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bigtimes

BIG LOTTERY FUND

How your Lottery money is transforming people's lives



In this issue

Packing a punch

Making a splash

Heart to Heart

Bigtimes Northern Ireland

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Naomi Rice, from the Immaculata Amateur Boxing Club on Belfast's Falls Road. The club recently received a grant from the Big Lottery Fund to develop classes for local girls to take part in the sport.

In this issue...

Welcome to the September 2006 edition of Big Times Northern Ireland where you can find more about how your Lottery money is transforming people's lives across Northern Ireland, through the Big Lottery Fund.

The Big Lottery Fund is having a major impact on communities throughout Northern Ireland, and earlier this year we took to the road to reveal how more than £100 million would benefit the most disadvantaged communities over the next few years.

We have already launched Reaching Communities, an £18 million programme which will support a wide range of projects that bring changes to people's lives, creating stronger communities and improved local environments.

And this Autumn two more programmes will be open for business which will boost learning opportunities for families and communities and help

communities work together to tackle health and safety issues.

This edition of Big Times tells the story of Kenneth Grey who is currently awaiting a heart transplant and has found a vital release through a walking club set up with Lottery cash from BIG.

Boxing coach Jerry Nugent also reveals how Lottery cash has helped him open up the sport to girls from the Divis area of west Belfast and Madeline Mulgrew highlights how her recovery from cancer has led her to help dozens of other people in the Tyrone area.

Also in this edition, Sadie O'Reilly reveals how Lottery cash from Awards for All helped her to set up a vital drugs and alcohol support group and keep the memory of her son Anthony alive.

All these stories and more show how the Big Lottery Fund in Northern Ireland is helping to transform people's lives.



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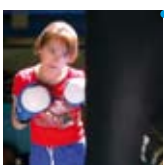
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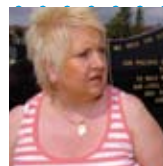
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Taking back control

A breast cancer diagnosis was the last thing busy Dungannon mum of four Madeleine Mulgrew was expecting. It has been a harrowing time for this remarkable woman but her experience has also been the catalyst for Cancer Choices, a support group she set up with a grant from the Big Lottery Fund for women coping with a cancer diagnosis.

“My diagnosis was a bloody awful shock. And not just for me. The possibility that I might have had breast cancer had never entered my head – even though my father had been diagnosed with it five

“Never underestimate the power of a rescuing hug”

years before” she said.

“I’d had a hysterectomy in October 2000 and noticed a breast change around Christmas but I put it down to the hormonal effect of the operation. It was only after a friend – who’s a doctor – said there really was a significant difference in the size of each of the breast that I went to the GP.

“It still never registered with me that I was going to get a cancer diagnosis and I went to those tests like a lamb to the slaughter with never the word ‘cancer’ in my head.”

The next few days were a roller-

coaster for the Mulgrew family who had been happily awaiting the delivery of their third grandchild.

But as they finally toasted her arrival on 1 June 2001 their joy turned to horror when Madeleine received her shocking news.

“I received my diagnosis on a Wednesday and the following Thursday I was in surgery. In one sense the short time span was good – but it didn’t give me any time to adjust,” she said.

“It was a terrible

time. People always thought I was the strong one but we were all scared. I just wanted to fall down and go to pieces but I couldn’t because I was afraid of everyone around me doing the same.

“Yet there were things I needed to say and confide – but I couldn’t burden my family with those thoughts. How do you tell your children you’re terrified you’re going to die?”

“My family were great but there’s still a sense that



Madeline with her grandson Reece Campbell

despite what you're going through you have to support them too.

You're telling your kids, 'Look I'm not going to die – I'm going to be fine' – when really you're terrified."

Madeleine's one outlet for all her fears, frustration and indeed anger was her friend Deirdre. Having been diagnosed with breast cancer eight years before, she knew what Madeleine was up against.

"The night before my operation Deirdre asked me to come over to her house. When she opened the front door I didn't know whether to kneel or lie down. Eight years before Deirdre had been at the same place as me now. She had no words for me – just what I call a rescuing hug."

And that embrace on a door step in Dungannon and the long talk they had over Deirdre's kitchen table were to be the start of something which neither of the women could have imagined that grim night.

For almost unbelievably, within just 10 doors of Madeleine and Deirdre, six women had been diagnosed with breast cancer in the previous few years.

"People were knocking on my door and saying, so you have it too? So whether I wanted to support other people or not, there was no choice," said Madeleine.

"The experience had knocked me for six, so I knew how difficult it was for these other women and the emotions they'd be trying to cope with.

"I'd had to keep up a brave face and that manifested itself in anger – I was angry that there wasn't anybody there for me with whom I could be completely honest. And that anger isn't an uncommon

experience for cancer patients.

"There's also an almost insurmountable sense of isolation for a cancer patient and it can hit you at the most unexpected times. There's just this sense that you've lost your place and your space in the grand scheme of things – in your family, your job. Everything shifts and it takes a long time to get it back and find a new space where you're comfortable.

"The reality of a cancer diagnosis is that your life changes but the lives of people around you don't and that's where the isolation lies. That's the loneliness of it."

It is that loneliness which her project Cancer Choices addresses.

"Ours was an emotional response to an emotional need," said Madeleine. "We thought our experiences of cancer would be enough but when you offer support to people they expect more. They need practical advice – they need to know how to manage their benefits during their illness, get extra money for heating or help towards travel expenses to their appointments.

"We didn't know anything about how to organise a group, or about running things through committees. When we called a meeting, 60 people would turn up at the house. We had our cancer experience but that wasn't enough. And that's when we went into training with anyone that would offer us any – the Southern Health Board, Macmillan Cancer Relief."

For a year Madeleine travelled back and forth to London to complete a course run by Macmillan which would give her the skills and contacts to turn into reality her and Deirdre's vision from around that kitchen table.

"But I felt that the scales had been balanced again: cancer had taken something from me but now I was back in control of my life.

"So never underestimate the power of a rescuing hug. When Deirdre held me that night she provided the catalyst for the formation of Cancer Choices and in doing so provided a rescuing hug for every cancer patient in Northern Ireland," added Madeleine.



Madeline pictured with friend Deirdre Duffin who gave her the inspiration to set up Cancer Choices.

Heartbreaker

Huntington Disease is an incurable genetic disorder that affects the mind and body. Lottery cash from the Big Lottery Fund has set up the Huntington's Project, a support service for sufferers and their loved ones. Pat McKay shares her heartbreaking experience of the disease that claimed the lives of her son and husband and reveals how the support service has thrown her a vital lifeline.

Pat McKay's eyes light up as she speaks about her handsome son Danny, a top grade student who loved sport.

It is a bittersweet moment for the 60-year-old Belfast woman who has experienced more heartache in the past 10 years than most people could bear in a lifetime.

Pat has watched Huntington's Disease tear her family apart, claiming the lives of her husband and her eldest son, both called Danny. Her other son Shane, 31, also carries the gene but has not shown any symptoms. Her youngest son David, 24, has not taken the test.

Huntington's is an inherited neuro-degenerative disorder that causes unsteadiness and mood swings. There is no treatment and it can take between 15 and 20 years to progress.

Pat, who is chair of the NI Huntington's Disease Association, is one of 146 families across Northern Ireland that has received support from the project ranging from advice on treatment and care to support in claiming benefits.

Pat's nightmare began in 1996 when Danny was 26 and developed problems walking. She explained: "We had no idea what lay ahead

of us. We were mostly concerned about his emotional state. When he started staying in his room we forced him to go to the doctor."

Danny underwent weeks of tests until finally the call came from the family's neurologist asking Pat to come to the hospital. "The neurologist told me that it was Huntington's," said Pat.

"Before we went to the hospital everything had been wonderful. Shane had just graduated from Queen's and my other son David was getting on great at school. I just didn't know how I could devastate four lives by telling them this awful news.

"He lived for his sons, adored them and he tormented himself for giving them this dreadful disease."

"Danny felt relief that he at least had a name for what was happening to him although at that stage we had no idea what was ahead of us. The following week my husband and I went to the clinic

to be tested but they knew just by looking at my husband that he had Huntington's.

"He didn't cope with the news well – none of us did. But my husband Danny refused to talk about it."

Over the next few years the disease began taking its hold over the family. Shane discovered that he had Huntington's in 1997 but kept it from his parents for six years.

Pat found it increasingly difficult to care for her son and husband. "I knew that there was no cure and we had to make the best of it. But I was becoming an emotional cripple – I was living and breathing this horrendous disease and could see no way out of it.

"It was hardest for my husband. It took him a long time to come to terms with it and the guilt he felt was tremendous.

"He lived for his sons, adored them and he tormented himself for giving them this dreadful disease."

"Then I found out about the Huntington's support group. The first time I went into the room I was terrified and alone but I came out of there realising there were people who were living the same nightmare as me. I can't tell you



Pat McKay with a photo of her sons Shane and Danny. Danny is on the right of the photo.

how important that was.”

In 2001 a grant of £126,236 from the Big Lottery Fund helped develop this vital support service into the Huntington’s Project, which consists of a team of three people based at Belfast City Hospital. Professor Patrick Morrison, lead consultant at the hospital, is working with project manager Rosie Dargan and secretary Marie Murphy.

Pat now works closely with the project offering advice and support to families and staffing an advice phone line all year round.

“Before the project was developed we could only spend a limited amount of time with people who have the condition and their families,” said Pat. “But the Lottery funding has allowed us to do that in an even more co-ordinated way. We can give patients and their families the vital emotional support and advice that they need.

“Getting involved with the project saved my life,” she said. “Rosie and her team’s dedication and loyalty to us are tremendous. They are the champions we need to fight our corner.”

Having the support of the project was vital for Pat when Danny’s

condition grew much worse in 2002. “Things deteriorated horribly,” she said. “Danny’s mood swings terrified me. I also knew that my other two sons were being torn apart watching their beloved big brother being ravaged by the disease.

“I’ll never forget the first time I noticed the change in Danny. The look in his eyes terrified me – it was so cold and distant, not the loving boy I knew. When I bent down to speak to him he punched me across the room.

“That was the worst time – trying to remember that the violent person screaming abuse at me was my lovely son and that it was this devil disease that was making him do these things.”

Danny died on 20 December 2003 and Pat’s husband died six months later. She only got through it with the support of the network of friends she had met at the group.

“Huntington’s is a horrendous illness as it takes away the person that you know and leaves you with a total stranger. It turned my gorgeous, sociable, heartbreaker of a son into an uncontrollable violent manchild.

“Getting involved with the project saved my life”

“It broke my husband’s heart and has left a shadow over all our lives. But I see Danny everywhere. He gives me the strength to sit down with people who are shell shocked when they first get the diagnosis and are terrified of the future. Young wives who are terrified of what lies ahead remind me so much of myself when I first got that terrible news.

“But that’s where I can help. I feel that it’s not been in vain, that I can give something to these families who are at the start of their heartbreaking journey. I can’t think of a better way to spend Lottery money – it has given us all a lifeline.

“This group is helping hundreds of people across Northern Ireland to come to terms with this awful disease and we give each other hope that someone somewhere will find a cure.”

More information

For more information call the Huntington’s Project on 028 90263982.

Hospice at home

The Hospice at Home programme, which has been developed with support from the Big Lottery Fund, has helped transform home life for Dale Eakin and his family. The eight year old suffers from Yunis Varon Syndrome, a rare genetic illness that causes chronic health problems. He needs round the clock care, but specialists from the Northern Ireland Children's Hospice take care of Dale while his parents Trevor and Jackie get much-needed rest time.

"He is thriving at school, which he just loves"

Yunis Varon Syndrome is an extremely rare genetic disorder with defects affecting the skeletal tissue, nails, hair, and teeth as well as the heart and lungs.

Because of growth impairment

before and after Dale's birth, he is just the size of a toddler. He also has severe breathing difficulties.

But against all the odds, Dale is able to enjoy lessons at nearby Glasvey Special School in Ballykelly and loves visiting a summer scheme at St Columb's Park in Londonderry.

The Hospice at Home programme provides vital support for children with life limiting illnesses and their families.

Northern Ireland Children's Hospice used a grant from the Big Lottery Fund to recruit staff and train them to provide flexible care and support in the home as well as additional respite care.

"He is oxygen dependent, needs a lot of medication and basically can't do most things for himself," said Jackie.

"But he is a happy wee boy, he loves being out and about and has really come on well. He is thriving at school, which he just loves."



Jackie's day starts at 6.30am when the nurses arrive. Once a week the Hospice at Home team drop in to give Trevor and Jackie some much needed time and space.

"All the nurses and carers are now part of the family. It is really helpful to have the same people on hand all the time.

"Dale knows them and is comfortable with them and they make such a big difference to our lives."

Dale goes to Altnagelvin Hospital in Derry every three weeks for respite with the same carers, and to NICH's Horizon House centre in Glengormley.

"It allows us to go out," said Jackie. "When Dale is at Horizon House we can go shopping or have a meal in Belfast, which we would never have been able to do before."

The Eakins live in a specially adapted home which was renovated after local fundraising.

"Dale is a very special boy and he has touched a lot of people. He was in hospital for the first four years. All this has meant that he can stay at home with us."



Dale Eakin with Hospice from Home staff Charlene Moore and Lee Robinson



Pearls of wisdom

about the way I was living.”

She lost two stone herself before she was directed to the Fermanagh Exercise Referral programme, supported by Big Lottery Fund. With the help of trainer Aoife Crudden she started to turn things around and began attending the gym at Lakeland Forum in Enniskillen.

“I had suffered from depression and I wasn’t one for going into groups so it was hard.

“But I stuck at it and lost another two stone and my blood pressure went down to normal.”

The exercise combined with healthier eating had a big effect on Pearl’s mood. “I felt great. The depression went way down, I think the exercise helped, and I started to feel brave enough to take the children swimming, which I would never have done before because I thought people would look at me.

“My husband and I began to go out for dinner, which again I would have been scared to do because of my size. It is easy to get stuck in a rut, but if you start gradually your confidence builds and you begin to enjoy it. I now am in the frame of mind to keep it up for life.”

Using a tailored exercise plan, Pearl worked on the treadmill and cross trainer, used weights and started walking.

“Aoife was brilliant, she always came round to check if you were OK, she never forgot about you

and was full of encouragement and praise. When I was big I would never go into shops, I wasn’t into fashion and dressed in a dowdy way to hide myself.

“Now I can fit into nice clothes and am confident enough to wear



them. I walk six miles a day, five days a week and I feel great. My whole outlook on life has changed.”

And Pearl’s three biggest fans – Matthew (10), Ashley (nine) and seven year old Chloe – are so pleased with their mum’s progress.

“I said to them the other day about a time when mummy was fat and they replied ‘But mummy, you were never fat!’ so it is nice to know they think of me the way I am now and not the way I was then.”

Further Information

For more information on the Fermanagh Exercise Referral programme call 028 66382171

When Pearl Moutray from Lisbellaw realised she might not live long enough to see her children grow up because of her unhealthy lifestyle, she decided to take action.

She took part in the Fermanagh exercise referral programme, developed with a grant from the Big Lottery Fund, and now has lost four stone. She is enjoying a new fit and healthy lifestyle – and her three kids are loving it.

Three years ago Pearl decided to change her life.

She had ballooned to a size 18, suffered depression and stayed indoors snacking on unhealthy foods. Her confidence gone, she was reluctant to go outside or mix with people.

Finally Pearl decided enough was enough. “I wasn’t aware of the damage I was doing,” she said. “My mum died six years ago and it took me three more years to go to the doctor. I wanted to be there for the kids so I decided to do something

Belfast's Immaculata Amateur Boxing Club, which sits in the shadow of the Divis towerblock on Belfast's Falls Road, is a by-word for excellence, thanks to its string of world champions, Olympians and professionals.

Now in its diamond jubilee year the Immaculata Amateur Boxing Club, which saw some of the darkest times in Northern Ireland's recent history, is facing one of its biggest challenges as local girls are getting in on the act.

"I don't really like the idea of girls boxing. It goes against all my beliefs!" said dad of 10 Jerry Nugent, who runs the club. "But you have to move with the times. It's come across from America – where everything starts. It's only now that Ireland's come round to thinking the same way as the rest of the world. You have to go with the flow and I suppose I'm starting to come round to it."

You have to admire this man who has held the girls at arm's length until now, despite pressure from his daughters and grand-daughters.

"I have six girls and four boys – all the boys boxed. But Deirdre, one of my daughters, used to go on at me all the time about wanting to box – yet it's only this year that we've started anything for the girls. It's her daughter Erin who's finally



getting the gloves on, as well as one of my other grand-daughters

Clodagh," said Jerry, who has boxed for a lifetime with the Immaculata.

"The first time I saw Erin and Clodagh sparing in the ring I could barely watch. It was hard, I can tell you. But it's only in the ring you see a boxer's courage and I knew then they really had it.

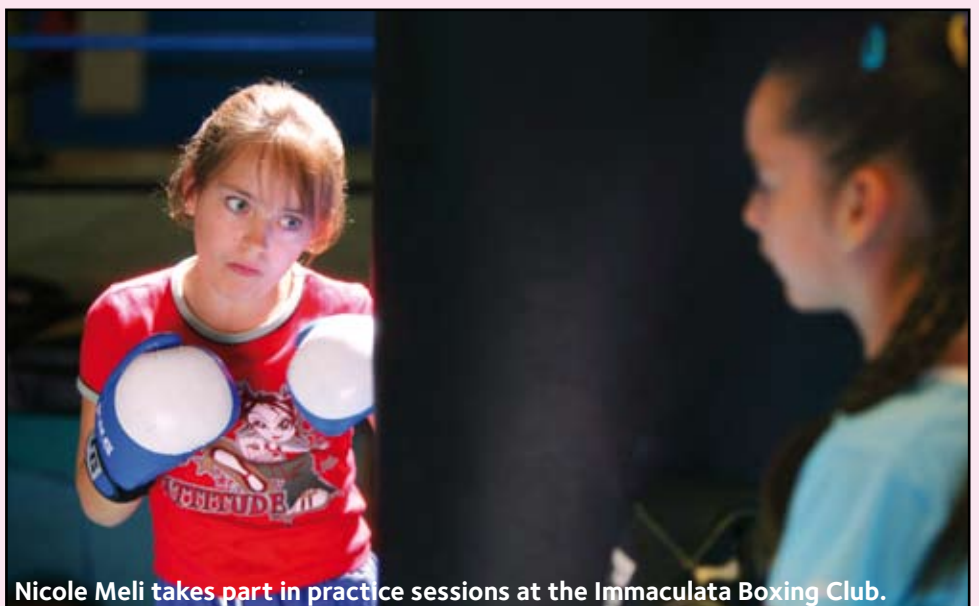
PAC A PU

"We're only entering our first competitions with the girls in Dublin later this year. Even the Irish Amateur Boxing Association is only just starting to legislate for female boxing," said Jerry.

"There are problems – basics like setting standards for the girls is difficult. You can put them in with boys but then the boys hold back and the girls take advantage.

"Setting girls' weight limits differs from the boys too because their body weight distribution is so different."

And that's why the grant from the Big Lottery Fund has been such a boost for this club which kept dreams alive for Falls Road youngsters throughout some of the



Nicole Meli takes part in practice sessions at the Immaculata Boxing Club.

KING PUNCH



city's most violent years.

"The club closed around 1970-71 – they were bad times. But then a few of us got together and got it up and running again. The Big Lottery Fund grant is the first we've ever had," said Jerry, leaning against the ring in the purpose-built premises the Immaculata now boasts.

"We raised the money for this ourselves," he said, looking around the walls which are covered in photos and certificates of the young title holders who have hailed from the surrounding streets.

"It's a brilliant sport for girls and great for self-defence"

"This club gives youngsters a focus – it gives them another way to go. Some of our boys have been to university. I'm not an educated man but I know that the focus and discipline boxing teaches pays off in education too. If they have to study then they can really dig in. The boxing is a great training for future life."

The girls' coach Kathleen Meli agrees.

"My son Alfredo, 16, was being bullied – but he's not bullied now.

He and his brother JD, 13, both box and our family has always loved boxing. They used to call me and my friends the Poleglass Cheerleaders because we were at every fight up there.

"I was bringing the boys down here every night of the week anyway and when the girls wanted to start boxing I decided I'd train to be their coach.

"It keeps the kids off the streets, especially as they get older and other ones round them are starting to get into drink and things.

"Now my youngest, Nicole, 10, is boxing. She is a pupil at St Gerard's Special Needs School in Belfast's Turf Lodge and the boxing has been great for her confidence.

"I've never boxed myself though, but I put on the body armour and let the wee ones punch me – that's about it.

"People say I must be very dedicated – but it's the kids who are dedicated. I'll come while they come."

And right now that is six days a week for young Nicole.

"Sometimes I am afraid but I've never been hurt. I think boxing's great for girls and the girls are definitely better than the boys," she said.

Jerry's grand-daughter Erin has taken Nicole under her wing.

"I've been boxing officially about a year but I've been brought up with it," she said.

"It's a brilliant sport for girls and great for self-defence but I have been scared at times. My mum can't watch me in the ring – she'd be in there after me!"

For all the sparring, though, the girls have a long way to go to match the successes of their male counterparts, but if their enthusiasm is anything to go by, they will not be throwing in the towel any time soon.



Coach Jerry Nugent helps his granddaughter Clodagh practice at the Immaculata Boxing Club.

Love hurts

Derry woman Sadie O'Reilly felt she had nowhere to turn when she discovered her teenage son had been using cannabis. But when his drug use escalated and he became the first person in his home city to die from a heroin overdose, she knew she had to do something to prevent other families suffering like she had. Lottery cash from Awards for All helped her to set up HURT – an addiction counselling and advice service.

Londonderry woman Sadie O'Reilly realises that her son Tony always had an addictive personality.

However, she could never have guessed that her healthy son would swap sports and training for cannabis, and eventually, heroin. In 1999 she found 22-year-old Tony slumped on the floor at home with a needle by his side.

He was the first person in his home city to die from an overdose of the deadly drug.

However despite the pain of losing her son and the stigma attached to his death she decided to do something to help others affected by drug and alcohol addiction.

Working from a tiny room with just a telephone and an old computer, she set up HURT (Have Ur Tomorrows), a counselling service for drug users and their parents.

Now, thanks to support from Awards for All, she has two paid staff, one part-time helper and a raft of volunteers.



The well-equipped centre offers training and alternative therapies and a website was launched earlier this year.

Tony started on cannabis at 16 or 17, and by 20, he was using heroin. Sadie said that discovering her son was hooked on drugs turned her life into a roller-coaster of fear, anger, disappointment and disbelief.

"It was something I knew nothing about, I was oblivious. I did a bit of research and left newspaper cuttings on his bed hoping he would read them, but it was no use."

"He was a different person one day, then a couple of days later he would be Tony again," said Sadie. "It was hard for the family – drugs tear families apart. You would do anything to protect your child and you forget about everything else."

Tony overdosed twice in 1998, once on the heroin substitute methadone, and Sadie tried even harder to get help. "Doctors were treating the addiction but we wanted to know what lay behind it. There was a lot of stigma attached to his addiction. People wanted to believe that there were no drugs in Derry but there were and I wanted to warn people."

In August 1999, Tony was clean for 12 weeks and seemed to have returned to his old hobbies. But despite staying off heroin for a prolonged period and re-



discovering his love of sport, Tony slipped back once again, with tragic consequences.

“Tony always had an addictive personality, he was fanatical about keeping fit. Then the drugs seemed to take over – and he always took things to the extreme.”

“He was back on it for a week before he died. He had injected pure heroin and died of a heart attack.

My husband and I found him – it was the worst day of my life.”

The following days and weeks were a blur to Sadie, but she does recall her determination to tell the truth about what happened to her son. “I thought people needed to hear, and know, that drugs were in this town.”

She said that the community’s reaction to Tony’s death stunned her. “It was strange. There were 420 cards in his coffin and there were people I had never met at the funeral, there were a lot of good people. But on the other hand, when he was using, people regarded him as a scumbag and he was judged.”

Sadie quit the job she loved as a teaching assistant for children with special needs and went through a painful period of soul searching.

“As a mother I wanted to understand what heroin does, why they like it so much, what sort of a hold does it put on people to cause so much pain and hurt. I even thought about trying it myself.

In 2003 having set up HURT Sadie rented out a room at Great James Street in the city and received her first grant from Awards for All. A second grant of £5,000 from Awards for All helped her move up a step and then a year and a half later with more Lottery cash she relocated to the current premises in Clarendon Street.

“People whose children we had helped came to volunteer and funding helped us employ an administrator. Word spread and our clientele got bigger. We started treating younger people, some 12 or 13, for alcohol and cannabis dependency.

“People appreciated that we

treated them like human beings and gave them respect.”

“We let them know that what they do is up to them but that they are hurting their families.”

At present HURT deals with 12 new visitors a day. What Sadie wants to do now is open a rehab centre.

“It would be a massive project, but I don’t give up! I couldn’t have done anything without Tony guiding me, he is here with me. I couldn’t let Tony be another statistic.

“He is driving me to help others and every time I see someone walk out that door feeling better than they did when they came in, I know I am doing something good in his name.”

Further information

For more information contact HURT on 028 71369696 or www.hurt.org.uk

My old china

When a group of Chinese and Ulster woman came together, thanks to a grant from the Big Lottery Fund, they discovered they had more to unite than divide them...

‘Same only different’ is probably the best way to describe how the women of a North Down housing estate feel about the Chinese friends they’ve made thanks to the Big Lottery Fund.

And the more time members of the Oi Yin Chinese group spend with their neighbours of the Women and Children in Breezemount group, the more they realise they have in common – as mums, daughters, wives and women.

“That’s what keeps surfacing the more we get to know each other – our similarities,” said Jean Leatham, 65, of Breezemount.

“We enjoyed a residential weekend together recently when we were asked to describe the games we played as children. We found out we’d played virtually the same things as kids – jacks, cat cradle, that sort of thing. We have families, we have children and we are all facing the same challenges, whether we’re from Breezemount or Hong Kong.”

The Breezemount women first got to know their friends from Oi Yin last St Patrick’s night when they

invited them to a party.

“We laid on Irish stew and Ulster fries and from that we’ve regularly met up to share cultures and enjoy each other’s company. The women of Oi Yin have taught us origami, Chinese writing and traditional dancing.”

“We laid on Irish stew and Ulster fries and from that we’ve regularly met up to share cultures and enjoy each other’s company”

Shirley Lung, 44, is a member of Oi Yin – which translates roughly as ‘nurturing love’. She first arrived in Northern Ireland from Hong Kong with her mother 30 years ago.

“I was scared. It was frightening,” she said. “My father had just died so it was a difficult time for us, coming to terms with that, and it was scary to think we were going to leave our home behind and go to a new country.

“We’d heard about the Troubles too and I didn’t want to see bombs – not that we did. I think I only ever remember being in one bomb-scare.”

But although Shirley was coming to live with family already settled here, her isolation was crushing.

“I didn’t speak any English so people would talk to me and I’d no idea what they were saying. It was frightening. Shirley isn’t even my real name but my sisters picked it because they thought it would be easier for Northern Ireland people to say than my Chinese name.”

However, with the support of her school at Movilla High in Newtownards, Shirley picked up the language.

“My sister-in-law has been here 15 years but she’s never really learned much of the language. It means that even when she goes to the doctor for the most personal things, she has to take her daughter to translate,” said Shirley, who met her husband Kwok Lung – also from Hong Kong – and married him in Bangor Town Hall, before a huge Chinese celebration in the family’s restaurant.



The arrival, though, of the first of their three children – Sam (22), Philip (21) and Anita (18) – brought a new set of challenges.

On the positive side Shirley knew her children would not be under the same academic pressure as they would have been in Hong Kong where, from earliest school days, they attend tutoring classes every evening. But there were other issues.

“We had discussed how we would bring up our children in Northern Ireland because we wanted them to know about their Chinese culture. We speak a mixture of both languages in the house and they all have GCSE Chinese – which makes me happy.”

In terms, though, of their cultural identity, Shirley says her children are ‘50/50’ – even though they’ve been bullied because of their race.

“Racism is something we are aware of. There are bad people who want to do crazy things – they’ll call the children names in school. I think part of the trouble is a lack of understanding – they don’t know about us, our culture, our food, our way of life.”

Mutual understanding is something Jean Leathem believes is central to the integration of cultures – and having lived in South Africa for five years she knows

what it is like to be a stranger in a strange land.

“When I went to South Africa I thought there were only two cultures – Catholic and Protestant. But those years were a great education – what struck me then and now, though, is how alike our cultures are – we all struggle at times,” she says.

But none of that can detract from the difference in values which appalled Shirley Lung about Western culture.

“I can’t believe the lack of respect that children show to older people – that’s what shocks me,” said Shirley.

Shirley, though, reckons it’s her

family’s Christian faith that has been its anchor.

“That’s what gave my children a foundation – they know the difference between right and wrong. My Christian faith gives me a template to live by – otherwise I’d lose myself,” she said.

But despite the obstacles Shirley reckons Northern Ireland is where she belongs.

“We try to get back to Hong Kong as often as we can and we have family there. But the children have never wanted to stay – it’s always just a holiday. And for me, when I say I’m going home, I mean Bangor.”





Heart to

Heart

It was New Year's Eve 1986.

Corks popped, champagne flowed, parties swung. But Kenneth Gray was oblivious as he teetered between life and death.

At just 41 the Co Londonderry father of four had suffered a major coronary which was to change his and his wife Louie's lives forever.

That New Year's Eve was to herald 20 years of deteriorating health before doctors finally placed him on a heart transplant waiting list last August. Ken is one of 104 people in the UK waiting for a new heart.

Now Kenneth and Louie keep a suitcase permanently packed. Keen travellers, their passports bear testimony to their many trips. But now, the couple can venture no further than a couple of hours from home as they await a last-minute call from the heart transplant co-ordinator of the world renowned Freeman's Hospital in Newcastle-upon-Tyne.

At just a moment's notice they have to be able to catch an air ambulance to the Freeman's – otherwise the transplant organ is useless.

"I couldn't believe what was happening that New Year's Eve," said Louie.

"Even the ambulance men said we'd picked the worst night of the year to take ill."

But civil servant Ken was back to work in three months with a clean bill of health. Just 18 months after his first attack, though, he suffered another.

"It was six weeks before our daughter Jayne's wedding. The consultant only let me go to the wedding on the proviso that I didn't give a speech or get stressed," said Ken.

A third coronary followed. By now, Ken's heart was so weak that a triple by-pass was necessary.

"I went for a blood test, but the nurse wouldn't let me leave without seeing a doctor," said Ken, undoing his top shirt buttons to reveal the outline of a little box beneath his skin.

"It's a £25,000 defibrillator," he said.

Despite all the medical intervention Kenneth's heart condition was deteriorating and his doctors decided that he should be considered for a transplant.

The couple were taken by air ambulance to Freeman's where Kenneth underwent tests to determine his suitability for transplant – though at over six feet he knows it will be more difficult to find a matching donor organ.

Just a few weeks ago, though, the couple thought the long-awaited operation was about to happen when the transplant co-ordinator called one evening at five to seven.

"The air ambulance was booked for 9.30pm and the ambulance arrived at 8.05pm to take us to the plane. I was outside in the driveway and Louie was still in the hall, checking we hadn't left any bags, when the phone rang."

It was the transplant co-ordinator to say there was a problem with the donor heart and the transplant could not take place after all.

"A couple of people have actually asked me if I've had 'a date' for my transplant. People just don't think

"People just don't think of what has to happen for me to have a transplant"



Ken and Louie Gray with from the Causeway Walking Group.

of what has to happen for me to have a transplant," said Kenneth, obviously aware of what the donor and their family have had to go through.

Yet this is about the only darker thought this pragmatic and endlessly good-humoured man voices.

But while he thinks about holidays they might enjoy after a transplant, Louie takes a step at a time and makes the most of what each day brings. When Ken's doctor, for instance, told him about a walking group, developed with cash from the Big Lottery Fund, based at the Causeway Hospital – his 'second home' as he calls it – they both signed up. Louie has even completed a training course to become a walk leader for the Causeway Health Walk Group so she and Ken have a social outlet they both enjoy.

"We've always enjoyed walking so it was good to be able to take it up again like this. One of the other walk leaders is actually a neighbour, so it couldn't be handier. Some days I feel more like it than others – but it's the sort of thing you always enjoy when you get there and you're glad then you made the effort to go.

"We walk every Tuesday in the grounds of the hospital which are really lovely. Even on wet days there's no excuse not to exercise – we just walk up and down the corridors. Our youngest daughter thinks we're mad. But there's always a cuppa in the canteen," says Ken, who has not given up yet on those travels he had planned for his retirement.

"I can't look that far ahead," said Louie. "What can you do though? You just have to get on with things, don't you?"

Making a splash

A project supported by the Big Lottery Fund is opening a new world of fun activities for people with disabilities at the Craigavon Watersports Centre.

The group from the Lisburn Assessment and Resource Centre could not have asked for better weather the day they took to the water and paddled their own canoes.

It was one of those days this summer when the sun split the stones and the Balancing Lakes at the Craigavon Watersports Centre could have been the Costa del Sol – complete with banana boats and pedallows, thrills and spills.

A session there is a great day's fun for anyone – but for this group, it means even more. Their smiles and enthusiasm said it all as they piled out of the bus and into the centre, its changing rooms lined with lifejackets and buzzing with

other youngsters giggling self-consciously in wetsuits.

"The Outdoor Pursuits for Disabled People programme has been immensely successful," said project manager Kelley Rushton from the Craigavon Watersports Centre.

By tailoring activities to suit those taking part, the project allows people with special needs to try new activities in a safe environment. The confidence they gain from fresh experiences and overcoming fears injects new impetus into other areas of their lives.

"We have one young man who came along – he had difficulties communicating, but we got to

know and understand him and he gained trust and confidence in us. The result is he's now coming along to our other activities, independently from the group. That would have been inconceivable before this scheme," said Kelley.

"On another occasion we had a granddad who took his little grand-daughter out for a sail on the lake in one of our specially adapted crafts. He loved sailing but never imagined he'd be able to enjoy it with the little girl because of her special needs.

"He had tears in his eyes when he got off the boat because he saw the enjoyment in his granddaughter's face. We've been able to open up a whole new avenue for that family."

The scheme has also benefited the centre's instructors.

"A lot of our young people wouldn't necessarily have had contact with anyone with a learning disability – there is a fear of the unknown. But now our instructors are learning different techniques for communicating – all skills which they can then take to their lives beyond the centre here."

You could talk all day about the worthiness of this programme, but what really matters is the thrill and delight of the people taking part and that was all too obvious as they donned their life jackets and headed for the canoes awaiting them by the water's edge.

Whoops and squeals filled the air – both from this party and others already enjoying themselves on the lake.

And there lies the point of it all – for at least during that hour this little group was just like any other on the lake that day... all enjoying the fresh air and sunshine, the craic and camaraderie and the thrill of



Instructor Chris Cassidy with Desmond Hassard from Lisburn Assessment and Resource Centre

Further information

You can call Craigavon Watersports Centre on: 028 383 42669



The mighty Quinn

When Gerry Quinn was selling fishing tackle from the back of his Toyota Corolla on a windswept hillside over a decade ago, he dreamt about opening a facility that the whole of his Londonderry community could enjoy.

Back in 1987, Gerry and three friends, who were all finding it difficult to find work, were looking for something to occupy their time, and decided to clean up the dilapidated reservoirs at the back of the city's Creggan estate.

Back in those days the land was a dumping ground and a magnet for anti-social behaviour. But Gerry wanted to transform it into an amenity for residents as well as something that could support him and his colleagues financially.

Along with Martin Gallagher, Malachy Coyle and Sean Semple, they started the Glenowen Fisheries Co-Op.

"We wanted to do something for the whole community, not just people interested in fishing, who were mainly men. There was a lack of facilities for young people and families and we thought that outdoor activities would be attractive to a lot of people. We had a lough and open space and we became a lot more ambitious."

So the men set up Creggan Country Park. Two grants from the Big Lottery Fund helped develop

the centre and went towards a hydro-electric energy scheme.

The park now sells electricity to Derry's flagship Millennium Forum theatre. Between 1999 and 2000 funding started to come through and a building meant that the park could operate to a much higher standard.

Cash from the Big Lottery Fund paid for paths at the park, which now attract thousands of walkers each year. The environmental improvements have meant that wildlife including sea otters, rabbits, foxes, stoats, buzzards and badgers are returning to the area.

"We serve a lot of people in the community, but not all, and that is our next challenge"

Activities include all manner of water-based sports and there is also training for young people to get them off benefits and back into work through the New Deal scheme. Indeed young people who have completed courses at Creggan Country Park are now returning as fully qualified PE instructors.

"It's been a long time but I never thought we wouldn't get there," said Gerry.

"It is great because we have given

ownership of this site and the area back to the people.

"Better management has meant that water quality has improved, we have stopped people coming up here to drink and wreck the place, and we have put a stop to illegal dumping, which was a huge problem. We also had two clean-ups over the summer."

The centre, which also now includes a restaurant, has a wide variety of users including adults, families, community groups and schools.

Gerry said that he is proud of Creggan Country Park's cross-community links.

"We have quite a large Protestant uptake and considering we are in Creggan it is quite unique," he said. "All staff are made aware that this is a neutral facility and there are no flags, football tops or emblems."

"Creggan Country Park targets as many groups as possible and we get visitors from Belfast, Antrim and Tyrone as well as Derry. Last year we had 9,000 people who booked, came and paid."

"We are looking at new activities to attract more people. We serve a lot of people in the community, but not all, and that is our next challenge."

Further Information

For more information on activities contact Creggan Country Park on 028 713 63133 or www.creggancountrypark.com

