

Celebrating 20 Years of Community First Responding



Community first responders are celebrating the 20th anniversary since the first CFR schemes were launched in January 2005, and now CFR Ireland - the National First Responder Network - is putting final plans in place for its 'Respond 2025' conference, which takes place on 27 September in Mullingar.

The last 20 years have seen major changes to community first responding in Ireland, with advancements in CPR and AED training programmes and assessments for community first responders, coupled with an increase in the number of CFR groups now linked up with the National Ambulance Service.

At the end of 2005, just over 20 CFR groups were linked to the National Ambulance Service (NAS). In 2014 there were 63 Community First Responder (CFR) schemes

in Ireland and today there are over 350 CFR groups in operation, with all volunteers linked to the NAS.

On looking back over the last two decades, John Fitzgerald, Chair of CFR Ireland, tells 'Emergency Services Ireland' that the very first Community First Responder (CFR) information meeting was held in Shillelagh, Co. Wicklow in August 2004.

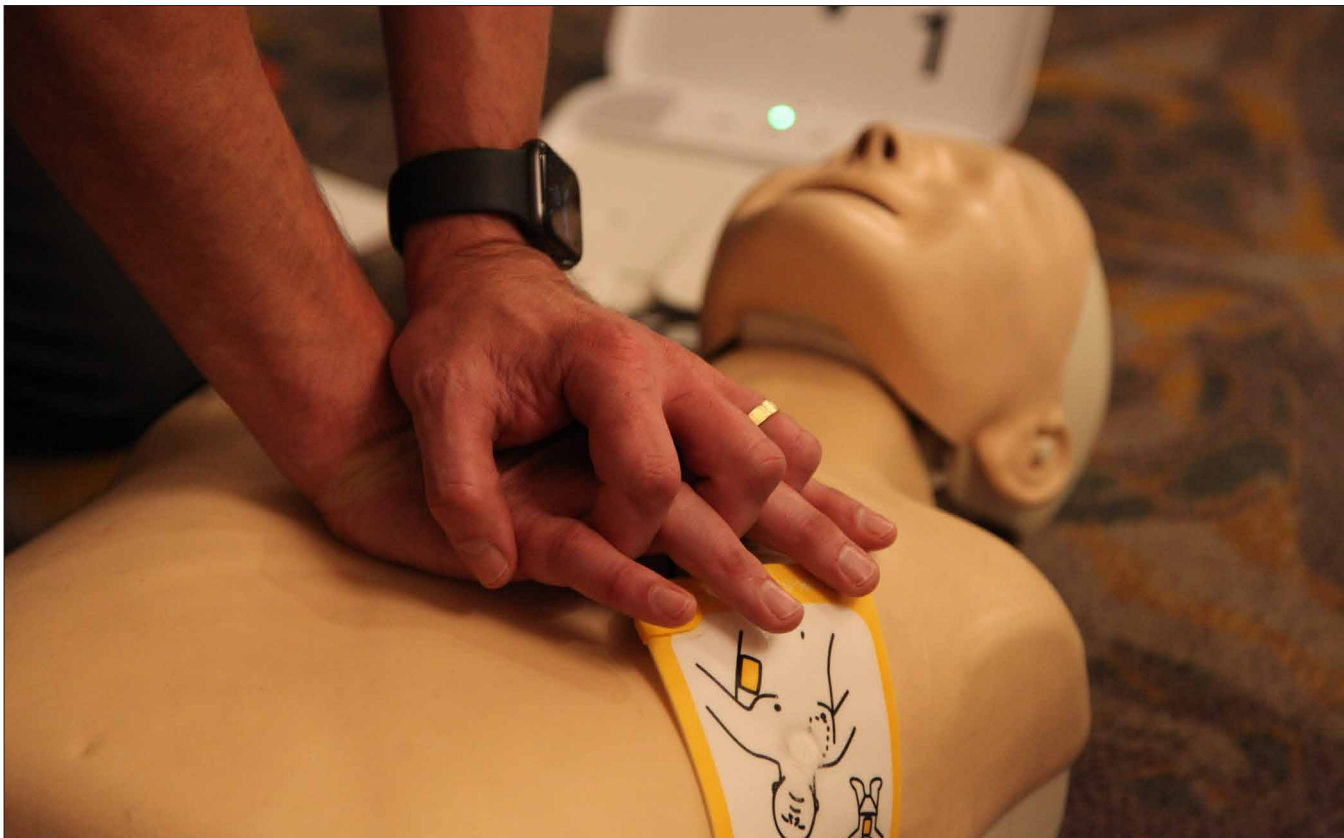
"The meeting, which was attended by over 200 people, was organised by local Fine Gael TD Billy Timmins in conjunction with Advanced Paramedics from the HSE National Ambulance Service - Shane Mooney and Richard Shannon."

RESPOND 2025 RETURNS ON SATURDAY 27 SEPTEMBER
Respond 2025 - the conference and exhibition organised by CFR Ireland for community first responders - returns to the Mullingar Park Hotel on Saturday 27 September.

"Respond 2024 was our 10th and largest conference to date and was attended by up to 550 delegates from all parts of Ireland," noted John Fitzgerald, CFR Ireland Chair. He said that having reviewed the feedback from the 'Respond 2024' survey, "we will develop and resource new workshops to add to the popular selection".

Registration for the conference is due to open in the next few weeks. The National Ambulance Service, Pre-Hospital Emergency Care Council, Irish Heart Foundation and many more similar stakeholders will once again be there to support Respond, while major first aid and AED equipment suppliers will also showcase their latest range of products and equipment for CFR groups.

Respond 
The National First Responder Conference 2025
Saturday 27th September Mullingar Park Hotel



There have been major advancements in CPR and AED training programmes for community first responders in Ireland.

REMEMBERING ‘THE GODFATHER OF CPR’

Reflecting over the last 10 years of Respond, John Fitzgerald said that while there have been many highlights, the most memorable was when Professor Douglas Chamberlain addressed the ‘Respond 2015’ conference, held in Tullamore, Co. Offaly.

“He was due to attend our first conference in 2014 but having injured his ankle he could not travel from the UK.

However, he had requested to attend the event the following year and the rest as they say is ‘Respond history,’” Fitzgerald recalls.

“Over the following years, we were very fortunate to meet the ‘The Prof’ on several occasions and to hear him speak. A huge supporter of community response, he was known as the ‘Godfather’ of CPR. He shared with us a number of what he called his ‘laws’.

“He wanted to bring CPR to the masses and demystify the use of AEDs. One of his laws was – **The only damage you can do to someone with an AED, is if you whack them around the head with it.** Prof Chamberlain, who passed away in May of this year, has left a legacy that will not just impact the UK and Ireland, but Europe and across the world. A true legend. *Go raibh dea-shúil de ar a anam.*”

Prof Chamberlain’s keynote presentation at Respond 2015: <https://youtu.be/ETqpShbnQK4?si=FUa9AGN-u3iYH60G>



Professor DOUGLAS CHAMBERLAIN

“The only damage you can do to someone with an AED, is if you whack them round the head with it!”

Cardiologist, founder of Resus Council and one of the main proponents of CPR and paramedics in the UK

We salute and thank you!

He recalls that over the course of the following months, information nights were held across Co. Wicklow and parts of next-door neighbour Kildare, e.g. the first Dunlavin CFR information night was held in in November 2004.

“The first CFR groups were established in parts of Wicklow and Kildare from January 2005 onwards, with the first training programme held on 12 and 13 February that year provided by instructors from the National Ambulance Service.

“Community First Responders (CFRs) from Dunlavin, Hollywood, The Glen, Donard and Rathdangan. CFRs were taught American Heart Association (AHA) Heartsaver CPR and AED for adults, children and infants, and the use of oxygen therapy for chest pain management.”

GOING LIVE WITH NATIONAL AMBULANCE SERVICE

Recommendations by the International Liaison Committee on Resuscitation (ILCOR) had not been introduced in 2004, with CPR delivered at a just a rate of 15:2 compressions to breaths. However, when the ILCOR recommendations were introduced the following year, this ratio saw an improvement when all CFRs were upskilled to 30:2 compressions to breaths during the autumn of 2005.



John Fitzgerald pictured with members of the Community First Responder unit, covering Blessington, Co. Wicklow and surrounding area at a previous Respond event.

Lookback to 2005 and what followed....

- Initial training of Community First Responders (CFRs) took place over two days.
- CFR volunteers were trained by paramedics and advance paramedics from the National Ambulance Service.
- CFR volunteers had to 'recertify' every 90 days.
- The National Emergency Operations Centre (NEOC) was not established at that time, and call centres were used instead. CFRs were notified of emergencies by phone call (there were no smart phones in 2005!).
- The PHECC Cardiac First Responder Community launched in 2006 and was rolled out in 2007.
- In 2005, the survival rate for out-of-hospital cardiac arrest was estimated at 1%.
- The Out-of-Hospital-Cardiac-Arrest-Register (OHCAR) was established in June 2007.
- In 2023, the survival rate had substantially increased to 8.4%. (OHCAR 2023).

The PHECC Cardiac First Responder Community training standard was implemented in October 2007, which subsequently allowed for aspirin therapy and FAST assessment to be included in CFR training skills.

The first CFR groups from Roundwood, Moneystown and Laragh in Co. Wicklow went live with the National Ambulance Service (NAS), quickly followed by several other communities across Wicklow

and Kildare. At the end of 2005, over 20 CFR groups were linked to the National Ambulance Service.

"Dunlavin CFRs went 'live' with the National Ambulance Service on 4 April 2005. Dunlavin's first response call for CFRs was to an incident of 'chest pain' at 1:05am on 16 February 2006. There was no text messaging at that time and CFRs were dispatched by telephone call from local NAS stations, Wicklow Town and Naas. Smart phones were not a thing in 2005!"



Prof Doug Chamberlain – known as the 'Godfather' of CPR – shared several of his 'laws' during his keynote address at 'Respond 2015' in Tullamore, Co. Offaly.