

The women of the Marlay Guild ICA craft group have felt the impact of lockdown during Covid-19, like everyone else. Separation from children, grandchildren and friends has been isolating and lonely. But even without their weekly meetings, they have continued to support other charities with their crafts, making scrubs for a South Dublin nursing home, knits for premature babies and very special bags for children with cancer to store their Beads of Courage®.



Beads of Courage® is a programme funded by Childhood Cancer Foundation Ireland, a charity founded by and led by parents of children with cancer. It is an international programme that has been proven to decrease distress, increase positive coping strategies and helps children find meaning in illness. Around 218 children (aged 0 – 19 years) are diagnosed with cancer every year.

As Mary-Claire Rennick, a voluntary Director of Childhood Cancer Foundation Ireland and the parent of a childhood cancer survivor, explains, a

diagnosis of childhood cancer has a devastating impact on the entire family.

“Families living with childhood cancer are all too familiar with the isolation that the wider world has faced on and off since March. Unfortunately, it is the reality for families of children with cancer for years during treatment, due to the serious risk of infection. One of the programmes we fund is called Beads of Courage®. It enables children to tell their story using colourful beads - symbols of courage that mark the milestones of their particular treatment path.”

“The average length of treatment for childhood cancer can last from 2.5 to 5 years and children will have many interventions along the way. The beads mark each chemotherapy, each blood transfusion, each surgery, each moment of courage. As you can imagine, they

gather hundreds, and in some cases thousands, of beads during these years, giving them something tangible to help explain their experiences. There is also a Siblings Beads Programme which helps brothers or sisters to better understand their sibling's cancer journey."

"The beautiful bags that the women in the Marlay Guild ICA craft group have been making for us allow the children to store their precious beads and they love the colourful, fun fabrics. They love having a choice of patterns and it means a lot for them to choose what bag they would like to store their beads in." explained Mary-Claire.



Colette Appleby, Craft Co-ordinator with Marlay Guild ICA, which was founded in 1993, says that the members' sewing machines have been working overtime over the last six months.

"There's always lots going on in the group and we do lots of our own projects but we also work with charities. This year we made scrubs for a local nursing home, using 100% cotton fabrics, we make teddies for a charity working in Eastern Europe and we do lots of knitting for premature babies in the Rotunda. When I heard about Beads of Courage® I knew it would be of interest and we're now on our third or fourth batch of bags. We source the fabrics from a wholesaler in Ballymount and use trimmings so we have very little waste. Childhood Cancer Foundation Ireland also has sourced Marvel, Spiderman, Star Wars, unicorn and Little Mermaid themed fabrics which are hugely popular with the children. The fabric changes depending on the need – sometimes they need more for younger children or it could be older boys. There are 70 or 80 bags being made up the moment."

Delivering fabrics during lockdown and having sewing machines collected for much-needed servicing, kept the members in touch with each other while some were cocooning and others were living alone. Although they won't be able to meet in person again for some time, they have recently started weekly Zoom meetings as a way to link in and have that all-important social contact.

For more information on Beads of Courage® and Childhood Cancer Foundation visit www.childhoodcancer.ie.



Notes:

1. Childhood Cancer Foundation was founded in 2013 by parents of children with cancer to raise awareness of childhood cancer, fund emotional supports and services for children with cancer and their families and to be the voice of children with cancer in Ireland.
2. Beads of Courage® was first introduced in 2003 in Arizona by a clinical nurse specialist, Jean Baruch. Since then it has spread to hundreds of children's hospitals in the USA, Canada, UK, Australia and Japan.
3. Childhood Cancer Foundation secured the sub license to bring Beads of Courage to Ireland. Beads of Courage® is a trademark of Beads of Courage Inc and is used under licence in Ireland from Be Child Cancer Aware UK
4. Beads of Courage is a resilience-based intervention designed to support and strengthen children and families coping with serious illness. Through the programme children tell their story using colourful beads as meaningful symbols of courage that commemorate milestones they have achieved along their unique treatment path.