

AIR AMBULANCE RETURNS TO SEVEN-DAY OPERATION



Despite the Covid-19 pandemic, a steady stream of donations and virtual fundraisers has enabled Ireland's first charity air ambulance service return to a seven-day operation, and the Helicopter Emergency Medical Service can now continue its mission to save lives.

The unwavering public support during the Covid-19 pandemic has ensured that the air ambulance service return to a seven-operation from 1 June, to save lives in need, according to Donna O'Regan, Project Manager of the Irish Community Rapid Response (ICRR), which operates the service.

"The Air Ambulance had operated a five-day only service due to cost-saving measures put in place earlier this year, after the unprecedented number of missions and Covid-19 put financial pressure on our service," she noted.

O'Regan said that a return to the seven-day service has been a huge focus for the ICRR team. "We are thrilled to finally see this critically-needed air ambulance where it should be – in the air when we need it most. However, the ongoing challenge of keeping it there is our priority and continued support from those than can give is vital. Every mission counts, so every donation counts too."

Since commencing operations in July 2019, nearly 520 missions have been flown within the past year. Recently the service was tasked to a

serious medical emergency in rural Adrigole on Beara Peninsula in Co. Cork, where a family member suffered anaphylaxis (a severe allergic reaction) and needed immediate lifesaving care.

INNOVATIVE FUNDRAISERS

To express their gratitude to the ICRR Air Ambulance crew, the O'Neill family from the Beara Peninsula set up a 'Go



"Every mission counts, so every donation counts too" – Donna O'Regan, ICRR Project Manager.

Fund Me' page to raise vital funds to help others in their time of need, and over €12,000 was donated to the page.

Mrs O'Neill said: "I'm so grateful to ICRR for saving my life. Without the Irish Community Air Ambulance and the local ambulance service we, as a family, could have had a vastly different outcome that day. We want to raise awareness about the importance of maintaining this vital service. My husband and I are overwhelmed by the generosity of our family, friends and the public."

Innovative fundraising in the face of the pandemic restrictions has been a huge lifeline for the service, with recent fundraising ideas like 'Duhallow's Fittest Club' – pitting 23 GAA clubs in the North Cork area of Duhallow against each other in a bid to raise funds for local charities including the ICRR Air Ambulance. The fundraiser raised almost €35,000 on their Go Fund Me page.

Organiser, Sean Linehan said: "We chose the Irish Community Air Ambulance as we see it as a vital service, not only for the Duhallow area, but for the entire Munster region. Participants were delighted to get some fun exercise in whilst also help raise vital funds. Some age-old rivalries also surfaced of course, but it was all very much well natured!"

SUPPORT AND DONATIONS

O'Regan also said: "From myself and all the air ambulance crew, we are so grateful for the outpouring of support and donations from people across Ireland. We sincerely thank each and every person who answered our call.

The online community spirit, by way of donations and showing support with beautifully-drawn pictures being posted to our crews, has made this difficult time an easier journey.

"It's been overwhelming and incredibly uplifting to see so many people understand the necessity of this service for our communities. The O'Neill family fundraiser is just one of many fundraisers that have ensured the air ambulance can continue to respond to the most serious emergencies."

The Irish Community Air Ambulance is part of the ICRR charity, which also has a network of volunteer doctors responding to serious medical emergencies and fighting the COVID-19 pandemic on the frontlines.



As reported in a previous issue of 'Emergency Services Ireland', pictured at the official lift-off of new air ambulance from Rathcoole Aerodrome in North County Cork on 2 September 2019 were (l-r): Martin Dunne, Director of the National Ambulance Service, John Kearney, ICRR Founder CEO, the then Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade Simon Coveney, John Daly, the then Minister of State, Department of Health, and John Murray, Captain of the charity chopper.

The ICRR Air Ambulance is tasked through the HSE National Ambulance Service (NAS) National Emergency Operations Centre via 999/112 calls,

while the Advanced Paramedics and EMTs aboard the helicopter are NAS staff members. Each mission on average costs €3,500.

CELEBRATING THE FIRST YEAR IN OPERATION

Ireland's first community-funded air ambulance celebrated its first 12 months in operation on 30 July.

During this time (as of 22 July 2020), the charity chopper has been tasked to 513 emergency medical incidents in rural and urban locations across Munster, Leinster and Connaught.



For further information visit www.icrr.ie

Tasked by the HSE's National Ambulance Service, the team responds to the most serious emergencies, where time can make the difference between life and death. The most common call-outs include cardiac arrest, road traffic collisions, fall from height, equestrian incidents, farming related injuries and stroke.

"These past 12 months have proved that the Air Ambulance is a vital service and the community has really got behind us. People know that they could need the Air Ambulance at any time, and our mission is to be there for them in those times of need," noted John Finnegan, Chairperson of the ICRR Board.

He also highlighted the partnership with the National Ambulance Service as being a key component in the air ambulance's operation. "We are proud of our strong relationship with NAS, which has ensured the highest levels of advanced paramedic care is in our helicopter, leading our team."