

# Families step in to fund future of St Mary of Angels

## Campaigners lobby Council over vital need to refurbish residential centre in Beaufort

By SINEAD KELLEHER

A MAJOR fundraising drive is underway to help improve facilities at St Mary of the Angels in Beaufort to ensure that the residents can live with 'dignity and privacy' in their homes in what is one of Kerry largest residential centres.

Following a long campaign to secure the future of this centre for adults with physical and intellectual disabilities, who need a high level of care, the parents and relatives' group have now started a new campaign to improve the facilities in keeping with HIQA regulations.

"Our mission is to improve residents' lives, enhance the grounds and buildings on campus and take all necessary steps to guarantee continued HIQA registration," says chairman of St Mary of the Angels parents and relatives group, Jack Fitzpatrick.

This year is the 50th anniversary of the centre, which is home to 76 full-time residents who live in 10 houses, and plans are underway to mark this historic occasion.

40 people also attend the day care centre at St Mary of the Angels, 50 children attend St Francis Special School also located on campus and there are 220 staff members, 10 national school teachers, 24 special needs assistants and four part-time secondary school teachers across all operations on the campus; representing a total community of more than 420.

It is run by St John of Gods and funded by the HSE.

"It's far more than a residential centre it is a centre of excellence. There are more

people involved in St Mary of the Angels than in many villages across Kerry which is why it is so important to look after it," Jack said.

Following a meeting with HIQA last year certain requirements now have to be met to ensure that the facilities meet the inspection body's standards.

These include the construction of extra bedrooms to reduce the number of shared bedrooms on campus. Currently there are three shared rooms in one of the residences, St Fidelis, which are shared by eight people and it is hoped to construct private bedrooms for each of those eight residents.

It is also planned to build two extra sitting rooms in two of the large chalets on campus, which are shared between seven and eight people. This would give them extra privacy and space - a requirement for HIQA.

Over the last 18 months the parents and relatives group has raised €80,000; €60,000 of which will go towards the works with €20,000 already spent on resurfacing the driveways on campus.

However, the total cost of the works is around €320,000 so more support is needed. The HSE has said it will not fund any works, so the money must be raised from other sources.

St Mary of the Angels has been chosen as a beneficiary of the Ring of Kerry Cycle this year, but even with the backing of the big charity event it is not expected to reach what it needs.

Mr Fitzpatrick has sought support from councillors in the South and West Municipal District and from Kerry County Council. The campaign



Jack Fitzpatrick

addressed a meeting of the Council on the issue last week.

The refurbishment campaign comes following a major battle by families to ensure the residents remain in the facility.

The campaign was sparked by a HSE plan to move residents, in line with the national policy 'Time to Move On from Congregated Settings', into homes in the 'community' - ie, towns and villages. The policy seeks to close all 72 centres, like St Mary of the Angels, around Ireland by 2021. This decision was vehemently opposed by the families and residents - many of whom have lived their life on the campus.

Cllr Michael Cahill who organised the deputation said that this facility is vital and must be supported.