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Councillor's cycle of awareness

Cllr Liam Brazil has once again presented the funds from his successful Mental Health and Suicide Awareness Cycle to the Suicide or Survive (SOS) charity which is providing important services in Waterford.



Cllr Liam Brazil with his wife Marie presenting a cheque for €8,000 to Val Duffy and Caroline McGuigan of Suicide or Survive (SOS).

A COUNTY Waterford charity cycle has been praised for generating significant funds for a mental health and suicide awareness charity.

The 50k Mental Health and Suicide Awareness Cycle, which is organised by local Fine Gael Councillor Liam Brazil, takes place on Easter Sunday each year and has become a popular annual fixture.

The route, which begins and finishes at Crotty's Inn, Leamybrien, encompasses scenic areas of Mid County Waterford including the Copper Coast.

A 30k route is also available for participants each year.

Cllr Brazil, who is a passionate promoter of positive mental health and suicide awareness, is thrilled that the cycle was such a success once again this year.

Since the event's inception, more than €30,000 has been raised for the Suicide or Survive (SOS) charity.

Over 300 people participated in the 2018 event which raised a hugely impressive €8,000.

Last week, the charity's founder and CEO Caroline McGuigan visited Waterford and accepted a cheque from Cllr Brazil.

She explained that the funds will help enable the continued delivery of SOS services here

in Waterford.

SOS events, which are staged at The Park Hotel in Dungarvan, have proven hugely successful and beneficial in the past.

The SOS Wellness Workshop is a one day workshop aimed at helping people to take charge of their own mental health.

It allows participants to take time out and learn a wide range of practical tools and tips which they can use in their everyday life to improve their own wellness.

The workshops are delivered in an informal and relaxed setting and are facilitated by people with experience of mental health difficulties and people with experience of working in various mental health arenas.

"The workshop is a really practical one day investment in your mental health which is delivered in a way that's jargon free," explained Caroline.

Meanwhile, the Wellness Recovery Action Plan (WRAP) is a two and a half day programme held over a three week period which helps participants to develop their own personally tailored Wellness Action Plan which can be used on a day-to-day basis to manage their wellness.

Caroline is encouraging all those who support Cllr Brazil's cycle to avail of the programmes in order to experience the benefits themselves.

"They are for everybody and people will be pleasantly surprised by them," she said.

On November 8th a one day Wellness Workshop catering for around 50 people will take place in The Park Hotel, Dungarvan, with the Wellness Recovery Action Plan taking place in the same venue on November 17th and 24th and December 1st.

Caroline says there is fantastic feedback to all of the services which are offered by SOS.

She takes pride in adopting a hands-on approach and uses her own personal experience of mental health issues to help others, emphasising that she doesn't want to lead the organisation from an "ivory tower".

"We don't claim to know what's best for everybody. We take the approach that people have the tools within themselves - they just need to add to those tools and build awareness," she explained.

Reflecting on the success of the charity cycle, Cllr Brazil thanked everyone who participates in the event and lends assistance year.

"There are so many people that make the day happen each year," he said.

"The cycle will continue as long as people support it. It's all about creating awareness around County Waterford about mental health and suicide and spreading the message that people can get help."

Val Duffy of SOS has participated in the cycle and said she was "absolutely blown away by the spirit and camaraderie" on display as well as the warm welcome.

"Liam made it look effortless," she said.

The event is made possible thanks to the support of many people within Cllr Brazil's local community as well as his family and friends.

His wife Marie has been instrumental in assisting to organise and stage the cycle each year.

She says the event is a fantastic display of community spirit.

"We have a brilliant team that come on board on the day," she explained.

is something which is very precious.

She highlighted the importance of the "ripple effect" which this creates and praised the participants and volunteers.

She also commended Cllr Brazil's "infectious passion".

"When you have people like that in your community, anything can happen," she said.

Even though he is part of Fine Gael, Cllr Brazil says the government is not doing

"I'm not naïve enough to think we can help everyone who is affected by mental health. People will have to come forward themselves and seek help. I personally believe that if you do seek help, the help is out there."

He added: "People are talking more freely, especially young people. Things are changing big time but we still have an awful long way to go."

He believes that managing mental health is a subject which should be on every school curriculum.

Among the many activities of SOS are talks in schools aimed at educating young people about the importance of minding their mental health.

"It's important to inform young people that there will be times when they will be so overwhelmed that they'll want to shut things off," explained Caroline.

"A lot of people want to kill off the despair and pain. We need to help them find supports so they don't have to shut it off with suicide."

Cllr Brazil is keen to continue his campaign surrounding mental health and suicide awareness and can certainly be proud of all that has been achieved to date.

He has delivered many impressive and deeply personal speeches on the issue where he has recalled his own family's experiences in the aftermath of the untimely death of his brother James.

Coming from a rural area himself, Cllr Brazil is keenly aware of the issues which face many people who are living in isolation.

Kilrossanty GAA was one of the first clubs in the country to step out and proudly support positive mental health and mental health awareness with their new jerseys which were sponsored by Cllr Brazil.

He has spoken extensively about mental health issues at meetings of Waterford City & County Council and has organised successful conferences in Dungarvan which have addressed issues around mental health and suicide.

Waterford is certainly fortunate to have a local representative who displays such enthusiasm and passion for such a difficult subject and hopefully his charity cycle will continue to be staged for many years to come.

For more information on Suicide or Survive visit www.suicideorsurvive.ie, email info@suicideorsurvive.ie, LoCall 1890 577 577 or 01 272 2158.



Cllr Liam Brazil pictured during this year's Mental Health and Suicide Awareness Charity Cycle on Easter Sunday.

"Locals bake for us and businesses provide sponsorship. Many volunteers come out and stand at crossroads, no questions asked."

She says the event also showcases the importance of meeting people and socialising face to face instead of staying indoors and online.

This is something which Caroline McGuigan wholeheartedly agrees with.

"Social media has a place, but as human beings we need that human connection," she said.

"The SOS workshops are phenomenal, but do not underestimate the impact of 300 people coming together on Easter Sunday. That gathering is just as powerful and

enough to support young people who are facing mental health difficulties.

"Caroline and the likes of Pieta House are doing fantastic work. The government should use their work as a template. If young people are suffering with their mental health, A & E is not the place end up," he said.

Cllr Brazil is glad that people can see that the funds raised are coming back into Waterford through the delivery of SOS services.

"SOS has been very good to me and the people of Waterford. I've rung Caroline several times about young people who were self-harming and she has spoken with them and helped them," he said.



Val Duffy and Caroline McGuigan from Suicide or Survive (SOS) accepting the proceeds from Cllr Liam Brazil's 2018 Mental Health and Suicide Awareness Charity Cycle.