



Jimmy Dalton (second from left) pictured with Peter Stokes, Rehab Foundation (centre) during the Rehab Foundation Respite Holiday in Cavan in 2003. Also pictured is fellow holidaymaker, Joan McGuinness, and two of the many volunteers who helped out on the trip.

Jimmy Dalton

It was with great sadness that those involved in Rehab Foundation's respite holidays learnt of the death earlier this year of their friend and fellow holidaymaker, Jimmy Dalton.

Jimmy had been a regular participant on the Rehab Foundation respite holidays since the summer of 1999, when the group travelled to Drogheda, Co. Louth. Since then, Jimmy visited many locations throughout Ireland with Rehab Foundation, including Trim, Monaghan, Mullingar and Cavan, the venue for last year's holiday.

A talented carpenter, musician and county hurler, Jimmy was just 27 years of age and engaged to be married when he was involved in a serious car crash near his home town of Castletown Geoghegan, Co Westmeath in June 1965. The crash was to

change Jimmy's life forever. Having been flung through the front window of the car, Jimmy was unfortunately moved by well-meaning bystanders before medical help arrived, and as a result was left paralysed for life.

Despite all that had happened to him in his life, Jimmy was remarkably positive. According to Rehab Foundation holiday organiser, Peter Stokes, Jimmy was a man of strong faith who accepted the cards that life had dealt him. "Jimmy was a great character. He was an intelligent man and a real entertainer who loved to chat and always had time for the many volunteers that helped out on the holidays. In his youth Jimmy represented Westmeath on

many occasions in hurling, and was a key player in the Castletown Geoghegan team that famously won the county title three years in a row. Throughout his life he retained a real passion for the sport. He particularly enjoyed trips to games at Croke Park with his good friend Frank Young, and he was there to witness Westmeath's first Leinster Championship victory in 2004."

Jimmy was never shy of taking on new challenges and in recent years he had begun to write poetry and had also started to take art classes in St Vincent's Hospital, Athlone.

To Jimmy's family and to his many friends, we extend our deepest sympathies.

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Encore Productions: actors will give drama workshops to students at Dundalk's Institute of Technology.

Encore does it again!

It seems that there's no rest for the talented, and very busy, cast and crew of Encore Productions, the Dundalk-based dedicated drama company designed to allow people with learning disabilities immediate access to the world of drama. Not content with just treading the boards, and producing high quality productions such as the hugely successful 'Wizard of Oz' and 'Strongman's Week', the cast of Encore Productions are now going to college to show others how it's done!

Starting this April, eight actors from Encore Productions will be giving drama workshops to Applied Social Care students at Dundalk's Institute of Technology.

The sessions are designed to illustrate to

students the benefits of using drama and other creative techniques when working with people with disabilities.

While for some, the thought of running a series of workshops for college students may seem a little daunting, that's certainly not the case for the cast of Encore Productions.

"The group are delighted to have the opportunity to teach others new skills, and are even more thrilled that they are going to be paid for it," says Sandy Sneddon, drama co-ordinator. "The income they raise from the workshops will go towards financing future productions. Their latest production, an adaptation of the 'Hound of Ulster', has already been recorded as a radio drama on Dundalk FM and will be performed at Dundalk's May Town Festival."

If that wasn't enough, the cast of Encore Productions have also recently produced a short film on RehabCare as part of the County Media Festival, and will be starring in a separate feature film that involves both the Louth Youth Federation and Louth's

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own film-maker in residence. While the title and content of the film remains a secret, there can be no doubt about the quality of the end product. As the students of Dundalk Institute of Technology will soon find out, Encore Productions are always top of the class!

A new National Learning Network programme is helping people get back on their feet after serious illness.

Each year thousands of Irish people are discharged from hospital following a major medical setback or having acquired a physical disability. Medically stable, they return home to their families, but not necessarily to the life they lead before. It can be a traumatic period as people try to come to terms with the impact that an illness or physical disability has had on their relationships with family and friends, and on their career and lifestyle.

Until recently, very little support has been available to help people who have had a major medical setback or acquired a physical disability to adjust to the huge changes that have occurred in their lives and to begin to move forward. However, delegates at a special one-day seminar in Tallaght Hospital last January have heard how an innovative pilot programme at National Learning Network's centre in Tallaght is beginning to address this deficit.

Funded by the Health Service Executive, the Connections Programme was launched in September 2003 following research conducted by National Learning Network (then NTDI). As part of the research, individual patients and staff at Tallaght Hospital, including social workers, occupational therapists and physiotherapists, were surveyed on the need for a programme to help people through the difficult period following serious injury or illness. The findings of the research formed the basis of the Connections Programme, which according to instructor, Ann Marie McDonnell, assists individuals in identifying their own needs and goals, and then helps them to achieve their objectives by opening up opportunities in education, training and employment.

According to Ms McDonnell, a key element of the programme's success is the establishment of links with existing community groups and services. "The Connections programme offers a safe environment for people who have suffered a major health set-



Connecting People

back to try new activities and explore new opportunities. By establishing links and interacting with the local community, participants on the Connections programme are able to access the many services and supports that local community groups provide outside of the National Learning Network centre. This ensures that the programme participants have a support network in place

when they complete the six-month Connections programme."

Personal development skills, managing change, first aid, manual handling and computer skills are among the core modules of the Connections Programme. In addition, career exploration and job-seeking skills form an important element of the programme, particularly as many of the partici-

**Pictures:**

Left: Susan Tormey; Victoria Hayes; Christy McKeon; Regina O'Connor, guest speaker at the event and past participant of the Connections programme; John Padden, and Charlie O'Connor TD at the Connections Programme seminar in Tallaght Hospital.

Below:

Ann Marie McDonnell (centre), instructor with Connections programme, National Learning Network Tallaght, pictured with Olga Hill and Margaret McGrath from Tallaght Hospital at the Connections one-day seminar which took place last January in the Hospital.



pants on the course need to reassess their lifestyles and careers following a major medical setback. The flexible nature of the Connections programme means that while there are a number of core modules, the course content can change depending on the individual needs of the participants and also

on the group dynamic. "The participants themselves bring so much to the Connections Programme," says Ms McDonnell. "They not only support and encourage each other, but their ideas, skills and experience have also really enhanced the programme content. For example one of

our participant's was a keen golfer and he ran a six week pitch and putt class. Another participant is an expert gardener, and she organised a number of gardening classes for the group. These classes not only offer participants the opportunity to try new activities and learn new skills, but also give those organising the classes a huge boost in confidence."

Unlike many other training programmes, there is no traditional set outcome from the Connections Programme. The end goal is to assist each individual in moving forward and entering a new stage of their life. For some participants this involves health and social gains, such as taking up a new leisure activity, doing voluntary work or learning a new skill.

According to Ms McDonnell, many past participants have used the Connections Programme as a stepping-stone to go on to further study. "Development Studies, Computer Aided Design, Psychotherapy and Counselling are just some of the courses Connections participants have enrolled in since finishing the programme. Others have re-entered the workforce in a variety of careers, and two former participants have even gone on to set up their own businesses, one in photography and the other giving classes in rap music to school children. The opportunities are really endless."

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