



NEWSLETTER

ISSUE 002 JUNE 2024

Inside...



Message from our CEO
Page 2



WIN A CAR
Page 7



Upcoming Fundraisers
Page 8



Volunteer Focus - Nora & Gay
Page 13

...And so much more



- April 2024:**
- €1,000 - Thomas Kearney
 - €500 - Attracta Foy
 - €250 - Christina Concannon

- May 2024:**
- €1,000 - Darren Reape
 - €500 - Seanagh Fox
 - €250 - Noel Byrne

Don't forget...the monthly draw is the first Friday of every month...and you've got to be in it to win it!

Next Draw: Friday, June 7th.

Sign up today. Call **094 93 88666**, email draw@hospice.ie, enter online at www.hospice.ie/draw or call into any of our 12 Hospice Shops.



Mayo Roscommon Hospice CEO Martina Jennings, pictured with RTÉ broadcaster and Hospice Sunflower Ambassador Miriam O'Callaghan.

Sunflower Ambassador Miriam O'Callaghan urges support for local Hospice services

This weekend is a big one for the Mayo Roscommon Hospice Foundation, with our National Sunflower Days taking place on Friday and Saturday, June 7th and 8th.

Across the two counties, our fabulous volunteers will be out in force, and all money raised will go directly back into local services.

Sunflower Days are hugely important fundraisers for Mayo Roscommon Hospice each year and every single cent raised locally, stays in the county. On Friday and Saturday, volunteers will be present in shops and on the streets - weather permitting - across both Mayo and Roscommon, and your support would be greatly appreciated.

Whether you're out for a walk, stopping off for diesel, or doing your grocery shopping, it will be hard to miss our Sunflower sellers this weekend. As always, there will be lots of lovely sunflower products to choose from, including sunflower seeds, pens, coffee cups and lots more.

Remember, your donation will go directly to your local hospice in Mayo and Roscommon, so that we can continue to provide person-centred, holistic, loving care to our patients and their loved ones.

If you're not around this weekend, but you'd still like to support our Sunflower Days, you can donate online at www.hospice.ie/donate or by calling the office on **094 938 8666**.



Together We Can Do So Much

A Message from our CEO, Martina Jennings

Welcome back to our second Newsletter of 2024. It has been a really busy couple of months in both our Mayo Hospice and Roscommon Hospice, as well as in the Community Palliative Care Services.

In May, we held our AGM and our annual public meeting. Our Chairman, Mike Smith, is heading into his final year in the role and it continues to be an absolute pleasure to work alongside him.

Mike, like all our directors, gives his time voluntarily and selflessly to the Foundation, and I am so grateful always for the support and advice from our board. The members always keep the needs of the patients and their families to the forefront of every decision they make, while also ensuring we are governed to the highest of standards.

At our annual public meeting in May, updates were provided on the services in both our Hospices, as well as our community service and our family therapist service. We will continue to fund, support and develop these services, with your help.

We are delighted, also, to fund an additional Clinical Nurse Specialist in Mayo to support the integration of a palliative care approach within nursing homes for residents, families, and all employees. This programme will engage with registered nurses, health care assistants and General Practitioners involved with the care of the resident in nursing homes. Non-clinical staff with an interest in palliative care will be welcome to engage with the programme also.

The aim of providing this education is to promote timely access to an appropriate level of palliative care for all residents with life limiting conditions, and consequently avoiding unnecessary transfers to the acute services.

Our Roscommon Community Team have had a particularly challenging time over the past few years working with children and young adults with life limiting illnesses. They have worked very closely with the Saolta Clinical Nurse Co-ordinators in the community to bring the very best service to these patients and their families. We were so proud to see the Minister for Health commend the work they do at the All Island Children's Palliative Care Conference recently.

June 7th and 8th are our Annual Sunflower Days fundraiser, and we are so grateful to all our volunteers throughout both counties for helping us out at this busy time.

As always, thanks so much to all of you who have held fundraisers so far this year. We don't take it for granted that you do this in your own time, and it is because of people like you that we have two state-of-the-art hospices in our region, along with an amazing community palliative care service.

Warm wishes,



Martina Jennings
Chief Executive Officer

Together We Can Do So Much

Palliative care teams are central to success says Hospice Chairman

The Chair of the Mayo Roscommon Hospice Foundation Board, Mike Smith, has paid tribute to the amazing work of the palliative care teams across both counties.

The Roscommon man, who has served four of his five-year term as chairperson, said the nurses and care teams are at the centre of the wonderful work being done by the organisation in Mayo and Roscommon.

"We have such a brilliant team across all areas - from our staff and volunteers to our excellent fundraisers, and from those who run and work in our shops to our Board who give their time so willingly. Chief among these, however, is our palliative care teams in Mayo and Roscommon, because we absolutely could not do what we do without them," he said.

A well known auctioneer in Co Roscommon, Mike hails from Boyle where he and his wife Mary raised four boys - Cian, Ronan, Donie and Enda. The latter pair are best known for their football prowess, regularly tagging out with the county's senior football team.

Mike first got involved with Mayo Roscommon Hospice some 13 years ago, when he was approached by a friend to join the Board. He was aware of the great work being done by the organisation across the two counties and was honoured to be asked to get involved.

"Like almost all families, we have had our own experience with cancer. In 2009, our son Cian developed throat cancer when he was just 18 and while he received his treatment in Dublin, we could see the brilliant work being done at home in Roscommon, and indeed the need for greater services. When I was approached, I didn't think twice about getting involved," he recalled.

"Thankfully, Cian made a full recovery," said Mike, adding that his son is now married with three children and is back working in the family business.



Mike Smith, Chair of Mayo Roscommon Hospice Foundation Board

In 2019, Mike was appointed Chairperson of the Board of Mayo Roscommon Hospice and is now entering his final year in the role. "Since I first got involved, there have been some huge milestones and my time as Chair has been particularly exciting and rewarding. We have built and opened two new Hospices in Castlebar and Roscommon at a cost of more than €15 million, and we have done so without any loans or borrowings. That's a fantastic achievement for the organisation," he added.

"We have a brilliant team and really amazing support across the region and of course, we are incredibly lucky too in our CEO. Martina Jennings has led us through two builds and has been a joy to work with. Her energy and enthusiasm knows no bounds," said Mike.

Continuing, the chairperson paid tribute to his fellow Board members. "We have a fantastic Board in place, who all bring their own unique skill set. We are all volunteers and each and every member is so generous with their time and efforts. I am so proud to have led the Board for the last four years on what has been a really brilliant journey. I look forward to my final year as Chair, and hopefully to many more years working with Mayo Roscommon Hospice," he said.



Love and laughter at Ladies Lunch

The Lodge at Ashford Castle played host to the sold-out Ladies Lunch fundraiser for Mayo Roscommon Hospice in late April and the weather didn't disappoint. A picturesque setting across all seasons, the lakeside venue was particularly stunning on the sun-drenched Friday afternoon, as friends and families gathered for a wonderful event, filled with love and laughter.

It was the first time the fundraiser had taken place since 2019 and by all accounts, it was a very welcome return. The afternoon began with a drinks reception in glorious sunshine, giving guests a chance to enjoy the fabulous Cong scenery, while chatting with old friends and new. A delicious lunch followed in the ballroom, punctuated with a host of great speakers, a fashion show from Carraig Donn and Catwalk Model Agency, and some amazing entertainment by The Galway Tenors.

Special guests on the day included RTÉ broadcaster Miriam O'Callaghan, Dr Mary

Ryan, Niamh Ryan from Ella & Jo, and Mayo Person of The Year, Rita Casey. The Ladies Lunch was MC'd by the ever-brilliant Laurita Blewitt.

Martina Jennings, CEO of Mayo Roscommon Hospice Foundation, said she was thrilled to bring the Ladies Lunch back to the annual events calendar, and noted that so much had been achieved since the last event in 2019.

"It's wonderful to see so many of you here this afternoon at this, the first ladies lunch since 2019. In the last five years, we have built and opened our two new hospices in Mayo and Roscommon. This is all thanks to

fundraisers like this, as well as support from the communities across both counties in Mayo and Roscommon," she beamed.

"We are committed to continuing to fund, support and develop palliative care services in our communities and we are so grateful for the support we have received to date, and that we continue to receive," added the CEO.

The Ladies Lunch sold out in record time this year and was thoroughly enjoyed by all in attendance. If you would like to attend next year's event, make sure you keep a close eye on our socials. No doubt 2025 will be another sell-out!



Photos by Conor McKeown

Ladies Lunch

The Lodge at Ashford Castle 2024



Ladies Lunch

The Lodge at Ashford Castle
2024



Photos by Conor McKeown



Ladies Lunch

The Lodge at Ashford Castle
2024



You could win a brand new car for just €15

Fancy winning a new car? Of course you do! Well the good news is, it couldn't be easier. Mayo Roscommon Hospice is delighted to be offering you a chance to win a brand new Volkswagen Polo Life, for as little as €15.

This year's Car Draw for Mayo Roscommon Hospice will take place in early September and is being supported by J Keane & Sons, Roscommon.

To enter, visit <https://winacar.hospice.ie/> where tickets are available for €15 for one, €50 for four, or €100 for ten tickets. Alternatively, you can call our office on 094 938 8666, or pop into any of our 12 Hospice Shops, where tickets are available to buy.

You know what they say...you've got to be in it to win it. Waste no time, get your tickets today!



Rossie to Aussie fundraiser gathers momentum as Fergal's challenge continues

When it comes to charity events, fundraising cycles aren't uncommon. Some set their sights on a 50-100km ride, while other brave warriors aim for even more.

But, for one Roscommon nurse, it's not about counting in tens or hundreds...Fergal Guihen is currently on his way across the world on an 11-month cycle covering an astonishing 23,000km.

Hailing from Arigna in Co Roscommon, and a general nurse at University Hospital Sligo, Fergal set off on his 'Rossie to Aussie' cycle in March, having set his sights on reaching Australia in February 2025. Along the way, he hopes to raise substantial funds for Mayo Roscommon Hospice and NorthWest Stop.

A part-time farmer, Fergal is no stranger to sport. He plays GAA for St Ronan's and enjoys running. Undoubtedly however, this fundraiser will put his fitness levels to the test, as he plans to average 100km per day on his mammoth journey.

The cycle will span 25 countries and three continents, and Fergal is funding the trip himself. He has brought a tent and a hot stove with him and his plan is to finally hang up his helmet next February at the iconic Sydney Opera House.

"This challenge is no doubt going to be the hardest, and evidently the stupidest thing I have ever done. I will require help and support along the way, but I am really looking forward to bringing you all along on my journey, through changing landscapes and a vast array of cultures," he said, before setting off in March.

All donations will be greatly appreciated. You can donate to Fergal's challenge at <https://www.idonate.ie/fundraiser/Rossie-to-Aussie>

WIN A NEW VOLKSWAGEN POLO LIFE

Supporting Mayo Roscommon Hospice
In association with J Keane & Sons Roscommon

1 x ticket €15
4 x tickets €50
10 x tickets €100
In aid of Mayo Roscommon Hospice Foundation

CHY No. 10980 RCN No. 20029098



Upcoming Fundraisers in Mayo and Roscommon



- **Friday and Saturday, June 7th and 8th** – National Sunflower Days for Mayo Roscommon Hospice, across both counties
- **Friday, June 7th** – Monthly Lotto Draw, enter online at www.hospice.ie/draw or call into any of our 12 Hospice Shops
- **Saturday, June 15th** – Golf event in Carrick-on-Shannon Golf Club in memory of Michael Moran
- **Saturday, June 22nd** – Kathleen Conneely Memorial Walk on Clare Island (contact Pat on 087 2931960 or Joe on 087 2338570, or email kathleenconneelywalks@gmail.com)
- **Friday, July 5th** – Monthly Lotto Draw, enter online at www.hospice.ie/draw or call into any of our 12 Hospice Shops
- **Saturday, July 6th** – Kathleen Conneely Memorial Walk on Inishturk (contact Pat on 087 2931960 or Joe on 087 2338570, or email kathleenconneelywalks@gmail.com)
- **Saturday, July 6th** – Achill Half Marathon & 10K Run. For more information, visit www.achillmarathon.com
- **Wednesday, July 24th** – Tea, Coffee, Cake & Raffle Garden Event in Achill. This fundraiser is being organised in memory of John Gallagher, on his first anniversary, at the home of his granddaughter Daisy Castle, Blathana Bray, Keel, Achill. Donations welcome.
- **Friday, August 2nd** – Monthly Lotto Draw, enter online at www.hospice.ie/draw or call into any of our 12 Hospice Shops
- **Friday, August 9th** – Fundraising '80s Party Night at Nancy's Nightclub Roscommon
- **Saturday, August 10th** – Golf event at Ballinrobe Golf Club in memory of Martin Hughes

Please note, dates and details relating to these fundraisers were correct at the time of publication, but like all events, are subject to change. For further information on these fundraisers and others, or to get involved, please call 094 938 8666 or email info@hospice.ie



Monthly Draw

WIN
€1,000
 JACKPOT
 2nd Prize
€500
 3rd Prize
€250

Mayo Roscommon
Hospice
 Foundation

Help Support Our
 Hospice for just

€10
 a month

Sign Up Now At Hospice.ie/draw Or Call Instore

Tel. 094 9388666 Email draw@hospice.ie Website www.hospice.ie



Mayo Roscommon Hospice CEO, Martina Jennings, being presented with her Social Entrepreneur of the Year for Charitable Organisation Award at the IMAGE PwC Businesswoman of the Year Awards. Martina received the accolade from event sponsor Eimear Govern of Marks & Spencer Ireland.

Martina Jennings named Social Entrepreneur Businesswoman of the Year at IMAGE PwC Awards

The CEO of Mayo Roscommon Hospice, Martina Jennings, has been named the Social Entrepreneur of the Year at this year's IMAGE PwC Businesswoman of the Year Awards. A hugely deserving winner, Martina was among 13 outstanding women in business recognised at a gala event in Dublin last month.

The awards celebrate the success, talent and accomplishment of female business peers across a wide arc of industries, professions and communities. Martina scooped the prestigious accolade on the night for Social Entrepreneur of the Year for a Charitable Organisation.

Martina became CEO of Mayo Roscommon Hospice Foundation in 2017 and over the last eight years, her exceptional leadership has brought the Foundation from strength to strength. She was chosen from among 650 entries and 125 nominations to take home the title – an incredible achievement by all accounts.

Speaking after the ceremony, Martina said she was so humbled and honoured to have won the Image PwC Social Entrepreneur Award.

“Everything we do at Mayo Roscommon Hospice Foundation is a team effort – from our Board, staff, volunteers, support groups, fundraisers, service delivery partners, and of course the incredible teams in our hospices and community. We are absolutely passionate to ensure we fund, support and deliver the very best palliative care service to all who need it, and I am proud and blessed to do a job I absolutely love, alongside very committed and hardworking colleagues,” she said.

“A huge thanks to Image and PwC for recognising our sector so meaningfully and giving us such a platform alongside incredible national and global businesses. To be shortlisted among CEOs that I know and respect is something I don't take for granted. All of us in this sector are disruptors, and will always challenge the system to ensure we get the very best of services for the people we represent,” Martina added.

In 2023, Mayo Roscommon Hospice Foundation funds were allocated to the following:

- €550,000 to our Homecare Teams
- €620,000 to the Roscommon Hospice – €300,000 on services and €320,000 on fitout and implementation costs
- €240,000 to the Mayo Hospice – €40,000 on insurance and €200,000 into reserves for future maintenance, capital development and to allow for any shortfalls in HSE Funding now or in the future
- €160,000 on Family Support – this includes funding towards home help hours for patients



**Congratulations
Martina!**



Aaron McLoughlin (from the Mayo Karate Academy) and the McLoughlin family recently raised €6,400 from a fundraising event in loving memory of John McLoughlin, who was Aaron's Uncle and Godfather. Aaron is pictured here with Ann Hannahoe, handing over the cheque to Mayo Roscommon Hospice



Vancouver Éire Óg raised €6,400 from their Solos for Santa Fundraising Event held in memory of John McLoughlin, Derryronane, Swinford (father of JP McLoughlin, Vancouver). JP organised this event in his dad's memory and the cheque was presented to CEO Martina Jennings by Margaret McLoughlin (representing her son JP in Vancouver), Paula and Padraig Whyte (representing their son Mathew in Vancouver), and Pat Higgins from Claremorris (representing his son Mikey in Vancouver, and all members of Vancouver Éire Óg). Thank you to Pearce O'Malley and Ruari McCann from Vancouver Éire Óg who also participated, and thanks also to John's nephew, Marc Ryan in Coventry, and his Four Masters GAA Club, who also participated in Solos for Santa.



Well done to the pupils and staff of Castlebar Primary School, who held a cake sale for Mayo Roscommon Hospice and raised €600. They had also previously had a Christmas Jumper Day, where they raised €648. Pictured presenting the cheque to CEO Martina Jennings are representatives from 6th Class with teachers Mr Carty, Ms Maloney and Ms Healy.



Colleen Kneafsey and her Rise Strong Mind & Body Transformation Squad raised €2,930 for Mayo Roscommon Hospice. The 24-strong team participated in the recent Westport Marathon 10K, raising money for Mayo Roscommon Hospice Foundation in the process. Pictured at the cheque presentation are May Kneafsey, Marion Tierney, Martina Jennings (CEO), Thecla Bourke, Colleen Kneafsey and Claire Dolan.



Congratulations to Hollymount Community Development Committee on their Lipsync Fundraiser, which raised an impressive €10,000. Pictured left to right, Mathew Gill (Committee Member), Catherine Cannon (Committee Member), Martina Jennings (CEO Mayo Roscommon Hospice), Noel Connolly (Chairman, Hollymount Community Development), Conor Gill (Treasurer), Laura Canny (Committee Member) and Tom Connolly (Committee Member and Director of Mayo Roscommon Hospice Foundation).



Miriam and Rachel Hastings from Ballyforan ran an Easter Camp for Kids in aid of Mayo Roscommon Hospice Foundation, and raised €533. They are pictured here with Board Member, Oliver McGuinness.



Thank you to the team at Kean's Claremorris for their donation of €500 from their recent Easter Egg Hunt. Marie McGuinness (pictured in the centre of the photo) from the Knock Office thanked Patricia and all the staff of Kean's for their generosity.



Well done to Sean Flannagan and all involved in the Annual Saddlers Inn Tractor Run, who raised €5,900 for Mayo Roscommon Hospice from the event. Sean is pictured here presenting the cheque to Kathy from Hospice's Knock Office.



James Duke and members of the Midlands Charolais Cattle Club raised €1,500 from a recent fundraising auction. James and some of the organisers are pictured here presenting the cheque to Martina Feehily and Patricia Rogers from Mayo Roscommon Hospice Support Group.



The team at Mayo Roscommon Hospice Foundation were incredibly grateful to receive a €14,329.50 cheque at Gerry Mac's Bar, Castleblakeney, from the O'Neill family from their fundraising event in loving memory of Seamus O'Neill. The fantastic total of €28,659 was raised at the event and shared between Mayo Roscommon Hospice Foundation and Galway Hospice. The cheque was presented to Mayo Roscommon Hospice Board Member, Paul Foxe. A huge thanks to all involved. Pictured at the cheque presentation were, back row: Tracey McDonagh, Valerie Higgins, Deirdre Lyons, Margaret Whyte and Sean O'Neill. Front row: Aisling O'Neill, Ria and Willow Mae Lane, Conor O'Neill, Paul Foxe, Carol O'Neill, Ronan O'Neill and Grainne O'Neill.



Mulranny Golf Club held a fundraiser over the May Bank Holiday weekend and raised €2,000 for Mayo Roscommon Hospice. Pictured are Lady Captain, Mary Hughes (left), and Joanne Hynes, Board Member of Mayo Roscommon Hospice Foundation.



The team at The Salon, Bridge Street, Castlereagh, held a fundraiser from May 6th to 10th for Mayo Roscommon Hospice, culminating in a 'wear your pyjamas to work day' on the Friday, and raising €1,150. Well done to all involved.



Claire Fitzgerald raised €1,520 by running the Naples Half Marathon in loving memory of her dear dad, Jim Conlon RIP, and in aid of the Mayo Roscommon Hospice Foundation. Pictured at the cheque presentation were family members Emily O'Mahony, Mary Conlon, Julie Conlon, Kathy from Knock Office, Claire Fitzgerald, Emma Fitzgerald, Gerry Fitzgerald, and not forgetting the doggies, Leo and Isak.



Belcarra Foróige Club held a bake sale in loving memory of Siobhan Tolan in aid of Mayo Roscommon Hospice Foundation. The event was held at the Belcarra Community Centre and €1,398.73 was raised. The cheque was presented to Martina Jennings CEO by members of the group.



Pictured at the launch of the Kathleen Conneely Memorial Walks were, left-right: Cllr Michael Kilcoyne, Maria Dillon and her daughter Stevie, Delia Conneely, Martina Jennings (CEO, Mayo Roscommon Hospice Foundation), Pat Conneely, Joe Brett, Cllr Blackie Gavin and Michael Baynes.

Island walks to raise vital funds for Mayo Roscommon Hospice

Two of Mayo's most picturesque islands will play host to this year's Kathleen Conneely Memorial Walks in support of the Mayo Roscommon Hospice Foundation.

On Saturday, June 22nd, the first of the walks will take place on Clare Island, with Inishturk welcoming walkers on Saturday, July 6th.

The fundraising walks for Mayo Roscommon Hospice are being organised by Pat Conneely and Joe Brett, and they are encouraging as many people as possible to get involved. Whether you're a regular island hopper, or a first-time visitor, you won't be disappointed. From the stunning scenery to the wonderful welcomes, Clare Island and Inishturk will certainly capture a piece of your heart.

Those hoping to take part in either of the walks are asked to notify the organisers of their intention to participate at least one week in advance. You can do so by contacting Pat on 087 2931960 or Joe on 087 2338570, or by emailing kathleenconneelywalks@gmail.com.

Entry for each walk is by making a donation of €50 per person, or by raising a minimum of €50 per person in sponsorship for Mayo Roscommon Hospice (via sponsorship card or online). This includes a free bus transfer from Balla, Castlebar or Westport, if required, as well as a free ferry crossing. All funds raised will go to support palliative care services in Mayo and Roscommon.

For more information on the islands, visit www.clareisland.ie and www.inishturkisland.com



Foundation's longest running charity shop going from strength to strength in Swinford

In July 2000, the Mayo Roscommon Hospice Foundation opened its first charity shop in the old ESB office on Chapel Street in Swinford. Now, almost 24 years later, it continues to be a vital cog in the organisation's wheel and much of its success is down to its wonderful local staff and volunteers.

As the new millennium dawned, a group of ladies in the East Mayo town began to explore the possibility of establishing a charity shop to help raise funds for the Mayo Roscommon Hospice Foundation. They approached the CEO with the idea and she was hugely supportive of the plan.

Prior to this, some of the core group had seen charity shops go from strength to strength in England and they were confident the idea would translate to Ireland. Crucially, they had the support of the Foundation, as well as the community in and around Swinford. Over the years, that local support has continued to grow and blossom, with the people of Swinford always ready and willing to lend a hand and offer their support to the manager and volunteers.

Victims of their own success in many ways, the ESB shop soon became too small to host the charity and when it became clear that they had outgrown the Chapel Street location, they sought alternative accommodation. Before long, they had

moved to a bigger retail premises on Bridge Street, but it wouldn't be the last relocation.

Over the years, the staff and volunteers have been nothing short of amazing. They have learned the business as they went along and the number of volunteers has grown from five to twenty. The donations and demand have continued along an upward trajectory and the charity is now based in a prime outlet on the corner of Main Street.

Since first opening the doors to its original store in July 2000, the Hospice shop has become a hub for the community, with people calling in to collect buckets for fundraisers, make donations, get information about the work of the Foundation, and enquire about upcoming events.

The Swinford store is now run by full-time manager Joanne, supported by two part-time staff, as well as scheme workers and a host of fabulous volunteers. While the support in the community has always been outstanding, the charity is still on the lookout



for more volunteers in the Swinford area to help in the shop and with street collections for national fundraising events.

As with all of the Hospice stores across both Mayo and Roscommon, the Swinford shop sells a wide range of stock including bric-a-brac, photo frames, children's clothes and toys, curtains, ladies shoes and clothes, as well as a large range of men's clothes. They are, of course, always welcoming of extra donations and interestingly, there is great demand for good quality men's shoes and clothes across all of the Hospice shops.

If you would be interested in getting involved, Joanne would love to hear from you. Pop into the shop to speak with Joanne today, or alternatively, you can contact our Area Manager, Kathy, by email to kathygrogan@hospice.ie or you can phone the Hospice office on 094 93 88666.



Swinford volunteers Nora Murghta and Gay Grealy pictured in the store on Main Street

Volunteer Focus: Swinford Hospice volunteers Nora and Gay want to give something back to the charity

Swinford volunteers Nora Murghta and Gay Grealy have been working in their local Hospice shop for the last seven years. Both have had their own experience with the organisation over the years, with each deciding to get involved in order to give something back to the charity.

Nora experienced cancer first hand and gets wonderful satisfaction now, knowing that her work contributes to helping provide services free of charge for those who need it most. Since coming out the other side, her volunteering in the Hospice shop is more important than ever. She gives thanks every day for her recovery and that she is able to volunteer again.

"I'm so happy to be able to help. I really enjoy meeting the other volunteers too. It's great to be involved and to do some work in the shop, and then the tea and the chat before heading home is the icing on the cake," she said.

Gay shares the sentiment. "I love coming in every Tuesday, meeting the other ladies,

getting through the work, and then enjoying the tea and cake," she smiled.

For Gay, her work in the Hospice store in Swinford provides a welcome distraction. She lives alone now, following her husband's passing, so it's good for her to get out of the house.

"I have eight children who now have families of their own. I love visiting them and enjoy spending time with my grandchildren, but it's great to have something else to keep me busy too," she added.

Gay first started to volunteer in the shop about seven years ago because she wanted to give something back to Hospice for the great care the home palliative care team

provided for her husband. He had been ill for five or six years with multiple medical issues and Gay had looked after him at home, with help from her family too.

Gay's husband received palliative care for 12 months before his passing and Gay is so grateful for all the care provided, both to herself and to her husband.

"I miss him and I find the loneliness difficult sometimes, but I like to keep positive and keep myself busy as best I can. Volunteering with Mayo Roscommon Hospice has been great and I look forward to going into the shop to meet the other ladies and to have a cup of tea and a chat."



Martina Jennings (left) and Laurita Blewitt (right) from Mayo Roscommon Hospice, pictured at the Ladies Lunch in Cong with Ballinrobe volunteers, left-right: Peace, Ola, Mary and Lola.

Warm Hospice welcome in Ballinrobe makes Mayo feel like home for Mary, her family, and her friends

Ireland has long been regarded as a nation of one hundred thousand welcomes but in challenging times, our generosity of spirit can sometimes feel trampled. It is therefore heartening to hear that amidst the chaos of our world, many of us are still quick to extend the hand of friendship. For four Ballinrobe residents, the welcome they've received at the local Hospice shop has made them feel right at home.

Mary, Peace, Ola and Lola arrived in Ballinrobe at the end of January this year, all with their own stories to tell. Together with their families, they were accommodated in Gannon's Hotel in the South Mayo town. When they arrived, they didn't know each other, but they quickly became friends and the rest, as they say, is history.

Looking back, Mary said it took them some time to find their feet in their new surroundings but after a few weeks – and with their children settled into school – the four ladies decided they wanted to give something back to their new community.

"We wanted to integrate and feel part of the community in Ballinrobe. We were also looking for something to do while the children were at school. One day, we called into the Hospice Shop in Ballinrobe where Majella, the shop manager, welcomed us with open arms. We became volunteers at the shop, working three days per week and we love it," she explained.

"We get so much from volunteering in the shop and it has opened doors for us in the community. Local people now know us from working in the Hospice shop. We have made new friends and we are learning new things about Ballinrobe every day," she added.

Sadly, it hasn't always been plain sailing for Mary and her family. Born and raised in Nigeria, Mary is married and she and her

husband have five children – two girls and three boys. Back at home, her husband worked in the university, while Mary owned her own shop selling ladies clothing and traditional Nigerian garments. She loved her business and travelled the country searching for the very best fabric to sell in her store.

Life was normal for Mary and her family until Islamist jihadist organisation, Boko Haram, began rampaging through the country, kidnapping, raping, killing and brutally destroying and burning homes and villages. Terrified for their own safety, and that of their children, Mary and her husband knew they needed to escape. The situation reached breaking point, one night, when their neighbour's house was set on fire, and they could hear the screams of terror.

Frightened they would be next, the family made the decision to leave Nigeria, selling their shop, home and all of their possessions. Securing passports and travel documents was a challenge but two years after pledging to get out, they stepped onto an aeroplane and left Nigeria in search of freedom and a new life.

Mary and her family first landed in the UK and made Bradford their home for the next year. Life was tough however, and despite both of them working, they had very little money left to feed the children once the bills were paid. "We were often hungry and we

found life very hard. People were not nice to us and we were very unhappy there," she said.

Advised to try a new life in Ireland, Mary and her family flew into Dublin on January 30th this year. They knew very little about where they were going and soon after arriving, the family – along with several other families, mainly women and children seeking asylum in Ireland – were transferred by bus to Gannon's Hotel in Ballinrobe, Co Mayo.

Just a few short months later, Ballinrobe already feels like home. "I became friends with Peace, Lola and Ola after we all moved to Ballinrobe, and volunteering in the Hospice shop was the beginning of a new life for us. People in Ballinrobe have been very kind to me, my husband and our five children. Our children are really settled. They love Ireland, their schools and their new friends," she added.

Of course, for Mary and her husband, their happiness is tinged with sadness for their siblings back in Nigeria, where life is very difficult. They worry about those they have left behind and try to send what they can back to Nigeria to help them. "We are sad for those we have left behind, but we will never return to Nigeria. Ireland is our home now, we love it and for me, getting involved with Hospice was the start of a whole new life," she smiled.