

TEXT OF THE INTRODUCTORY ADDRESS DELIVERED BY: **MS CLIONA De BHAILDRAITHE MARSH** on 3 December 2012 in the Royal College of Physicians of Ireland, on the occasion of the conferring of the Degree of Laws, *honoris causa*, on **JANE CORBOY**

A Sheansailéir, a mhuintir na hOllscoile agus a dhaoine uaisle,

Philanthropy is a word stemming from the Greek, philo - anthropos meaning love of man. Among the dictionary definitions one will find: love of humankind, the disposition or effort to promote the happiness and well being of one's fellow people. Irish has the word daonchairdeas and philanthropist is duine daonnachtuil; German has the words Menschenfreund and Menschenfreundlichkeit which clearly underlines the meaning of the word. French retains the greek root in un / une philanthrope and la philanthropie.



Whatever language one may care to use, all the above words describe Jane Corboy. She is one of our great philanthropists. Many people only think of those individuals who have the financial means to donate large amounts of money, but where would we be without those who volunteer their time to make a difference?

Jane Corboy, née Corcoran, was born in Wexford in the late fifties to John and Ann Corcoran. She is the eldest of four children, has two brothers Patrick and Andrew and a sister Roseanne. Jane is greatly loved by her nieces and nephews and in turn is devoted to them. She was educated at Our Lady's School Clermont Rathnew, following which she honed her linguistic skills at the University of Paris and later at the University of Munich. It is evident from her career path that she has remarkable organisational skills and great business acumen. In her early career she worked in public relations for several high profile Irish companies. Later in 1990 she founded Corcoran Associates, a corporate communications and event management company.

Jane married Denis Corboy about 20 years ago. She went to live in Georgia, where Denis held the position of EU ambassador to Georgia and Armenia in 1994, a role he held until 1999; he later returned to Georgia as an EU special Envoy in 2002. Jane used all her talents and skills to support Denis in his ambassadorial role. He was very fortunate in having such a warm, hospitable and intelligent person who in every way epitomises Irish hospitality, being open, generous and an excellent hostess. While in Georgia Jane became involved with various international organisations including UNICEF and Save the Children, working with state-run institutions for young children. During her time there, she saw the horrific conditions prevailing for such children, particularly in Kaspi near Tblisi where children had been abandoned after the civil war and were severely malnourished and dying. She took it upon herself to change this.

She realised very quickly that any attempt to reform the situation would not suffice and launched herself wholeheartedly into a new project. She understood that it was necessary to start up a new organisation which would result in creating a structure to train people to use modern rehabilitation facilities and, most importantly, provide long term training for

all involved. After discovering an orphanage in the Georgian town of Kaspi in deplorable conditions with over 100 severely disabled children barely surviving, Jane decided to co-found First Step Georgia in 1998 with Nino Kadagidze-Zhvania, the wife of the then Chairman of Parliament and subsequent Prime Minister Zurab Zhvania.

The First Step Georgia (FSG) co-founders mobilized their contacts and their resources and set out to literally save the lives of these children as an emergency measure in the first instance.

The first few years of First Step Georgia were dedicated to medically, physically and emotionally rehabilitating the children who had been found at Kaspi. Its mission is to enhance the quality of life, and promote the rights of children and youth with intellectual and physical disabilities.

Since then Jane has made a lifelong commitment to creating services in Georgia. What she has achieved in Georgia is extraordinary. This could not have been done without her commitment, her unstinting hard work, her demanding standards, her inspiration to all who work with her and the organisation. Jane is a hard taskmaster and expects others to follow suit, yet never demands more than the person can deliver. This is the only way such an organisation could be successful. Jane, who speaks French and German fluently, has also mastered Russian to help her operate in Georgia.

Realising that training for local staff in Georgia was an important element in the sustainability and success of First Step Georgia, Jane enlisted the help of St Michael's House Dublin who magnanimously offered to train the staff from Georgia for the project, both at local level and by bringing staff to Ireland. St Michael's House has been extraordinarily generous in carrying out this work. To enable the project to flourish and survive Jane has developed a solid board of Trustees in Ireland - Norman Crowley, Denis Corboy, Jonathan Mills, Anne Davy, Des MacMahon - and also in the UK, and has put in place a international network of support including the charity's patron, Mary Robinson, former President of Ireland and UN High Commissioner for Human Rights. In 2008 Jane was awarded The Philanthropist of the Year award which recognises extraordinary individuals who have shown outstanding leadership in the area of personal philanthropy and who, through their giving, have made a remarkable difference in bringing about sustainable social change. This award encompasses her work with children in Georgia through the First Step charity (in Georgia) and The Next Step - Children of the Caucasus (in the UK & Ireland).

Jane now spends her time mostly between France, London, Tblisi and Ireland. Only a person of such energy and organisational skills could sustain such a life moving between these places. She is the châtelaine in Fayence, where her regular yoga sessions must be what help to keep her sane and find some work life balance. She is known to be a very loyal friend, extraordinary generous, a great hostess and enjoys good company.

PRAEHONORABILIS CANCELLARIE, TOTAQUE UNIVERSITAS:

Praesento vobis, hanc meam filiam quem scio tam moribus quam doctrina habilem et idoneum esse qui admittatur, honoris causa, ad gradum Doctoratus in utroque Jure, tam Civili quam Canonico, idque tibi fide mea testor ac spondeo totique Academiae.