

GROUND-BREAKING SPEECH THERAPIST WHOSE WORK HELPED PEOPLE FIND THEIR VOICE

stunned the world



Professor Fiona Gibbon, Head of the Department of Speech at UCC, with exhibits which will go on show as part of the Fr O'Flynn exhibition at the college.

UCC a centre of excellence

STAMMERINGFACTFILE

SOME 50 years after Fr O'Flynn's death, between 25 and 30 speech and language therapists are graduating from University College Cork every year. For many years after Fr O'Flynn first began helping people who stammered, there were no speech and language therapists in Ireland.

Using techniques he'd acquired from the elocutionist McHardy Flint while studying to be a priest in Maynooth, Fr O'Flynn nurtured children and young adults in Cork who struggled to overcome their speech impediment. Prof Fiona Gibbon, head of the Department of Speech and Hearing Sciences at UCC, said he projected his confidence that stammering could be overcome to help people.

"He'd use techniques to help people become fluent. There was a time when people thought about purely the type of exercise you might do to become more fluent, but these days, therapists are much more concerned about the person being able to have what we call strategies to help them become more fluent in different situations and to try and take away the fear they might have about stammering.

"It's about managing and taking the fear out of social situations if you know you're very disfluent, but also learning ways to come out of blocks or stammers that you find yourself in. Treatment involves counselling and guiding the person into living and managing their stammer. Some people do become very fluent, but not everyone does." She said parents with children who stammer should bring them to see a speech and language therapist. "While most people, even GPs would say to let nature take its course, a speech and language therapist dealing with very young children can spot the difference between a child who would be going through a normal period of disfluency and one showing signs that may need some type of guidance. It's really important not to leave it and get them referred to therapy."

Children with speech impediments in Ireland today have many more resources at their disposal compared to the time when Fr O'Flynn was working from The Loft. The first speech and language therapy course in Cork was started in 2003 at UCC, with its first set of students graduating in 2007. Prof Gibbon said: "When people think about speech disorders they think about stammering, but it's really a very tiny part of our work.

"A rough estimate is that one in 10 children will have some type of communication problem and that can include learning language and speaking difficulties, hearing impairment, autism, dyslexia, cerebral palsy and physical difficulties as well as head injuries in children who have some kind of brain damage.

"The first speech and language course in Ireland started in 1969 after Fr O'Flynn died, so everybody practicing in Ireland at the time had trained in the UK. Huge progress was achieved during the 2000s, with courses offered in Trinity, UCC, NUI Galway and a postgraduate course at the University of Limerick. We suddenly had 100 people graduating every year from the four colleges who could provide a service for people in Ireland and those services grew in Cork.

"People who stammer can live fantastic lives and I know some really high fliers. It doesn't mean you can't live your life to the full."

Artefacts go on show at exhibition

AN EXHIBITION on the life and work of Fr James Christopher O'Flynn is due to open in University College Cork tomorrow.

'Give me the Flowing Line' celebrates the life of Fr O'Flynn and his work with people in Cork who stammered.

It comes nearly 50 years after his death and acknowledges the progress made in the last

The exhibition has been collated by the Department of Speech and Hearing Sciences and features images from Fr Christy O'Flynn's life,

50 years in providing speech and language therapy for the people of Cork. The exhibition is due to be officially opened by broadcaster Donncha

O'Dúlaing at a reception in the Jennings Gallery in the Brookfield Health Sciences Complex in UCC tomorrow evening. The exhibition has been

collated by the Department of Speech and Hearing Sciences and features images from Fr O'Flynn's life, panels describing his work in The Loft, a bust and artefacts such as his handwritten notes, his beretta and chasuble.

The exhibition is due to be opened at 6pm tomorrow evening and is open to the public until November 4.