

Dr Patricia (Paddy) McCaul Collins (1917–1995)

SI Drogheda, Ireland

Dr Patricia (Paddy) McCaul Collins (1917–1995) was born in Nuremore, Carrickmacross, Co Monaghan, Ireland. In 1941 she graduated as a medical doctor from University College Dublin with a First in surgery.



In August 1945, she joined the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA) as a medical officer in a Displaced Persons camp. Displaced persons camps were established for refugees from Eastern Europe and for the former inmates of concentration camps. Paddy was the first female doctor in her DP camp in Oberlinningen, Germany, and helped displaced Poles, Ukrainians, Latvians and Lithuanians. She returned to Ireland in late 1947, where she worked in general practice in an impoverished part of Derry City where there was huge unemployment and tuberculosis was rife among her patients. In 1948 she was appointed Acting County Medical Officer, and later Assistant County Medical Officer for Co. Donegal. In 1950 Paddy married and moved to Drogheda where she immediately became involved in the Irish government's national BCG (anti-tuberculosis) vaccination programme in the town's schools and factories.

In 1958 the SI Drogheda Club was chartered. Paddy was a founding member of the club and its first President. In her professional life, Paddy had always striven to help women gain equal rights and had fought for the rights of the disabled. She was a pioneer in promoting sex education in Drogheda schools, which might not have been very popular at the time! The ideals promoted by Soroptimism were a perfect match for Paddy and the club thrived under her leadership. The first project was the restoration of St John's Home for Elderly Women in Drogheda.

Paddy had the vision to see the need for a special needs school for children with learning difficulties. It's hard to grasp today that, up to 1963, there was no such thing as special needs education anywhere in Ireland. At the time, the authorities did not see the need for such a school. This did not deter the Drogheda Soroptimists! With Paddy leading the way, a special town meeting was convened and all the factory workers of the town agreed to pay 6 old pence from their wages to pay for the school. The school, St Ita's School, was the first of its kind in Ireland. The Irish Government, through the Department of Education, took over the school and replicated the teaching model by establishing special needs schools throughout Ireland.



In 1976 Paddy supported the club when it started the Voluntary Adult Literacy programme, which became a Soroptimist ROI National Project before being taken on by the Department of Education in Ireland.

Paddy made a difference locally, nationally, and internationally. She was an inspirational leader, and she helped thousands of people in need whom others chose to ignore. Even today her vision is impacting people's lives. After Paddy's death, a garden seat inscribed with her name was dedicated to her memory outside the local Alzheimers' Association premises. Paddy brought vitality and wisdom to the many debates in our club and the seat is a silent tribute to the many charitable causes that she herself espoused during her lifetime.