

Celebrating Mary's birthday and life



At the Down Syndrome Waterford Christmas party, Mary was honoured as being the group's oldest member. She is pictured with Mayor Lola O'Sullivan.

THIS week marks a special event for local woman Mary O'Dwyer as she celebrates a landmark birthday.

Mary, known affectionately to her family and friends as 'Moll', will turn 63 this Thursday February 26th.

As she was born with Down Syndrome, it represents another remarkable milestone for Mary in what has been a remarkable life.

Although life expectancy for those living with Down Syndrome has increased significantly in recent years, average life expectancy is still just 55.

Born in Kilkenny in 1952, Mary grew up in a loving family with her parents and five siblings.

"There were no special schools in Kilkenny when Mary was born. She came to school with me and we grew up together, making our Communion and Confirmation together," said Mary's sister Kathleen Farrell who lives in Killure.

"Our parents and another family kept on fighting for a special school, and we did eventually get one in Kilkenny," explained Kathleen.

Mary, who has always enjoyed working with her hands, spent time working for Kilkenny Design Centre as part of her work in SOS Kilkenny, a workshop for people with intellectual disabilities.

This enabled her to display her skills in pottery, stitching, sewing etc.

After moving to Waterford, Mary first spent time living with Kathleen and her family in Killure while attending workshops run by the Brothers of Charity.

As part of her placement, Mary engaged in various different jobs which she thoroughly enjoyed.

She moved to the Waterford Intellectual Disability Association (WIDA) facility in Ballinakill in 2007, continuing her placements and workshops up until Christmas 2014 when she retired.

However, Mary still keeps herself busy and enjoys spending time helping out with the laundry and baking her speciality which is brown bread.

Kathleen praised the staff at WIDA, who she says always ensure that Mary is well looked after.

Of the WIDA facility, Mary herself proudly says: "It's my home".

The spacious premises boasts brightly decorated rooms, with each of the residents having their own private bedroom.

Residents can also avail of the facility's minibus for transport.

Mary loves shopping and dining out and particularly enjoys a glass of red wine.

She also regularly travels out to visit her family in Killure.

Mary enjoys completing word searches and watching her favourite soap operas, in particular Coronation Street and EastEnders.

Some years ago, during a visit to Manchester, Mary toured the set of Coronation Street and even met some of the cast members.

Ensuring she's always up to speed with the latest happenings in Walford and Weatherfield, Mary collects TV magazines and has assembled a vast collection of photos of her favourite stars.

Over the years, Mary has also met some of her favourite music stars, including Daniel O'Donnell.

At the Down Syndrome Waterford Christmas party held in Dooley's Hotel last December, Mary was honoured as being the group's oldest member.

And there was huge excitement as Mary met Mayor of the Waterford Metropolitan Area Cllr Lola O'Sullivan on the day.

Mary's family and friends have joined with her in celebrating all of her birthdays, in particular her landmark occasions.

Three years ago, a party was held at the Woodlands Hotel to mark her 60th birthday.

Mary's long and happy life is testament to her upbringing and the care which she continues to receive from all those around her.

"Nowadays there's so much help that wasn't there when Mary was a child, such as speech therapy and occupational therapy. As a child she was treated the same as the rest of us. It's probably why she did so well, as she was never made feel different and we all accepted her as who she is," said Kathleen.

Mary's story is an example for all and shows that any obstacle in life can be overcome.

Here's to many more special birthday celebrations for Mary!