

## OPEN DOOR Day Centre

### looking after people with disabilities and their families

In the county of Wicklow In Ireland, in 1982 a young woman in her early 20s, Helen, had a brain haemorrhage which left her physically impaired, but mentally fine. She lost her independence, and her family took care of her. Some friends in the area helped her family look for some activity, stimulation and social life for her outside the home, but found that day care for people with disabilities was available for children up to the age of 18, and for the elderly (as those of 65 were then called!)...there was nothing offered for the huge cohort of people between 18 and 65.

So three friends carried out research and found 18 people condemned to stay at home because of lack of facilities for them. A pilot project was initiated with the help of the Wheelchair Association, then taken over by the Eastern Health Board, and now, almost 40 years later is running with the help of the Health Service Executive (HSE). That is how Open Door Day Centre started.



The Centre provides facilities and activities for adults with varying physical disabilities resulting from strokes, multiple sclerosis, motor neurone disease, spina bifida and road traffic accidents, amongst other conditions. Therapies include art, music, physiotherapy, ceramics, wood work and computers, and members get a great sense of achievement from their involvement in these activities. The members look forward to their days at the Centre, which provides them with a social life as well as the activities, in a comfortable, friendly and caring environment.

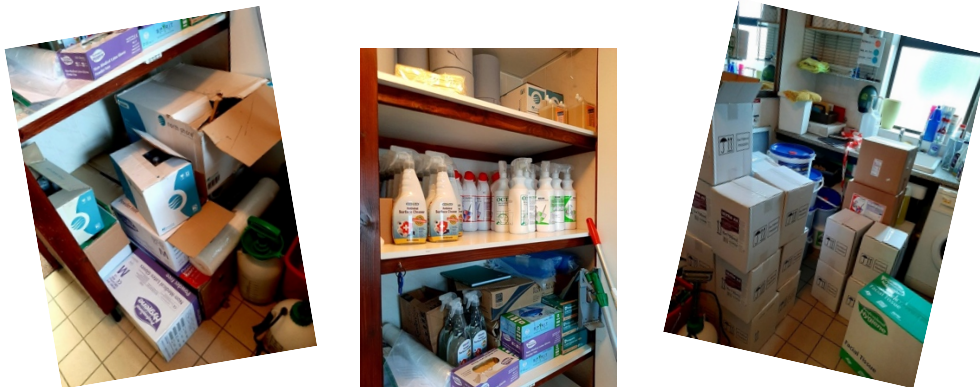


In addition to being an important part of the members' lives, Open Door also provides carers with a break, and much needed time for themselves. Children, spouses, parents, siblings and relatives depend on this respite.

Members, who come from widely varying backgrounds, tend to come in for two or three days each week. Because of Covid, which forced the Centre to close twice in the past 18 months, numbers are limited by social distancing rules, so from some 33 members participating daily, a limit of 10 per day applied for some time; they are now up to 18 per day. Interestingly, privacy rules prevent the Centre asking if members have been vaccinated - so they simply run the Centre as if everyone might have Covid! And happily, as a result of their many careful measures, so far they have had no cases.

The HSE provides some 70% of the total funding for the Centre, with the rest - approximately 130 000 Euros - raised through grants, events and donations. Normal fund-raising events have been impossible during the Covid era.

And at exactly the wrong time, additional and unexpected expenses arising from Covid, including for personal protective equipment (PPE) and sanitizing equipment, have arisen. This threatened at one point to provoke a further closure of the Centre, to the dismay of the members, the families and the highly motivated staff.



Fortunately, Femmes d'Europe was able to provide a grant to cover PPE and sanitizing equipment for some months, thus permitting the Centre to continue to provide this vital service to those with disabilities and their families, while strictly adhering to Covid-19 guidelines and protocols.

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Projects Committee