

'Skydive is about getting to grips with my MS'

BY VICTORIA HOUSDEN

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A BRAVE Omagh lady who will simply not be defeated by her MS, will soon be taking part in a tandem skydive to raise money for two charities close to her heart.

Casting her fears of the unknown aside, Shirlee McKeown has decided to fall from the sky this summer in aid of her two favourite charities, MS Omagh and District Group and Fermanagh Branch of the Children's Heartbeat Trust.

The 51-year-old who works as an administrator in the Fermanagh and Omagh District Council offices in the Grange, was diagnosed with Relapsing Remitting MS (RRMS) at the age of 45. The symptoms she suffers include persistent fatigue, headaches, and distracting sensations reminiscent of pins and needles on her body.

"I'm very excited for the skydive, but of course it's nerve-racking as well," Shirlee said. "The skydive is really about me getting to grips with my MS. It's about accepting what it is doing to me and its progression.

"I just told myself, Right. There are things which I've put off for years.

Let's do them while I'm still well enough to do them. And these things included the sky dive, and finishing off my BSc degree."

She added, "It's easy for someone to tell me that I look well on the outside, but my MS affects me inwardly. It affects my mindset, my mobility, and it saps my energy.

"For years, I didn't feel like doing anything. So this is my way of facing my MS head-on, and doing something which I've wanted to do for a very long time for two charities which mean the world to me."

All money which Shirlee collects will be recorded and split equally between both charities.

For more information and to donate online, visit Shirlee's personal website which she designed herself ahead of her skydive on May 6: www.smck.ne.uk

There are also collection boxes for Shirlee's cause in Bennett's, Omagh, the Public Services Centre, Omagh and the Omagh Leisure Complex.

Meanwhile, local MS charity, the MS Omagh and District Group will be hosting a quiz night tomorrow (Friday, March 24) at McGinns Bar, Killyclogher to raise funds.



Shirlee McKeown is hoping that she will have more than a Mary Poppins umbrella when she goes on a charity skydive to raise money for the Multiple Sclerosis Society and Children's Heartbeat Trust.

Picture: Michael Cullen