

AGE CONCERN CAUSEWAY

From dementia support groups to lunch clubs, **THE IRELAND FUNDS IS HELPING AGE CONCERN CAUSEWAY** deliver an array of key services to older people in the Causeway and Glens area of Northern Ireland.

For over 40 years,

Age Concern Causeway has been improving the quality of life and combating the social isolation of older people in Northern Ireland. As the population continues to age, Age Concern Causeway's cross-community services are increasingly important to the local area which has a higher percentage of age 55+ residents than other areas.

"There are so many needs in our older community," explains Liz Lee, Chair of Age Concern Causeway. "Northern Ireland has reported an increase in suicide between the ages of 59 and 64 year. Each year our population is getting older so our programs are very important in keeping people engaged. The partnership we have with The Ireland Funds is so important. Without the support of our funding partners we simply could not deliver the services we do."





GRANTS FROM THE IRELAND FUNDS

totalling £9490 are providing these services to improve the quality of life for older people in and around the Causeway Coast area of Northern Ireland. All activities encourage cross-community interaction.

Safe and supervised transport to support groups for vulnerable older people with dementia. This **supported an average of 8 people per session for 88 sessions**. Without this transport, the majority of members who live in rural and isolated areas would not have been able to attend.

Reading Room sessions for people with dementia. Families and carers reported that the **24 members returned in calm and relaxed state from 6 sessions** of this therapeutic program designed to stimulate memory.

A Lunch Club providing warm, **healthy meals for 20 members over the course of 10 weeks**. Members within an area of high-deprivation enjoyed meals together while also learning about additional Age Concern activities and services.

Line Dancing classes for 30 older people who attended 2 classes a week for 21 weeks. Led by an instructor, participants stayed active and connected which addressed social isolation for many.

Provision of the “Mind Matters” program for 80 people in the local community. With a focus on mental health and emotional well-being, the program offers resources to address stress and depression.

ONE OF THE SERVICES SUPPORTED BY THE IRELAND FUNDS IS AGE CONCERN CAUSEWAY'S DEMENTIA SUPPORT GROUP. HERE, BRENDA BURNSIDE SHARES FIRST-HAND WHAT A DIFFERENCE THAT GROUP HAS MADE FOR HER AND HER HUSBAND PHILIP.

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MY HUSBAND PHILIP WAS DIAGNOSED WITH CORTICAL BASAL DEGENERATION IN OCTOBER OF 2017.

This is a very rare neurological disease which affects all aspects of the patient's life: cognition, mood, mobility and maybe more importantly, their sense of worth.

Philip worked until his 64th birthday in 2016 so he had a purpose in his life even though he was already experiencing difficulties with cognition and mobility and was also suffering from depression. We were working closely with an Occupational Therapist and she suggested that he be referred to Age Concern Causeway's Dementia Support Group.

At the time of diagnosis, it seemed to Philip that his life had ended and this further impacted on his depression. However, the group gave him a reason to get up in the morning and it took him out of the house. His depression has been reduced and in fact he was recently prescribed a different lower dose antidepressant by his doctor. She feels this is evidence that the social interaction that Philip is experiencing is having a real impact on his mental health.

Attending the group has ended a period of social isolation for Philip. He has been forging new friendships in a safe environment and has become very friendly with another member of the group. This new friend was initially hesitant about attending but through a period of building trust between the two of them, his friend now also attends the group on a regular basis. Philip takes great delight in helping others to get as much out of the group as he does. He comes home from the group and excitedly tells me about what activities they did, who he was talking to, and how his friend also enjoyed the morning. I feel that all of this is helping to sustain his language and speech as well as his thinking skills.

The coordinators of the group go out of their way to provide a safe and nurturing environment where people with dementia can be themselves without any fear of ridicule—they bring out the best in the participants! This is a great benefit to Philip because he is self-conscious about his condition and ability to communicate. In the outside world, people suffering from dementia are often ignored and questions are directed to the person who is with them rather than to the person with dementia. **However, in the group Philip is treated as an individual and his ideas are treated with respect.** This in turn is helping to build his self-esteem which is very important when I consider that he was given only a couple of years to live at the time of diagnosis.

Another benefit of attending the group is that it gives him the opportunity to take part in new activities which he didn't have time to consider when he was working. He really enjoyed the poetry reading and the short stories when a poet came to the group at the start of the year. This inspired him to ask his support worker to print off the poems and stories so that I could read them aloud to him. This helps to take the focus away from the illness and puts the focus onto Philip, the person. It helps to maintain his cognition and simply allows him to enjoy the

moment for what it is. The group ensures that there is a very person-centered ethos no matter what stage in the dementia pathway someone may be on. This gives Philip a sense of belonging.

For me, the Dementia Support Group has many benefits. It has allowed me to have a little respite time from this most horrible disease. Caring for someone suffering from dementia is difficult and takes up almost every moment of the day. When he is at the group for a four-hour session, I know where he is, I know that he is safe, and I know that he is happy. This time is precious if only to get away from the relentless caring duties which build up as the condition progresses. The group even organizes transport to and from the sessions allowing me even more time to do something for myself or to have coffee with a friend etc.

The Dementia Support Group has been a lifeline for Philip and me. It provides a wonderful service not only for people who are suffering from dementia but for their families as well. Without the support of this group I am quite sure that Philip's deterioration in his disease would have been much faster and this is his doctor's opinion as well. These years are now about making memories and helping Philip make the journey through his illness in the best way possible.

— Brenda Burnside

Brenda's husband Philip is a member of Age Concern Causeway's Dementia Support Group

