.

SII's motto chosen by the staff in 2019, is by Helen Keller 'Alone we can do so little; together we can do so much.'

2020 was definitely a year in which we acted together as a community for the common good of all and we would like to express our gratitude to everyone of you.

Fiona Bolger
CEO

SERVICE USER STORY

Bernard's Diary – Lockdown Life

March 2020 – A strange month of epic proportions

It has been a strange month of epic proportions. It started off with the knowledge that there was a pandemic making its way towards Ireland. I was naturally concerned as I usually am when these things come to pass, given that I'm likely to be in that vulnerable group. The weekend of the 6th March I was considering the milestone of 40 years since my accident. In the lead up to this some of my friends had approached me and asked if I had any objection to marking this date with a celebration of my post-injury life. I was humbled by this and quickly said that would be great. So, a gathering of my close friends and colleagues from way back all those 40 years ago and more gathered at Scarpetta restaurant in Skerries, having a great night with a meal followed by drinks in Joe Mays pub on the Harbour. Little did we know that this was the last night that most of us would be socialising for months. From that weekend our world changed dramatically.

The week the schools closed I happened to be in my local SuperValu with a basket on my lap. It was crazy. I weaved through the aisles slowly getting the daily groceries. As I was buffeted here and there by trollies from all sides it reminded me of the dodgems at the local amusements years ago. Just like then there was real intent on the shoppers faces as they crashed through and came to a sudden stop in the ever-increasing queue for checkout. I proceeded as best I could muttering audibly so they could hear my frustration. Just then an employee spotted my predicament, took my now full basket off me saying "get out of here and I'll deliver this later". As I scurried out of the shop I realised I had been the only one with only a basket, evidenced by the big stack at the doorway.

One more obstacle was getting past all the kids congregated at the door. I called to my mother then phoned my wife to alert her to the delivery. Where could I go that would be quiet?

I grabbed a coffee and proceeded up the road in the direction of Skerries Rugby Club. The gates were open and nobody was there. I went in and down to the path to the end of the new synthetic pitch.

Aaaah! That's better.

I stopped and sat in the sunshine with my coffee. I gazed onto the area where, some forty years ago, the incident that changed my life occurred. I tried to replay it in my mind like they do in the movies. But I couldn't! Not because it was painful, but perhaps so much had happened in my life since then.

I spent the next two weeks sneaking into the rugby club for a couple of hours. The coffee was replaced by some stretching exercises, relaxation and space for my wife. Coffee this time followed the workout from a side hatch at the local cafe. This had become my daily external routine. **The keep fit videos on the Spinal Injuries Ireland Facebook page enabled me to structure my workout better. Shout out to the awesome Rob O'Byrne for his videos.**

As the measures imposed became more restrictive many friends offered to get shopping etc. I had been using SuperValu's early morning shopping opening times for the elderly and vulnerable. But at this stage I was sufficiently concerned and we both were reluctant to go out. I made use of my friends' offers. The last few days I have not gone to my quiet place primarily, because I'm concerned and, secondly, it has been a bit cold. I just got **Rob's week two video yesterday for home exercise. Timely!**

April 2020 – Trainspotting, Easter Hampers and missed calls from Mali

I had not gone out the door for the first couple of days in April. Then, the weather improved and I ventured out to where I thought there would be less people about - the railway station car park. I was hoping that my only company would be the birds as I did my exercises and took in some fresh air. This new venue had a pop-up coffee shop which I had assumed was closed. But it was open!! Ger, the owner of Coffee Breaks, has been meticulously implementing the new social distancing measures. Yellow lines, traffic cones, card rather than cash, hand gels, wipes and a few chairs well spread out. Had he been in the Army before? No! He has been trying to maintain a bit of personal well-being by staying open under the watchful eye of an Irish rail camera. Those that appear for coffee have heard on the grapevine that Ger is open for business to the small number of train travellers. It is nice to have some kind of interaction with the public. I have been there every day since; - exercises, coffee and chat. Although still concerned if I was doing the right thing and being responsible, I consoled myself with the realisation that in this beautiful town we live in, everybody else is going in the opposite direction to me - the harbour and beach.

I find that the briefest time spent out of the house does everyone a little good. Netflix, podcasts, zoom quizzes etc. are a welcome distraction. I'm even learning to speak Norwegian, but I don't know why. Getting out, however, is what's driving me.

Rambling around on my own with a little bag containing water, hand gel and a face mask is the first thing on my mind when I awake. It keeps my relationship with my wife well also. My mother is cocooning and she gets a shout every day from the top of the drive.

I'm missing the pub! "Lush", I hear you say. No! I'm missing that banter, slagging and social interaction of the great Irish pub.

Us 50 somethings meet up on the first Friday of the month. Friday 3rd April and there goes one I've missed. Okay! I miss a few creamy ones! There's always Good Friday.

It's approaching Easter and we all know now that the "Lockdown" continues into May. Still waiting on those few online purchases to be delivered; - an exercise machine for my wife, seat cover for my wife, sewing materials for my wife. Just as I realise I haven't bought anything for myself, I receive a text today that my delivery is on its way. I look at the origin and it says basketcase.ie. My wife didn't order anything from them. Mmmm! I go online to their site and now have my suspicions. Then it arrives; - an Easter hamper courtesy of IRFU Charitable Trust. Thank you guys. I get an Easter egg after all. In a recent zoom meeting with Spinal Injuries Ireland I was relieved to find out everybody's been doing much the same activities as myself.

Now off for some more trainspotting!

My routine has now become so predictable that any assassin would have an easy job. Ger at Coffee Breaks tells me I arrive at 1.50pm most days. "Think I'll get the next train into town",

I shout over to Ger. "Maybe another coffee instead" he replies, knowing I'd love to spin in and experience an empty Dublin City.

In normal times I'm never long enough on the platform to admire how nice it is here in the sunshine. This trainspotting lark is better than I thought! For now! Oops! There goes another missed call. Is it Mali again? No! Somewhere else, I won't bother looking up the country code.

May 2020 - Nature and Design

May began with another missed first Friday night out with the boys. It's the simple things ...

Happily, from the 5th, my mother was able to escape her cocoon. Although the weather was fine, she didn't see any reason to go beyond her gate but instead, went to work on the garden – where she has spent the whole month since. A constant reference to nature now pervades daily thoughts and conversation. It's probably a combination of nature realising we are in a sort of hibernation and our attention being drawn closer to it as the other stuff in our lives loses perspective.

I've tired of Netflix, have given up on online shopping and forgotten about most things I thought I had missed the last three months. Except sport! There is a limit.

Shop local from now on. The hawk is out and I've realised there must be millions of birds in this country. They are everywhere and, for a change, the seagull is quite absent; a godsend to us coastal residents. Our seals don't have competitors for now. I bet they'll be back by mid May when phase one gets into its stride.

So, on a sunny mid May morning as I sipped my first of the day, I turned to Ger "So what's here to stay that we didn't have before"? , I asked. "Screens in taxis and queues!" he exclaimed. "Is that it?" I replied dissapointedly. "People will return to the office, cash won't disappear and we will tire of washing our hands 100 times a day" he explained. "I could go on and on- but taxi drivers will like the screens and queues are in." We get down to the nitty-gritty of the argument that's on most people's minds should they admit to it. Some do freely and it's a daily topic of conversation. When will the pubs be back? I argue the pub is gone! The pub in Ireland is gone and what will replace it will be a new design more on a continental style. It may be a threat to the social culture that existed in the pub. However, now is the time to design something that's good and inclusive to all. "Nah! We can't do it.

As soon as things relax the pub will be back to how it was- that is to those that survive. People find it hard to cope with change", he sighed.

"So that is that! Let's see how the golfers got on" he spurted through his coffee, rubbing his hands in anticipation of the arrival of the happy "hackers". Sure enough, the first group of golfers arrived on cue at Coffee Breaks . Then it started. Nine holes, eighteen holes, 14 minute waits to tee off, no refreshments at the club (Ger was ok with that) and GUI rules. They couldn't agree on which of their complaints needed immediate rectification. I knew one thing. I'd lost my friends to golf again- how careless. Ah well, there's always the chance of a Norwegian popping by for a chat (I'm still learning).

An irritation that keeps me consumed from time to time is the use of words or phrases which get so overused – particularly by politicians – and creep into the every day lexicon. So, if I was on room 101 I'd throw "the new normal" into the abyss to join "kick the can down the road" and "disingenuous" ...never to be uttered again.

I think its all getting to me.





To top that, the seagulls are back just in time as the first aromas of fish 'n chips waft through the beach area of the town. In Skerries, that is the signal that summer has begun. But obviously, we shouldn't be getting any visitors. A few however, have snuck through the 5km barbed wire barrier, seagulls overhead ready to pounce on unsuspecting owners of vinegar drenched chips.

I must finish the month in an upbeat mood. Rumours and little hints about the possibilities of early announcements at the start of the new month bring a bit of hope and optimism about our current situation. The extraordinary good weather is helping us through this period. The swans have a new family to look after. Here's to June.

June 2020 - Basket Case

Another first Friday is set to be missed! It's driving me a little crazy.

Not this time baby! About 10-12 of us have traditionally met up each month. One of the guys has volunteered his garden as a venue since restrictions have relaxed a bit. Once the idea was floated, everybody was on board. Too many! Problem solved. 2 nights of 6. So we did it on 5th and 6th June. Although quieter than usual and with slightly more mature behaviour (for a change), it was very enjoyable and I didn't spill a drop.

Football is coming back. I just might get excited. 20km is coming. I just might get on that train.

With a view to the future when the weather is not so good, Ger decided to get a ramp made for Coffee Breaks. He installed a plexiglass screen and now I can shelter along with everyone else when it pours; social distancing taken for granted of course! He didn't need to be asked; he took the initiative.

The harshness of nature for the new-born revealed itself last weekend. A fledgling was screeching outside our door for most of the morning. Along hopped a Jackdaw (or Jay maybe) and dispatched the fledgling in seconds. The beauty is there also. The new cygnets, the terrapin and ducks are attracting great numbers at the pond near the Mills.

A few days ago, I took my first trip into Dublin in four months. I was excited and looking forward to experiencing how the city was coping with the changes. It seemed quieter to me but not everything was open. It reminded me of Sunday years ago. I realised that what I was missing had not returned. Actually, not much to see or do; we have it all here.

Phase 3 began on the 29th and many businesses were allowed to reopen. "I never thought the day would pass when you had to pre-book to sit in a pub in this country" tutted Ger. Let's just see where it takes us. People seem to be a little more positive as we seem to be doing certain things well. I went into Dublin a second time to meet my friend Eoin. It was much livelier this time but still comfortable to move around. We met in Stephen's Green on a fine sunny day and the mood and the crowds were the same as any summer previously. Things are looking up but we've got to be cautious still. I'm one of only a few with face coverings on the train home.

Here's to a July with no bumpy openings please!

July 2020– A nation holds its breath.

The ‘First Friday’ was such a success last month that our Rugby Club President volunteered his garden this month. All were able to turn up on the same night on this occasion and it was another enjoyable night, got to make it that way as it’s likely to be the only night out each month for a time. By now queues are a part of the streetscape every day. Some people are not taking it well and have that resigned look that they are just not that special any more; just like Henry Hill in *Goodfellas* - “Have to wait around like everybody else”.



Made a very tough decision not to attend a good friend’s 60th Birthday bash in Donegal end of this month. While the advice is staycation, somehow I felt that going was just a bit too early for me. It’s stay local for the moment and the weather is not providing any encouragement. I thought when Ger got his ramp it was for future planning. At this stage it has been used quite often to shelter from the rain, too often for our liking! On a positive note, however, Ger’s initiative last month caught on as a couple of shops in Skerries acquired some ramps. This was followed by a couple of my friends also. At this rate we could be heading for a fully accessible community. I won’t hold my breath though. It is proving to be a month for umbrellas just as more people and businesses are getting back to work. July in Norway is traditionally when less work is done. Fellesferie is the term and if you are looking for anything from officialdom you’ll be waiting.

Jack is gone!

All the memories of his era as our football manager are being played out all over the media. I wasn’t around for the summer of love but I was for ’88, ’90 and ’94 and those years were, for many of us, great times for our

nation. A day trip to Sicily for a terrible match against Egypt was my only attendance at any of those tournaments but at home they were great summers. I was in France for the last Euro championships and the current generation of fans behaved like those back then even though they haven’t had as much to celebrate of late.

Just as the outpouring of grief for Jack is expressed by the grateful Irish public, it’s announced phase 4 is postponed until 10th August.

I said no bumpy rides please!

This means the, by now tiresome, conversations on pubs that were fading, are likely to return again. Wait! The weekend is not all doom and gloom. Leeds are back in the premier league after sixteen years. A lot of 50 somethings are happy around here including myself. The week gets better! Rugby training is back so there will be activity at the club from now on. For the last four months there has been a solitary wheelchair user wandering around the club’s grounds. I will either have company or be turfed out.

I have noticed changes in people’s behaviour which I am sure is universal. First, people are waving more at each other from behind their face coverings. Gotta do with the inability to recognise each other quickly I’m sure. The new game in town is *spot the person behind the mask*. Secondly, this could be my imagination but, we are blaring our car horns at each other more loudly and frequently.

I’m sure it’s the absence of close interaction that prompts us to blare at the sight of someone, as if we hadn’t seen them in years.

It’s the end of the month and the good weather has returned. Skerries is at its best and the restaurants have been open for a while now. Myself and my wife were wandering around on a sunny day and she suggested we try our first meal out. “Without booking”? I cried, as if it was somehow illegal to be spontaneous. So, on a hot July mid-day the only place to go is the harbour. Fingers crossed we can avail of a walk-in. Success! The *Brick House* has a table free. It’s all strange and we are both nervous. Like a first date. I have a sense of how frustrating it is for anyone trying to embark on a new relationship at this time. I realise also that I could have a pint. And when I can have something, it would be rude not to. It makes up a little for my absence from Donegal, a great weekend had by all so I was told. So 28th of July is *First Pint* day on my calendar. That’s another thing I’ve got out of my system. No more talk of it then.....perhaps.

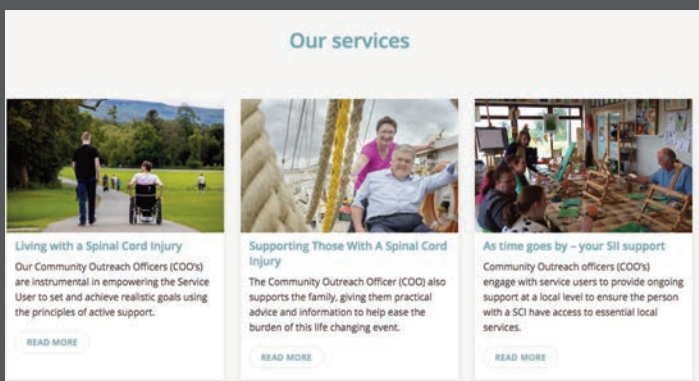
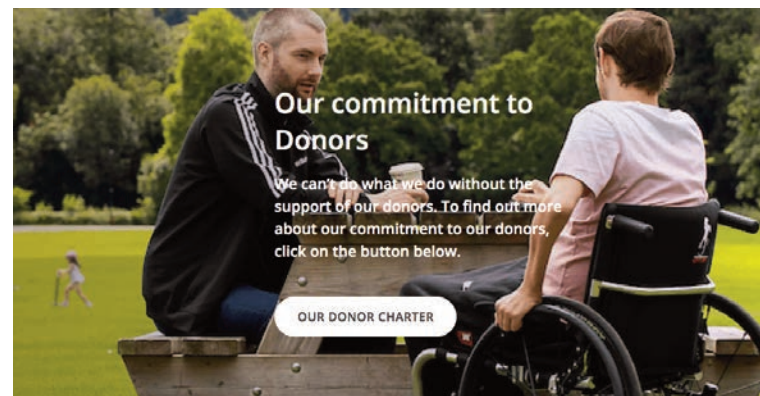
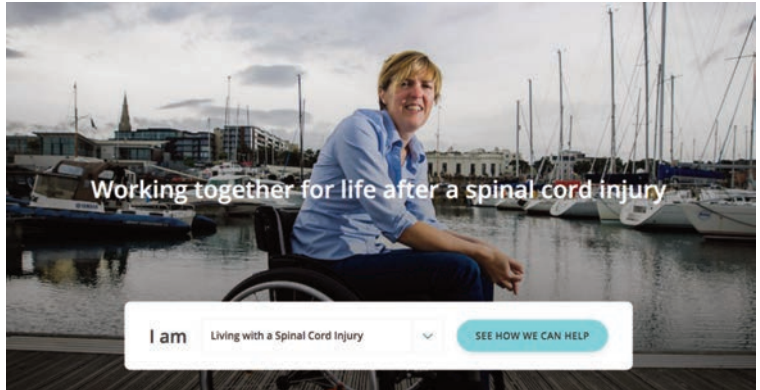
Bernard Healy 31st July 2020

WEBSITE REVAMP

2020 saw a complete overhaul of the SII website with the new site going live in December. It is far more user-friendly, with a whole host of new features, including:-

- A live chat feature where you can pose a question about anything SCI related, and can chat with one of our Community Outreach Officers directly through the site in real time.
- A Community Forum - This is a space for people and their families living with a spinal cord injury to chat amongst themselves about all things SCI.
- A new, improved Resources section, where we give accurate and up-to-date information about living with the physical, emotion and financial aspect of living with a SCI
- The site is translatable into 6 languages other than English: Irish, Spanish, Chinese, Polish, Portuguese and Romanian. This way we can support as many people in Ireland with a SCI as possible.
- There is a Text-to-Speech option for anyone who is visually impaired. If people double click on a block of text, a speaker icon will appear. If they simply click on the speaker icon and the text will be read out aloud.
- Dedicated section for families and health care professionals to support those living with a SCI

Anyone can browse the site, whether they are a family member looking for some guidance, a medical practitioner, or someone looking to engage with our Peer Volunteers.



With the development of our new website we needed new images and we are extremely grateful to the service users who agreed to model for us.

Thank you to Jenny Needham, Rogerio Ribeiro, Philip Quinlan, Julia Thurmann, Paula McCormack, Barry McLoughlin, Rob O'Byrne, Kieran Fitzgerald and Jack Shannon Cole.

On Wednesday 16th September SII held their Annual General Meeting and for this year it was held virtually due to Covid 19. We were honoured that Anne Rabbitte TD, Minister of State with responsibility for Disability addressed the AGM prior to the meeting. She outlined the investment that the state was making in rehabilitation and in particular with the new development at the NRH. Fiona Bolger, SII CEO responded to the Minister's address and she took the opportunity to detail the major issues that people with a spinal cord injury face and offered recommendations to the Minister as follows:

ISSUES

The National Strategy & Policy for the Provision of Neuro-Rehabilitation Services in Ireland had not been budgeted for or implemented. Many of the issues resulting from this are as follows:

- Serious delays for newly injured patients in accessing rehabilitation – in some cases, patients are transferred back to a regional hospital, nursing home or home to wait for a bed at the NRH. At that time there were 52 people on the waiting list to access the NRH. During this period they do not receive any basic rehabilitation and the delay in treatment causes further physiological and psychological issues.

'I was sent home from hospital with a catheter and bag without knowing what to do. I got repeated infections while I waited for a bed in the NRH and received no support from the hospital. I was shown how to manage them once I got to the NRH'. Service User- Louth

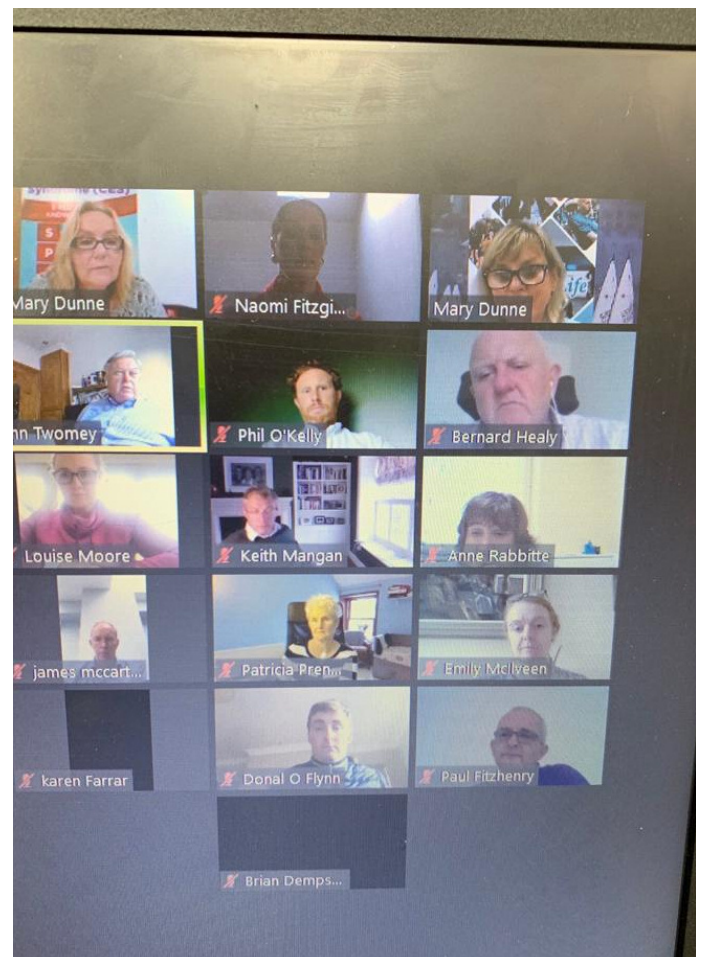
- People with a SCI are not automatically entitled to a medical card. There can be delays in accessing a card which in turn delays access to services and supports. Even if a person with a SCI receives a medical card, they fear when they have to be re-assessed in case they lose it. This causes undue stress and anxiety.

- Insufficient budget for homecare packages particularly for complex cases. Some young people with an SCI are living in nursing homes as care packages are not available to them to live independently. The cost of high lesion SCI care packages are in the region of €100,000 + and the typical response of local Disability Managers is that this level of funding is not possible at local level.

- 60% of people do not feel that hospital and medical staff have enough knowledge and experience of

managing someone with an SCI. Poor SCI education can cause misdiagnosis or create additional medical issues, particularly in relation to bowel and bladder management care which is essential for people with SCI. 40% of people are not comfortable with their bowel and bladder management at regional and community level. It is a post code lottery for bowel management programmes in the community. In some areas the PHNs do not have the capacity to carry out this function.

"You have to fight for everything – you receive no appointments or services unless you keep fighting". Service user- Cork



- It is estimated that it could cost €250 million per annum to manage pressure ulcers across all care settings in Ireland (Gethin et al.2005). The NHS estimates that 25% of pressure sore cost is due to SCI. If the correct care pathway was in place the cost of pressure ulcer management would reduce and the investment in the pathway would be self-financed.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Implement the National Strategy and Policy for Neuro Rehabilitation services in Ireland.
2. Increased and ring-fenced budget for homecare packages for complex cases to clear the pathway of care and free up beds at acute and rehabilitation stages. An additional €2m cumulatively annually allocated centrally to the Spinal Cord programme would clear the pathway and decrease waiting times.
3. Grant medical cards based on medical need, not income, to people with a SCI.
4. Investment to address staff shortages and training for healthcare professionals in both inpatient and community settings.

Minister Anne Rabbitte thanked SII for giving her the opportunity to hear first-hand all the issues and she looked forward to working with Spinal Injuries Ireland.

The Minister then left the meeting and the AGM began with Fiona Bolger outlining the work of the organisation during 2019 which was a very important year for SII as the year started with the launch of the strategic plan 2019-2022. She also reiterated that a person with a spinal cord injury is at the core of everything SII does and that each new service and support is based on research with the service users.



*Anne Rabbitte TD,
Minister of state with responsibility for Disability.*

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, including the additional standards for larger organisations.

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 Standard, The Charities Statement of Recommended Practices (SORP), the Guidelines for Charitable Organisations on Fundraising from the Public.

We were awarded the Charities Institute Triple Lock Standard which demonstrates the transparent reporting and strong fundraising and governance carried out by the organisation.

SII SERVICES REVIEW 2020

THE YEAR IN NUMBERS....

SERVICE USERS

2019 **2158** 2020 **2211**

(2020: NO ACCESS TO HOSPITALS DUE TO COVID 19)

PEER SUPPORT

2019

2020

42

SESSIONS

89

SESSIONS

ACTIVITIES

2019

2020

98

0

(2020: NONE DUE TO COVID 19)

GRANTS

2019

2020

35

12

(2020: NO UK GRANTS DUE TO BREXIT)

SERVICE USER GOALS ACHIEVED

2019 **405** 2020 **318**

ALL INTERACTIONS

2019 **20,871** 2020 **97,021**

We started the year with our survey for Service Users and their families to assess level of engagement and satisfaction with our services and provide an opportunity to feedback to us. We also wanted to identify the key themes for our upcoming conference. The key themes identified were:

- **Education and Vocational Education** 20%
- **Exercise and fitness** 17%
- **Peer support, Mental Health support** 16%
- **Community outreach** 11%
- **Group hobbies** 13%

Most service users wanted education delivered by online webinars facilitated by Peer Volunteers

'I love the interactive group sessions from peers with SCI' Train with people like myself'

Respondent replies advised that SII Programmes have made them feel:

- **53% felt better able to cope with life's challenges**
- **32% believed that it helped them make a positive change in their lives**
- **25% were empowered to have better habits**

Unfortunately, on the 14th of March, we had to change the way we provide support and information to Service Users overnight. Like so many other organisations we were unsure how best to adjust, but we all pulled together as a team and got on with it. Our priority was to phone all our Service Users individually. Service provision was directed by the Business Continuity Plan, March 2020. Considering the situation and in line with Government policy on Covid-19 pandemic, the SII Services Team adapted to deliver core services virtually, over the phone, Zoom and Microsoft Teams. The Community Outreach Team maintained a strong online presence. They maintained contact with existing Service Users in line with SII's Mission and Vision. A decision was made to develop a new website to improve our digital footprint. The Activities Programme was not active during 2020 due to Covid-19.

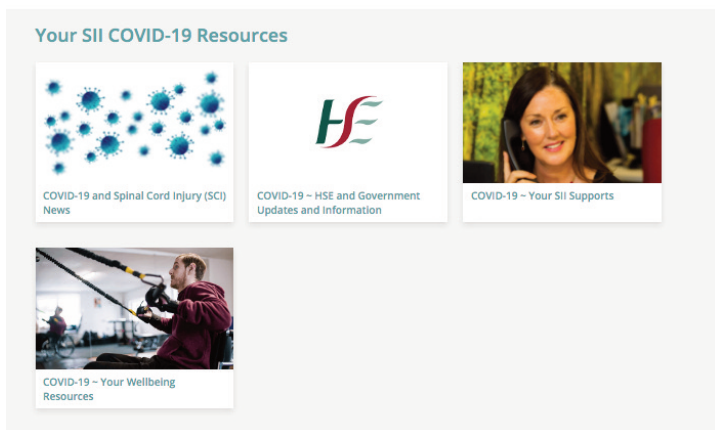
Each member of the Community Outreach Team engaged with Service Users by phone starting with those newly discharged from hospital followed by the most vulnerable and isolated. We used phone, text, email and webinar for face-to-face interactions. Along with one-to-one phone calls, services were delivered via our online platforms. We developed weekly digital engagement plans to deliver a wide variety of information and support, including messages from Service Users and HSE Covid-19 updates. By sharing Service Users' experiences and coping skills during this time, we aimed to motivate the Service Users to keep engaged, supported and active. We shared relevant information from other organisations at home and worldwide who were all dealing with Covid-19 and including:

- An update from Dr E. Smith with relevant information specific for those with a spinal cord injury
- A 'Daily diary' from a Service User
- Exercise sessions from one of the Service Users
- Professional psychotherapist supervision and counselling sessions from Mary Scarff
- Pilates and chair yoga sessions

We created a specific webpage for Covid-19 containing all information and links to relevant and helpful social media pages. The only programmes put on hold were the Activities and our Great Day out programmes. We look forward to re-instating these services as soon as this pandemic allows.



*** 30th April 2021 - NEW PUBLIC HEALTH MEASURES IN PLACE FROM 4th MAY 2021 - THE PATH AHEAD



Education and Vocational Programme

Our series of online webinars and education sessions were well received and proved an essential way for people to engage and support each other. In September and October, we hosted the first series of virtual education sessions via Zoom on Relationships, Intimacy and Sexuality facilitated by Michelle Donald PGDip.PST, a qualified Psychosexual Therapist based in the UK. The webinar series was well received with over 200 of our service users attending the various sessions over the 7-week period. Topics covered a broad range of issues including what is psychosexual therapy, dating with a spinal injury, & communicating your relationship needs. We also ran many webinars on a variety of topics requested by Service Users including:



- Returning to work with a SCI.
- Healthy Bladder and Bowel Management and Pressure Care Awareness.
- A joint pilot project with the NRH reviewing the vocational programme – a 6-week course was then proposed for those interested in returning to work.
- We ran two mental health workshops: IWA Roxboro Limerick on 16th January, facilitated by Claire Flynn from Mental Health Ireland & in IWA Clonakilty on 21st January, facilitated by Emily Daly from SHINE Mental health services Cork.
- With IWA Limerick, we ran a Coloplast Bladder and Bowel talk.
- We linked in with 4th year health and leisure students in Limerick Sports to provide a fitness course to 6 Service Users over 7 weeks.
- In Carlow, funded by a National Lottery Grant, we ran a 4-week hydrotherapy course.
- Again, funded by a National Lottery Grant we ran a 6-week fitness class in Dublin.
- Our Community Outreach Officers took part in a course on Assistive Technology, facilitated by Siobhan Long, Enable Ireland.
- The WRAP programme, delivered sessions on thinking styles, understanding stress.
- We ran several sessions facilitated by Shine Services, which supports people affected by mental ill health.



Peer Volunteer Programme

A 2 day in-person peer training was held in January 2020 with 19 attendees in total (14 peer and family volunteers and 5 activity volunteers) with a mix of existing and new volunteers. The second group of training took place online in March. The training covered an overview of Spinal Injuries Ireland, including strategy, organisational chart, governance code, fundraising, rationale for training and SCI causes and types. The specifics of volunteering and motivation for the role were explored. A psychotherapist presented on trauma, boundaries, as well as listening and communication skills. We trained 3 peer family members for the first time, as a direct result of the findings from our research with family members carried out last year. All volunteers are Garda vetted and undergo Children First training, sign a code of conduct and a volunteer agreement before undertaking their volunteer role. Peer and family volunteer profiles are available on the SII website and have been promoted online.

We hosted 6 virtual coffee mornings to meet the need of those living with different types of SCI. The rationale behind this was to gauge the specific needs and topics of discussion for each group for future information sessions. We delivered SII awareness sessions in person in the NRH and online to promote SII Services with in-patients and staff.



My Life and Wellbeing During Covid 19 - Virtual Conference



The banner features the SII logo (Spinal Injuries Ireland) on the left, the dates '19th - 23rd October 2020' and 'Conference Speakers' in the center, and the Coloplast logo on the right. Below this, there are ten individual portrait photos of the speakers, arranged in two rows of five. Each photo is accompanied by the speaker's name in a white box.

sii Spinal Injuries Ireland
Support all every stage

19th - 23rd October 2020
Conference Speakers

Coloplast

Dr Éimear Smith

Mr Keith Synnott

Brid Keenan

Eimear Daly

Mary Scarff

Michelle Donald

Paula Keane

Ann Marie Flanagan

Karen Stokes



We were devastated to have to cancel our conference in April, so we decided to host a virtual conference instead on October 19th – 23rd, sponsored by Coloplast. There were 13 sessions over the week with a different theme each day. Almost 250 people engaged with the conference over the week. The conference covered a wide range of topics including an overview of the implementation of A Trauma System for Ireland from Mr Keith Synnott, National Clinical Lead for Trauma Services in Ireland and Consultant Orthopaedic and Spine Surgeon. Dr Eimear Smith Consultant in Rehabilitation Medicine and Medical Director of the Spinal Cord System of Care Program at the National Rehabilitation Hospital and Mater Hospital, presented on the new NRH Hospital. Expert speakers covered multiple topics related to the physical and psychological effects of living with a SCI.

Other sessions covered were Psychosexual Therapy, looking after your mental health, communication skills, and SCI and Trauma. Paula Keane, the Spinal Liaison Nurse in the NRH covered Autonomic Dysreflexia alongside Eimear Daly, the Programme Manager in the Crann Centre Cork, who presented on Pressure Wound Care.

The week ended with a specific session for family members facilitated by our family peer volunteers Gabrielle and Mary. We are so grateful to these two ladies for being so honest and eloquent in sharing their lived experiences and how they support others who may find themselves in a similar situation.

Strategic Plan

The Strategic Implementation Plan was reviewed by the CEO and Head of Services and updated in light of COVID -19 in August 2020. All goals were on target to be achieved despite the impact of Covid 19. Services delivery policies which were updated pre COVID – 19 are working well with clear guidelines about supporting Service Users virtually.

FUNDRAISING UPDATE

COMMUNITY FUNDRAISING

In the face of Covid 19, like every charity, SII had to learn to reinvent its fundraising strategy. Up until 2020, fundraising had been very centred around events & challenges, all of which came to a halt in March 2020.

Our amazing service users stepped up to the plate, donating to our Emergency Appeal, organising their own virtual fundraising and participating in huge numbers in SII virtual events, such as our Virtual Portugal Cycle and our Runners and Rollers Virtual Marathon.

In May of this year, in the middle of lockdown, Jonathan Ranson set himself a goal of completing a marathon, using a hybrid hand bike. It was a massive achievement and Jonathan raised an amazing €17,500! This was followed by Aengus Burkes who on the 21st June, found a way around the Covid distance restrictions to run 21 miles. His route took him back to Rossleighan approximately every 22 minutes, where the Portlaoise AFC U/16 team that Aengus coaches met at the same time to kick a ball around and joined him on a relay basis for the duration of the run, raising over €2,700.

“I know the consequences of a spinal cord injury and appreciate the work done by Spinal Injuries Ireland. I suffered a SCI in 1984, but luckily made a full recovery, others are not so lucky,” said Aengus. “I’m inspired by the work of Spinal Injuries Ireland and wanted to support them by raising money. The more people that know about Spinal Injuries Ireland, the greater their impact.”

In November, Graham Whelan completed his first ever marathon, having just recovered from Covid. Graham’s mum Paula suffered a spinal cord injury in 2011. Graham said that SII helped his mum and he wanted to return the favour.

During the first lockdown period the Graiguenamnagh rowing club members decided that it would be interesting to see if they could combine all their distances to row the width of the Atlantic Ocean. The Atlantic Challenge to raise money for Spinal Injuries Ireland was the brainchild of Dan Walsh whose girlfriend works as a nurse in the Spinal Unit in the Mater Hospital. After 3 weeks of teamwork, motivation, determination and commitment they had 50 participants, with their total journey amounting to 4,600KM or 3,000 miles from La Gomera in the Canary Islands to English Harbour in Antigua. They raised €2,600 of much needed funds.

In June, we launched our Runners and Rollers Virtual Marathon, and people did their own versions of it. Our fantastic supporter and service user Mark Nugent and his sister in law Mary Healy hand cycled and cycled respectively 165km for us in a week. Ronan O’Keefe rolled



42km for us while his brother Donal ran alongside him and they raised over €1,500.

Not content with one marathon, Jim Clancy completed three, including virtually travelling up Carrauntoohil twice in the same week of the eighth anniversary of becoming quadriplegic due to a high-level spinal cord injury. An amazing result and Jim raised €600.

Kyle McCarthy also decided to set himself an almighty challenge and ran 400km in June, raising a fantastic €4,725. Kyle is a relation of Sr Aileen McCarthy, one of the founders of Spinal Injuries Ireland and the McCarthy family continue to be great supporters.

Rosie Gowran and her daughter Nora, aged 13, also ran a virtual marathon and raised over €1,200 while community outreach officer, Philippa O’Leary did her mini marathon of 10km in Killarney and service user, Paul Fitzhenry did his virtual Great Limerick Walk 10km in May.



Virtual Portugal Cycle

When Covid hit and we were forced to cancel our planned mixed ability cycle in the Algarve in collaboration with the IRFU Charitable Trust, Irish Paralympian Medallist, Mark Rohan, who was helping organise the event in Portugal, stepped into the breach and agreed to hand cycle from Porto to the Algarve, posting video footage as he went. Thanks to his and his team's efforts, he raised over €8,000. We were also encouraged to set the challenge for lots of other brave Irish cyclists and a total of 32 people cycled the 220kms or 650kms virtual Algarve routes that Mark had set. One lady, Carmel Hughes, did it on her exercise bike and wheelchair user Brigit Tol used her therapy bike!

Senan Corry's father Diarmuid has a spinal cord injury and together they took part in our virtual cycle. Senan is only 13 years of age and cycled 294km, raising a whopping €995.

In total our cyclists raised an incredible €32,598.

Oakdale Facemasks

Early in the first lockdown, when it was nigh on impossible to buy face masks, Hazel Wilson in South Wicklow put together a crack team of volunteers who turned out the most colourful and eye-catching ones. They provided these through their local pharmacies and shops and took orders over the phone, with all of the proceeds coming to SII. Hazel was a former primary school teacher of SII service user, Gemma Willis. It was Gemma's positivity that inspired Hazel and her team to raise over €6,500 for SII.

Robert Kenny Head Shave

Our own Robert Kenny, who suffered a SCI in 1984 and is the longest serving member of staff in SII, normally works tirelessly organising collections in supermarkets. Frustrated at not being able to do just that, he took the drastic decision to shave his head last May, donating the proceeds to SII.

Pop artist, Orla Walsh

Pop artist Orla Walsh, whose husband has a SCI, kindly donated 50% of the proceeds of the sale of her Limited-Edition Barry's Tea Prints, netting an incredible €6,574.37. The Barry Group also added a donation of €2,500.

Facebook Birthday Fundraisers

2020 was the first year that SII pushed Facebook Birthday Fundraisers, the response was fantastic.



CORPORATE FUNDRAISING

Key Capital

Staunch supporters of SII for many years, 2020 saw Conor Killeen, personally, and Key Capital, as a company, really step up to the plate when we made our Emergency Appeal.

Evra Motors

Richard Considine of Evra Motors, a long term supporter of SII, was yet again extremely generous in donating €5k to our Emergency Appeal.

Robert Walters

Staff at Robert Walters, who have supported SII for many years, raised €500 for our emergency appeal.

O'Brien Lynam Solicitors (OBL)

Michael Lynam of OBL, who had personally run several marathons for SII organised a donation of €5,000 in lieu of a celebration of the firm's 20 years in business.

Brindley Health Care

Neal McGoarty of Brindley Healthcare donated €2,500 and additionally offered SII whatever practical support they could provide to our service users through their 6 HIQA registered residential care facilities.

Neil Cauldwell Quantity Surveyors

We would like to thank Neil for his generous donations of €3,000 in 2020.

Eisner Amper

Eisner Amper hosted a pre-match BBQ for the Ireland v Scotland Six Nations Rugby International. The event included a charity raffle in aid of SII which raised over €1,500 and featured a great Q&A session with Scotland rugby legend Scott Hastings. Our own Philip Quinlan was there to tell his story and to explain how vital these funds were for SII and how we spend them.

Directors/Trustees

John Twomey
James McCarthy
Keith Mangan
Donal O’Flynn
Herman Wilmink
Eimear Smith
Brian Dempsey
Emma Cahill

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Louise Moore

Chief Executive Officer

Fiona Bolger

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