

Autumn/Winter 2025

Issue 10

# HOSPICE CONNECTION

Your link to us and the care that you support



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STORY:

"HERE I AM  
A **VIP**"



CARE FOR  
CHILDREN  
WHEN A  
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LEGACY



St. Francis Hospice

# Community Connections



**I am pleased to update you on progress with our Raheny in-patient unit redevelopment. Works will begin on site this December and we look forward to welcoming patients to the new facility before the end of 2027.**

The new in-patient unit will provide 24 spacious single-patient rooms with enhanced facilities for families and visitors. The St Francis Hospice catchment area of North Dublin and surrounding counties is the fastest-growing region in the country. Our new in-patient unit will enable us to keep pace with this growth and the ever-increasing demand for specialist palliative care services.

Recently, Brendan Gleeson joined us at St Francis Hospice Raheny to launch our Buy a Brick campaign. This is a meaningful way for anyone to support the building project and dedicate a message on your brick in the Virtual Community Support Wall. The wall has already become a community focus of remembrance, gratitude, hope, and generosity. I invite you to find out more from the postcard enclosed or by visiting: <https://www.sfh.ie/buy-a-brick/>.

In this issue, you will find stories that tell the tale of what St Francis Hospice is all about. Joanna's story on page 3 highlights the person-centred care she is receiving from our complementary therapists and other professionals on the hospice team.

Turn the page to read Elaine's story of her son Darragh's care in St Francis Hospice and his family and friends' fundraising efforts in his memory: community supporting community.

On page 6 you can link to a new video about how St Francis Hospice cares for children when a member of their family is seriously ill or dying. Everyone who matters to the patient also matters to us.

Our 2025-2030 Strategic Plan outlines how, with the support of our amazing community and our strong relationship with the Health Service Executive, St Francis Hospice aims to grow our services, improve access, and continue to earn our place as a national and international leader in palliative care provision.

Thank you for your continued support as part of the St Francis Hospice family.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Fintan Fagan'.

**Fintan Fagan**

Chief Executive Officer,  
St Francis Hospice Dublin



## Leaving a Legacy of Care

At St. Francis Hospice, our mission aspires to provide excellent specialist palliative care for every person we serve. Looking ahead to 2030, our new five-year Strategic Plan sets a determined course to meet the growing needs of our community.

With your support, and the dedication of our compassionate staff, we can expand access, achieve higher standards, and offer even more inclusive services – ensuring St. Francis Hospice continues to be a national and international leader in palliative care.

Legacy giving is one of the most powerful ways you can help us reach these goals. By remembering St. Francis Hospice in your will, you create a gift that lives on – supporting not only our patients but also their loved ones. Your generosity will allow us to reach more people living with life-limiting illnesses, enabling them to live the best quality of life possible, right to the end.

To find out more, contact  
**Eimear Kellett** on (01) 8327535  
or [ekellett@sfh.ie](mailto:ekellett@sfh.ie).



# Joanna's Story

*"Here I am the most important person in the world, a VIP,"* says **Joanna Zawadzka**, 63, as she describes her experience with St Francis Hospice.

Joanna attends as an outpatient for complementary therapies and has also had successful treatment for lymphoedema by one of the hospice's specialist nurses. About once a week, a Community Palliative Care nurse from St Francis Hospice visits Joanna at home.

Two years ago, Joanna was diagnosed with stage 4 breast cancer that had spread to her bones. Initially, her hospital treatments worked and she had seven good months. When things began to change again, the hospital team referred Joanna to the hospice for help managing her symptoms. It took her a long time to find the courage to engage with the hospice.

Joanna remembers, "I was afraid, very afraid. For a long time, I didn't come here. I was thinking this is the place for the last wave, the last photograph. I was terrified to use this number." But once she found the courage to make the call, with the help of her son Jacob, she knew immediately that she had made the right decision.

Joanna encourages anyone who fears hospice care, as she once did, to find out more. She describes how reading an article in the Hospice Connection newsletter helped her realise that palliative care is about living as well as possible and that the hospice is a place filled with light, not darkness. "This is a bus stop, not the last stop. Just a bus stop," she says.

The hospice team took a holistic approach, helping to improve communication between all Joanna's care teams within the health system. "If you are looking for help, the hospice is the best place to come. I always know that everything can be sorted," she says.

It is the complementary therapies, such as massage and reflexology, that Joanna finds most helpful in managing her symptoms. She describes how, after she had spinal surgery to remove a tumour, the specialist massage techniques practiced in the hospice helped, "Slowly, slowly, week by week, the feeling came back in my back."




Joanna also appreciates how the staff and volunteers just speak to her "normally", rather than using mournful tones or "cocker spaniel eyes" as she says she has experienced previously. "Everybody listens to you here and they understand your feelings," she says.

Joanna's life story is one of courage. She came to Ireland from Poland in 2004, when the EU opened borders between member states. She spoke no English, but was seeking a better life for herself and her two children, Jacob, 21 and Anna, 10. They remained in Poland for several months while Joanna found employment and set up a home here.

For Joanna, Ireland is very much her home now, and she has a particular fondness for the Connemara region. She worked for 21 years in Connolly Hospital where she formed strong ties, first in the catering department, where her colleagues used children's books and encouragement to help her learn English. Later, Joanna attended to medical records in the A&E department, where she especially loved any opportunity to help translate for patients speaking one of the many languages she knows: Polish, Russian, German and French.

With the help of the hospice team, Joanna is living her best life. She enjoys knitting, crocheting, and embroidery, and spending time with her children and her friends. "You know how I feel? I feel safe. I know now there is someone to help me, that I will be safe until the end," she says.





*"An emotional and beautiful celebration", a moment of light in what had become a very dark time.*

## Remembering Darragh Ruane: A Story of Loss and Enduring Love

**Last July, the family and friends of Darragh Ruane gathered to mark his one-year anniversary. Darragh was only 28 when he died as a result of colon cancer – a disease many believe is for older people, but as his story shows, does not discriminate. His illness journey, his final weeks spent in St Francis Hospice, and the deep legacy of love, generosity and awareness he left behind continue to touch many.**

Darragh's illness began after what seemed like an ordinary day: he was out for a run in mid-2023 when he was hit with sudden, severe abdominal pain. After antibiotic treatment, symptoms returned a few weeks later. A colonoscopy revealed the terrible truth. Despite repeated efforts with surgery, chemotherapy, radiotherapy,

Darragh's cancer spread to his bladder, prostate, and eventually his liver. The medical team offered what they could, but surgery was no longer an option.

This is when St Francis Hospice became a place of grace, dignity and comfort for Darragh, and for his family in their hardest hours. Just weeks before he died, in a moving ceremony held in the social room of the hospice, Darragh and his fiancée Ginte were married. Surrounded by family, friends, and the hospice staff, they exchanged vows in a room decorated with photographs and flowers. Darragh's mam Elaine describes it as "an emotional and beautiful celebration", a moment of light in what had become a very dark time.

Elaine describes Darragh's care in the hospice as flexible, taking into account his preferences







***"Two minutes,  
no panic"***

**Darragh**



regarding mealtimes, medical checks, and even some precious nights away with Ginte in their own home. Darragh was known for a catchphrase: Two minutes, no panic. Elaine

says, "The staff in the hospice were so approachable. They worked around what Darragh wanted, even his 'two minutes' requests, which would often be for much longer than two minutes."

Six weeks after marrying Ginte, Darragh died in the hospice, in his mother Elaine's arms, with his wife and close family by his side. Elaine recalls being the first to hold him in life, and also the last, telling him

it was okay to let go. She remembers the hospice staff not only eased his pain but also honoured his wishes, allowing Ginte's dog, Gucci, to stay with Darragh, as it gave him comfort.

Since Darragh's death, Elaine, along with the family and community of Dunboyne, have channelled their grief into fundraising and raising awareness. The Darragh Ruane Memorial Cup, held at Dunboyne AFC last July, is one of several events organised in his memory. Funds raised will support St Francis Hospice, enabling others to receive the care, dignity and love that Darragh did.



The poignant event was organised by Darragh's oldest brother Jason, who provided much of Darragh's care at night during his illness. The Memorial Cup drew the community together for some of Darragh's favourite things: football, family, friends, and fun. Younger brother Liam and several friends flew home from Australia to take part. Darragh's youngest brother, Bobby, his only sister, Ciara, and his nieces and nephews contributed hugely to the success of the event.

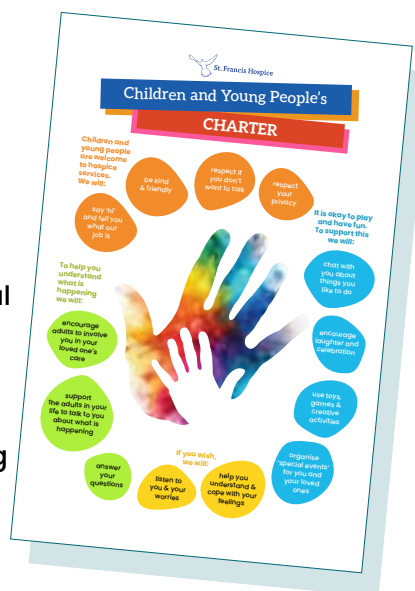
Through his illness, death and the love that survives, Darragh's story reminds us of the vital importance of early detection of illness. "I want people to be more aware, especially for young people, to get themselves checked if something isn't right," Elaine urges.

Darragh's and his family's experiences also point to the vital nature of compassionate care in end-of-life settings, and of community coming together in support. "St Francis Hospice eased his suffering, and even helped create moments of joy in Darragh's final days," Elaine says. It is in honour of that care and Darragh's memory that the family continues to walk this path – turning sorrow into service, loss into enduring love.

# Supporting Children

“Children and young people are important members of any family. When someone in the family has a serious, life-limiting illness, it affects the whole family,” says Niamh Finucane, Coordinator of Social Work and Bereavement Services, in a recently released video. “In St Francis Hospice, our care includes supporting children and young people.”

To help communicate this inclusive approach for children and young people, St Francis Hospice recently launched its Children’s Charter, which was developed by hospice staff with input from young people and a youth advocacy group. The charter is on display throughout our hospices in Raheny and Blanchardstown.



“The hospice team provides support to patients and relatives about ways to include and involve children in an age-appropriate way at all stages of the illness. All members of the hospice team contribute to a culture of ensuring that we include children when we think about patients. Team members will say ‘hi’ and tell children what their role is,” Niamh explains.

The St Francis Hospice Social Work team has published three books to help support children and young people facing a serious illness or bereavement in their family. The most recent, published this month, is “Something has Changed: For children and parents about illness and dying”. All three books are available free of charge, with thanks to AWS in Communities. You can order the books on [www.sfh.ie/shop](http://www.sfh.ie/shop).

In Niamh’s words, “Children and young people have a right to be heard, listened to, and taken seriously.” To view our new video about the support we provide for children and young people, scan the QR code to the left.



St Francis Hospice Blanchardstown recently invited corporate partners Bristol Myers Squibb Ireland (BMS), patients, staff and volunteers to the official opening of a new putting green and boules court at the hospice. BMS kindly sponsored the facility, which will enable patients to enjoy familiar pastimes or have fun learning new skills while engaging in palliative rehabilitation activities with the hospice’s clinical team.

*Pictured are Pádraig Keane, BMS, Desy Haughton, Aishling Kearney, Director of Nursing, and Khristine Maguire.*



I want to make a donation to ensure St Francis Hospice Dublin can always be there when it is needed

Enclosed is my gift of:

☐ €25 ☐ €50 ☐ €100 ☐ Other: € \_\_\_\_\_

Gift Method:

☐ Cash or cheque for € \_\_\_\_\_ enclosed

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OR

Make your gift online at: [www.sfh.ie](http://www.sfh.ie) or call 01 832 7535

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St. Francis Hospice

Charity Number: CHY10568

Charity Regulator Authority Number: 20027193

Commencing with the first payment on:-

☐ D ☐ M ☐ M ☐ Y ☐ Y

\* By donating €21 or more a month St Francis Hospice can claim a tax refund on your donation



## Bewley's Big Coffee Morning for Hospice

Thank you to all our wonderful supporters who hosted or plan to host a Coffee Morning in Support of St Francis Hospice. Coffee Mornings can be held up to the end of October so if you wish to gather with family, friends or work colleagues just call **01-8327535** or visit [www.sfh.ie](http://www.sfh.ie).

This year's 33rd Bewley's Big Coffee Morning for Hospice kicked off with a launch by the one and only Marty Morrissey in Bewley's Café. Staff from hospices throughout the country joined Marty in celebrating some amazing Coffee Morning Super Hosts, including Phil Kavanagh and Angela Flanagan, representing St. Francis Hospice.

We are deeply grateful to the Campbell Family, Bewley's Managing Director Jason Doyle and all Bewley's staff for their support of this unique and long-standing partnership.

## Drive into the New Year in a Brand New Toyota Yaris Cross Luna Hybrid Car

With the continued support of Denis Mahony Toyota we are promoting ticket sales for a chance to win a Toyota Yaris Cross Luna Hybrid car. There are also two cash prizes of €2,000 and €1,000 and five €200 gift cards (donated by the Blanchardstown Centre).

Tickets cost just €10. Attached is a tear-away slip to order your tickets. They make great stocking fillers for Christmas. Tickets may be purchased using the QR Code or calling the hospice on 01-8327535/01-8294000.

Our wonderful volunteers will sell tickets from 17th November to 14th December in the Blanchardstown Shopping Centre. We are deeply grateful to Crystal Jewellers and the Management Team at the Blanchardstown Centre for their brilliant support of the Annual Car Draw.



The Car Draw will take place on the 22nd January 2026. Best of luck and thank you for your support.



## Sunflower Field

Members of the community flocked to Ballyboughal again this summer to experience the beauty and tranquillity of the newly located Sunflower Field of Life in aid of St Francis Hospice. Generously provided for a fifth year by the Hoey and Bergin families, the field provided a place of relaxation, reflection and many hours of fun for children as they explored the tracks through the Sunflowers and enjoyed family picnics. We are grateful to all who visited and shared their photos, poems, and reflections which have been shared with Hoey and Bergin families. The Sunflower Field will remain in the same location next year and we look forward to welcoming all back to this very special place.



# Annual Car Draw 2025



## St. Francis Hospice

Charity Number: CHY10568  
Charity Regulator Authority  
Number: 20027193



1st Prize: Toyota Yaris Cross Luna Hybrid (supplied by Denis Mahony Toyota)

2nd Prize: €2,000

3rd Prize: €1,000

Runners Up: 5 x €200 Gift Cards (donated by Blanchardstown Centre)

Tickets can be purchased until Sunday 11th January 2026

You must be 18 years to enter this draw. Draw entry is restricted to residents of the Republic of Ireland.

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Address:

Eircode:

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I would like to purchase ☐ Car Draw Tickets

Tickets cost €10 each

I am enclosing payment of

☐ Cash or cheque for € enclosed

OR

Card Number:

Expiry Date:

CVV:

/

Signature:

OR

Purchase tickets online at:

[www.sfh.ie](http://www.sfh.ie)

or call 01 832 7535 / 01 8294000

  
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Charity Regulator Number: 20027193 CHY Number: 10568

Please join us for the  
**Tree of Life ceremonies**  
in **St Francis Hospice**  
**Blanchardstown** on  
**Thursday 4th December**  
and **St Francis Hospice**  
**Raheny** on **Thursday**  
**11th December**

Remember a loved  
one by dedicating a  
light on the hospice  
Christmas tree -  
€6 per light



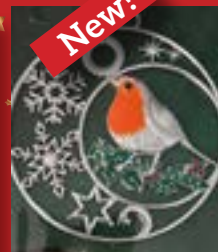
Box of 12 with 2 Cards of each image €10



Connect with  
us for our  
**Christmas  
Appeal**



Send your Christmas greetings at home  
and across the miles by using hospice  
Christmas Cards



**New!**

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to Guide  
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