

Quay Times



Merchants Quay Ireland
Homeless & Drugs Services

The Newsletter for Supporters of Merchants Quay Ireland

Conor was motherless at four, homeless at 19 and shattered by 24.

Conor could have easily lost years in homelessness. Your love helped him get his life back on track with MQI's Young Person Support Programme.

Conor is a proud young man and a picture of health now, strong and fit. His blue eyes are full of life and hope. As he describes the years in group homes and hostels, Conor's voice is both brave and fragile... with a wisdom much older than his 24 years.

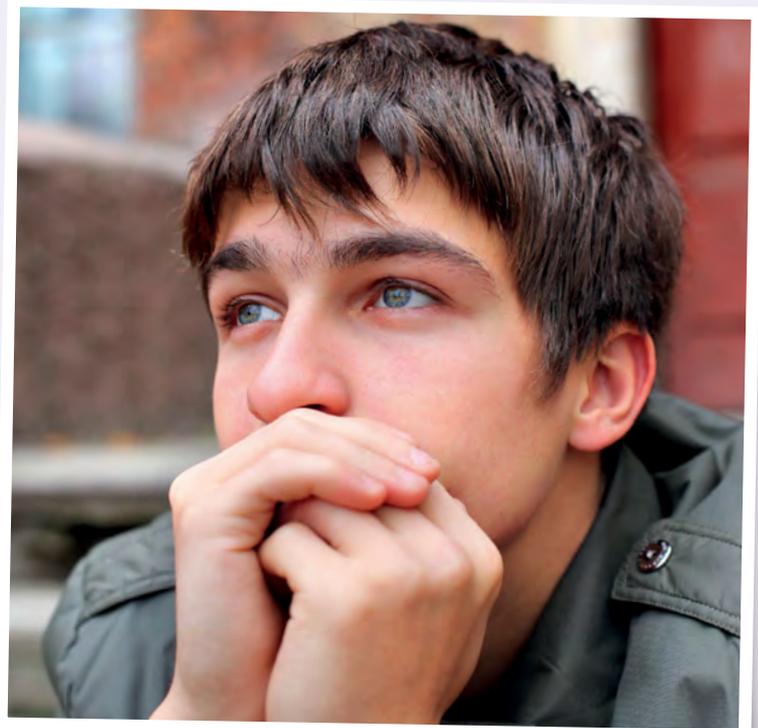
"My mum died when I was four and my dad had drug problems, so I had to go into care. My sister took me in when she turned 19. She was my mother figure, an angel. It was only when I got into my teens that it sunk in I'd lost my mum forever and I'd never ever get to know her."

Conor's grief caught up with him. Drugs began to take hold of his young life, pulling him down. "I worried that I was a burden on my sister, so when I was 19 I thought it was time to stand on my own two feet. But I had nowhere to go and I didn't know how to cope on my own. Before long I was homeless."

"I couldn't show any weakness"

Living in emergency accommodation broke Conor's tender spirit. "At first, I'd just get up in the morning and leave the hostel. Anything not to be around the

“ Homelessness broke me down. I felt it was just me against the world. When I reached out to Merchants Quay Ireland, I really needed to get help.”



other people, because you can't show any weakness."

"I tried to keep mentally strong, but after six months being homeless, it felt like the world was against me. That's how I got into a hole. I started drinking too much, smoking drugs, taking pills. I just broke down."

Young people like Conor can very easily spiral downwards - with years lost in pain and addiction. Because of you, Conor got the help he desperately needed at MQI. He came to our Riverbank drop-in centre and joined our Young Person Support Programme. This is a special programme 100% funded by you, our MQI family.

I was broken.

"When I came here that first day, I'm not going to lie, I started crying. I looked in the mirror, my face was so skinny, like I was on worse drugs than even pills. I felt disgusted with myself. I was broken. I'd lost

continued on Page 5

Your kindness lights a candle in every client's heart. Thank you for believing people can change

“Just because I made a wrong turn, doesn't mean I can't change direction.” How your faith in MQI lights John's way to a new life.

John has the hands of a musician. He plays classical guitar and the fingernails on his right hand are slightly longer, to make the strings ring out. At 41 years of age, his face lights up when he talks about the art sessions he completed during his rehabilitation at MQI's High Park.

John's creativity and love of music started in early childhood. As a happy go lucky ten-year-old boy, he was thrilled to win a trophy in a local talent show for singing. More than anything, he was delighted to make his grandad proud. As his only father figure, John adored his grandfather.



Yet, despite their special bond, John was unable to tell his grandad when a man in his local community began to sexually abuse him. The abuse was horrific, John's innocence was stolen, and he was so afraid he didn't tell a soul.

Secrecy and shame took over

His feelings of shame and hurt were pushed down inside. The abuse he suffered turned John into an angry teenager. John numbed his pain and blurred the awful memories with alcohol and eventually drugs. Drugs led towards crime. And crime led him to prison.

“It was 25 years later” says John, “Only then could I talk

about the trauma of what had happened to me as a child. That's how long it took for me to open up.”

Every client who comes to MQI wants to recover – to set themselves free from the pain that underpins years of addiction. At High Park, your support helps to heal the human spirit.

“Coming from prison, the environment at High Park was like coming home almost,” says John. “There's a family feeling and we look after each other. When you have differences or disagreements, you have to air them out and resolve them. You get pulled-up on your behaviours and you have to sit down and think about being responsible. You can't just run

away, and that helps to break the cycle of addiction.”

Using art to connect...even with subjects that are terrible

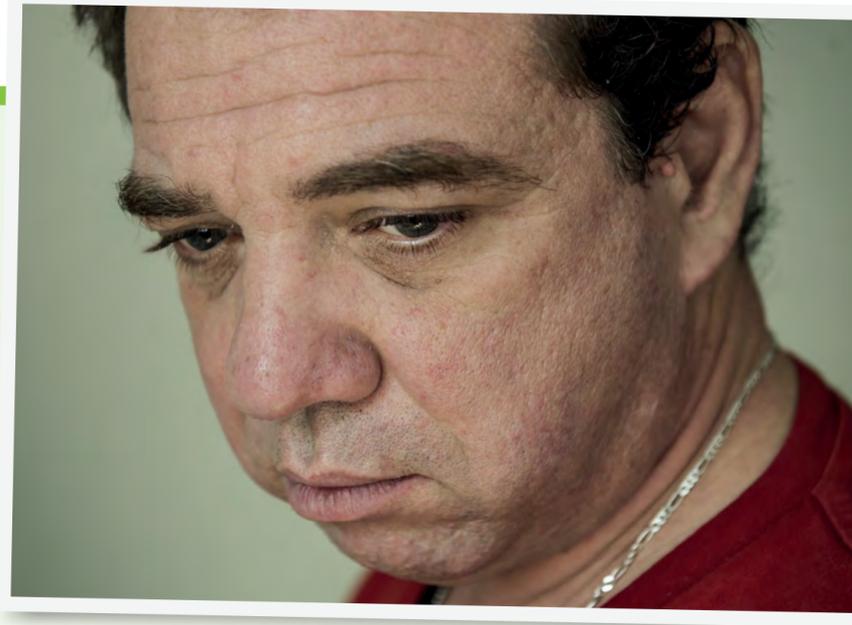
As well as group therapy sessions and one-to-one counselling, with your support, High Park can offer holistic therapies. Art sessions are a powerful way to reach inside, bringing dark feelings into the light. “I really enjoyed art, even though at first I thought I couldn't draw a stick man!” smiles John. “But it wasn't about that at all. Art is for getting in touch, even with subjects that are terrible. We'd draw or paint something to signify the hurt buried inside. I did one project for my grandad because he passed away

when I was in prison and I couldn't go to the funeral. I couldn't even talk about it. But working on that little art project was my way of starting to grieve for him.”

“I'd like to work to my strengths”

Since moving on from High Park, John's still using creativity as his source of strength. His goal is to build a career working with vulnerable young people, teaching and healing through music and writing. He hopes to dedicate his life to giving back and helping others.

You are behind the courage to start again with Merchants Quay



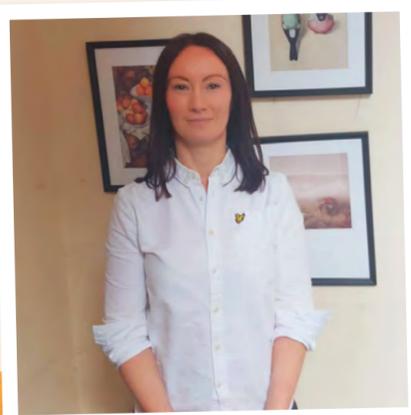
Ireland. Your support brings about change in people. Through programmes like art therapy at High Park, your kindness lights a candle in every client's heart. “I can't say enough good things about High Park,” John wants to tell you, “It's probably one of

the most difficult things I've ever done in my life, but the most rewarding.”

Being strong is more about what you can't see, it's having the courage to be vulnerable. Thank you for believing that people can, and do, change. ■

“Drawing helps people feel free enough to express themselves. There's no such thing as good or bad art here.” – Meet Tara, art therapist at High Park rehabilitation centre.

When clients first arrive at High Park, it can be hard for them to know where to begin their recovery journey. Specialised activities and therapies, provided by your generous donations, are a bedrock for healing.



Starting to talk about very painful experiences in a group setting can feel frightening. It takes courage to be vulnerable, to share your story and to learn from others. Tara runs group therapy sessions as well as the art classes. So,

she sees how each compliments the other.

“Clients coming to High Park usually have never tried drawing or painting, so they imagine they're not creative and won't be any good,” explains Tara. “I encourage clients to focus on their emotional space - how things feel rather than how things look.”

An image more powerful than a thousand words

“The beauty of art therapy is people don't need to talk about themselves. Instead, they can talk about the picture they painted. This can feel safer and less intimidating. As clients build trust in the process they often open up and face things they have found too hard to talk about before.”



Often clients who come to High Park have trouble with reading and writing. Tara invites them to draw their life story. “Sometimes a very simple drawing can be more powerful than a thousand words on a page,” says Tara. “Some people enjoy the process of drawing or painting and they just relax into it. Others find it very frustrating. The work is just as



valid. Even to the person who tore up their sheet and threw it in the bin – there's lots to talk about in that! It's not really about the end result, it's the whole process.”

It takes patience and kindness to heal a wounded heart. Thank you for giving this precious time and space to clients at High Park. ■



Please Will You be Our Guest

Your warm welcome to MQI's High Park Supporter Open Day!

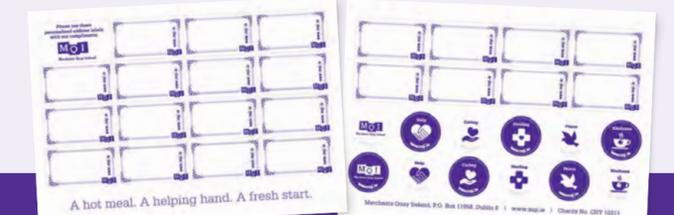
We would love it if you could be our guest of honour at this special Supporter Open Day in the heart of Drumcondra at MQI's High Park Residential Rehabilitation Centre. Meet the dedicated staff you help support...hear more about the amazing 14-week programme you make real... and enjoy a guided tour with past and present clients. ■



When: Saturday September 3rd from 11am to 3pm.
Where: High Park Residential Rehabilitation Centre, Drumcondra, Dublin 9 (minutes off the M50!)
How: To be included on the guest list, please RSVP to Emma by July 30th on **01 524 0139**.

Help Spread the Word About MQI's Work With Every Letter You Send:

Unless you've requested otherwise, with this newsletter you'll find an MQI summer tradition: Our gift of MQI address labels, to you. They're not fancy, and we print them right here. And they only cost around 7c per sheet. Until every person in Ireland has a place to call home, you'll help us spread the word by using the labels. **To request more any time, please ring Maggie on 01 524 0139. Thank you! ■**



“Art helps clients to open up and face things they find hard to talk about.” Tara, art therapist at High Park



continued from Page 1

three stone in weight. I said to myself 'I'm not doing this anymore, I'm joining the gym, I'm going to start eating like a horse.'

Because of your support for MQI's work, Conor's life is now back on track. He comes regularly to the Young Person Support Programme with other clients aged 18-24. This programme gives those young people most at risk of falling into addiction or homelessness, the space to discover themselves through creativity.

They're young, homeless and just want to talk

"There are people in our programme who aren't using drugs. They're homeless, they

don't have any family and they just need somewhere to go. We come here and talk to each other and to Antoinette, the young person support worker.

"I'm seeing improvements every week in myself, but I'm also seeing improvements in the others who come. For the first few weeks people are really depressed. And now as weeks go by, I see more smiles on our faces. We're moving forward, rather than backwards or downwards, if you get me."

Today, Conor has completed a detox programme, has a flat of his own and a MQI key-worker to support him. In May this year he got a new job and is busy planning his future. Like so many young people his age, he dreams

of travelling.

"I want to be working from now until next year and have a good bit of money saved. My dream is to one day go to Rome and see the Colosseum and the Sistine Chapel."

The Young Person Support Programme works completely because of you. Your generosity to Merchants Quay Ireland keeps young people like Conor from losing years to homelessness and addiction. Thank you for every beautiful, promising life you save... just in time. ■

Moving young people out of homelessness

Antoinette has been working with MQI for 11 years and is passionate about supporting young people who are homeless.

"It's very easy for young people to fall through the cracks. When they come in the door of MQI, they are feeling lost and alone. Many have come from the care system or they are here because of family breakdown. More and more they struggle with their mental health. I think Covid left them feeling isolated and cut off from the world.

With the Young Person Support Programme we work at building their self-esteem and confidence. They have a WhatsApp group together and it's lovely to see them looking out for each other.

I can't thank our supporters enough for caring about these vulnerable young people."





You are lighting the way forward

Thank you for your lifeline of hope

Your generosity towards MQI's urgent summer appeal is already at work. For people losing their homes and their hope in the current economic crisis, your kindness is a godsend.

Your generosity of heart provides a refuge at MQI for everyone who comes to our door. Your compassion ensures people who find themselves homeless for the first time, alone and overwhelmed, are given the support they need to survive. Your kindness is in every nourishing meal offered, every hot shower, every healthcare visit.

As the cost-of-living crisis sends more people into darkness and despair, you are a north star lighting the way forward with hope. ■

Thank you!

“ I came to MQI when I first got evicted and had nowhere else to go...The staff are helping me sort my life out and find a flat I can afford. They believe things will get better for me, even when I struggle to believe that myself.”

Patrick – MQI Homeless Service client

A Summer Wish List

People sleeping rough still have extreme weather to cope with even in summer. When scorched by the sun or drenched by the rain, that extra relief you give shows that someone still cares.

Can you help with any of these items?

- ✓ Sunscreen and sunhats to prevent sunburn 
- ✓ Toiletries: shampoo, shower gel, toothpaste and toothbrushes 
- ✓ New, packaged men's underwear (boxers and briefs) size medium 
- ✓ New, packaged women's underwear (including sports bras) size medium
- ✓ New, packaged socks for men and women
- ✓ Light, waterproof rain jackets for men and women. 

Donate your items in person to MQI at 24 Merchants Court, 10:00 am to 3:00 pm, Monday to Friday. Or if you live in Dublin and can't come to us, just ring Emma on **01 524 0139** and she'll arrange to collect them from you. ■

Big Wish

Can you help to renovate a bathroom at High Park? Your donation towards the total cost of €2,000 can make this happen! Please ring Emma on **01 524 0139** if you'd like to help.

Thank you!



Merchants Quay Ireland
Homeless & Drugs Services

24 Merchants Quay,
P.O. Box 11958,
Dublin 8

To make your gift by phone: please ring us on **01 524 0139**.

-  **Telephone:** 01 524 0139
-  **Volunteering:** 01 524 0128
-  **Email:** supportercare@mqi.ie
-  **Website:** www.mqi.ie
-  **Facebook:** Merchants Quay Ireland
-  **Twitter:** @MerchantsQuayIR

At MQI we respect everyone who turns to us for help – and many are just beginning their fresh start in life. So while client stories are genuine and true, names are changed and stock photographs of models are used for illustrative purposes and to protect client privacy. Thank you for your understanding.