

Spring / Summer 2026

Issue 11

HOSPICE CONNECTION

Your link to us and the care that you support

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NEW BOOK
TO SUPPORT
CHILDREN



CELEBRATING
THE YEAR
OF THE
VOLUNTEER

INNOVATIVE
PATIENT
CARE



St. Francis Hospice



Community Connections



At St Francis Hospice, we meet people at some of the most vulnerable moments of their lives. It is a privilege, and a profound responsibility. That is why I take heart from the real sense of progress and

momentum in hospice and palliative care, both nationally and here in North Dublin.

In 2025, Ireland was ranked 9th in the world in the first-ever global ranking of palliative care under the WHO framework. That recognition belongs to many – state services, voluntary hospices, educators, researchers, and, above all, patients and families.

For us at St Francis Hospice, it is not a finishing line but an encouragement to keep improving access, quality and equity of care in the communities we serve.

Our Strategic Plan 2025–2030 sets out a clear direction: responding to changing needs, strengthening links with hospital and community partners, investing in education and research, and protecting the deeply personal, relational nature of hospice care. In the coming weeks, work will begin on our new 24 single-bed in-patient unit in Raheny, made possible through HSE support and extraordinary community generosity. It will enhance dignity, privacy and comfort for generations to come.

As well as big development projects, progress is measured in quiet ways: a patient who feels less anxious, a family who feels supported, a community that knows its hospice is there when needed. With your continued support, I look to the future with gratitude and confidence.

Fintan Fagan

Fintan Fagan
Chief Executive Officer,
St Francis Hospice Dublin



In Memoriam

The entire St Francis Hospice community continues to grieve for our colleague **Sr Patricia Walsh, DC**, who died on 5th November 2025. We fondly remember her as a wonderful person, an exceptional colleague, and a very dear and special friend. She cared greatly about our hospice team, our patients and their families, and the wider community. Her influence, especially her work with core values and organisational culture, enabled St Francis Hospice to grow and evolve as a positive and affirming workplace and centre of care. We hold her memories and strong legacy deeply in our hearts.



May she rest in peace.



Something Has Changed: Our new free book for families with children



Sinéad Kavanagh reads from the book to her sons Oisín and Conor

When someone we love is seriously ill, it can be hard to know how to talk to children about what is happening. Many parents and grandparents in our community will recognise that feeling – the wish to protect, alongside the wish to be honest.

As a primary school teacher, Sinéad sees every day how grief can affect children, and how often parents ask, “What should I say?” She believes this book offers something invaluable: words children can understand, and a way for families to feel less alone.

That is why St Francis Hospice has created *Something Has Changed: For Children and Parents about Illness and Dying*, a gentle book written by our Social Work Team. Rooted in years of walking alongside families, it offers simple language, thoughtful stories and illustrations to help children make sense of big emotions – sadness, worry, anger and confusion – when someone important to them is seriously ill. A companion guide supports adults in having these tender conversations with reassurance and clarity.



Thanks to generous support from Amazon, the book is available free of charge through our online shop and will also be given to families with children who are using hospice services. It has been shared with local schools and libraries, and will soon be produced in accessible formats in partnership with Vision Ireland.

At the recent launch in St Francis Hospice, book ambassador Sinéad Kavanagh shared her own family’s experience of hospice care. When her dad was cared for in the hospice, she remembers his room as a place where they could still be together – where her children could sit with their granddad and simply be a family.

If you would like a copy for your family or to share with someone who might need it, please visit: www.sfh.ie/shop.

Other books available free of charge from St Francis Hospice:

Always in My Heart: A book for children about grieving

Finding Your Way Through Grief: For teenagers and young adults



Celebrating our Volunteers

Inset: Patricia with Anna-Marie Langan

Below: Brian and Berna prepare to sing at Tuesday mass



Brian describes how he came to the hospice over 30 years ago to meet Sr Annette, who was then the Director of Nursing, to offer their services as volunteers.

At the time, he was suffering from severe PTSD and he struggled to leave the house because of agoraphobia. He says, "It's hard to understand, but I have never not been able to come down here, to sing for people, even when I wasn't able to do anything else."

When asked if their music in St Francis Hospice is a mission, Brian responds, "Hmmm...or is this a home?" He continues, "When you come in that door, the hug you get, you are just enveloped in love." Berna adds, "There's always a welcome and a smile."

Having found this special place, Brian and Berna say they will continue volunteering in the hospice for as long as they are able. In addition to marking 30 years as volunteers in St Francis Hospice, this year they celebrate their 50th wedding anniversary. Congratulations, Brian and Berna!

Patricia MacDonagh has volunteered in two roles during the past 30 years. She recently hung up her scissors as she retired from the role of hairdresser in the in-patient unit of St Francis Hospice Raheny. And Patricia continues to help provide tea/coffee and the warm hospitality that is so important to

bereaved family members who attend the hospice's Bereavement Information Evenings. Patricia, who is from Malahide, is part of a family of St Francis Hospice supporters; her husband, Stephen, actively fundraises for the hospice in association with the local branch of the Lions Club, and their daughter Mairead works in the hospice as a nurse educator. Patricia says it is a privilege to be part of the hospice's services to the community.

Reflecting on her time in the hairdressing role, Patricia describes the joy of "seeing patients' eyes light up" at the invitation to have their hair washed and styled. The hospice's specially equipped salon area makes this possible for just about everyone, regardless of their mobility. However, many years ago, Patricia also learned the skill of hairdressing for someone who is bed-bound, and this has made a huge difference to the lives of St Francis Hospice's patients.

Patricia's volunteering now brings comfort and a friendly presence to people who have been recently bereaved. As they attend an information evening about grief and the support available in St Francis Hospice, Patricia and her fellow hospitality volunteers provide the much-needed cuppa, served with a smile. This is truly an example of community spirit – kind-hearted people looking after those around them in the simplest and most meaningful of ways.

To find out more about volunteering in St Francis Hospice, please visit our website <https://www.sfh.ie/how-you-can-help-us/volunteers/>

Every year is the Year of the Volunteer in St Francis Hospice," says volunteer services manager Barbara Kilbride, "We couldn't do what we do without them. But this year is extra special because it is the global UN Year of the Volunteer."

Each one of the 274 St Francis Hospice volunteers brings something special to the hospice team and enhances the care the hospice provides. They work across dozens of roles from hospitality to administration, from transportation to gardening.

We celebrate all our volunteers and thank them for the unique contribution each of them makes to the care our hospice provides to patients and

their families. In this issue we feature the stories of three exceptional volunteers who have each given 30 years of selfless service to St Francis Hospice and the community of North Dublin and surrounding counties.

Brian and Berna Cunningham bring the gift of music to those attending the Remembrance Services held six times throughout the year for families of those who have died under the care of St Francis Hospice. They also sing at Tuesday's mass in the Raheny hospice each week, and at special events that crop up from time to time.

Their spirit of service is grounded in their deep faith and their understanding of the special effect that music can have for people experiencing difficulties or challenges such as illness or grief. They describe their style of music as "contemporary spiritual", saying, "It's like prayer to us, and we do always have people tell us it's soothing, it's comforting."

'The true meaning of life is to plant trees, under whose shade you do not expect to sit.' *Greek proverb*

The vision and foresight of our founders nearly 40 years ago has brought St. Francis Hospice to where it is today; caring for the community of North Dublin across two sites, Raheny and Blanchardstown.

The care the Hospice provides brings comfort, dignity and holistic person-centred care to people who are faced with a life-limiting illness. It is a privilege and we need the support of our community to ensure we are here into the future.

By remembering St. Francis Hospice in your Will, you plant a tree that will shelter others in our community who come after you, enabling St Francis Hospice to continue growing and caring for patients and 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.

If you would like to leave a legacy that will live on and keep you connected with your community, please consider leaving a gift in your Will to support the work of St Francis Hospice Dublin. You can learn more by visiting www.sfh.ie/wills-legacies.



Transition Year Programme

St Francis Hospice values its place at the heart of the community. Part of our mission is to help people learn more about what we do and how palliative care can help people live a better quality of life throughout many stages of an illness.

Recently, we hosted 15 transition year students for a week-long programme in our Raheny and Blanchardstown hospices. The students met with members of various departments to learn about the role each one plays in delivering excellent patient care and running the hospice service. Many students had a perception that the hospice

environment would be one of sorrow or sadness, and they were delighted to find instead a place of warmth, kindness, and positivity.

We were proud to share our experience and the joy, fulfilment and satisfaction we get from working in St. Francis Hospice. We enjoyed having the students with us, and hope that one day some of them may return to work or volunteer as part of the hospice team. Meantime, we look forward to our next transition year programme later this year. To apply, email Carol Brady at cbrady@sfh.ie.

Innovative Patient Care: Virtual Reality Headsets

Many people who have life-limiting illnesses find they struggle not only with their symptoms and side effects of treatments, but also with stress and anxiety. One new approach to managing anxiety is through the use of Virtual Reality (VR) headsets. This technology immerses the user in a virtual space where they can experience relaxation.

St Francis Hospice is always seeking to innovate and enhance patient care, and fundraised income plays a vital role in this. One example is a recent grant from the Hospital Saturday Fund that will further our ability to provide comfort and well-being for patients and staff alike.

Palliative care focuses on improving the quality of life for those facing life-limiting illnesses, through holistic physical, emotional, and spiritual support. Palliative rehabilitation is central to this approach, helping patients to remain independent, adapt to change, and live in comfort.

New funding has supported the purchase of VR and seating equipment for our Occupational Therapy team, benefiting patients, while also promoting staff well-being. Shine VR Headsets, successfully trialled at St Francis Hospice in 2025, have reduced anxiety and enhanced relaxation for patients. Additional riser recliner chairs also provided greater comfort, dignity, and accessibility for patients.

An added benefit of the VR headsets will be for clinical staff, who have also reported benefits from short VR sessions during busy or emotionally heavy times of providing patient care.

These innovations, funded through generous donations, help ensure that St Francis Hospice will continue delivering compassionate, person-centred care on every patient's journey.



VHI Women's Mini Marathon: Join Eve in supporting St Francis Hospice

Please join the wonderful gathering of inspirational women in Dublin for this year's Women's Mini Marathon on the 31st May. We are delighted to have Eve McMahon, World Medallist in Sailing, as our Ambassador and participant in this year's Marathon. Please join Eve, if you can, by contacting the hospice on **01-8327535** or online www.sfh.ie.

Eve represents the latest generation of her family to provide ongoing support to St. Francis Hospice. In 2024, she became the first Irish woman to win a Bronze Medal at the World Championships in sailing. Eve is now training toward her ultimate goal, to win an Olympic Medal representing Ireland at the Olympic Games in Los Angeles, USA, in 2028.

"I am constantly striving to achieve excellence, pushing the boundaries of my sport. I aim to inspire future generations in the community while fostering a culture of respect, trust and overall inner and outer well-being, the fundamentals that drive my sporting success."

Eve McMahon

"Eve reflects so many of our core values here at the hospice and we are deeply grateful to her for participating and encouraging support for this year's Vhi Women's Mini Marathon. As we embark on our respective missions, together, we can achieve so much for others."

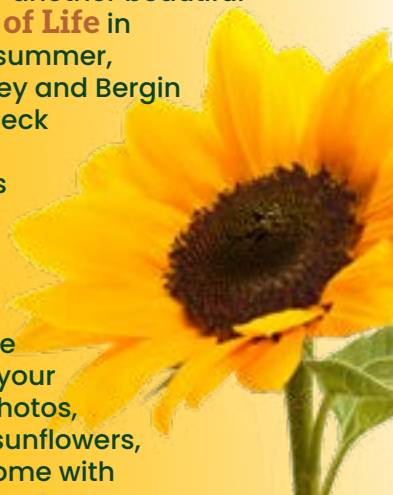
Fintan Fagan,
Chief Executive Officer

Hospice Annual Car Draw

Thanks to the generosity and support of everyone who purchased a ticket, our 2025/26 Annual Car Draw raised an outstanding €171,000. The funds raised will provide vital comfort, care, and support, helping us to continue making a meaningful difference in the lives of those we serve. We are sincerely thankful to each and every person who contributed to making this event such a tremendous success. Congratulations to all our winners.

We now turn our attention to planning next year's Annual Car Draw 2026/27 thanks to the dedication of staff and volunteers who work quietly behind the scenes making it all happen. It is a privilege to work with such a brilliant team. Onward to 2027!

We look forward to another beautiful **Sunflower Field of Life** in Ballyboughal this summer, courtesy of the Hoey and Bergin families. Please check our website and social media posts in July for opening dates. Once open, we welcome you to visit any time of the day to remember your loved ones, take photos, stroll through the sunflowers, and bring some home with you to enjoy.



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

OR
 Card Number:
 Expiry Date: Cvv:
 / Signature: _____

OR
 Make your gift online at: www.sfh.ie or call 01 832 7535

Data Protection Notice At St Francis Hospice, your privacy is very important to us and the Fundraising Department will only use personal information to alert you to our fundraising activities during the year. Your personal details (Name, Address, Telephone Number, Email) are contained on our Fundraising Database. At any stage if you wish to have your details removed from our fundraising database or from a particular fundraising initiative please contact the Fundraising Department and your details will be removed immediately. We thank you for your support of St Francis Hospice and if you have any queries please do not hesitate to contact the Fundraising Team on 01 832 7535. Tick here if you wish to have your details removed from our database.

Full Name:
 Address:
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Become a Monthly Supporter:
 By giving monthly you safeguard our future, enabling us to plan and expand our care, knowing that we have the income to do so. Please change my credit / debit card the following amount EVERY MONTH:
 €10 €21* €30* Other € _____

Committing with the First Payment on:

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

Scan to set up a Monthly Donation Directly Online

St. Francis Hospice
 Charity Number: CHY10568
 Charity Regulator Authority Number: 20027193

Your Support Makes a Difference

Together we can ensure that St. Francis Hospice Dublin is here to provide specialist palliative care for the people of north Dublin and surrounding counties



St. Francis Hospice

How We Can Stay Connected



MARCH
Remember Me Walk



SEPTEMBER - JANUARY 2027
Annual Car Draw ticket sales

31ST MAY
Vhi Women's Mini Marathon



25TH OCTOBER
Dublin City Marathon



12TH/13TH JUNE
Sunflower Days Collection



6TH/7TH NOVEMBER
Christmas Appeal Collection

24TH SEPTEMBER
Bewley's Big Coffee Morning for Hospice



3RD DECEMBER BLANCHARDSTOWN
10TH DECEMBER RAHENY
Tree of Life Ceremonies



Donate to www.sfh.ie

Hospice Monthly Draw

1st Prize
€1,400

Join the Hospice Monthly Draw

2nd Prize
€700

€7 per month
€84 per year

3rd Prize
€500

Contact Pam
01 8327535

4th Prize
€250

Corporates / Trusts

Please consider partnering with or donating to St Francis Hospice Dublin

Contact Eimear
01 8327535

Hold an Event

Organise your own event and raise funds for St Francis Hospice.

Contact Bernadette or Corinna
01 8294000

Collection Boxes / Units

Please place a collection box in your home or business

Contact Karen
01 8327535



Would you prefer to receive this newsletter by email? Contact fundraising@sfh.ie.



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