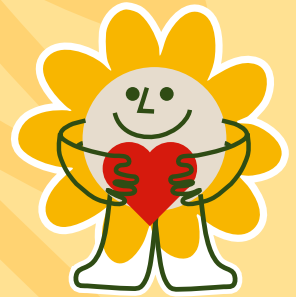




MAYO ROSCOMMON  
HOSPICE  
FOUNDATION



Together We Can Do So Much

DECEMBER 2025



Mayo Roscommon Hospice Foundation Chair Paul Foxe and CEO Martina Jennings at the launch of the Sunflower Children's Hospice plans in Castlebar. Pic: Michael McLaughlin.

# Don't forget the children

Mayo Roscommon Hospice Foundation has revealed ambitious plans to build a state-of-the-art children's hospice in the heart of Co Mayo. Details of the Sunflower Children's Hospice project were unveiled at a special launch event in the TF Royal Hotel and Theatre in Castlebar on November 17th last, with 400 in attendance.

The project is expected to cost in the region of €14 million, with €7 million already raised towards the project. Mayo Roscommon Hospice Foundation has now launched a campaign to raise the additional €7 million over the next 12 months to ensure construction can commence in 2026. It's a huge ask, but make no mistake, it will happen.

Martina Jennings, CEO of Mayo Roscommon Hospice Foundation, speaking at the unveiling of plans, said the dream will become a reality. "Together, we will build the Sunflower Children's Hospice. Together, we will not forget the children. Together, we can do so much."

Funded by Mayo Roscommon Hospice Foundation, the Sunflower Children's Hospice will provide essential care for children with life-limiting illnesses, and their families, across eight counties on the Western seaboard. The announcement marks a significant milestone, as this will be the first children's hospice to be built outside of Dublin, and the first of its kind to be constructed since 2011.

Serving Mayo, Roscommon, Galway, Sligo, Leitrim, Clare, Donegal and Limerick, the eight-bedroom in-patient and respite

facility is expected to be completed in approximately two years. A site has already been secured in Castlebar, with the Government and HSE committed to supporting clinical governance. A planning application for the development will be submitted in early 2026, with construction expected to begin by mid to end 2026.

Speaking at the launch in Castlebar, the CEO spoke of the inspiration behind the planned facility and the simple message that she has carried with her for several years.

"Eight years ago, a very special family said something to me that I will never forget: 'Don't forget the children.' At the time, we were building our Mayo Hospice – soon followed by Roscommon Hospice – and we couldn't act right away. But those words stayed with me. They became a promise," she recalled.

"When the time was right, we began to explore what life is like for children and young adults with life-limiting illnesses, and for the families who walk that journey beside them," Martina continued.

Drawing on the experience of the Dunford family (see pages 6 and 7), she said the Sunflower Children's Hospice would be so much more than just a building. "It will be

a home of comfort, care, and love – a place where families can find light, even in their darkest moments."

"To our supporters, fundraisers, volunteers, donors, and corporate partners – you are the heartbeat of this foundation. For 33 years, you have helped us care for more than 25,000 patients and families, all through fundraising. Now, we are asking you to walk with us again – join with us in making this happen. Help us to build the first Children's Hospice outside Dublin," she implored.

Acknowledging that the work ahead is significant – for Mayo Roscommon Hospice Foundation, the HSE, and the Department of Health, the CEO said she and all the team are completely dedicated to the project. "The HSE will now begin the challenging process of planning, governance, and staffing so that this hospice can be included in the HSE Service Plan," she explained.

Continuing, she stressed that political support is needed now, more than ever. "To our Ministers, TDs, and Senators – your cross-party support has made our work possible. And let me be clear: We will build this hospice. We will do our part. We ask you to ensure The Sunflower Children's Hospice is in the HSE Service Plan for 2028," she said.

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# Aidan O'Shea and Andy Moran get behind Sunflower Children's Hospice

Mayo sporting legends Aidan O'Shea and Andy Moran are putting their shoulder to the wheel, not just when it comes to Mayo GAA, but in supporting this amazing children's hospice project.

Mayo Roscommon Hospice Foundation is proud to announce Aidan and Andy as Ambassadors for the Sunflower Children's Hospice. Celebrating the launch of the plans in November, popular Virgin Media presenter Deric Ó h'Artagáin travelled to Castlebar with his camera crew to feature the launch on Ireland AM.

Speaking with Deric, O'Shea said it would be difficult not to be inspired by Martina Jennings and her team. The Breaffy and Mayo GAA star stressed the difference that the Sunflower Children's Hospice will make for families across the western seaboard, and urged families, businesses, communities and universities to get behind the project.

"It's going to have an unbelievable impact for children and their families," Aidan said, acknowledging that the team already has proof of concept with both the Mayo Hospice and Roscommon Hospice.

"We know they're going to do an unbelievable job for the children along the western seaboard. We need people now to come out and support the fundraising drive," he added.

Mayo GAA Manager Andy Moran, who worked with the Mayo Roscommon Hospice Foundation in 2012 as Community Development Manager, is also delighted to get involved.

"We want to get all the local communities, businesses, clubs to row in behind it. We're trying to raise an additional €7 million for an unbelievable facility. Let's get behind it and get this facility built," he said.

As CEO, Martina Jennings said, she couldn't place enough importance on building a children's hospice in the west. "We've seen the difference that the Mayo and Roscommon Hospices have made for all those who have come through our doors. Why shouldn't our children have the same?" she reasoned.

"We are absolutely determined. We'll have this hospice built in 2028, and we're asking the people in the eight counties, and beyond, to get behind us."



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### Minister for Health, Jennifer Carroll MacNeill

*"A children's hospice in the region represents hope for families who have, for too long, had to travel long distances for specialist palliative care. I want to commend the fundraising organisation, Mayo Roscommon Hospice Foundation, their supporters and communities across the West for their incredible commitment and contribution. This is a truly important day for palliative care in Ireland."*

### Minister for Social Protection, Dara Calleary

*"The work of the Mayo Roscommon Hospice Foundation is simply incredible. There is virtually no family in the West of Ireland who has not been touched by their compassionate care in their greatest hours of need. The Sunflower Children's Hospice is a one-of-a-kind, vital extension of this mission. The ambition, the drive to offer first-class facilities and care, coupled with an extraordinary ability to raise funds, is what Martina and the team have become synonymous with. I look forward to working closely with the Minister, the HSE, elected representatives, and the entire Hospice team over the coming years to deliver this project for the West of Ireland."*



### Paul Foxe, Chair of Mayo Roscommon Hospice Foundation

*"I am so proud of the communities throughout Mayo and Roscommon who have supported us for over 30 years to fund our community palliative care service, along with building our Mayo and Roscommon Hospices. With their continued support, we will continue to fund our community palliative care service, and services in both hospices.*

*I'm also very proud of what we have achieved so far, in partnership with the HSE and Department of Health in terms of getting Mayo and Roscommon Hospices up and running. We are incredibly grateful to the HSE for the work they have undertaken in the needs establishment report for this Children's Hospice, and don't underestimate the work they have ahead in establishing an organisation and governance structure for this service."*

### Tony Canavan, Regional Executive Officer, HSE West and North West

*"This is a hugely important service which will deliver care, dignity and compassion to young people and their families when they need it most. Our communities right across the West and North West will have access to specialist palliative care without facing a burden of significant travel. We are really looking forward to working with Mayo Roscommon Hospice Foundation to progress this much needed facility."*



### Chuck Dunford, Co. Mayo, whose son Kevin died in 2014

*"If there had been a hospice in the West of Ireland, the problem would have been solved. We, as parents, could have been relieved of the burden of the medical care, and we could have concentrated on his final days. The Sunflower Children's Hospice in the West of Ireland will make a huge difference to families who have been in similar situations to us. It will take a huge burden of worry off them, trying to keep family life as normal as possible.*

*"When you have a community palliative care team and a hospice building, working hand-in-hand with your hospital, and in our case disability services, that is the perfect jigsaw."*

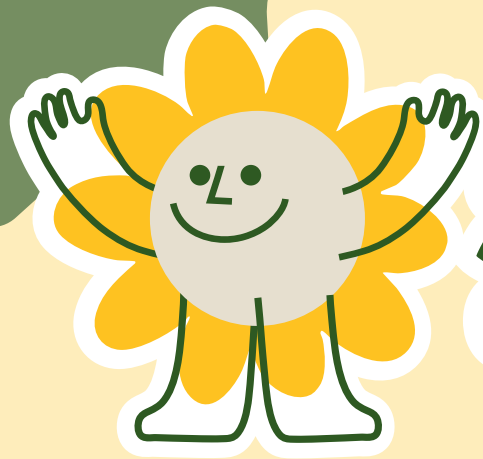
### Martina Jennings, CEO of Mayo Roscommon Hospice Foundation

*"Our goal is to ensure that children with life-limiting illnesses and their families, in the West of Ireland, get the very best of care throughout their journey from diagnosis to end of life. I'm a firm believer that by doing the right thing, you achieve your goals. Together, we can build the Sunflower Children's Hospice and provide hope, comfort, and care for families who need it most. No longer will the services that children and young adults receive be defined by where they are born. To meet this critical need, we must raise €7 million over the next year. We did it before for Mayo and Roscommon Hospices and I know we can do it again with the supportive communities we have. This time, we have the support of eight counties and I'm calling on businesses, schools, universities, community groups, families and friends to join us in our fundraising efforts. Every contribution, no matter the size, will go directly towards creating a hospice that will provide much-needed care and support."*



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# Sunflower Children's Hospice

## A Legacy of Care for Generations to Come

The Sunflower Children's Hospice in Castlebar will be the first children's hospice outside Dublin, providing specialist paediatric palliative care for children and young adults along the Western Seaboard, led and funded by Mayo Roscommon Hospice Foundation.

### Our Vision

The Sunflower Children's Hospice will be the first dedicated children's hospice outside Dublin, serving families along the western seaboard. It will provide a sanctuary where children and young adults with life-limiting illnesses can receive specialist care in a peaceful, playful, and comforting environment. It will be a place where families can make lasting memories together and find support through the most difficult of times.

### Research

Research conducted by University College Dublin (UCD) on the need for children's palliative care services in the West and North West region found that:

- Siblings of those receiving care, wished to have the opportunity for more activities closer to home and wanted more active participation in their siblings' care.
- Parents said there was not only a lack of support for siblings but overall inadequate support and inequitable service delivery in terms of hospice care for children.
- Healthcare professionals recognised the gaps in service provision and saw the need for care as close to home as possible.

### Why It's Needed

Families caring for children and young adults with complex medical needs often have to travel long distances to access respite or end-of-life care, adding stress to an already unbearable situation.

#### This new hospice will ensure that:

- Children can receive expert, compassionate care closer to home.
- Parents and siblings have access to emotional and practical support.
- Families can rest, recover, and spend precious time together in a space designed with their needs at heart.

### What It Will Be

#### The Sunflower Children's Hospice will include:

- In-patient and respite suites for children, and young adults and their families.
- Therapy and play spaces designed to bring light, laughter, and connection.
- Family accommodation to ensure parents and siblings can stay together.
- Gardens and sensory areas to nurture calm, peace, and joy.

### The Team Behind Sunflower Children's Hospice

Mayo Roscommon Hospice Foundation has been in existence since 1993 and provides palliative care services to people with life-limiting illnesses and their families in County Mayo and County Roscommon.

Over the past 30 years, the Palliative Care Teams have assisted in the care of over 25,000 patients and their families.

In 2019 the Mayo Hospice was completed at a cost of €9 million, all of which came from fundraised income. Services continue to be funded within the Mayo Hospice through fundraising.

In February 2023, Roscommon Hospice opened to the public. It is built on a site purchased by Mayo Roscommon Hospice Foundation. It is an eight-bed inpatient facility with full day-care services and came in under budget at €6.3 million.

Both hospices were developed and paid for by fundraised income (a combined €15.5 million) and are a result of the great support received from the people of Mayo and Roscommon.

Built and funded by the Mayo Roscommon Hospice Foundation, through the generosity of people like you, the Sunflower Children's Hospice will stand as a lasting legacy of compassion, community, and hope for generations to come.

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## Specialist paediatric palliative care across eight counties

The Sunflower Children's Hospice will provide specialist paediatric palliative care for children and young adults with life-limiting conditions across eight counties along Ireland's western seaboard. This will ensure that children from the eight counties – Mayo, Roscommon, Galway, Sligo, Leitrim, Clare, Donegal and Limerick – have access to the care they deserve, as close to home as possible.



### The Plan and Progress to Date

- ✓ Site secured in Castlebar
- ✓ Government and HSE support for clinical governance
- ✓ €7 million raised toward €12-14 million goal
- ✓ Official Launch of project November 2025
- ✓ Planning application to be submitted in early 2026
- ✓ Construction expected to begin by mid to end 2026



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Chuck and Mairéad Dunford, pictured at the launch of plans for the new Sunflower Children's Hospice in Mayo. Pictured, left-right: Paul Foxe (Chairperson), Chuck Dunford, Martina Jennings (CEO), Minister for Health Jennifer Carroll MacNeill, Mairéad Dunford, and Minister for Social Protection Dara Calleary. Photo: Michael McLaughlin.

# Kevin's legacy lives on

Kevin Dunford was three weeks short of his ninth birthday when he died on April 29th, 2014, in Our Lady's Hospital for Sick Children in Crumlin, now Children's Health Ireland (CHI). Kevin never had a formal diagnosis for his life-limiting condition.

Kevin was a long-awaited first born child and older brother to Iarla and Hannah. Kevin's parents, Mairéad and Chuck, recall bringing him home from the Special Care Baby Unit and stopping at a layby on the Windy Gap between Castlebar and Lahardane, where they made a pact that no matter what the outcome was going to be they were going to give Kevin the fullest life possible.

Kevin had several health-related challenges from birth. Despite his condition, the Dunford's say Kevin, the person, was never a burden – only pure joy and their lives are less rich since he died – as a family less complete. His condition and many illnesses cut through all the superficial nonsense of life. Kevin just wanted the 'craic' and to live life in the moment.

After Kevin's death, Mairéad was a guest speaker at a hospice bereavement event, where she met Mayo Roscommon Hospice Foundation's CEO, Martina Jennings. Mairéad and Chuck knew of the great work that was being done by the Foundation in the West of Ireland. The couple, due to their experience, highlighted to Martina the need for focused pediatric palliative

care services, and particularly access to a Children's Hospice on the Western Seaboard. Mairéad's message to Martina was simple – "Don't forget the children."

At the time, Mayo Roscommon Hospice Foundation was focused on developing two purpose-built hospice facilities in Mayo and Roscommon. But Mairéad's words struck a chord with Martina. "We couldn't really look at building anything else at that stage, but it was always in the back of my mind," the CEO explained.

Mairéad's words became the inspiration for the Sunflower Children's Hospice and as soon as the two Hospice facilities had opened in Mayo and Roscommon, Martina's focus shifted to the next big project.

"We see the difference the Mayo Hospice and the Roscommon Hospice have made to the patients of families that go through the door. The minute they go through the door, it's a place of comfort, it's a place of security, and it's a place where the whole family is looked after. Why shouldn't our children have the same?" she reasoned.

At the launch of plans for the Sunflower Children's Hospice in Mayo in November,

Martina spoke about the inspiration for the facility and praised the Dunford family for their courage and perseverance.

The audience watched a short film, where Mairéad and Chuck shared their story, culminating in the death of their beautiful son, Kevin. From their home in Co. Mayo, the couple praised the care Kevin received towards the end of his life, saying it allowed them to "really concentrate on being a family".

"He had a great zest for life and a great spirit. In hindsight, how brave he was, how much he suffered, you have to admire him. When he was here, and when we look back at photographs, he was so happy, he was always smiling. Kevin made the most of life when he was alive, and we made the most of life with him," Chuck explained.

When it got to the point that the family needed more than the very supportive disability services, about 18 months before Kevin died, Kevin's parents "had worked it out in their heads that [they] needed palliative care support". They accessed hospice services in the community and the only Children's Hospice in Ireland, LauraLynn, which was three-and-a-half, to

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four hours, travel time away in Dublin. Palliative care is often a term that strikes fear into people but according to the Dunfords, it was just what they needed. "We were crying out for that support... Life changes for the better under palliative care. You're protected, it's a cushion of compassion."

The care they received was valuable, but for a family from Mayo, it was often exhausting. "It was the only thing that was missing for us in the West. We used to envy the families in Dublin and in the greater Leinster area who could access the out-patient element as well. When we went into the building, the burden of care was taken away from us and we could concentrate on being a family."

In the last week of Kevin's life, the Dunfords were trying to figure out how to bring Kevin closer to home, somewhere in the West of Ireland. Sadly, it wasn't to be, and when Kevin died, Mairéad and a family friend were with him in hospital in Dublin.

Undoubtedly, a Children's Hospice in the West would have eased the burden greatly for the Dunford family. "If there had been a hospice, the problem would have been solved," Chuck reasoned. "We could have gotten Kevin down to the Children's Hospice. We, as parents, would have been relieved of the burden of medical care. We could then just concentrate on his final days, bring in our children and the extended family and friends. We could have looked after him, as a family, in his final days."

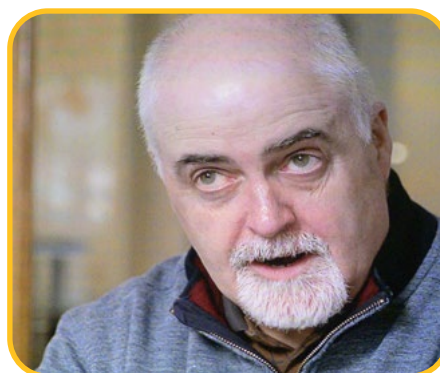
The Dunfords feel very strongly about the benefits of palliative care with a mix of acute hospital care, to community services, to a hospice building creating the "perfect jigsaw".

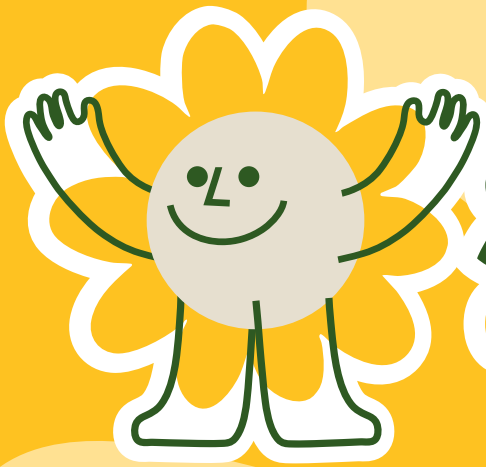
Chuck emphasised that the Sunflower Children's Hospice in Mayo, once complete, will make a huge difference to families of children and young people with a life-limiting condition, all across the Western seaboard stating: "It will take away a huge burden of worry and of organisation, and of trying to keep family life as normal as possible. Once this building is here, it will make a massive difference".

The Dunford family were present at the unveiling of plans for the Sunflower Children's Hospice in Castlebar in November. On the day, in conversation, Chuck alluded to the fact that "a Children's Hospice is something people don't want to think about, seeing it as someone else's story, however, the thing is, it can come to any of our doors, at any time. It can come to our children, grandchildren, nieces, nephew, friends or a neighbour's child. Nobody knows what lies ahead."

Echoing their sentiments, CEO Martina Jennings said the new facility will be much more than a building.

"It will be a home of comfort, care, and love – a place where families can find light, even in their darkest moments. The woman who first said, 'Don't forget the children,' was Mairéad Dunford. Today, we are honoured to have Mairéad, Chuck, Iarla, and Hannah with us, sharing the story of their beautiful son and brother, Kevin," Martina told the audience. With the development of the Sunflower Children's Hospice, Kevin's legacy will live on.





# sunflower

## Children's Hospice

### How to support

Your support will bring The Sunflower Children's Hospice to life. Every donation will help us build a place of comfort and care for children and families across eight counties on Ireland's Western Seaboard.

**Donate or Learn More**  
[www.sunflowerchildrenshospice.ie](http://www.sunflowerchildrenshospice.ie)

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[marie@hospice.ie](mailto:marie@hospice.ie)



# Together We Can Do So Much

