**IMMEDIATE RELEASE – MONDAY, JULY 1st 2019**

**TEACHER FROM DONEGAL TAKING PART IN SOLO 145KM THREE-DAY ‘HOME TO HOME’ WALK TO RAISE FUNDS AND AWARENESS FOR PEOPLE WITH DEMENTIA – NORTH AND SOUTH OF THE BORDER**

A teacher from Co Donegal, Elaine McConnell, along with her dog Lucy, will be pushing herself to the limit as she takes part in a solo 145km three-day ‘Home to Home’ walk to raise awareness and much-needed funds for The Alzheimer Society of Ireland and the Alzheimer’s Society in Northern Ireland.

Elaine, who works as a behaviour support teacher in Longstone Special School in Dundonald, Belfast, is leaving her home in East Belfast at 7.00am on Friday, 5th July and will arrive in her family home for a special barbecue with family and friends in St Johnston, Co Donegal on Sunday evening, 7th July.

Dementia is very close to Elaine’s heart and she was inspired to organise this solo adventure by her uncle, Bill McVitty, who lived with dementia for 10 years; Bill was always trying to ‘go home’ which is where the idea of ‘Home to Home’ came from. Bill sadly passed away in May after being cared for at home by his wife, Doreen, for many years.

Elaine now wants to complete the challenging walk in Bill’s memory and has been taken aback by the support that she has received so far – with one hotel, the O’Neill Arms Country House Hotel in Toomebridge in Antrim, offering a free stay for her first night on the road. Graham/Farrans Construction Joint Venture has gone out of their way to allow Elaine access to the site of their almost completed 7.3km of new A6 dual carriageway that will allow Elaine to walk safely, traffic free from Randalstown to the Toomebridge bypass and Charles Hurst, Belfast have generously donated a minibus for three days to act as a support vehicle that can transport any volunteer walkers back to their cars if they have joined Elaine for a stretch.

Elaine will be joined by friends and family members at various points along the way and she is encouraging others to follow her progress on social media or make a donation online.

All the money raised will be split evenly between The Alzheimer Society of Ireland and the Alzheimer’s Society in Northern Ireland.

**Elaine McConnell said:**

*“I am doing this to raise awareness of dementia and to also raise funds for The Alzheimer Society of Ireland and Alzheimer’s Society in Northern Ireland. Dementia is a cause close to the heart of my family and many others. I have witnessed how devastating and heart-breaking this condition can be on a family. My uncle Bill had dementia and we were all impacted by his journey with the condition so I am going to do this for him, his family and everyone else out there who is affected by Alzheimer’s and dementia.*

*“I am really looking forward to raising awareness and funds for these great charities north and south of the border to show people who are caring for people with dementia in particular that there is support out there and to raise the importance of people talking and seeking help and advice. I also want to highlight the issue of caring for the carer who do so much work and are heroes in our own communities.*

*“The generosity and support that I have received so far from family, friends, colleagues and members of the public has been fantastic. Little things like people offering their support, leaving messages, people making donations both large and small and even the offering of services and company during the walk has been absolutely phenomenal. I have been taken aback by the reaction to this walk and the public’s support.”*

There are an estimated 2,000 people living with dementia in Donegal.

The Alzheimer Society of Ireland provides numerous services in Donegal including Day Care, Social Clubs, Alzheimer Cafes and Home Care and also has an active Donegal Branch Office. Full details on www.alzheimer.ie

Members of the public can make online donation here: <https://www.justgiving.com/crowdfunding/hometohome2019>

**-Ends-**

For more information, please contact The Alzheimer Society of Ireland Communications Manager, Cormac Cahill on 086 044 1214 or cormac.cahill@alzheimer.ie

**Notes to the Editor:**

**About 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**

**About Dementia:**

The number of people with dementia in Ireland is expected to more than double over the next 18 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 are 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.
* 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.

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