

# RAPID RESPONSE IN THE COMMUNITY

Having created a network of over 200 volunteer doctors to respond to life-threatening emergencies in communities throughout Ireland since 2008, there are now plans afoot by Irish Community Rapid Response (ICRR) to recruit more medics over the next five years. Founder and CEO John Kearney talks to Lorraine Courtney about the importance of industry partnerships, fundraising initiatives and community resilience.

John Kearney was prompted to set up West Cork Rapid Response in 2006 to provide professional pre-hospital emergency care directly to the site of emergencies, following the tragic death of his friend's six-year-old daughter.

"She died tragically due to the time it took her to get definitive care. So, that was the catalyst to do something about this," he says. Coming from a voluntary background those years of experience had helped this former member of the naval diving unit, with a background in marine tourism.

He has also been heavily involved in a number of things within the community throughout his life. "So, I thought I'd use my experience and contacts to try to figure out what could have been done differently in that instance."

This little girl's death wasn't a once-off and together with

John O'Shea from Bantry, John came up with the idea for a new voluntary service. John O'Shea, who has sadly since passed away, also had a personal experience with loss in the world of pre-hospital care.

When someone dials 999 for an ambulance, a local network of medical carers will be closer to the patient than the paramedics. After a major accident there is the so-called 'Golden Hour' during which treatment (even of the severest injuries) is likely to lead to recovery.

"From the time of reaching an emergency to the care of the hospital, it was this pre-hospital space that really interested and concerned me. I knew we had to find ways to bridge that gap. We fundraised and managed to get a vehicle as well as a doctor to man it in a voluntary capacity. It became very successful even though the service was only part-time."



Pictured at the recent handover of Renault vehicles to ICRR at UCD's School of Medicine: (Back Row): John Kearney, CEO of ICRR, Dr Phil Darcy, North Dublin; Dr Tomás Barry and Dr Mark Ruddy from South Dublin, Advanced Paramedic Mark Dixon from Clare; (Front Row): Liz O'Gorman, Marketing Manager with Renault Ireland; Dr Niall Conroy, Dublin/Meath; Dr Helen Connolly from Waterford/Kilkenny; Dr Sean O'Rourke from Laois/Offaly, and UCD's Prof Gerry Bury.



John Kearney pictured with Dr Jason van der Velde who was one of the first pre-hospital physicians to come on board West Cork Rapid Response in (Pic: Independent.ie)

### **SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP**

West Cork Rapid Response proved to be a resounding success and was recognised by the Arthur Guinness Fund in 2012, and the following year the Cork man was honoured with a Social Entrepreneurs Ireland Impact Award. In 2015, he was also elected as an Ashoka Fellow (an international network of social entrepreneurs).

"Through this network we connect to help each other out with best practice. I've helped others to develop similar models to ours while some stuff done internationally has helped me too," John says.

Replicating the success of the West Cork Rapid Response model in 2008, ICRR has since taken its unique template for social entrepreneurship nationwide by developing a network of volunteer medics throughout Ireland.

Working in conjunction with the HSE National Ambulance Service, the ICRR's volunteer doctors will respond to high priority 999 or 112 where there is a critical illness or significant injury

As ICRR celebrates 10 years in operation this year, there are dozens of people alive today thanks to John's idea and, crucially, because he works tirelessly on it. "When we set up in West Cork I had no vision of going beyond the county bounds. But I discovered when we went to Dublin for meetings that we weren't the only community in need and it became apparent that other communities had similar challenges.

"I knew we had to let it expand into the ICRR, so instead of having 30 or so companies independently operating throughout the country, we now have one single organisation. One resource works better to deliver this kind of service."

### **THE PERFECT PARTNERSHIP**

To date, the ICRR has enlisted over 200 volunteer GPs, in conjunction with the Department of Emergency Medicine at UCD. "When we started out first, we didn't want to be doing the job of the ambulance service – we're very conscious of the work that frontline ambulance staff do. We didn't want to compromise their service, if anything we wanted to complement and increase their service by bringing a doctor to the scene."

ICRR made big strides with GP recruitment through a collaboration with Prof Gerry Bury, who is Professor of General Practice at UCD's School Of Medicine. "Our biggest breakthrough was partnering with UCD and Prof Gerry Bury, who has been instrumental in the expansion of ICRR nationally, and especially with the recruitment of doctors. He had been trying to do something similar himself but didn't have the community partnership that we brought to the table. It was the perfect partnership for all of us."

And over the next five years, the ICRR now plans to add a further 50 doctors each year to its service, with Prof Bury's help. "We've received a lot of enquiries from the medical sector and I've been blown away by the goodwill from GPs around the country."

### **FUNDRAISING AT THE FRONTLINE**

Fundraising efforts have always been very successful in West Cork where the service has been very well supported since John Kearney first set it up there in 2006, and in Mayo, Wicklow, East Cork and in Dublin, and more recently Clare, Kilkenny/ Waterford, Laois/Offaly and Roscommon, following the national rollout of Irish Community Rapid Response within the last

decade.

“Our busiest service is in Dublin which is surprising, and we now have three rapid response cars based in the capital. But it’s much easier to get resources rurally even though there’s more of a need within urban areas.”

Fundraising initiatives range from coffee mornings to tractor runs. “You name it we’ve done it,” says John. “Community fundraising is very strong in some areas and other developing areas are getting stronger but we’re also trying to develop a ‘donor chapter’ for partnerships with industry.”

Attracting sponsors is a hugely important issue and John admits this can take a lot of walking and talking. “We had to listen to a lot of ‘nos’ before we got a ‘yes’. That journey, especially back when we were new was hard. It’s a bit easier nowadays.

“So many people have experienced the benefits of the service and there are a lot of good news stories out there about the Rapid Response model. Back in 2008 Rapid Response was a whole new concept.”

However, the service is always on the look-out for volunteers, which are the backbone of the service. John says they always need people to fundraise, donate, volunteer at events, and to give talks in their local community. “This is all about community resilience, one community person helping another.”

**IN TOP GEAR WITH RENAULT**

Earlier this year Renault Ireland donated seven Renault Kadjar crossovers (valued at €50,000) to Irish Community Rapid Response, which doubles their total number of Rapid Response Vehicles (RRVs) operating throughout Ireland, and has a major impact on their volunteer doctors on the road in providing professional pre-hospital emergency care.

Six of the new vehicles are equipped with 4x4 capabilities and all are complete with built-in satellite navigation systems to meet the needs of ICRR service providers. These new vehicles will operate in Clare, Dublin, Kilkenny/Waterford, Laois/Offaly, Mayo and Roscommon.

All Rapid response vehicles and volunteers are declared National Ambulance Service (NAS) Assets, and are tasked to life-threatening emergencies via the 999/112 system. All ICRR teams

**RAPID RESPONSE VEHICLE FOR THE ROYAL COUNTY**

*The Renault Kadjar Crossover, one of seven vehicles recently donated by Renault Ireland, has been rolled out in Meath, dedicated to medical emergencies in the Royal County. Based in Trim, Co. Meath it will be led by local volunteer doctor Dr Niall Conroy.*

*The ICRR rapid response service will work alongside the National Ambulance Service, and volunteer doctors will be tasked – via the 999/112 call system at the National Emergency Operations Centre (NEOC) in Tallaght – to attend serious life-threatening emergencies.*



Pictured at the roll-out (l-r): Meath’s senior footballer Mickey Burke; founder and CEO of Irish Community Rapid Response, John Kearney; Trim-based volunteer medic Dr Niall Conroy; and Cathaoirleach of Meath County Council, Cllr Gerry O’Connor.



Trim-based volunteer medic Dr Niall Conroy pictured with John Kearney, who welcomed the roll-out of a new Rapid Response Vehicle, dedicated to medical emergencies in Meath.

are equipped to provide specialist care as per the standards set down by the Association of Anaesthetists, the Pre-Hospital Emergency Care Council and the NAS clinical guidelines.

ICRR also supports almost 200 other doctors responding to emergencies in their communities at local level. Overall, ICRR volunteer doctors responded to almost 1,000 calls in 2017.

Patrick Magee, Country Operations Manager at Renault Ireland, said that providing seven Renault Kadjars will expand ICRR's reach to so many more parts of the country.

John Kearney has described the donation as "a big milestone" in ICRR's journey, and he acknowledged Patrick Magee and his extended team at Renault Ireland for their help in assisting the expansion of this successful life-saving service.

**BIGGEST PROJECT YET**

So, without doubt, setting up Irish Community Rapid Response has been John Kearney's biggest project yet. And now with plans afoot to include an air ambulance service this year, how does he find the time to do it all? "Well, I've a wife who says she's like a 'single mother' while the dog growls at me and not the postman!" he muses.

The reality is that the high cost for any social entrepreneur is family time. "My family have suffered in this journey and from my commitment to deliver the service. And the main thing we need now is

for all the communities to assist us in developing this further," he says.

"We're not looking for very much, we're just looking for any support, whether it's time or whatever resources people are able to give us. Our service can only go as fast as the resources we have."

For more information on Irish Community Rapid Response visit [www.icrr.ie](http://www.icrr.ie)



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