

SPOKE OUT

SPOTLIGHT ON:

Johnny Mulhall

Budget '26 - what does it mean for you?

OTHER FEATURES:

Disability language,
Documentary premiere,
Remembering Turlach & more

Hello readers, Autumn has well and truly arrived and for IWA-Sport it is a very exciting time with both the Irish Wheelchair Rugby team and our Irish Powerlifters competing in international competitions, and we couldn't be prouder!

In this issue we catch up with Irish Wheelchair Rugby Captain Johnny Mulhall who talks to us about the battles he has overcome to get back on the court for the "Wheels in Green" and his story is one you won't want to miss.

Budget day was on Tuesday but what's in it for people with disabilities? Our National Advocacy Manager Joan Carthy has been keeping a close eye on it all.

We're also talking about something else that is really important – the words we use when talking about disability. We recently asked our members what matters most when it comes to language, and we're sharing some of the key takeaways.

On a sad note, we've a special tribute inside to Turlach Cotter, a much-loved IWA member and wheelchair basketball legend, who sadly passed away in September.

Finally, a massive thank you to everyone who got involved in our Annual Fundraising Day! Whether you donated, volunteered or helped spread the word – we couldn't have done it without you.

Enjoy the read,

Marie.



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Spotlight on Johnny Mulhall

European Promotion in sight after a long road to recovery for Johnny.



As Ireland head to Skien, Norway to compete in the European Championships, Division C, *Spoke Out* caught up with long-time Wheelchair Rugby player, Johnny Mulhall, who has been named Irish Captain.

After a life-changing accident in 2012 that left him as a quadriplegic, Johnny began his recovery at the National Rehabilitation Centre (NRH). It was there that he also began his journey into the world of Wheelchair Rugby.

Johnny said: "I got involved in Wheelchair Rugby while still a patient in the NRH after being invited to try it out by Ger Scully, an ex-international player while he was in the rehab giving a talk. After my first training session I was hooked and never looked back."

Intense Sport

Wheelchair Rugby is a physical and intense sport but that spurs Mulhall on.

"It was the physicality, the team element, and the fast pace. Wheelchair Rugby demands resilience, tactical awareness, and commitment – values I already would have been using prior to my injury. Other sports gave me exercise, but Wheelchair Rugby gave me purpose. It's the only sport that truly felt like "me".

Johnny has been around the globe representing Ireland at numerous competitions including the World Championships in Australia, European Championships in Italy and Norway. Also, at club level playing at the prestigious Bernd Best Turnier in Cologne, Germany. It's something that any athlete would dream of achieving for their country and club.

A part of those hair-raising moments that embed themselves into Johnny's memory is pulling on that Ireland jersey and hearing *Amhrán na bhFiann* echo around the hall before the start of a game.

He told *Spoke Out*: "Pulling on the Ireland jersey and hearing the national anthem is always a standout moment. Representing your country is the highest honour. At club level, competing in Europe with Leinster and proving we could hold our own against top teams has been just as special."



Johnny Mulhall and Chris Meneilly

In 2024, due to complications after an ileostomy procedure, Johnny spent a long time on the sidelines and at one point it felt like he might have never return to Wheelchair Rugby.

“Yes, there were times I questioned whether I’d get back. Being sidelined that long brings doubt, and I wondered if I’d ever return to the same level. The operation was major, and I faced complications straight away. Living with an ileostomy meant adapting to a completely new daily routine.” he said.

“I couldn’t have made it through without the support of my family, friends, and the Wheelchair Rugby community. I couldn’t have got through it without them but ultimately it was my own determination that drove me — I wasn’t willing to let that setback define me, and I fought my way back to this level.”



Wheelchair Rugby star Johnny Mulhall

October 10th is International Mental Health Awareness Day and a recent report by Movember’s Real Face of Men’s Health found that four in five deaths by suicide are male. Johnny has learned that when facing difficult times, it’s a strength to speak out and lighten the burden.

“My advice is simple: don’t keep it all in. Speak to someone you trust — whether that’s a teammate, family, or a professional. Living with challenges, both physical and mental, can feel overwhelming, but sharing makes the weight lighter. I’ve learned that asking for help is not weakness, it’s strength. Look after your mental health the same way you train your body — with consistency and care.”

The Irish Wheelchair Rugby squad have been working hard in preparation for the European Championships where they’ll be aiming to gain promotion to Division B over hosts Norway and South Africa

Johnny revealed: “Preparation has been intense but positive. We’ve been working on fitness, strategy, and most importantly, building trust on court. The squad is hungry, and that hunger is showing in every session. After what I’ve been through, just being part of this journey again means everything to me.”

Securing promotion to Division B would be huge for the game in Ireland

“It would be massive,” he said. “Promotion would show that Ireland belongs on a bigger stage and would put our sport in the spotlight back home. Success at international level inspires the next generation, brings new players in, and gives momentum to clubs around the country. This is about more than one tournament — it’s about building the future of Wheelchair Rugby in Ireland.”

Having gained so much from the game of Wheelchair Rugby, Johnny encourages others to copy his journey and get involved!

“Give it a go. It’s not just about the sport — it’s about the friendships, the confidence, and the sense of belonging it gives you.

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“It will push you, but it will also reward you in ways you can’t imagine. Taking that first step is the hardest part, but once you do, you’ll understand why so many of us are hooked”, he said.

Irish Wheelchair Rugby compete at the European Championships, Division C from October 8th-12th in Skien, Norway.

IWA-Sport will be bringing you the latest updates from the tournament and providing links to watch the competition as it unfolds.

Advocacy

*Budget'26 Reaction from Joan Carthy,
National Advocacy Manager*



We are utterly disappointed in the failure of the Government to provide for a permanent cost of disability payment in Budget '26.

We know that this coupled with the absence of once-off support payments and extra bonus payments this year, will really hit disabled people financially, with IWA estimating that some people with disabilities will be €1,614 worse off, pushing many further into poverty.

For too long people with disabilities have lived in poverty, and with the impact of the extreme rise in the cost of living on top of the cost of disability, we know that people are being forced to make choices on whether they eat or keep warm.

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IWA's National Advocacy Manager, Joan Carthy being interviewed on RTE on Budget Day

In the last few years we have seen our winters become more severe. There is no long-term strategy from the government to alleviate the pressure, and the removal of the electricity credits means that people will lose out on that €250.

While IWA acknowledges the €10 increase to the Disability Allowance, it falls way short of the €78 rise recommended in IWA's Pre-Budget Submission from €244 to €322. This would bring this in line with the standard poverty line figure. IWA had also sought for the winter fuel allowance to be extended to 52 weeks of the year, for those with a disability, but again this has not happened.

IWA has advocated for a permanent disability payment over stop-gap temporary measures but to have neither in this Budget is a huge blow, and a real cause for concern.

At the moment, it is unclear of any provision for the implementation of the National Human Rights Strategy for Disabled People.

IWA vows to continue to put a spotlight on these and many more issues at government level to hold them accountable.

If you would like to share how the budget has impacted you, please get in touch with us by email at news@iwa.ie or on WhatsApp at 087 773 7371.

Joan Carthy,
National Advocacy Manager,
Irish Wheelchair Association

Fundraising

The Power of Participation: What schools can do to support IWA



At Irish Wheelchair Association, we know that every donation counts—but the support we receive from schools across the country is more than just financial.

This support brings energy, creativity and a deep sense of community spirit that fuels our mission to create an Ireland where people with disabilities can enjoy equal rights, choices and opportunities.

Among the many ways schools support IWA, one of the most vibrant and impactful is by registering to take part in our *Wear It Your Way* campaign. This unique fundraising initiative gives students the chance to express themselves while making a difference. Whether it's donning their favourite sports gear, dressing up as a superhero or choosing themed colours for the day, *Wear It Your Way* puts fun and inclusivity at the heart of giving back.

Wear It Your Way raises vital funds for our work with people with disabilities and also helps raise awareness of disability issues among young people. For many schools, the event becomes a learning opportunity that connects students with the wider world encouraging empathy and understanding – as well as raising money.



Ciaran McDonagh, IWA Community & Events Coordinator with students from Ardscoil La Salle from Raheny who took part in *Wear It Your Way* earlier this year.

One of the areas of IWA's work that our [Wear It Your Way campaign](#) supports is our School Leavers Service and young members like Eoin from Galway who embraces all that the programme has to offer.

The IWA Galway's School Leavers Programme organises a wide variety of activities and programmes for members, based on their interests and abilities. Current activities include swimming, squash, a drumming programme, bowling and cooking lessons.



Alongside staff, the members also contribute to the upkeep of the centre and have jobs around the centre such as filling and emptying the dishwasher and making tea. Members are also supported to undertake work experience and get part-time jobs in their local communities.

Eoin says: "Since I started with IWA, I've been to places I've never even thought about. And now I say 'Wow, now I know I can do that.'"

The *Wear it Your Way* campaign has seen incredible engagement from primary and secondary schools nationwide. We are constantly inspired by the creativity and compassion that schools bring to their fundraising efforts. Whether they raise €50 or €5,000, they are supporting our important work.

"Schools play a vital role in the success of our fundraising campaigns – especially initiatives like *Wear It Your Way*. Their energy, creativity and sense of community bring something really special to our work. It's not just about raising funds. It's about raising awareness and creating connections. When schools get involved, they're helping to build a more inclusive and supportive society for people with disabilities. We simply couldn't do what we do without them." says Ciarán McDonagh, Community Fundraising Coordinator

As we look ahead to another exciting year of *Wear It Your Way*, we hope to see even more schools join the movement, celebrate individuality and stand in solidarity with our members. Together, we can continue to build a more inclusive future for all.

If you or your school would like to find more ways to support Irish Wheelchair Association, please visit the [Wear it Your Way page](#)

The importance of language and words in relation to disability

Key preferences identified in IWA consultation

British Wheelchair Association (IWA) recognises the importance and power of words and language in our work.

Language is so important. They can influence the way we think about ourselves, our work and the way wider society perceives and treats people with disabilities.

The language and words used in relation to disability are very important. Current language has developed over time, with preferences in terminology reflecting the way in which disability is understood e.g.: models of disability such as the Medical Model and Social Model. While there is no universally agreed consensus on terminology regarding disability, with many diverse opinions, use of appropriate language is fundamental to the dignity and respect of people with disabilities.

Being cognisant of the evolution of language used and the most appropriate language to use within the organisation, we consulted with the people within the IWA through a mixture of one to one in person meetings, group sessions and an online survey to our membership. Our guiding ethos is that we should be guided in everything we do by our members and people with disabilities. Therefore, the language we use must reflect your preferences on what is most appropriate and respectful.

Watch IWA's Language Project Video



Overall, we received 996 responses which shows how much people care about this issue. Key to the findings is that personal choice must be respected. We should always use a person's name, not objectify, place them in boxes or assign labels. We are people first. But, at times, the need to provide context is recognised and

understood. There is also a fear that in becoming too prescriptive about the words we use, we may create a sense of fear of using an incorrect term which may result in people engaging less or not at all.

That said, some key preferences include:

1. That IWA uses person first terminology 'People with Disabilities' whilst respecting the use of identity first by members and other organisations
2. That 'Member' is the preferred term in IWA for the people who avail of our services. There is a notable dislike of the term 'Service User' which people feel is based on a medical model, is impersonal and does not reflect a social model approach
3. That 'Requirements' is preferred to the term 'Needs' with people feeling 'Needs' gives an inference of a one-sided transaction
4. The preferred description of our work is 'Support' which is delivered through 'services and assistance'

For more details on what you told us, [please have a look at our "Language in IWA" video](#). It is important to remember that this will be an ongoing process as preferences around language will evolve over time. IWA is committed to ensuring your views are reflected in what we do and how we do it and we will keep this matter constantly under review.

Turlach remembered at Junior Wheelchair Basketball Blitz

Players, coaches and supporters at IWA's recent Junior Wheelchair Basketball Blitz in Clontarf observed a minute's silence in memory of one of their own – Turlach Cotter from Co Louth who sadly passed away on September 15th last

Turlach Cotter

One of the founding members of North East Thunder Wheelchair Basketball Club, Turlach put his heart and soul into his beloved club, wearing many hats including assistant coach, player, secretary, and sccc representative.

But to the members of the club Turlach, or T as he was known to his basketball buddies, was much more than those hats. He was a true friend to every member, someone who you could speak to about anything, and he always had great advice, with a witty comment to go along with it! His smile could light up a room, his booming laugh would echo and leave you stitches.

Turlach was full of mischief and wanted nothing but to make others smile and feel good. He always put the team's needs before his own and had an incredible way of making everyone feel valued. His leadership style was inspirational, he always wanted to get the best out of those around him and in his own way made sure he did.

Friend and coach of North East Thunder's junior team, Katie Byrne was unsure about whether to play in the blitz, coming just two weeks after Turlach's death, but deep down she knows that it was what T would have wanted.

"He just loved the club and the game, and he would have wanted the junior players to be here enjoying themselves. The minute's silence was a lovely tribute to him."

The Dundalk based club will be lasting legacy to Turlach with the new kids on the block in the junior section gaining so much from having a club to call their own and being able to participate in the sport.



Turlach Cotter

One such player is Archie Cunningham, aged 10, who when asked what he likes most about playing wheelchair basketball and his club his response was 'everything'.

"I love going to training, it is really good fun and I've made good friends. I really enjoy the games even though some teams are tough. I was really looking forward to today."

Archie's mam Debbie said that being involved in North East Thunder has given her son the opportunity to meet other children who are also in wheelchairs and also the chance to play sport. "He just loves it and has made good friends. It's nice also for parents to be able to talk to other families who are in the same situation as you."

Success Story

A huge success story, North East Thunder's junior wheelchair team comprises over 20 young players who train in Dundalk Sports Centre every Friday from 7-8.30pm. "We have members with different types of physical disabilities and then some of their siblings play too which is fantastic," explained Katie.

"I'm here 13 years and it is not just about wheelchair basketball, it's about the social interaction, the building of mobility, strength and conditioning as well then as the development of wheelchair basketball skills. There is a huge fun element too, if you don't have fun you won't keep the kids. New members are always welcome."

She added: "Many wouldn't have sport if not for our club and for some their only outlet outside school is wheelchair basketball. They find their people here, there is a real element of family. We support each other outside of wheelchair basketball," she added



Archie Cunningham and his mum Debbie



North East Thunder Wheelchair Basketball Team

Looking forward, the club will work towards keeping Turlach Cotter at the heart of everything it does.

“T spoke openly about his mental health and was in many ways a role model for those who had mental health difficulties, people from all over the basketball league looked up to Turlach and he was there as a sounding board for anyone who needed support,” said Katie.

“Throughout his years playing basketball, he made true friends throughout the country, who he always spoke fondly of.

“Our kid” there will always be a missing piece in our team, however we promise to make you proud of us, we will ensure all your hard work, and effort continues. We will all hold you closely in our hearts forever and always.”

*Remember Kid,
There's heroes and there are legends,
Heroes get remembered,
But legends never die*

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Volunteers

Killarney Volunteers making a difference



In this month's Spoke Out we are delighted to shine a light on two amazing volunteers from our Killarney Branch, who share what it's like to be part of the IWA family and the joy they've found in giving their time.

Joan Toomey

For 15 years, Joan Toomey has been a dedicated and vital part of the IWA Killarney Volunteer Branch, generously giving her time as a volunteer driver. Her connection to the IWA, however, goes back nearly 30 years, rooted in a deep, personal bond with her sister and the community that supported her.

Joan's journey with the IWA began through her late sister, Eilis, who was a member. Joan first got involved by helping with church gate collections, but her role deepened significantly over the past 15 years.

When Eilis passed away three years ago, the thought of returning was difficult. Joan said: "It was hard for me to get back. "But all the people encouraged me to stay involved, and I am happy that I did."

That encouragement from fellow members and staff highlights the close-knit community she had helped build, and her decision to stay is a testament to the strength of those bonds.



Joan Toomey

The Joy of the Journey

As a volunteer with a bus licence, Joan is instrumental in helping members enjoy trips and outings. For her, the reward is found in the shared moments of fun and friendship.

"I look forward to meeting members, to go for the trips"

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"There is craic and laughter, so the social aspect is very important." It's this sense of connection and equality that she cherishes most. "We all know each other very well and I can do things for other people even if I am not a qualified nurse – I can help them and be with them. We are all equal. I really enjoyed that it helps me

with my confidence.”

Noel Kenny

As the current Chairperson of the IWA Killarney Volunteer Branch, Noel Kenny has been officially volunteering since 2011. However, his connection to the organisation is lifelong, shaped by family and a deep-seated sense of community from his earliest years.

Noel’s story with the IWA is unique. “I was there since I was born because of my uncle, Mícheál Kenny,” he says.

Mícheál was not only the chairman of the Killarney branch but also one of its founding members. For Noel, the IWA was a constant and positive presence throughout his life.

“I grew up with the IWA branch in the background, going to Christmas parties with my uncle,” he recalls. This early exposure instilled in him the values of community and support, paving a natural path for him to become formally involved as an adult and to eventually take on a leadership role himself.

For Noel, volunteering is about meaningful action and genuine connection. He thrives on creating opportunities for members to get out and enjoy themselves, living up to his self-described “hands-on” approach.

“Volunteering for IWA has a purpose – a meaning behind it, there is a lot of friendship here,” he explains.

Whether he’s taking members fishing or accompanying them on holidays and days out, Noel finds immense satisfaction in the shared experiences.



Noel Kenny

“When we go for days out or for a holiday I enjoy that a lot”.

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His passion for doing things with and for the members is what makes his contribution so impactful.

When asked what he would say to others about volunteering with the branch, his sentiment is simple and heartfelt: “It is a great place to volunteer.”

Members Premiere Their New Documentary in Gorey

Members from IWA's Wexford Young Adults Programme attended the premiere screening of their new documentary last month, which took place in Movies @ Gorey cinema, followed by a reception in the Amber Springs Hotel, Gorey.

The documentary, 'Ireland Through the Ages' is set in the Wexford's popular Irish National Heritage Park. It takes viewers on a journey through the Wexford open-air museum, which tells the story of human settlement in Ireland spanning 9,000 years.

The film is presented and narrated by the Young Adults Programme, based in Ballycanew, and members worked in front and behind the camera to bring the project to life. What is unique about 'Ireland Through the Ages' is that for the first time the story of this popular national tourist attraction is told through the voices and perspective of people with disabilities.

Clyde Cash is a member of the group who worked on the documentary, and he presented one of the sections in the film. He said the premiere day was a real success. "It was a great day. I was really surprised by what they had done." He hadn't seen the final edit of the documentary until the premiere, so he was impressed by how it all turned out. "I was very surprised by it. It was very good."

The premiere was an opportunity for members, friends, family, staff and sponsors to celebrate all the hard work and what the group has achieved.

Mary Butler is Programme Leader of the Young Adults group in Ballycanew and she said there was a lot of planning and organising to create the documentary. "A lot of [members] are very into digital stuff and movie making, so they decided that they would like to create a documentary," she said.



L-R Conor Cahill, Annette Barnes, Clyde Cashe and Dan Morris pictured during filming for the documentary 'Ireland Through the Ages'.

Mary said once the group was approved to receive the grant from Wexford County Council through the Artist in the Community Scheme they decided to film a history documentary. "They said they would like to film in the Heritage Park, if possible and research an area through time in Ireland, hence the name, Ireland Through the Ages."

Michael Benson, a local videographer, collaborated with the group to support the members with the documentary. Michael is an award-winning filmmaker, who works in Ireland and internationally, so his expertise was invaluable to the group.

"Michael tutored them on how each shot is set up and how the camera worked – and with his guidance he helped to get each shot ready," according to Mary.

"We acted like a tourist guide in the film" according to Clyde, "I was looking after the farmers' houses and how they used to be years ago. It's very interesting. We got a tour of the park first," explained Clyde "and then we worked up five different things to look at in the film- like the farmers' houses, the boats and the graveyard."

While some members got very involved behind the scenes working on the editing process to bring the project to life, Clyde focused mainly on his presenting part, "I'm just the talent," he joked.

After filming was complete, Michael returned to the group to take them through the long editing process of film making. "Michael came to Ballycanew and set up the editing equipment and explained it all," said Mary.

"They each got a chance to edit a part of the documentary, and they all had complete say on what was left in and what was taken out – that was fantastic," Mary added. "It was all their choice, everything they wanted to do down to the elements of what they were speaking about and what they wanted to film."

Clyde says he enjoyed learning new things during the project. He learned about talents he had that he had never realised before, particularly presenting in front of the camera. "I was surprised at myself, I couldn't believe I just did all that with the camera on me" he says. "It was amazing. It was nerve-wrecking at first but then you just get used to it."

The project was supported by the Artist in the Community Grant from Wexford County Council and with thanks to Michael Benson.



IWA members and staff pictured with film maker Michael Benson and Una Cahill, Wexford County Council at the premiere of 'Ireland Through the Ages' at Movies @ Gorey

Thanks for your company

If you like what you're reading, please spread the word!

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Remember:

Your voice, your choice! We're all ears for your feedback, thoughts, and suggestions.

Share what topics intrigue you the most and what you'd love to see in future magazine features.

SPOKE OUT

SpokeOut is Irish Wheelchair Association's lifestyle magazine published every month for our members.

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