

Rural Housing Association tenants recognised as Frontline Stars

Rural Housing Association tenants Claire McKeefry and Maureen Flaherty were shortlisted for HQN's Frontline Stars Resident's Award, in recognition of the vital role they've played in supporting their community during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Both ladies are from the small rural town of Castlewellan and were actively engaged in a variety of volunteer roles prior to the outbreak, including as tenant representatives on RHA's tenant panel.

When the pandemic began, Maureen and Claire's passion for their community and their commitment to supporting the most vulnerable helped them overcome any barriers presented by lockdown measures and continue supporting families in Castlewellan.

Claire continued to work as a classroom assistant in a local hub school, which was set up specifically to support key workers and their children throughout the lockdown. She took on the role recognising the risks involved but put the needs of keyworkers and their children first to support those struggling to manage childcare whilst working on the frontline. Her energy and commitment to this role has been evident throughout the pandemic, working to support children in their education while their parents fight Covid-19.

When asked about her role as a frontline worker, Claire said: *"My work environment and routine have changed dramatically since Covid-19 measures have been implemented. I practice social distancing at the hub school while carrying out my classroom assistant duties. This has led to new experiences when creating a familiar and consistent learning environment for our young people. I find it very rewarding to give back to the community in the best way I can."*

Martina Cranny, RHA's Housing and Operations Manager, praised Claire for her commitment: *"Claire works tirelessly in her local community, supporting those who need someone to lean on in this difficult time. The response to the Covid-19 pandemic has created a number of challenges for our association, and we are privileged to have Claire involved in our tenant participation work helping us to advise our tenants on the issues arising from the restrictions in place."*

Maureen shares this proactive approach to supporting those most vulnerable to the impact of the lockdown. Her community spirit and passion for helping others has proved invaluable to the Castlewellan community.

Despite recently losing her husband Maureen continued to work in a local charity shop where she had been volunteering for 14 years. However, since its closure due to coronavirus she has focused on her role as a volunteer for the Home Start project, where she's supported young mothers who are vulnerable, isolated or in need of support through regular telephone calls, providing a much-needed point of contact during lockdown.

Sharon Robinson, Home Start organiser, said: *“Maureen has been a valued member of the Home Start volunteer team for the past 15 years. Her approachable and caring nature has helped encourage lots of families in the community to improve family life and engage fully with Home Start.*

“Maureen has been an extended member for families with little to no support and a grandmother to many children who were isolated, befriending mum and dad and becoming an inspiration through her love and kindness of what a good relationship can look like.

“Maureen is well known for her understanding and non-judgmental attitude by adapting to suit to family’s needs to alleviate their problems bringing a good balance to their homes. Maureen’s beautiful smile and zest for live continues to help families in the community enjoy their children, remaining friends with whoever she meets with strong values.”

Martina Cranny also praised Maureen for her vital role as an RHA tenant panel member. *“Maureen Flaherty is a very unique, kind and generous person who makes such a difference in her local estate. Although Maureen has had personal loss in her life recently, she still manages to care for her neighbours and show endless empathy and compassion. Rural Housing association are privileged to know Maureen and have her involved in our Tenant Participation work.”*

Both ladies are a shining example of the difference local people can have in supporting rural communities during periods of crisis. Their unwavering commitment to addressing rural isolation and supporting the most vulnerable in their communities has been an asset to the local town of Castlewellan.