

# **Polio Survivors Ireland**

By Lauren Kavenagh

Polio Survivors Ireland, originally founded as the Post-Polio Support Group, is the result of two ladies, Joan Bradley and Rosaleen Gallagher, who both had polio. Joan, experiencing unexplained weakness and pain, found her symptoms dismissed by doctors. Around the same time, Rosaleen had just been in the USA and had learned of a condition called Post-Polio Syndrome or Post-Polio Myelitic Syndrome. Recognizing the critical lack of awareness and support for polio survivors in Ireland, the two women resolved to take action.

In 1992/93, Rosaleen and Joan began meeting in Rosaleen's home. Unaware of how many survivors were still in Ireland, they wrote to many newspapers asking survivors to get in touch. The overwhelming response highlighted the urgent need for information and support.

Later that year, Joan connected with Jim Costello, who was receiving care at Cherry Orchard Hospital (COH). Jim helped with setting up a registered Voluntary Organization, called the Post-Polio Support Group, and a constitution was drawn up and signed. The organization's early operations were modest, run from Joan's flat or Jim's desk at COH. Jim was elected the first Chairperson of the Committee that was formed at the time, and there were seven of them involved.

In 1994, the committee used their first grant from the Polio Fellowship of Ireland to have Dr Marinos Dalakas from the USA speak at a Polio Conference they had planned, as he specialized in the Late Effects of Polio. This event also connected the group with Dr Orla Hardiman, who later established a Polio Clinic at Beaumont Hospital—a facility that is still running today.

With the foundation laid, the next need was for information to be distributed to survivors, doctors, health services, and the Government. They began lobbying, seeking media coverage, contacting health services and informing survivors and everyone they could find who might have a part to play in assisting them. Many individuals contributed to these early initiatives, laying the groundwork for the organization's future success.



### **Rebranding and Mission**

In 2017, the organization was renamed *Polio Survivors Ireland*, to better represent its mission of supporting all polio survivors, regardless of whether or not they experience Post-Polio Syndrome.

With over 30 years in existence, we are - for polio survivors by polio survivors - that's how the organization began in 1993 and how we remain today. Polio Survivors Ireland continues to work to maintain the independence of polio survivors, provide practical support to allow its members to remain active in the home and outside, and advocate on behalf of all polio survivors in Ireland. Recent efforts include presenting to members of the Oireachtas (Irish Parliament) in Leinster House on the urgent need to address the significant health inequalities faced by polio survivors.

Through decades of advocacy and support, Polio Survivors Ireland continues to maintain the dignity of polio survivors, ensuring their voices are heard and their needs are met.