

COMMUNITY EMPLOYMENT

QUIETLY WORKING FOR OVER 20 YEARS

Special projects help people break addiction and change their lives

BY ALLEN MEAGHER

Barry Corkery is one of this year's selectors on the Cork senior football management team. He is less well known in Cork for his day job as a senior addiction counsellor managing a HSE-funded treatment centre in Tralee, Co. Kerry.

Corkery is obviously good with teams and, as he once told *Irish Examiner* readers during an interview about fitness, the work of his addiction support team in Brandon House, Tralee, is tremendous.

Speaking of his colleagues supporting people in recovery, he said, "You would be just blown away by the work being put in."

The staff in Brandon House work closely with equally dedicated staff supervising a special Community Employment (CE) scheme next door.

Through collaboration between the HSE and North East West Kerry Development, people supported by Brandon House are often encouraged to seek a place on the special CE scheme. CE projects nationally are funded through the Department of Social Protection.

Last July, *Changing Ireland* met with participants on the scheme. They provided rich testimony about personal, physical and career development goals they reached or were striving towards on the scheme.

Many of the participants, as they moved on from addiction, had plans to study at third level, become counsellors themselves, or gym



• *Róisín, one of the Tralee participants, sings for her classmates and visitors.*

instructors. One former engineer wanted to change his life and was, at the time of our visit, abroad in Scotland on a course in forest meditation.

Such is the level of transformation possible for participants who emerge from a treatment centre clear of their addiction, but not yet ready to slide easily back into society and find regular employment or know

what they want in life. By taking a place on the CE scheme, they allow themselves three years to grow and develop.

The reason for the gathering in the kitchen on the day *Changing Ireland* dropped by was a ministerial visit, and there was a quiet, dignified atmosphere in the room as the participants told their stories.

"I had fear coming in here at first

and I'm now here two years," said one person who was afraid at the beginning to even speak.

"It has changed my life," said a fellow participant, and she explained how.

A third chose instead of speaking to sing beautifully for the visitors.

The staff explained why the programme works so well.

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• *ALL SMILES: Development workers and HSE staff with Community Employment Scheme participants and staff during Minister Joe O'Brien's visit.*

“We know it works because it has been tried and tested,” says the HSE's Barry Corkery

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“We go softly. Personal development is a key part of it,” said Daniel O’Shea, CE supervisor.

His colleague Tara Conway, piped in: “We follow the academic calendar from September to May. It helps people get structure and routine after they come out of (addiction) treatment.”

The project gets its training through Education and Training Board tutors and classes run from 9am-1pm, Monday to Friday.

“During the summer, they do a lot of outdoor activities such as paddle-boarding, rock-climbing, drumming, meditation, running, art – it’s wide-ranging,” added Tara.

Barry said, “We know it works because it has been tried and tested.”

He said that people come because of heroin, cocaine and tablet use.

“However, alcohol is still the number one addiction that we see in our services next door in Brandon House.”

He said it was helpful to have the CE scheme operate alongside – “under the same roof” as the HSE’s Brandon House treatment centre.

“The opposite of addiction is connection,” he said, adding that the locally-based response was “hugely significant”.

Minister of State Joe O’Brien was duly impressed.

OVER 20 YEARS

Some people may not have heard of CE drug rehabilitation schemes, despite their having been in existence for over 20 years.

In 2003, this magazine reported on concerns in Dublin that CE project funding would be cut, and Macro Community Resource Centre was especially worried.

Macro expressed pride in the achievements of the 13 participants on its drug rehabilitation scheme. Each one was a former opiate user. Four were early school leavers who were excelling in education; four more had just run a mini-marathon to raise €500 for the CE project; two others were on work placement and all had completed a range of courses.

Nevertheless, the project felt compelled to appeal to then Community Minister Noel Ahern to maintain funding.

While drugs taskforce funding was reduced, “shamefully” said youth

workers, the special CE schemes survived. (Today, Macro still operates a CE scheme).

Moving forward a decade, in 2013, there were 47 CE drug rehabilitation schemes around the country, with the vast majority (35) of them in Dublin. Together, they provided training and support to around 1,000 participants. Funded by the Department of Social Protection (DSP), they helped recovering drug users to develop their personal and employment skills and where possible find a pathway to work.

In a study conducted in 2013, the DSP recognised that unemployment was high in many areas where drug use was also most prevalent, yet it nonetheless “strongly valued” the role of the schemes.

Speaking nearly a decade later – last May - Minister of State Joe O’Brien said the schemes have “a very significant social inclusion focus”, they are “well embedded in our local communities nationally” and are “engaged in significant levels of local service support”.

Two months later, he visited the project in Tralee.

The scheme there was begun in 2017 by two community workers, Cathal O’Shea and Robert Carey from NEWKD.

Tara recalled, “There was one supervisor and 13 participants. Because of the success of the scheme, we got one more supervisor and two administrator roles and increased the participant number to 18.”

Recently, the scheme was approved to take on another supervisor and eight more participants on a bespoke programme for people in recovery and on methadone. The same programme worked well ten years ago for Macro.

Figures for 2022 show there were 905 drug rehabilitation scheme places across the State that year. Roughly half of those were in schemes in the capital. There were 94 places in the mid-west, north-west and west, but only six places in the midlands.

In 2023, there may be scope to extend such schemes further. David Lane, co-ordinator of the HSE’s Southern Region Drugs and Alcohol Taskforce, hopes to see each ‘hub’ in Cork and Kerry with at least one CE drug rehabilitation scheme in the future.

Tralee's TEAM project is a place where together everyone achieves more!

Tralee's Team Project is a Community Employment Scheme for people in recovery from addiction. It gives people coming out of recovery a safe space to find out what they want to do next. Often people in addiction have chaos in their lives. This project provides a calm environment in which every person is nurtured while they grow roots to anchor themselves in life.

AIMS

The aims of the scheme are individualised depending on the future goals of the participant. The main aim is to improve the participant's life by:

- Encouraging health and wellbeing.
- Supplying access to training and education.
- Sourcing relevant work placements and work experience.
- Supporting progression to further education and/or employment.

PROJECT PARTNERS

The key partners behind the project are:

- North, East & West Kerry Local Development Company;
- Addiction treatment services - Brandon House, Edward Court, The Grove, and Coolmine Treatment Centre;
- The Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection;
- The Southern Regional Drug and Alcohol Taskforce;
- Kerry Education and Training Board;
- The group participants are referred by HSE addiction services, Coolmine addiction services and the Grove residential treatment centre.

CONTACT THE PROJECT

Contact: CE Supervisors Joanne Kelly-Walsh or Daniel O’Shea (*pictured right*). Tara Conway has moved on to a new job.

Email: joannekellywalsh@newkd.ie or danieloshea@newkd.ie



WEBSITE

Find out much more here about the project and what participants can typically expect: <https://newkd.ie/employment/team-project/>



COMMUNITY EMPLOYMENT

Killian and Geraldine tell their stories after joining a Community Employment scheme

We moved from destructive patterns to building new habits and it's transforming our lives

BY ALLEN MEAGHER

Geraldine and Killian, both participants on a Special Community Employment Scheme, spoke to *Changing Ireland* about how they moved from being panicky, nervous and withdrawn to becoming confident, hopeful and action-orientated people. They had both been through treatment, but found the scheme was necessary for them to move on from addiction.

Geraldine is in her third year on the scheme. She said it "absolutely" made a big difference going from a treatment centre to a CE scheme: "Because of all the years of relapsing, I came to the stage where I knew I had to do this very slowly."

She was nervous.

"Back then I could not speak in public. I was afraid of my own shadow. I was isolated."

The scheme focuses "mainly on physical health, mental health and personal development" and she said she needed it. "Coming out of addiction, my self-belief and self-esteem was shattered, broken, on the floor."

In her fourth year in recovery, Geraldine is now confident.

"With the benefits of what we've been doing here on the scheme I have found my voice. I can speak. I push myself further. In personal development, one of the things we do here is taking little steps to push past the fear. It's gently done.

As a group it helps that we're all going through similar stuff.

"Structure is a big thing here. We have our timetable. We know what we're going doing for the next week. It varies from doing workshops, doing steps, to doing kayaking, mountain climbing. There are around 17 in the group – the number varies," she said.

"We call it the T.E.A.M. project – Together Everyone Achieves More," said Killian. "It's like a family. We all bond through our experiences. It's a safe place."

NEGATIVE TO POSITIVE

Killian is a year and a half on the scheme.

"After treatment there wasn't a hope I could have gone straight into college. I'd have been too anxious.



• Killian and Geraldine have changed their lives and hope to help others.

"If you can get into a project like this you've struck gold."
- Killian

"You need a bit of time to yourself to get to know who you are. I thought I wasn't able to socialise with people, that I was socially incapable.

"From working in the scheme, I noticed that actually I'm not a bad communicator. They were just negative beliefs.

"It was like creating a new life. Addiction is soul-destroying because you do things you thought you'd never do, but that's just you with the drink or the drug. You lose the connection with yourself. The real you you have to unearth.

"I find with the help of the scheme, doing tasks daily, having structure – it helps you get balance in your life. For example, we learn basic life-

skills like cookery, but it's not just about the culinary skills, it's about learning to eat nutritious foods.

"As addicts our heads go very fast, so we do things to slow down our minds, like meditation and art therapy. We do things like hillwalking, paddle-boarding and kayaking to get the endorphins going.

"Working with (CE supervisors) Daniel and Tara, they help you to come out of yourself, to rebuild you. It's like when you're building a house, you need a good foundation – before you go on to get jobs, or go into college.

"We came in here with all sorts of destructive patterns, but day by day

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"On the scheme I found my voice. I can speak. I push myself further."
- Geraldine

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we're building new habits and it's transforming our lives. Anything is possible. The world is our oyster.

"This is like my secondary treatment," he said. "I found it was the best thing I've ever done."

ADVICE FOR OTHERS

Asked for advice to anyone thinking of going into treatment and wondering what will happen afterwards, Killian said:

"I think after treatment you do need a whole year to yourself just to kind of find out who you are. If you can get into a project like this you've struck gold."

Geraldine joined the scheme after "it was suggested to me to come here".

"Really and truly, for anyone out there, I know in my heart and soul, after many, many relapses, after feeling hopeless, that getting onto a scheme like this was the next right thing I needed to do.

"It was very simple to pick up the phone to Daniel and Tara here to get that organised (to sign up for the scheme).

"My addiction had changed so

many lives, but now my recovery is changing lives too, gently and slowly. It's beautiful," she said.

FUTURE PLANS

When we first spoke to Killian, his ambition was to do a personal training course in a gym.

"That was my passion before. I want to be a coach, to maybe become a life coach and help people with their mental health through fitness. That's what helped me. I got through my addiction by renewing my old passion for the gym."

Since then, and while remaining on the CE scheme, Killian has gained an industry standard qualification in fitness by completing a personal training course with Elite Fitness and Performance Academy in Dublin.

Geraldine was interested in studying addiction counselling and psychotherapy. She could study part-time and stay on the CE scheme.

"Wouldn't it be wonderful if I could turn my life story around and take that experience and channel it in a positive way - that would be amazing," she said.

She looked forward to "going back into the workplace and doing a course" and since then she has begun a Level 6 course in Mental Health in the Community in UCC.

MORE SCHEMES

Both Killian and Geraldine would like more people to know about the scheme and welcomed last summer's visit by Minister Joe O'Brien.

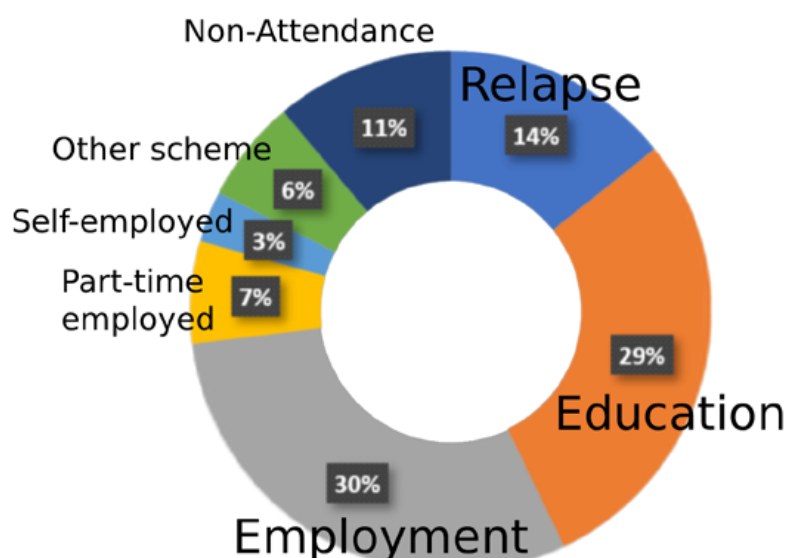
Geraldine said, "It's great to see someone at that level taking interest. We're so passionate about the scheme. It has changed my life. Those changes weren't just for me. I have two sons at home. The positive ripple effect on them. I can put that down to the support and to the work I've done here."

"And it was nice to see him acknowledging the work by Daniel and Tara," Killian added. They both agreed that "There should be more of these schemes around the country."

NEWKD

Teach Bhreannain
BRANDON HOUSE

TEAMS - Past participants outcomes to date (Jan 2023)



MORE PEOPLE SHOULD GET INVOLVED WITH PUBLIC PARTICIPATION NETWORKS

A new public awareness campaign for Public Participation Networks (PPNs) was launched in February to encourage community groups to join and have their voice heard in local decision-making.

The campaign also aims to encourage groups that represent young and marginalised people to join their local PPN.

Public Participation Networks allow local authorities to connect with community groups and give people a greater say in local government decisions that affect their communities.

Each county and city in Ireland has its own PPN, and more than 18,000 community and voluntary groups are currently members.

Some of the projects and initiatives undertaken by PPNs include: summer camps for children with autism in Longford, the development of an Anti-Poverty Strategy in Clare, and liaising with women living in Direct Provision in Galway to help improve their employment prospects.

Cliona Kelliher from Kildare PPN said: "More than a thousand PPN representatives are currently on boards and committees of local decision-making bodies. They are contributing to decisions on climate, transport, migrant integration, community health and wellbeing, policing and many more."

In June 2022, the Department of Rural and Community Development published the PPN Structural Review Report.

It found that not all PPNs operated independently and recommended a review of the PPN structure to ensure independence is improved.

Membership of a local PPN brings benefits. It gives groups access to training programmes, information on funding and grants, and on proposals or decisions being made in their county, as well as networking and learning opportunities.

For more information, see:
www.gov.ie/PPN.