

Election Fever

On a warm, sunny day in March 2011, 110 people from RehabCare's services all over Ireland travelled to the Ashling Hotel in Dublin for the National RehabCare Advocacy Council Annual General Meeting.

THE REHABCARE ADVOCACY COUNCIL (NRAC) ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING is a notable day in NRAC's calendar as it presents a chance for representatives of RehabCare's resource centres to come together to talk about things that are important to them in their services.

The AGM had a significant item on the agenda – the election of a new National Committee. Sixteen people from around the country had put themselves forward for election. They arrived, speeches prepared, nervously awaiting their opportunity to set out their stall in advance of voting. Before proceedings began, they took the chance to do some last-minute canvassing. One thing was for sure, this election would bring a big change to the National Committee. All but one of the existing committee members were not going forward for re-election because under new rules, members must step down after two terms of office.

Before the electioneering got underway, Jenny Cullen, Advocate with the new National Advocacy Service, spoke to the assembled delegates, presenting the new advocacy service that is available to people with disabilities throughout the country.

During her welcome address, Margaret Gillard, Rehab Group Director of Health and Social Care Services, highlighted the benefits of RehabCare and NRAC working together, saying, "It is so important for RehabCare that NRAC is strong at all levels: local, regional and national. It is the best way for RehabCare's management to engage formally with the people who use its services. By working with NRAC, RehabCare can ensure that its services are meeting people's needs as much as possible."

Michael O'Brien, vice chairperson of the outgoing NRAC National Committee, delivered a rousing speech about the need for NRAC members to continue to work hard to speak up for themselves. He spoke of the benefits of being a member of the NRAC National Committee. "Being a member of the National Committee has given me the confidence to represent myself and people who cannot speak up for themselves."

After the speeches, the election got underway. Each region was electing the people it wanted to represent them on the National Committee. Before the vote, each candidate spoke about the things that they hoped to achieve through membership of the committee. Delegates then got down to the serious business of voting for the new representatives.

Lunch was a noisy affair as delegates got a chance to meet friends, old and new, with much speculation as to the membership of the new committee.





Pictured above: Jimmy Dooner, outgoing National Committee Member receives his certificate from Angela Kerins, Chief Executive, Rehab Group in recognition of his contribution to NRAC.

After lunch Angela Kerins, Chief Executive of Rehab Group, addressed the audience and took the opportunity to thank the members of the outgoing committee – some of whom had been involved since NRAC's formation – for their enormous contribution and commitment over the years. They were: Patrick Hargadon, Bray; Michael O'Brien, Douglas, Cork; Simon Buggy, Douglas, Cork; Jimmy Dooner, Tullamore; Alice Jackman, Bray; Margaret Norris, Lifford; Bernard McGrath, Lifford; Geraldine Harrington, Tullamore; and Catalina Keys, Lifford. Each outgoing committee member was presented with a certificate of recognition.

Of his period on the National Committee, Simon Buggy said, "I really enjoyed my time on the NRAC National Committee and my role as secretary. It was a great learning

experience and a great opportunity to interact with staff and management. I wish the new committee the best for the future."

Then came the moment everyone had been waiting for – the announcement of the new National Committee members. Michelle Joyce, NRAC National Development Officer, first thanked all of the candidates for having the courage to put themselves forward for election before announcing the successful candidates to much applause.

Siobhan Sharkey, new NRAC National Committee member for the North East and Midlands, was delighted to be elected. "I would like to thank everyone who voted for me. I will work hard on their behalf and look forward to going to meetings in Dublin and in my region."

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Aidan Hogan from Limerick was also happy to be elected. "I was delighted to be elected onto the NRAC National Committee, I am looking forward to the experience and it will also be a challenge. I will work hard to represent the people who elected me in the South/Mid-West region." ■

THE NEW NATIONAL COMMITTEE MEMBERS ARE:

- **James Coughlan,**
Costello, Galway
- **Mary Nora Curran,**
Kilkenny
- **Bernadette Dowd,**
Dunboyne
- **Stephen Doyle,**
Kildare
- **Fiona Friel,**
Lifford
- **Aidan Hogan,**
Limerick
- **Alice Jackman,**
Bray
- **Shane Loughlin,**
Cavan
- **Declan Madden,**
Galway
- **Siobhan Sharkey,**
Dundalk