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Residents and staff at St Mary of the Angels, Beaufort.

# Vital service marks a milestone of service to the community

ST MARY of the Angels in Beaufort is marking a milestone - fifty years of providing a vital service that really makes a difference to people with disabilities across the community.

The Golden Anniversary will be marked with special celebrations on July 17, with past and present staff, families and residents all invited to attend the commemorations.

St Mary of the Angels was founded by the Franciscan Sisters in 1968 as a residential home for children with disabilities - the only one of its kind in Kerry.

For the past half century, it has provided this service to hundreds of these children, becoming their home from home. When the children reached adulthood, some of the young adults moved out of St Mary of The Angels while others remained in what became their home for life.

Just as homes evolve, so has St Mary of the Angels. It grew to encompass a St Francis Special School so that the children could be educated,

while a hydrotherapy pool and state-of-the-art gym were also added. A day service was opened for non-residents, while after-schools services and respite services were also provided.

"Today, we provide residential, respite and day service provision to more than 300 men, women and children with intellectual disabilities throughout Kerry," says General Manager of St John of God services in Kerry, Claire O'Dwyer.

"Essentially, what we aim to do is to empower them to realise their full potential by enhancing their skills through providing a quality person-focused service."

In recent years, St John of God Kerry Services has expanded and now offers day programmes, after-schools and respite services in locations such as Cahersiveen, Tralee and Listowel.

"It's all part of catering to the needs of the men and women we support within their local communities" says Helena Cronin, Programme Manager for Day Services at St John of God Kerry Services.

The management of St Mary of the Angels has also changed over the years. The Franciscan Sisters ran it until 2005, when it amalgamated with St John of God Kerry Services.

The two organisations were a good fit, according to the Programme Manager of Residential Services at St Mary of the Angels, Nora Brosnan.

"The Franciscan Sisters and the St John of God Services had a very similar ethos," she says. "St John of God has built on the strong foundations that existed in Saint Mary of the Angels and further expanded the services across the county and the site in Beaufort to what we have today."

"The Golden Anniversary celebrations on July 17 will celebrate the facility's achievements. It is also fit-

ting that on this occasion HIQA have informed us both centres on campus will be registered."

These commemorations will include a Mass that will be said by the St Mary of the Angels chaplain, Fr Derek O'Connell. A Brother from St John of God will speak a few words. It is also hoped that Sister Mary Rose Doyle, whose family donated the house and farm that made it possible for St Mary of the Angels to exist in Beaufort, will attend and share her thoughts on this special occasion.

"We'll also have some live music and refreshments and we will screen a special commemorative DVD that we have made to mark this milestone anniversary," says Helen O'Connor, the Household and Volunteer Coordinator.

This DVD will feature interviews with families of residents as well as staff members, all sharing just what St Mary of the Angels has meant to them over the years.

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# ANNIVERSARY - 2018



Sheila Marie Fitzgerald (Children's Services Programme Manager), Nora Brosnan (Residential Programme Manager, Adult Services) and Helena Cronin (Day Services Programme Manager, Day Services) at St Mary of the Angels, Beaufort.



## A vision for the future

Claire O'Dwyer (Manager), St Mary of the Angels, Beaufort.

**ST MARY of the Angels in Beaufort celebrates fifty years of achievements - and also looks to the future.**

"We have accomplished a lot together during our first 50 years and we have empowered countless men, women and children to realise their full potential.

"But what matters most now is what we do next," says Claire O'Dwyer, General Manager of St John of God Services in Kerry.

"Our aim for the future is to continue to enhance the skills of the men, women and children we support and to continue providing a quality person-focused service now and for decades to come," says Claire.

She points to recent developments in Tralee, Beaufort, Killorglin and Listowel as proof of the fact that St John of God Kerry Services are continually growing and expanding.

"Despite the economic constraints of recent years, we have opened additional day programmes in Tralee and Listowel," she says. "We have also opened residential homes."

The Programme Manager for Day Services, Helena Cronin, added: "We are so

grateful for the support we have received and continue to receive from families."

"What we do here is a collective effort with the families of all the people we support. We work hand in hand with them to support their family member in living their lives to their fullest potential.

"At this stage in our history, as St Mary of the Angels celebrates its 50th anniversary, I would like to thank families for all of their support and say that we look forward to working with them for many more years to come," Claire said.

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# Public support is crucial to funding

Launching this year's fundraising Golf Classic, which takes place in Killarney Golf Course on August 10th, in aid of St Mary of the Angels, Beaufort, were l-r: Gary O'Sullivan, Siobhan O'Donoghue and Liam Healy, pictured here with the car that was purchased from the funds raised through last year's Golf Classic.

**THOUSANDS TOOK** part in the Ring of Kerry Cycle on the 7th of July 2018, providing valuable support for local charities - including St Mary of the Angels, which has always relied on the public for much of its funding.

"We receive government funding but we fundraise for things that normal funding wouldn't cover," says Liam Healy, the Operations Manager at Saint John of God Kerry Services.

"These are things that add value to people's lives. For example, the Kerry Ladies' Vintners did some fundraising for us recently and we've bought some patio and garden furniture with it."

"It's a very sunny morning this morning and I can see the residents having their breakfast outside. They couldn't have done that without the donation."

The St Mary of the Angels Parents and Relatives Association have also been a huge support to the service since they formed in 2016. Part of their work is also running events to raise funds to enhance and develop the living

conditions on campus.

To be chosen as beneficiaries of the Ring of Kerry Cycle is hugely important, says Liam.

"We received a significant donation as a result and we will be able to use that for one of our major projects like renovating some of the homes."

"This needs to be done in order to create more space and privacy for the residents and to give them more dignity as they live their daily lives," he says.

There are eight staff members involved in the fundraising group. Their main focus every year is the annual golf classic which raises funds for St John of God Kerry Services including St Mary of the Angels in Beaufort.

"Last year, we were able to buy a second-hand Ford Galaxy which has helped us to get out and about even

more with the residents," Liam says.

The Golf Classic will take place in the Killarney Golf and Fishing Club on the 10th of August this year.

"It's for teams of four and we usually have about 50 teams that take part," says Liam. "The cost is €200 per team of four and anyone who wants to take part this year can contact Helen O'Connor at 0871338702."

Support from the wider community also comes from events like sponsored cycles and nights at the dogs, while Killarney Rotary and Tralee Rotary also help.

Support comes in other ways too, Liam says.

"For example, we've got a great bunch of ladies that help us with the administration of the Golf Classic every year.

"From dealing with all of the entries to organising the raffle, they do it all and we're so grateful," he says.

"It doesn't matter whether it's a big or small donation, it all helps."



# ST MARY OF THE ANGELS 50TH

# Committed to the highest standards

**WHEN THE Franciscan Sisters** decided to care for the intellectually disabled in Kerry, they did so to the highest possible of standards and that commitment to excellence continues to this day.

The residential home opened in 1968, with room for 60 children. Today, it's home to over 70 residents with physical and intellectual disabilities who live in their homes on the campus, many of whom use the day service on site.

St Francis Special School was recognised by the Department of Education in 1970 and continues to abide by its ethos of enabling, encouraging and enriching the lives of these children to this day.

Everyone who attends St Mary of the Angels on a residential, respite or day service has access to the wide range of facilities, including a hydrotherapy pool.

This pool is very beneficial for people with mobility and muscular issues, providing them with a means of exercise as well as a form of therapy.

There's a gym on the grounds too as well as a special sensory room which has been designed to meet the needs of people with autism.

Its heated water bed has

proven to be very popular with residents.

Oaktree Day Centre, located on the grounds of St Mary of the Angels supports service users to access community-based social activities, ensuring that they play an active role in their local community while developing and maintaining valua-

Miriam Doyle, Batt Brosnan, Maura Spillane, Denis Galvin, Emil Rothlander and Deirdre Tangney, pictured at the Oaktree Lodge Day Service (Arts and Crafts facilities) in St Mary of the Angels, Beaufort.

ble life skills. Oaktree day service is also very proud of the excellent art and craft products made and which were showcased in an exhibition in Killarney in October 2015.

"It's hard to put into words just how much the service means to families," says Nora Brosnan, the Programme Manager of Resi-

dential Services at St Mary of the Angels.

"Many of those who live here have grown up here, so the service is intertwined in their lives and that of their families, they have such a strong connection with the place and it provides a great support and sense of security for them." Nora said.



Breda Harrington and Hannah Cahillane on the treadmill at the gym in St Mary of the Angels, Beaufort.

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# ANNIVERSARY - 2018



## Families find comfort in caring ethos at St Mary of the Angels

THERE ARE some people who live at St Mary of the Angels on a full-time residential basis, many of whom access Oaktree day programme facilities.

It's one of 15 day centres that St John of God Kerry Services runs across the county to support people to reach their full potential in life.

"The service supports a wide range of needs but it aims to integrate people with their local community," says Helena Cronin, Programme Manager for Day Services.

"Everything we do is to promote independence and personal choice and to help people be actively part



Anne Buckley and Juliette O'Sullivan, staff at The Arches, Beaufort.

of the world around them."

A range of education and training opportunities are offered, including courses in numeracy, literacy and personal development.

If possible, people are provided with opportunities to access employment - service users have worked in supermarkets, hotels, cleaning companies and a range of other businesses and community-based projects. Also, some of

those who attend day services also access local Mens' Sheds such as that in Killorglin. Other day programmes are involved with the Tidy Towns.

"We're also working with NEWKD and the Farm Family Group to establish a small pet farm project on site here at St Mary of the Angels," says Helena. "This would give a new set of opportunities to people on campus who enjoy working with

animals."

Oaktree Day Service has a long tradition of arts and crafts. Some of its service users have produced such fine work that in 2015, they held an arts and crafts exhibition in the Killarney Heights Hotel.

From arts and crafts to training in literacy and numeracy and work placements in the local community, the people who attend

Oaktree Day Service and any of the other St John of God day services across the county are supported to explore a wide range of life experiences.

"It is a social care model of support that focuses on the person as a whole," says Helena.

"Supporting a person in a person-centred manner is part of our ethos, across all of our programmes."

## Caring culture in a home from home

CREATING A home from home has always been the aim of the staff at St Mary of the Angels.

Anne Hannon, sister of long-term resident Johnny, can testify to this. "There's such a loving culture at St Mary of the Angels," she says. "The people there genuinely care for Johnny."

The Hannon family was living in New York when Johnny, who is the youngest of four, was born in 1969. It soon became clear that Johnny was different to the other children and had special needs.

"He is physically fit and able but he's profoundly autistic," says Anne. "He is non-verbal and he has epilepsy."

His parents struggled as he became older. "My mother couldn't toilet train him and he was always running away," says Anne.

Their options in the US were limited. "They had heard horror stories about state-run institutions and they couldn't afford private ones," says Anne.

"But then my aunt who had moved home in the early 70s told them about St Mary of the Angels. She thought it would be perfect

for Johnny. So we came home especially for him."

Johnny was five years old when he went to live at St Mary of the Angels and he has thrived there ever since.

"It became his school and home all in one and the nuns brought him on in ways we hadn't been able to do," says Anne.

"He's 49 now and he's able to communicate his needs. He can dress himself and he understands what people say. He's happy there and the staff love him. That's such a comfort to us as a family."

Anne and the Hannon family are so grateful that they found a home for Johnny at St Mary of the Angels. "It was a super place 50 years ago when the nuns first set it up," she says.

"It was ahead of anything that our family could find in New York. It's still a super place 50 years on, when families need it more than ever."

"It's such a happy home for Johnny and we hope it's still there as a home for others in another 50 years time."

## Children's services throughout Kerry

ST MARY of the Angels was set up 50 years ago with the aim of helping and supporting children with intellectual disabilities. Half a century later, our service is still at the forefront of providing children with much-needed services here in Kerry.

"We provide our services to children between the ages of 6 and 18 years with intellectual disabilities and these services are essential for the children and their families," says Sheila Marie Fitzgerald, the Children's and Adult Respite Services Manager.

Services are spread throughout the county. In Beaufort, the Arches respite children's house deals with 25 children. In Cahersiveen, the Saidhbhín Care after-schools service deals with an average of eight children every day.

In Listowel, there's the Abhaile respite children's house which is used by another 25 children as well as the Ashfield after-schools service.

"We follow a child-focused approach where all activities are designed to suit their needs," says Sheila Marie.

"From our outings to games, whether we're go-

ing out for a meal, going bowling or bringing the children somewhere like the Tralee Wetlands Centre or Kennedy's Pet Farm, we make sure that the children are always safe and happy."

Recent feedback from HIQA reports testifies to this. "Abhaile had its first inspection and it received the best children's report in the country," says Sheila Marie.

"We haven't had the official report on the Arches back yet but feedback from the inspectors on the day was excellent."

Sheila Marie believes this is a testimony to the hard work and effort of the staff.

"Michael Moriarty heads the team at the Arches and Siobhán Keane is manager in Listowel. Both managers and their staff run such a good service," she says.

"I'm proud to be the programme manager of such a service with such a committed team."



Saidhbhín Care in Cahersiveen, a St Mary of the Angels facility, is offering an after-school Child Care Service for 6- to 18-year-olds with intellectual disabilities, pictured here, l-r: staff nurses Lisa O'Neill and Lorraine Barry.

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ST MARY OF THE ANGELS 50TH ANNIVERSARY - 2018

# Volunteers help make a difference



Vincent Keogh, Rachel Walsh, Willie O'Riordan, Robert McCartin, James Kenny, Marie Flaherty and Patricia McGuirk, pictured at the chalets in St Mary of the Angels, Beaufort.

**VOLUNTEERS PLAY** a valuable role at St Mary of the Angels and have done so from the very beginning. Whether it's bringing one of the residents for a walk around the grounds or accompanying a group on a night out at the cinema, their contribution makes life better for everyone.

Patricia McGuirk volunteers at St Mary of the Angels one day a week. She used to be a senior staff nurse there and only retired last year.

"The hours were getting too long for me so I retired early," she says. "But I loved working there and still wanted to be part of the community and to give something back so I decided to volunteer."

She now visits one day a week and accompanies residents on trips off campus.

"Because I have a full driving license to drive the wheelchair bus and because of my nursing experience, I can bring residents who need to have a nurse with them - residents who have epilepsy or who need help with tak-

ing medication for example - with me on the day out," says Patricia.

"It might just be going for a cup of tea in a cafe or it could be a full day out somewhere like Dingle."

Patricia really benefits from her volunteering. "I get so much from it," she says. "The welcome I get from residents and staff when I go in is something special and it's so lovely to still be part of the team at St Mary of the Angels."

She would urge everyone to try volunteering.

"You don't even need to have a lot of time to spare," she says. "It's the quality of what you have to give, not the quantity," Patricia said.



Paul O'Connor tending to the vegetables at the St John of God Centre in Monavalley.

## Campaign to save St Mary of the Angels

**Parents and Relatives Association fight to ensure future of service**

**THE ST Mary of the Angels Parents and Relatives Association** was set up in 2016 following the announcement that St Mary of the Angels was to close in line with government policy.

"We had a meeting with staff that informed us that the government wanted to close residential units such as St Mary of the Angels and move the residents to community care," says Lynn

Fitzpatrick whose brother Bernard has lived at St Mary of the Angels for the past 36 years since he was five years old.

"This came as a huge shock

to us and we decided to try to do something to stop it from happening."

Lynn's father, Jack, is the chairman of the association and together with other families, they have led an energetic campaign.

"Since 2016, we've had lots of meetings with other families," says Lynn. "We've set up a Facebook page that has more than 6000 followers. We've had lots of media coverage. We've done so much fundraising.

"We've worked hard to make sure that everyone is kept informed of exactly what's happening and we've also had meetings with HIQA."

Those meetings have gone very well and given the

group some hope.

"They praised St Mary of the Angels, the staff and all the work that has been done to bring the place up to a high standard," says Lynn.

"They also liked the fact that families are so actively involved with life at St Mary of the Angels."

The Fitzpatrick family have always held St Mary of the Angels in high regard.

"We were in and out all of the time as children," says Lynn.

"We grew up seeing what that community was like and we have huge affection for the place. Person-centred care may be a buzzword today but it's always been true at St Mary of the Angels.

"It's Bernard's home as

much as our family home is and we would hate to see him moved from there."

The main success the association has had to date in making sure that this doesn't happen is a written undertaking from the HSE that no resident will be moved against their wishes or the wishes of their families.

"This is reassuring in a way," says Lynn. "But it's still the policy of the HSE that places such as St Mary of the Angels will be closed by 2021 and that's a worry."

The association will keep campaigning to make sure this will not happen. In the meantime, they are also focusing their energies on fundraising so that improvements can continue to be made to the facilities at St Mary of the Angels and so that it maintains its HIQA registration.

"My father and brother-in-law took part in the Ring of Kerry Cycle recently as part of an effort to raise funds so that the final few residents who still share rooms at St Mary of the Angels can now have rooms of their own," says Lynn.

She and everyone on the St Mary of the Angels Parents and Relatives Association are committed to keeping St Mary of the Angels open.

"Community care is not for everyone," she says. "There should be a choice when it comes to where people live."

"St Mary of the Angels deserves to be recognised as an excellent model of care and Bernard and the other residents deserve to continue living in what is a very special community."

Visit [www.savestmaryoftheangels.com](http://www.savestmaryoftheangels.com) to find out more about the campaign.

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# 'People of Kerry kept us going'



Sr Maura Bermingham

**SISTER MAURA** Bermingham has many happy memories of the 34 years she spent working at St Mary of the Angels in Beaufort. From the day she started in 1971 to the day she left in 2005, she gained hugely from her experience working with the residents.

"I started out as a ward sister in one of the units and later on I became a programme coordinator for residents who weren't able enough to attend the Oaktree Lodge Day Centre," she says. "For all of those years, I found it a privilege to look after our residents. I found that they taught me much more than I ever taught them. Their patience, trust, appreciation and smiles were examples to us all."

She remembers music playing a significant part in all of their lives. "We played a lot of music, especially percussion, and it was a wonderful therapy for them," she says. "I remember at one stage in the 1970s we were invited to perform for the public as part of a variety concert in Beaufort village. That was a big evening for us."

Sister Maura also has fond memories of setting up the Cáirde Centre sensory room at St Mary's. "Those facilities made such a difference to the lives of our residents," she says. "They added a new dimension to their daily lives."

One of the things the residents would do in the Cáirde Centre was to make occasion cards and especially birthday cards for their family members. "It was all about keeping them connected as much as possible," says Sister Maura.

The involvement of residents' families was another thing that Sister Maura enjoyed at St Mary's. "There was a tremendous relationship between the sisters, the very dedicated staff and the parents and relatives of the residents at St Mary's," she says. "There was great communication between us all as we worked together to give the best quality of life to our residents."

Sister Maura would like to thank the people of Beaufort and all of the various groups throughout Kerry that supported St Mary's financially and otherwise.

"People supported us with our fundraising from day one," she says. "When we started out, we had very little money and we did things like grow and sell strawberries in Killarney town and parents, friends and locals together with the staff and sisters organised events such as whist drives, garden fetes and sponsored walks and cycles. The people of Kerry always gave as much as they could and their generosity was what kept us going. We couldn't have done it without them."