**IMMEDIATE RELEASE – WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 17th 2018**

**PIONEER OF DEMENTIA ADVOCACY HELEN ROCHFORD BRENNAN RECEIVES HONORARY DEGREE FROM NUI GALWAY**

**HUMAN RIGHTS AND SOCIAL JUSTICE CAMPAGINER WANTS DEMENTIA-SPECIFIC BUDGET TO BE HER LEGACY**

The Alzheimer Society of Ireland (ASI) is delighted that a pioneer in dementia advocacy Helen Rochford Brennan has been awarded an Honorary Degree from NUI Galway at a special ceremony earlier today.

Helen has encouraged the medical profession and community to look beyond the solely medical model of care for people with dementia and to focus on the person ever since her diagnosis with dementia at the age of 62 in 2012.

Since her diagnosis, Helen has campaigned to raise awareness of dementia through a rights-based approach, speaking at international conferences, giving media interviews, engaging with scientists, clinicians, educators and research projects.

Helen has written very personally about living with the Alzheimer’s type of dementia and this year she has contributed to two books on human rights and she hopes her participation in research will one day help to find a cure and create a better quality of life for people living with dementia.

Helen, who is from Tubbercurry in Co Sligo, is the current Chairperson of the European Working Group of People with Dementia and is the group’s nominee to the Board of Alzheimer Europe; she is former Chair of the Irish Dementia Working Group and continues to sit on the steering committee.

Helen is on the Monitoring Committee of Ireland’s first National Dementia Strategy, she is also an (Alzheimer type) Dementia Consultant and a Global Dementia Ambassador.

In addition to Helen, three other distinguished individuals are being conferred at NUI Galway this week including Catherine Corless, local historian, campaigner on behalf of survivors and deceased of the Tuam Mother and Baby Home; Sharon Shannon, internationally-recognised traditional Irish musician; and Brendan Dunford, biodiversity campaigner and founder of BurrenBeo Trust.

**Dementia Advocate Helen Rochford Brennan said:**

“I am honoured, delighted and privileged to receive this award today. I have thoroughly enjoyed taking part in advocacy work for people with dementia since my diagnosis in 2012 and I hope that this award will inspire others to also take up voluntary work and give back to their community. I am also hopeful that this award will inspire the Irish State to increase supports for people with dementia and their family carers across Ireland.

“I have loved everything about advocating for people with dementia – especially being involved with The Alzheimer Society of Ireland and Alzheimer Europe and I am very passionate about research. My advocacy work has given me a great focus and sense of purpose and has shown that people, despite their dementia diagnosis, can still live an active and varied life. I can honestly say that with supports I am living my life to the full, I am advocating to the best of my ability and through this work, I have gone to a place that I could never have dreamed of.

“Despite all of this, I am immensely disappointed to see that the Government is still refusing to put in adequate supports for people with dementia and their families in Ireland. There was no mention of dementia in the Government’s Budget 2019 announcement last week. This was a huge blow to me as I know people are at breaking point. I would dearly love to see a dementia-specific budget so people with dementia and their family carers can have access to basic dementia services. I’m going to give everything in power to make this a reality – I want a dementia-specific budget to be my legacy.”

**The Alzheimer Society of Ireland CEO Pat McLoughlin said:**  
  
“Since her dementia diagnosis, Helen has been a human rights and social justice campaigner for people with dementia in Ireland, on the European stage and also internationally. Helen really has made an immeasurable difference to people’s lives and has been so open and honest about her own experiences of living with dementia since 2012.

“Helen has been a pioneer and has blazed a trail for dementia advocacy and has spoken at conferences where people with dementia have not been heard before such as her speaking engagement in Hungary last week. Helen has been hugely successful and influential – she has met queens, ministers, TDs, heads of state, diplomats to name but a few. Helen’s advocacy work just shows you what a difference one person can make in the world.

“Helen is an absolute inspiration to us all and has been a tireless campaigner for people with dementia over the years whether it’s at national or international speaking events, conferences, media engagements and much more. We are all so proud of Helen for getting this special recognition today from NUIG. It is truly deserved.”

**Further Information:**

For all media enquiries, please contact The Alzheimer Society of Ireland Communications Manager Cormac Cahill on 086 0441 214.

**Notes to the Editor:**  
**● The Alzheimer Society of Ireland**

The ASI is the national leader in advocating for and providing dementia-specific supports and services and each year the organisation provides more than one million hours of community-based dementia-specific care throughout Ireland.

The ASI provides the following services:

• National Helpline  
• Social Clubs  
• Support Groups  
• Day Care Services  
• Home Care  
• Dementia Advisor Service  
• Mobile Information Bus

Helpline: The Alzheimer Society of Ireland National Helpline is open six days a week Monday to Friday 10am–5pm and Saturday 10am–4pm on 1800 341 341.

Website: www.alzheimer.ie

Twitter: @alzheimersocirl @DCCNIRL

Facebook: www.facebook.com/TheAlzheimerSocietyofIreland/

**About dementia:**

• The number of people with dementia in Ireland is expected to more than double over the next 20 years, from 55,000 today to 113,000 in 2036.

• Dementia is an umbrella term used to describe a range of conditions which cause changes and damage to the brain.

• Dementia is progressive. There is currently no cure. Dementia is not simply a health issue but a social issue that requires a community response.

• The majority of people with dementia (63%) live at home in the community. Over 180,000 people in Ireland are currently or have been carers for a family member or partner with dementia with many more providing support and care in other ways.

• Each year over 4,000 people develop dementia. That’s at least 11 people every day and anyone can get dementia - even people in their 30s/40s/50s.

• 1 in 10 people diagnosed with dementia in Ireland is under 65.

• The overall cost of dementia care in Ireland is just over €1.69 billion per annum; 48% of this is attributable to family care; 43% is accounted for by residential care; formal health and social care services contribute only 9% to the total cost

*Figures referenced to Cahill, S. & Pierce, M. (2013) The Prevalence of Dementia in Ireland*