**IMMEDIATE RELEASE – MONDAY, 23rd SEPTEMBER 2019**

***\*Pictures attached***

**INSPIRATIONAL ADVOCATE KATHY RYAN VOTED AS THE NEW CHAIR OF THE IRISH DEMENTIA WORKING GROUP FOLLOWING FIRST NATIONAL GATHERING IN DUBLIN**

Inspirational Dementia Advocate ***Kathy Ryan*** has been voted in as the new Chair of the Irish Dementia Working Group (IDWG) as the group held their first national meeting at the Ashling Hotel today in Dublin to mark **World Alzheimer’s Month 2019** to encourage other people living with dementia to have their voice heard and work towards upholding the human rights of people with this condition.

The IDWG is a national advocacy group which is supported by The Alzheimer Society of Ireland, which gives voice to the lived experience of dementia and has over 25 active members all of whom have a diagnosis of some form of dementia. Members range in age from 40 to 79 and are from all corners of the country.

Tipperary native ***Kathy Ryan*** was voted in as the new Chair of the IDWG with a two-year term of office from her fellow advocates and members of the group with Limerick native ***Kevin Quaid*** voted in as new Vice-Chair of the group. A new steering committee has also been voted in today with the new members including ***Jacinta Dixon*** (Dublin), ***Sean Mackel*** (Kildare) and ***Marguerite Keating*** (Tipperary) as IDWG Steering Group members.

The full IDWG Steering Committee now consists of ***Kathy Ryan*** (Chair); ***Kevin Quaid*** (Vice-Chair); ***Dr Helen Rochford-Brennan*** (Chair of European Working Group of people with dementia;***Jacinta Dixon*** (Dublin), ***Sean Mackel*** (Kildare) and ***Marguerite Keating*** (Tipperary) as IDWG Steering Group members. Ronan Smith is the outgoing Chair of the IDWG.

***Kathy Ryan*** was diagnosed with Younger Onset Alzheimer's in January 2014 at the age of 53 and is a mother to two boys and lives in Cashel, Co Tipperary. Kathy got involved in advocacy work because she wants to break down the stigma of dementia and this September will be taking part in The ASI’s Camino Adventure fundraiser after successfully completing it last year. Kathy is Vice-Chair of the Irish Dementia Working Group supported by The ASI.

***Kevin Quaid***, who is originally from Broadford in Co Limerick but now living in Kanturk, Co Cork, was diagnosed with Lewy Body Dementia in 2017 aged just 57, is an avid GAA fan and speaks about the fighting spirit of the Limerick hurling team and the fact they never gave up. Kevin is a member of the Southern Dementia Working Group, supported by The ASI.

***The Alzheimer Society of Ireland CEO, Pat McLoughlin said:***

*“This was a timely event today to promote the voice of the person with dementia and to acknowledge them during World Alzheimer’s Month 2019. I believe having the voice of the person with dementia to the fore gives our organisation real integrity and there is a huge value in having these voices from different parts of the country coming together for the very first meeting of this kind in working towards creating change. The group has gone from strength to strength since 2013 into a national grouping now that growing in the east, south and west. This is great progress over a very short period of time. I would like to wish Kathy and Kevin the very best of luck in their roles over their two-year term in office. I am sure they will very successful in amplifying the voice of the person with dementia even further in the years ahead. Well done to them both.”*

***Chair of the Irish Dementia Working Group (IDWG), Kathy Ryan said:***

*“I am honoured and humbled to have been voted in as the new Chair of the IDWG by my colleagues and friends today. I promise to work hard on behalf of everyone who has dementia and will give this role everything for the coming two years in office. I am especially looking forward to working with Kevin and also the new steering group. The IDWG is a unique group of pioneers and innovators – 10 years ago nobody living with dementia in Ireland was speaking publicly and in less than a decade, with the support of The Alzheimer Society of Ireland, we they have changed that. Ireland is an international leader in Dementia Voice – indeed many countries do not have working groups of people with dementia or formal structures to have their voice heard. I am really looking forward to the coming two years and hoping that I can make a difference to lives of people living with dementia and to ensure that their voice, our voice, is amplified in all corners of the country and all areas of society.”*

***Vice-Chair of the Irish Dementia Working Group, Kevin Quaid said:***

*“This is a fantastic honour for me and my family. I would like to say a big thank you to my colleagues and friends for voting me in and I am looking forward to working with the new steering group and Kathy to bring the group forward and to make a difference to how people living with condition are perceived and treated across Ireland. I want to shatter the stigma around dementia in the two years ahead that me and Kathy have in office together.* ***There is a stigma around dementia; there is no doubt about it. That’s why this group is here – to step out of the shadows. People should not feel embarrassed or ashamed about dementia. A way that I fight this stigma is be very open with people in my own community about having dementia. I always tell people. And, when I tell them, I find that they just treat me the same. Thanks to everyone for the support today – I won’t let you down.”***

**Further Information:**

For all media enquiries, please contact The Alzheimer Society of Ireland Communications Manager Cormac Cahill on 086 044 1214.

**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](http://www.alzheimer.ie/)
**Twitter:** @alzheimersocirl
**Facebook:** [www.facebook.com/TheAlzheimerSocietyofIreland/](http://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 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

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

**ENDS**