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## Bereaved mother helps car crash survivor to 'speak' again

By Seanin Graham  
 Health Correspondent

**T**HE mother of a GAA player killed in a car crash has revealed how a charity set up in his memory has bought a special machine to help a victim of the accident 'speak' again.

Shaun-Paul O'Hagan (26) was the first person to die on the north's roads in 2007. He was killed not far from his Martinstown home in Co Antrim when the car in which he was a passenger left the road early on New Year's Day.

The sports fanatic played senior football for Antrim and had been named 'personality of the year' by his area's GAA club, Conn Magee's, shortly before his death.

His family and friends have raised £6,000 to buy a specialist 'communicator' machine for Larne woman Cara McGerrigan (26), who survived the crash. She now uses a wheelchair and has lost the power of speech due to the extent of her injuries.

The portable piece of equipment is similar to a small laptop.

Known as a 'voice output communication aid', it uses letters, symbols, key phrases and pictures which were previously part of Cara's vocabulary to allow her to express herself.

The highly sophisticated equipment is available on the NHS but is subject to a waiting list.

Sinead O'Hagan said the loss of Shaun-Paul, who was the eldest of her four children, was still "very raw".

"We were so devastated after Shaun-Paul, we needed a goal to keep us going. He was always helping and doing favours for others



**CHARITY IN MEMORY OF VICTIM:**

Shaun-Paul O'Hagan was killed in a car crash in 2007. His mother Sinead has founded a charity to help people injured in road accidents

so we decided to set up the charity to help survivors of car accidents," she said.

"The first person we thought of was Cara. She got the machine in August and it is being personalised to her needs. We hope it helps her.

"I have also contacted Musgrave Park brain injury unit in Belfast to tell them what we're doing and provide any help.

"Our aim is to provide financial support for medical care and equipment to victims and their families."

Cara's parents, Anne and Paul McGerrigan, expressed their gratitude to the charity.

"We are so touched that they thought of us and we hope this will make a difference to Cara's life," Mr McGerrigan said.

Last week *The Irish News* reported that Northern Ireland is bucking a worldwide trend with a sharp rise in the number of road deaths. A total of 104 people have died on the north's roads since the beginning of the year, compared to 94 in the same period last year.

The fundraising website set up by the O'Hagan family is [www.spocharitabletrust.co.uk](http://www.spocharitabletrust.co.uk).



**DELIGHTED:** Cara McGerrigan, left, and Sinead O'Hagan with the electronic device that will help Ms McGerrigan to communicate

PICTURE: Mal McCann



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