



Gort Cancer Support

Supporting People affected by Cancer

Sept 23

Issue 12

Welcome to the September 2023 edition of our newsletter

The Vicky Phelan Campaign & Portrait Tour

Gort Cancer Support Group was honoured and privileged to host the Vicky Phelan Campaign & Portrait Tour in Gort, on the 22nd & 23rd September, in conjunction with the Lady Gregory Hotel.

What an amazing event this was. It was an extremely moving and emotional weekend.

Our MC for the evening, Ollie Turner from Galway Bay FM, welcomed everybody. This was followed by an opening speech by David Kelly, Chairperson of our Support Centre, who welcomed Vicky's parents, John & Gaby, her sister Lyndsey & her nephew Tyler. Sarah Nally, Cancer Patient Advocate, told her own personal story. She was diagnosed with ovarian cancer in October 2022 at the age of 26.

This sent shockwaves throughout her and her family's worlds. But despite the trauma and turmoil of the devastating diagnosis, Sarah is fighting to raise awareness for ovarian cancer in the hope that other women can feel empowered to be confident when asking for medical help.



Ollie then introduced David Brennan. David is a lifelong friend of Vicky Phelan. They grew up together in the village of Mooncoin in south Kilkenny and their families share a close bond. David and his wife Alicia were watching the Late Late Show one Friday evening when they saw the portrait being unveiled and heard about the charity auction.

When David's wife Alicia turned to him and said 'You have to buy that painting, you have to bring it home', he knew she was right.

After speaking to Vicky on a couple of occasions after the unveiling on the Late Late Show, David became aware of Vicky's hopes for the painting and he could see her vision for it.

A few weeks later, he bid at the online auction, and following several nerve-wracking minutes, he emerged as the proud owner of the portrait. He sees himself as the conduit for Vicky's wishes to use the portrait to raise awareness and continue Vicky's extraordinary legacy.

With over 200 people in attendance, you could hear a pin drop when David was unveiling the Portrait. He spoke about his life long relationship with Vicky and her family. He explained all the imagery in the portrait in great detail.



The portrait is a 'triptych'. and was created by the Irish artist Vincent Devine who based the painting of Vicky on Doonbeg Beach in the west of Ireland. He based the story of the painting on Vicky's Memoir 'Overcoming'. Vincent's aim was to convey the tragedies and the joys in Vicky's life, through symbolism in the anatomy of her body and different objects. Vincent divided the painting into three panels, Vicky's past, present, and future.

Commenting on her collaboration with Vincent, Vicky describes how she felt Vincent understood what was important to her and why, "I could see how invested he was in his work. He's very strong into women's rights and advocating for women and what I really loved was the anatomical way he painted me. I really like this idea of showing my scars. We all live with scars that nobody sees, and I thought it was a really clever way of making the invisible visible."



The left-hand panel is dominated by a powerful image of a horse whose forward motion is suddenly halted.

The centre panel dominates. The image of Vicky engages directly with the viewer. Events, both joyful and traumatic are rendered symbolically. Her outstretched right hand supports a bird, a young crimson rosella, representative of her daughter. On her left hand, her son as a sapling oak. Beneath her left foot, a colonnade represents a legal triumph while shamrocks close to her heart are emblematic of the continuous support she has received from the people of Ireland and beyond. Within her torso, invisible cancer is made visible. Her eyes are bright with strength and hope.

In the right-hand panel a horse is looking backwards, a collage of powerfully charged symbols is placed between its hind legs and forelegs. A flickering candle reminds the viewer of the fragility of life itself. Indented into the sands beneath, Vicky Phelan's footsteps leave the canvas.

Vicky collaborated with the artist throughout the process and they both agreed the painting should be situated in Doonbeg in Co. Clare, a location she describes as her favourite place on earth.

Vicky has always loved the painting for "making the invisible visible" and hoped the work will act as a "symbol of hope" for those who see it. She was unsure when first approached about the portrait but that the artist "won her over".

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The following is Vicky's message for every woman in Ireland:

***"I have a message for Mná na hÉireann,
I hope I have fought enough for your future
but now it's time for you to take the baton
and stand up for yourselves,
question everything.
This fight was for you."***



Gardening Workshops

On a very wet and blustery evening in early July, an evening only fit for the ducks, it was marvellous to have Tom Stewart, from Keane’s Garden Centre, back again in Hollyblue House for another gardening workshop.

He brought the summer feeling with him with the enormous array of plants he showed us. From telling us how to care for these plants to the correct way to take cuttings, he kept everybody captivated with plenty hints and tips on the best way to keep our flowers looking their best for the summer. He also advised on the best thrillers, fillers and spillers for our garden flower pots.



We were delighted to welcome Tom back again on 14th September with loads of advice of how and when to plant bulbs for early spring colour. Creating a really successful display requires more than just colour coordinating, it’s about getting the timings right and choosing varieties with flowering heights and differing flower forms which sit together harmoniously.

Both evenings finished with a raffle and 5 lucky people went home each night very happy with the wonderful plants they won.

“There are no gardening mistakes, only experiments.”
~Janet Kilburn Phillips





Time to say 'goodbye'

After 3.5 years, the 8th September marked Rosa Silva's last day here at Hollyblue House. With her welcoming friendly smile & constant good humour, we will really miss her around the centre. With her eye for detail & creative flair it was always great to have Rosa here, popular with everybody and so obliging at all times. Thank you Rosa for all your hard work at Hollyblue House but especially for your beautiful decorations for the centres' activities and events.

Rosa, it has been a pleasure & we wish you nothing but the best for the future. Please call in to see us when you are in Gort.

Yoga for Cancer

We were delighted to have Carol Casey of 'Ceann agus Croí' here at Hollyblue House for Yoga for cancer taster sessions on Wednesday 26th July and 23rd August.

These yoga taster sessions shared a glimpse of how yoga can support you and your body to reconnect. Researchers are now regularly showing evidence of the benefits of yoga to manage side effects and symptoms using physical movement with breath. If you are feeling anxious, struggling with fatigue, joint pain, menopause or lymphedema this can help. The class itself was planned for beginners with modifications available for anyone who fancied a challenge on the day.

These taster sessions were so successful that classes commenced on a weekly basis on 27th September.

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Breathe

Yoga Taster Session

With Carol Casey of Ceann agus Croi

Wednesday 26th July at 11am



Welcome Iryna!

We are delighted to have Iryna Rotaru join us on a TUS Scheme. Iryna is here in the centre every morning till 1.30pm and is a great addition to our team.

Iryna arrived in Gort with her daughter from Ukraine in April 2022. She has a PhD and was a lecturer at the university before having to flee, leaving her husband and family behind. Thankfully her husband was able to join her at a later date and the 3 of them are currently staying in the Convent in Gort.

Ласкаво просимо, Ірино!



Countertop Boxes

We are so grateful to all the local and neighbouring businesses who have kindly allowed us leave our countertop boxes in their premises.

With very little State funding, these boxes are a valuable source of income for us. Whether you can afford to give 50c or €5, it's all greatly appreciated.

Every donation received adds up and helps us make a positive difference. Even if you don't have a lot to spare, you could just skip one morning coffee a month and donate that regularly instead. Whatever you give, we are always grateful for any amount received.



All donations help provide supportive services free of charge to your friends and neighbours affected by a cancer diagnosis.

"The most truly generous persons are those who give silently without hope of praise or reward."

- Carol Ryrie Brink