Show Number 1 – Michelle Lynch Power speaks to Jillian Godsil

Wickow Good News is a podcast available on <https://wicklowgoodnews.buzzsprout.com/> and <https://www.facebook.com/Wicklow-Good-News-108171104170251/> to tell the good news stories coming out of Wicklow as Irish people rise in solidarity with front line workers to help their neighbours. Wicklow Good News was set up by Jillian Godsil and Marlena Murphy. Over the coming weeks they hope to speak with the many heroes who shine despite the terrible times.

*We will overcome and we will overcome together*.

The first guest to speak on the show was Michelle Lynch Power, audiologist and activist based in Greystones but working in Tallaght Hospital. Michelle was previously on the Wicklow This Week radio programme on East Coast FM which I presented until COVID19 put a stop to all that. On that occasion, the subject of the interview was her daughter Grace who was only 5 years of age. Two years prior Grace has seen a picture of a child with no hair undergoing cancer treatment. She was very upset, even as a three year old, and wanted to do something to help. Her response was to grow her hair so that she could donate it to a charity. Two years later with lots of tears, as tangles were a daily occurrence, her hair was long enough and she went to the hairdressers to have it cut and sent to a charity.

The actual radio interview was less successful as Grace decided not to say anything. However, between mum and me, we got the great story out there and Grace did say hi at the very end. Never work with children as they say.

Michell is a very busy woman. She is an audiologist in Tallaght Hospital but also runs her own practice in Wicklow Town and Greystones. She is also very involved in dog rescue.

“People know me as the audiologist – or the dog lady,” she laughs as we chat. “Often when my husband gets home, he never knows how many dogs might greet him.”

Michelle acknowledges that her in laws are all very involved with the local community through local businesses and sport. We both agree that Grace inherited that community spirit.

Michelle is reflective when it comes to the virus. As a nurse she is aware of the anticipation of the virus, more so than the rest of us who are not on the front line. She speaks of the big changes being made in the hospital.

“It’s almost as if we are all holding our breath,” she says, without drama. It is a fact.

Michelle is very active on Facebook, rehoming dogs and posting community news. She watched as over the past number of weeks there were more and more messages from people wanting to help. People saying that they did not know what to do but they wanted to help in some way.

“But these were all separate, individual people,” she says.

So, three weeks ago, on a Friday morning, Michelle posted on Facebook. She put her hand up and asked if folk would like her to start a page or group. People came back and said yes At first it was between 25 and 30 people responded. Michelle admits she hadn’t a clue what she was doing. By the end of the day, there were just under 200 volunteers.

By now there are almost 3000 people and lots of other groups have emerged, all joining up together.

A local printer, Ian Mullen of Ross Print Services, stepped up to the mark and agreed to print volunteer leaflets for free. These were given out to volunteers – handovers often being made by Michelle in grocery carparks and looking very suspicious. The volunteers could then fill in their details and drop them into houses in their patch. Sometimes it might be a road or part of a housing estate.

The leaflets also have other important telephone numbers on them such as the HSE helpline. “He even printed a QR code so tech savvy recipients could scan in the code and be brought straight to the Facebook page.

“What was really heartening was the response from people. Sometimes they didn’t need anything, but they were really happy to know someone was out there – close by – to help them. People told us they felt safe as a result.”

People who are cocooning may have family but not close by. They might live in another county and find it hard to travel to see loved ones. This way, people who could not get out knew they had help on hand if it was needed.

Michelle reckons that the volunteers will initially be helpful in doing pharmacy runs or collecting groceries.

“But as this lockdown continues the needs will become greater. Things like pensions may need to be collected or bigger grocery shops as supplies run low at home. We are also talking daily to the local community Guards to make sure we protect volunteers and our people needing help. Local councillors are also very helpful in guiding us too.

“But it is ratcheting up all time. Every time there is a new announcement from the government the online shopping portals are gone. So we are working all the time with local businesses, ensuring we can shop local – which keeps the them in business too.”

Michelle points out that while cocooning for tech savy people can be relatively easy but what if the person is not online, does not have online banking or has never done online shopping?

“We can’t even sit with them and show them how is done – so the alternative is not to go online but go local.”

What the future holds no one knows at this stage but as the lockdown looks set to continue beyond Easter, it is certain that the local volunteers will become more and more important.

To look for help, or to volunteer, please visit the Facebook page https://www.facebook.com/groups/216297419730230/?ref=group\_header