

Quay Times



Merchants Quay Ireland
Homeless & Drugs Services

The Newsletter for Supporters of Merchants Quay Ireland

"People tell me I don't 'look' homeless. But what does a homeless person look like?"—

She Could Be Anybody's Child

For every story of recovery from homelessness or addiction there are a hundred more still unresolved, faces in crisis at our doorstep and in such sad need of someone to care. And if not for you – right here beside us – this young and grieving woman would have no one at all. Thank you...



"I used to always be thinking 'what's rock bottom?'. But I know what rock bottom is now because I can't see a way out. I tried to get into treatment twice over the winter. Everywhere is at capacity. I'm trying to accept the fact that this is my life now," says Rachel. Right now your kind support is Rachel's only lifeline, providing direct help like the Night Café, hot meals, and clean clothes.

Rachel is just a waif of a thing – there is so little weight left on her she seems to vanish in the clothes she's wearing. She tugs at her jumper as if trying to hide her shame. Poor mental health, trauma, homelessness, and addiction will beat you down that way. "Just look at the dirt of me," she hangs her head.

This is a difficult story to tell you. Rachel isn't her real name. But she wants you to know everything, the whole unravelling of her life – and when you hear it you will be glad to guard

her privacy, because she is so fragile. She wants you to know it could happen to anyone. She wants you to know she is grateful to you. And she prays, most of all, for her peace of mind, for hope... for a way out.

Near the steps of the university she attended

You are, in a literal sense, keeping Rachel alive. "I've been homeless for two years," she pauses, then pulls her sleeves over her slender hands

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Thank You For a Year of Sundays!

It's still early days after Easter. But we wanted to let you know that it's looking really promising...

The generosity you showed this Lent stands ready to safeguard a year of Sunday Services at MQI. Our thanks can never match the relief on the hundreds of unimaginably weary faces who will now be able to turn to us in your honour.

On a day when virtually every other door is closed to them, every Sunday dinner... every hot shower... every grateful word... is because you chose to give. 100% of all Easter donations will be ringfenced to fund the Sunday dinners, and we just want to thank you for keeping the lights on and the homemade meals cooking for people in need. **You are, today and always, the heart of MQI. ■**



Anybody's Child... (continued from cover)

as if to gather the courage to continue. "I started coming because sometimes I can get in for the Night Café. Now I use Merchants Quay Ireland for every day, for showers and clean clothes, for something to eat, and my prescription from my doctors to help manage my anxiety."

She wanted us to show you as well the scars on her arms, and her legs. But it is just too painful to see – as painful as the story that brought her to this point. Days before we spoke Rachel slept rough near the steps of the university she once attended. A loving home and a good education were not enough to stop her world from crumbling. Starting when she was young, a panic disorder and crippling anxiety led to prescription medication from the age of sixteen. Still a child, before Rachel knew it she was overly dependent on the drugs even to function.

Two terrible losses

Her eyes fill with sorrow, and shame. "My mam helped get me into treatment. When she got sick, I would drive her up to St. James for

chemo treatments and I promised her I wasn't using drugs. But I was. She passed away from the cancer. The guilt still eats me up inside. She was my best friend."

A second loss would soon follow. The sudden and unexpected death of Rachel's beloved partner by suicide, the only other stable presence she'd known, has left her reeling. "It really helped me being with him. He had no problems – no money problems, he was totally against drugs, no one who knew him could believe he was gone like that. Now it's just me again," she says, and admits that in her grief, she has stumbled. "I'm blanking the pain out with anxiety drugs."

"It's gone very bad"

And she is mortified to beg on the streets. "Begging for money is the worst thing, it's so degrading. I'm afraid someone from down home will see me. Then being looked down on, being told, 'you don't look homeless, you're a fake.' But what does a homeless person look like? I've seen people begging with their cups, and someone comes and just kicks their cup into the middle of the road. It's gone very bad."

You might wonder how... in this



"The high level of homelessness, coupled with Ireland's ongoing drug epidemic, is causing a deep and widespread trauma. When people in addiction are forced to spend longer and longer in homelessness, their addiction and mental health can worsen. At MQI, we've seen a big increase in demand for the mental health services [that our donors help to keep here]," said CEO Paula Byrne in a recent interview for the Irish Catholic.

desperate effort to keep people like Rachel alive and safe from deadly drug overdose while they wait for more treatment places to become available... how is it possible to see even a spark of hope?

You hold the spark

For this weary waif who could be anybody's child, and for so many others – there but for the grace of God go any one of us – you hold the spark. Not just in the hot meals, clothing, and the basic medical and dental services you make possible. But with a mental team that is helping Rachel with her anxiety and grief. And by keeping our door open, a stable presence in her life. The place where she doesn't have to be afraid to close her eyes. The place where she is talking about recovery. "If I can't sleep at night now I meditate. I breathe deeply and slowly and say, 'Please God, come please.'" Then she tells us in her soft, shy voice, "I hope one day I'll be strong enough to get a place at St. Francis Farm. Please keep helping if you can, Merchants Quay are really good to us." Thank you, this springtime, for keeping people like Rachel alive. ■

For more on what clients like Rachel face, see part 2 of this year's special "Silence & Stigma" reports from MQI CEO Paula Byrne:

Ireland's 'Boxes of Despair'

Frontline responders describe the very real, yet seldom-discussed links between trauma, mental illness, addiction, and homelessness – and how support like yours is working at all four points to help people who are caught inside these 'boxes of despair' to survive, and one day, to thrive.



You're Invited!

Bring a garden tool if you can, and be our honoured guest —

Donor Open Day at St. Francis Farm

Chat to clients and staff and see firsthand the transformative work you support on your visit to MQI's St. Francis Farm Detox & Rehabilitation Project in Tullow, Co. Carlow for this year's **Donor Open Day, Saturday 8th June**. Seating is available on a limited, first reserved basis for free round-trip transport via private coaches from Dublin. You are welcome as well to make your own way by car. Either way, **please RSVP to Emma by 1st June on 01 524 0965 or Emma.Murphy@mqi.ie**. Buses depart 24 Merchants Quay at 10 and 11am.



Your day on the Farm:

- 10:00 and 11:00 am** Bus departs MQI-Dublin
- 11:30 am** Arrive at St. Francis Farm for welcome, coffee & tea
- 12:00 noon** Client and staff-led tours of the grounds and buildings
- 1:30 pm** Farm-fresh lunch in Beaumont House Rehab Centre
- 2:00 pm** Bus departs St. Francis Farm
- 3:30 pm** Arrive at MQI-Dublin, 24 Merchants Quay



Bring a garden tool: It means the world to our men and women to have you be part of their recovery journeys. If you're able to bring a garden tool to donate on the day, clients and staff on the Farm will be doubly thankful! See the wish list on page 6 for details, and we'll be waiting to greet you on 8th June!



Hope & Help in 12 Counties: Your Caring Donations at Work Across Ireland

Whether it's St. Francis Farm residential detox and rehabilitation in Tullow, or Riverbank's always-busy open access for people in City Centre with nowhere left to turn, every day across Ireland your generosity helps to provide a hand up, a first step, and a fresh start to hundreds of lives.

Thank you...

22 Locations Across 12 Counties

In addition to the direct help you provide through MQI from Dublin to Tullow, the practical supports you make possible also serve as a vital bridge to the future for men and women who complete MQI's State-funded counselling programmes inside the Irish Prison System.

Every day you ease suffering and rebuild shattered lives far beyond Dublin. Thank you so very much for the great good you do. ■



Through poetry, one client expresses his thanks for all you make possible in helping people move on from homelessness and the devastating disease of addiction —

Serenity

(One Client's Poem of Gratitude)

SERENITY

I'm proud to announce I'm sober three months today. It hasn't been easy let me tell you. The only way it has happened was keeping in the day.

Days I've had struggles and nearly gave up, but I stuck out, kept going, haven't taken one sup.

It's both amazing and scary the hold alcohol had over me. Hurting family, friends, my loved ones but most of all me. I'm so grateful to have found that place Merchants Quay.

They opened their door and let me in. Offered me food and a bed. That's when my whole journey would begin. With a safe space to lay my head.

It's clear to me now, that alcohol isn't for me. Lost so much respect, and belongings. All my actions on alcohol I could not see.

It took me places I never thought I'd be. Homeless. Lost and without dignity.

So anyone out there who struggles with addiction in any way. Keep tough, go to meetings because for me it was the only way.

Today I stand proud. Doing a scheme through CE and huge/massive thank you, to all the staff in Merchants Quay.

There is a place in my heart for all the staff in Merchants Quay. Such kind-hearted people, without their help I don't know where I'd be.

— By "D.W." who came through MQI's homeless centre and recovery programme as a direct result of donations like yours. Thank you.



Healing Through the Arts:

Wherever MQI works across Ireland, from the prison system to St. Francis Farm, healing through poetry, music, painting, and other forms of art are often integral to a client's processing – and eventually moving past – addiction, homelessness, and devastating past life events including abuse and loss. Your support makes this innovative and effective therapy happen. For this, and a hundred other daily mercies, **we are forever thankful to you.**



A County Kilkenny Lady

She wanted only to be described as a simple lady, and never looked for publicity or thanks. But to all the lives she transforms through her bequest to MQI, the quiet compassion of Rena Murphy will live on...

Frank Murphy never knew his 93-year-old mother planned to leave a gift to MQI in her Will. "After she passed I recall thinking, 'How did she know about Merchants Quay?' Then I realised she'd visited St. Francis Farm for Open Day (your invitation, page 3), years ago. She was so impressed with what she saw that she must have put a legacy into her Will soon after. It was so important to her that she never changed her Will all those years."

Then this son of Rena Murphy proves that his mother clearly shaped the man he's become: he shared her story in the hopes it might inspire others to give. "My father's tombstone is in memory of my dad. Would you believe, I've just got it, all she wanted on her tombstone was that she was his wife Rena, who died aged 93. She left a legacy to another Irish charity too."

Her charity began at home

Frank's eyes sparkle at her memory. "She came from a farming family, she's actually a County Kilkenny lady. Although she chose the nursing profession and trained in London, she always came back. You could say that her work began at home – and charity began at home – that she felt you've got to sort out home first. So she'd be delighted, absolutely thrilled, to see her MQI legacy at work here in Ireland."

He continues. "The patient would have always



During her lifetime no one knew the legacy of kindness that Rena – pictured here with daughter in law Teresa – would leave behind. "She wanted to be described as a simple lady," smiles her son Frank. "But Merchants Quay was obviously very much in her heart. She was amazing."

come first. It was well known in the parish that if something was wrong she was the lady that could be called upon. Any of the lads on the football field ever got injured, my mother was the first port of call!" His voice grows serious. "But she never forgot there were people who didn't have the same advantages she had. That would have been a big factor with her legacy. Particularly in how MQI help people overcome difficult circumstances – I thought, 'Aha, that would have been typical of her to give.'"

Kindness to the last

During her lifetime no one knew the legacy of kindness this lady from County Kilkenny would choose to leave behind. It was, until the end, between Rena and a trusted solicitor. It was how she wanted it too, smiles Frank. "She wanted to be described as a simple lady. She never looked for publicity about anything, or for any thanks. Merchants Quay was obviously very much in her heart. She was amazing." ■

►► **Note:** Large legacy or small, if you are considering a gift in your Will to MQI, the choice to let us know is always yours. On page 6 you'll find wording you can take to your solicitor, and the number to ring us, privately and confidentially, if you've ever any questions. Thank you.

Thank you, Frank, for honouring your mother's memory by sharing her story. And thank you Rena, for holding our men and women in your heart. You are, and will always be, forever in our hearts too.

Our simple and informative pack on Will-making is always free —

If now is a good time for you to be thinking about your own life story...

If right now is a good time for you to be thinking about the story your own life will tell, at Merchants Quay Ireland we have a simple and informative packet on leaving a gift to charity in your Will that we'd be happy to post to you FREE – privately and confidentially – with our compliments.

Whether you choose to remember MQI, or *any other charity*, in your Will, with the pack we'll include a beautiful beechwood heart handcrafted by clients at St. Francis Farm with their deepest thanks, and ours.



Once again the pack is free, and other supporters have told us it's a wonderful tool to take to their solicitor for a candid conversation on Will-making. Ring or email Emma to request yours, on **01 524 0965** or **Emma.Murphy@mqi.ie**. For every new story you begin at MQI for people in need right here at home, we will always remember you. ■

A Springtime Wish List...

"Blossom by blossom, the spring begins..." And so it is at MQI that – if you find yourself with items to spare – journeys back from addiction and homelessness can begin with "blossoms" as simple as your kind donation of much-needed items like these:

- ✓ Garden seeds
- ✓ Toiletries (always welcome)
- ✓ Water-proof jackets for comfort in wet weather
- ✓ New socks & jocks, all sizes
- ✓ Suncream to guard against exposure
- ✓ Commercial washing machine (Big wish! €4,000)



Donate your items in person to MQI at 24 Merchants Court, 9:30am to 5pm, Monday to Friday. Or if you live in Dublin and can't come to us, we'll be delighted to call to see you with the MQI photo album and collect your donated items – **ring Emma on 01 524 0965 for more.**

Special wish for if you are attending St. Francis

Farm Open Day: Emma isn't able to pick these items up beforehand. But if you're able to bring them with you to donate on Open Day, it would mean the world to clients there:

- ✓ Table tennis bats & balls, snooker cues
- ✓ Garden tools including secateurs, forks, spades, and hedge trimmers
- ✓ Wellies
- ✓ Mugs for coffee & tea



See page 3 for Open Day details. And thank you again! ■



Merchants Quay Ireland
Homeless & Drugs Services

Merchants Quay Ireland
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.

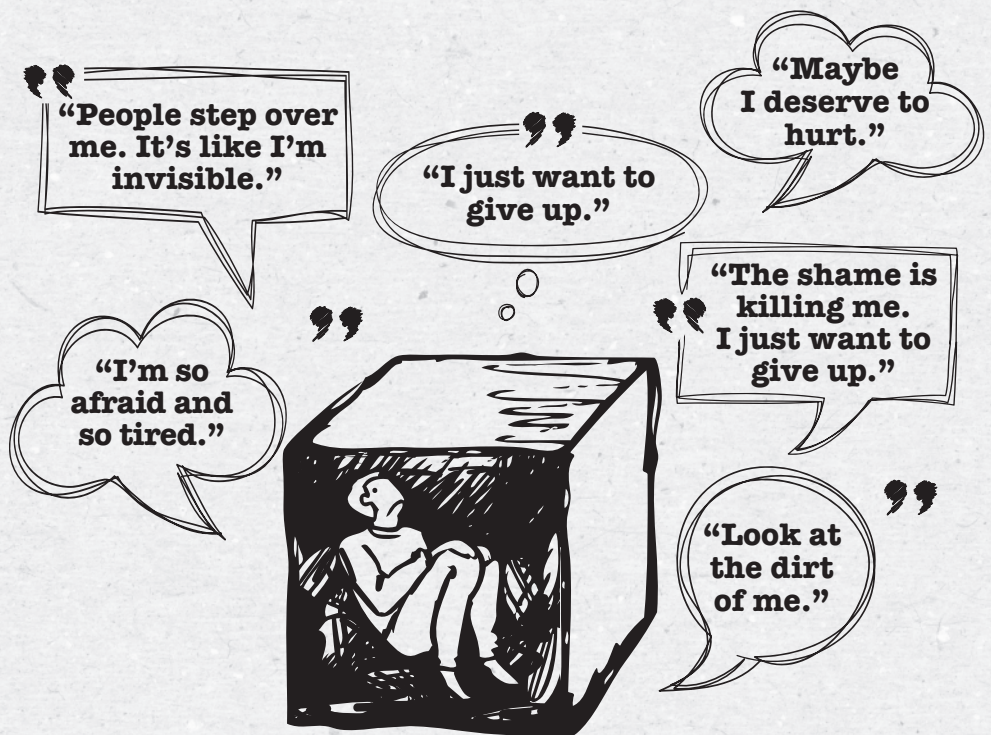
Ending the Silence & Stigma:

Part 2 – Ireland's 'Boxes of Despair'

For five years, frontline responders at MQI have been documenting the links between homelessness, life trauma, addiction, and mental illness: not only can one lead to the other, but often they compound each other as well. And it's leaving fragile people boxed in by despair...

Zoe Dillon's eyes are bright with passion and intelligence as she describes her work as a mental health nurse at the frontlines of Ireland's homelessness and drugs crisis. "I don't think there's been one day when we haven't seen someone here who is feeling suicidal, or who might have self-harmed. And it's not just in Ireland, it's worldwide."

She continues. "Because of the area that we're working in at Merchants Quay, to be able to better help people, we wanted to find out, which things come first? Is it life traumas – such as domestic violence, or childhood abuse, or poverty, or loss – that contribute to homelessness? Then does that lead to addiction? Homelessness itself, we know – losing your home – is in essence a traumatic experience. What we're finding is that all of these elements, the life traumas they've faced, poor mental health, homelessness, and addiction, there's a huge link between them all. Each impacts the other." Zoe's voice saddens as she adds, "I've spoken to people who've said that if they didn't have MQI they wouldn't have anything to live for."



Cruel walls of the housing crisis

While many in Ireland say they are tired of hearing about the prolonged housing crisis on our shores, it continues to build cruel, unseen walls for people left behind. If you are homeless for even 90 days, research shows it will significantly harm your mental health. Studies in Australia, the US, and the UK support this, indicating 35 to 67 percent of homeless people develop mental health struggles after they become homeless.¹ But

without people like Zoe and places like MQI, help can feel out of reach. "Until I came here I didn't realise that unless you have an address, it's very difficult to access community mental health teams," she says. "To be so vulnerable and then to be told, 'Oh, because you have no home it will be even harder to see a community mental health team,' it is shocking. And that despair can drive people to drug and alcohol misuse then. If it's lashing rain and you're sleeping on a footpath and you haven't slept for a week, and someone

Ireland's 'Boxes of Despair', *continued*

gives you a tablet and says, 'This will help you sleep,' You mightn't have done any of that in your life, but a lot of people will take that tablet. Our men and women are hugely open to being targeted by people."

The added barriers of trauma and addiction

Combine homelessness and fragile mental health with addiction and past life trauma, and those four walls of Ireland's 'boxes of despair' are leaving people trapped. Zoe gives an example. "It's easy to turn your face and say they chose the drugs, but look at the child who was sexually abused. Who'd say to me, 'I didn't want that done to me, Zoe. I didn't want to be raped.' And who'd come to our homeless centre as a grown man carrying that shame and guilt over what happened – whose family didn't know how to deal with sex abuse and so he was given anxiety medication to help him sleep at the age of 8, frozen in time from that moment on. Could you honestly go back and tell that child it's his fault he'll be taking drugs one day?"



“I don't think there's been one day when we haven't seen someone here who is feeling suicidal, or who might have self-harmed. And it's not just in Ireland, it's worldwide. Homelessness – losing your home – is in essence a traumatic experience. But our work is showing there's much more to it than that.”

— Zoe Dillon, MQI mental health nurse

Where do we go from here?

With all the walls seeming to box vulnerable people in to homelessness and addiction, Zoe Dillon explains how at MQI and other places, frontline responders are starting where it matters most, with out-of-office hours access to a mental health team and a strategy called *trauma informed care*. "It's about seeing each person as an individual, and recognising that they are traumatised – by being there as a support for them continuously we can start to reshape their coping strategies. We'll be presenting our research at the Fifth Horatio Festival for

Psychiatric Nurses from 9th to 12th May in Copenhagen, and I'm working right now on the bare bones of an anxiety management programme we hope to roll out for clients as a group project. Whether it takes a week or a year, we'll put to use any bit of knowledge to help our clients break down the walls and move on with their lives." ■

Sources:

"Are the homeless mentally ill?," Guy Johnson and Chris Chamberlain, RMIT Victoria, https://www.aspc.unsw.edu.au/sites/www.aspc.unsw.edu.au/files/uploads/aspc_historical_conferences/2009/paper375.pdf.

"The surprising link between mental illness and homelessness," SBS Australia, <https://www.sbs.com.au/topics/life/health/article/2017/06/27/surprising-link-between-mental-illness-and-homelessness>

"Specialist Mental Health Services for Homeless People," The College of Psychiatry of Ireland, <https://www.irishpsychiatry.ie/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/Position-Paper-of-College-of-Psychiatry-of-Ireland-on-the-Specialist-Mental-Health-Services-for-Homeless-Peopl.pdf>.



Learn more about trauma informed care and meet the MQI mental health team:

At the next private tour on 8th May, when Riverbank homeless centre is closed and quiet, MQI's mental health team will be on hand to answer your questions, chat about the work they're doing, and show how it's making a tangible difference in helping people to move on from homelessness and addiction. Please ring Emma on **01 524 0965** if you'd like attend.

"Ending the Silence and Stigma" is a special four-part series for MQI's supporter newsletter, *Quay Times*.

For earlier issues or extra copies, ring **Emma on 01 524 0965** or email to supportercare@mqi.ie.