



Pictured left: Karl McEvoy with his Dad, Hugh.



Talk for Me

Rehab News learns how, thanks to technology and a dad's vision, a young man who attends RehabCare in Dundalk has been given a voice for the very first time.

LIKE EVERY YOUNG MAN OF 21, Karl McEvoy likes to be cool and, at the moment, what could be cooler than an iPhone? But Karl's iPhone is more than just the latest gadget because thanks to his dad, Hugh, the iPhone has given Karl a way of communicating with those around him.

Karl was diagnosed with the rare neurological condition dystonia when he was just four years old. Dystonia affects people in different ways. For Karl, the condition affected his ability to speak and his literacy skills. In order to communicate with those around him, Karl would point to images and basic phrases contained in a handbook that he brought everywhere. However, as Hugh explains, the handbook wasn't ideal.

"Karl didn't really like carrying his handbook around. It was

cumbersome and it made him feel different from his friends. We had given Karl an iPhone for Christmas and there were applications, or apps, available for everything – from games to education tools. It got me thinking, why couldn't there be an app that would help Karl to communicate?

"So, that's how the idea for the 'Talk For Me' iPhone app came about. I did some research and approached a company that specialises in developing iPhone apps. The rest is history. Although it's only been available for the past couple of months, it's already made a big difference to Karl's life and it will hopefully have the same benefit for others with speech difficulties.

"The app contains a wide array of images and photographs that relate to Karl's life, his likes and interests,

as well as standard phrases such as 'please', 'thank you', 'hello' and 'goodbye'. Karl simply selects the image that conveys what he wants to say and the app reads out the text that we inputted to accompany the image. It's that simple, and because photographs can be uploaded at the touch of a button, Karl's personal library is growing day by day.

"Although it's been less than a year since Karl started at the RehabCare resource centre in Carroll Village, it's completely changed his life. He loves it there. Between horticulture, drama, and arts and crafts, Karl has much more going on these days. Now, thanks to the 'Talk For Me' app, he can easily share his experiences and thoughts with those around him. The app has given Karl a voice – there's no stopping him now!" ■