

Quay Times



Merchants Quay Ireland
Homeless & Drugs Services

The Newsletter for Supporters of Merchants Quay Ireland

SPRING 2025

A safe space, a fresh start – and your love at the heart of it.

Over 14 weeks John has made incredible progress. He's gone from almost giving up on life to planning for college, his future career and a better life for his son. Project Worker Aislinn wants to share the role your support played in John's recovery in MQI's Residential Rehabilitation Centre, St Francis Farm.

One of the first things I noticed about John was how easy he is to talk to. His voice is soft, and earnest and he has the kindest smile.

Home was never a safe space

But growing up John didn't have a lot to smile about. His childhood was shaped by chaos and neglect. Home was never a safe place. His parents both struggled with alcohol and his older brother, John's childhood hero, became involved with drugs.

He said, *"There always seemed to be either a fight or a party happening in the house. It was never calm. You couldn't relax because you never knew when it'd all kick off again."*

Can you imagine the effect never feeling safe has on a child? When the adults who are supposed to love and look after you constantly put you in dangerous and frightening situations.

And when your unwashed clothes and empty lunchbox make you an easy target for bullies.

Those experiences took a huge toll on John. He stopped smiling, stopped playing with other children. He kept to himself as much as possible. He was in survival mode.

Childhood trauma like John's is a common theme among the people I work with who are experiencing addiction and homelessness.

John turned to his older brother - the only person he could - for guidance. But his brother had his own struggles. He wasn't old enough or equipped to help, and he had started dabbling in drugs. Without a safe place to turn, John found himself slipping further away.

"I loved sport, but the bullying made school unbearable. I started pulling away because it no longer felt safe. My brother was dealing with his own trauma, and before I knew it, I was following the same path - toward the wrong crowd."

"I left school and started down a very dark road. My girlfriend was the only bright spot, she was

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"Today I can look people in the eye, if I need to say something I'll say it. I won't bottle things up."

John, MQI Client

Hope takes root at the farm thanks to you

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always trying to bring me back to myself, to remind me of the person I could be."

For John, taking drugs was a way to feel camaraderie with his brother and to escape from his painful reality. It was his way of numbing and running away from very difficult feelings. But the harsh reality is drugs quickly began to destroy his life further. *"I was wasting away, every day blurred into the next. It wasn't life, I didn't want to live anymore. I ended up homeless. It was pure misery. I couldn't go on the way I was. It was either get treatment or take my own life."*

The birth of his son changed everything

Through it all John's partner was there for him. And when they found out they were having a baby, John knew he needed to take control of

his life. Not just for himself, but for his young son.

"When he was born, I just knew I wanted more for him. I want him to feel safe. I want to be present in his life, take him to football matches. I want him to have a proper family, me, him and his mam."

John is deeply ashamed of how low his addiction took him. He told me, *"I hate thinking about who I became, but I have to sometimes, just to remind myself I'm never going back there."*

Finding himself again

From the moment he arrived at Merchants Quay, John threw himself fully into life at the farm. From counselling and group work to relapse prevention, he's applied himself in a way he can be truly proud of.

We've seen a softer side of John emerging. A side he says was always there. ***"I was always a softie as a kid, that went away when I was on drugs, but I'm finding it again."***

John's confidence was in his boots when he first arrived. He could barely make eye contact. Thanks to the

support and care you're making possible, this young

"I thought I was alone for a long, long time. But I found out I wasn't alone in what I was going through."

- John, MOI Client

man can stand up and proudly recite his own poetry.

"I started writing poems here, something I never thought I'd be good at. I've written one for everyone who graduates here. I've written poems for my son and partner too, it's them that's given me the strength to get through this."

A future full of hope - thanks to you.

And the future? John says he's looking forward to it *"I want to go to college, see what I'm good at and live the best life I can. Give my family the best life I can."*

And he's got a message for you too.

"When you're in addiction, you feel so alone. There is so much stigma and shame around being a drug user, it can totally destroy you as a person. But the people who support Merchants Quay, who made it possible for me to come here changed that. You have changed me; you've given me the support I need to face up to my past and deal with my addiction. To build a future worth living. To be the dad I desperately want to be. To give my son and partner the love and safety I never got."

Your generosity works every day at MOI through Aislinn and her colleagues. Thank you for giving people space to heal and hope for their futures. ■



"Addiction can swallow you up, but your generosity is the reason I'm still alive. That I can be here for my son. I can never thank you enough."

- John, MOI Client

We sit down with St. Francis Farm Project Worker Aislinn

Aislinn shares your commitment to helping people experiencing homelessness and addiction. She's committed to helping give John and all the clients she works with the structure, safety and support they need to rebuild their lives.

What is the biggest change you see in clients when they leave compared to how they were when they arrived?

Their self-esteem, their belief in their own abilities changes completely. The first day I met John he could hardly make eye contact. Now he's writing and reading his own poetry, he's learned to cook, he's doing things he never thought possible and it's given him back his confidence. Instead of feeling guilty and ashamed he's feeling proud of his accomplishments. He's learning to believe in himself again.

Can you tell donors what the programme at St. Francis Farm is like for clients?

It can be a daunting prospect at first. It's a really fragile, vulnerable time in someone's life. The stigma around drug use and how drug users are treated in our society have a huge impact on people's confidence and ability to trust. So making people feel comfortable, safe and welcome is key. Like John, many of our clients have or

are experiencing homelessness. But for the 14 weeks they are here, St. Francis Farm is their home, and that's how we want it to feel.


It's thanks to our donors that we are able to provide this safe, nurturing environment. As well as counselling and group therapy, clients have the opportunity to get involved in other activities like mucking in with work on the farm, helping to tend the vegetable gardens or feeding our resident flock of chickens. They can also participate in art therapy, gym classes, yoga and meditation and life skills like cooking and cleaning which they may not have learned growing up.

People in recovery need support to discover and develop their interests, whether that's education or a hobby they love. There's a depth of talent and ability in everyone, but not everyone gets the chance to discover these things growing up. Here, thanks to donors, people like John are given the opportunity to discover and develop their talents. Having that new interest, something to be passionate about is a key part of recovery. It helps fill the void left behind when people embark on a drug free life.

What would you like to say to the people who support MQI?

First and foremost, it would have to be 'thank you'. Everyone who comes here to rebuild their life does so because of you. You're not only helping every client who walks through our doors but their families and the communities they come from.

Your generosity, your impact is having a ripple effect in homes and communities up and down the country. Ireland is a kinder, more compassionate place thanks to wonderful people like you. ■



"Clients will sometimes ring in and tell us they're doing okay, and it makes the day a bit nicer. It reminds me why I do it."

- Aislinn, MQI Project Worker

Bernie's Lasting Gift

Like Bernie, your kindness and generosity can live on - and change lives for years to come.

Long-time MQI supporter Bernie O'Raw is just one of 10 people who remembered MQI in their Will so far this year. MQI simply couldn't do what we do without that kindness. Their generosity has helped put food on empty plates, brought people in from the cold, and offered hope to hundreds of people in despair. A proud Dublin woman and mother of seven, Bernie was an active member in her local community. Her words and acts throughout her life left a legacy of love to all who knew her.

Could you consider leaving MQI a gift in your Will? Of course, your priority is to ensure your loved ones are looked after. Please know that any size gift you choose to leave us, no matter how big or small, is hugely appreciated and will make a significant difference. If you have already decided to leave a gift to MQI, please accept my heartfelt thanks. ■

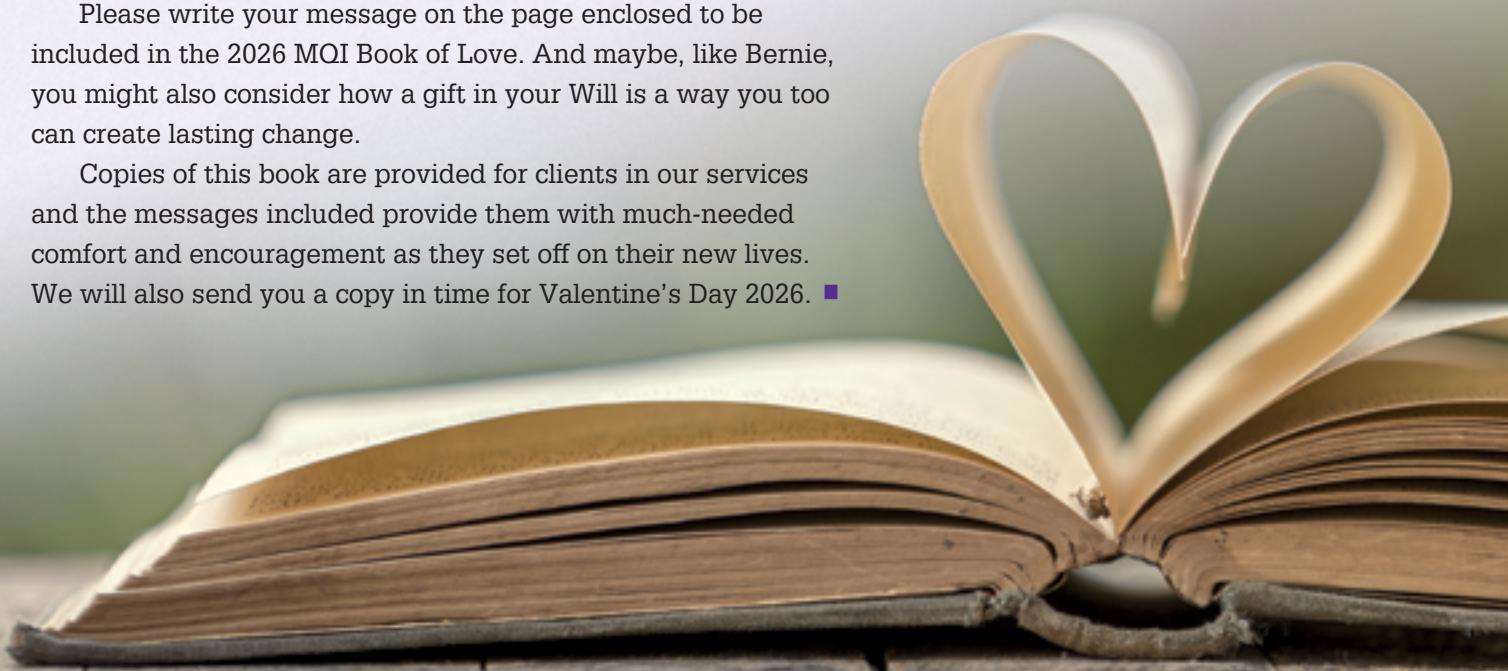
The MQI Book of Love is a celebration of the kindness and compassion shown by people like you. It's a beautiful opportunity to offer messages of hope and comfort to our clients, reminding them they are not alone.

Please write your message on the page enclosed to be included in the 2026 MQI Book of Love. And maybe, like Bernie, you might also consider how a gift in your Will is a way you too can create lasting change.

Copies of this book are provided for clients in our services and the messages included provide them with much-needed comfort and encouragement as they set off on their new lives. We will also send you a copy in time for Valentine's Day 2026. ■



*"Her personal motto was '**it doesn't hurt to be kind**'. Having been born 'out of wedlock' in 1930's Ireland, and then fostered, Bernie always felt she experienced less love as a child. Perhaps not being fully loved as a child she always wanted to give love, and she became a mammy figure to everyone. She minded other people's children as well as her own, she gave holiday breaks to a young boy from an industrial school and later she took in a child from a foster home."*
- Bernie's son, Paul.



Your message of hope will lift hearts

Are you ready to spend a day on the Farm?

We are delighted to invite you to spend a very special Donor Open Day, on the 5th of July at St. Francis Farm.

Join us on a trip to see the transformative work you support on your visit to MQI's St. Francis Farm Detox and Rehabilitation Project in Co. Carlow. During your visit you'll get to chat to clients and staff and learn more about life on the farm and the vital role you play in people's recovery.

There are a limited number of free seats on our return coach trip from Dublin. Or if you'd prefer, you're welcome to make your own way by car. Spaces are limited so RSVP Shauna asap on **01 524 0139** or email **fundraising@mqi.ie**. The coach will depart 24 Merchants Quay at 10am and return at 3pm. ■



*You're invited!
5th of July at
St. Francis Farm*



A Springtime Wish List

The days are brighter, but the weather is still harsh - one moment warm, the next, cold and wet. For those without shelter, every downpour is a struggle. You can help by donating essential supplies for people who are rough sleeping or in emergency accommodation.

- ✓ Waterproof rain pants, track pants and leggings
- ✓ Gently used trainers/runners
- ✓ New, packaged socks and jocks, sports bras, and underwear to restore dignity
- ✓ Feminine hygiene products, toiletries, and shaving gear for a fresh start
- ✓ Bath towels (second hand is absolutely fine!) for people needing a hot shower



✓ Big Wish

We need to raise €2,750 for a new Rotavator needed for the farm tractor in St Francis Farm.

Please ring us at 01 524 0139 if you'd like to help. Any additional donations will cover the cost of equipment needs we might have in the future.

Items can also be dropped off in person to MQI at **24 Merchants Quay** (just past the Riverbank homeless centre) from 10:00am to 3:00pm Monday to Friday.

Thank you!

Are you ready to go all the way in this year's VHI Mini Marathon for #TeamMQI?

We're asking you to join our MQI Family as we walk, jog or run the streets of Dublin on June 1st in the VHI Women's Mini Marathon. Every cent raised by #TeamMQI will be used to support Jane's Place, our dedicated female only service. By joining us you'll be helping support vulnerable women to rebuild their lives and end the silence and stigma. So, lace up your runners and get ready.

To secure your place contact Shauna on 01 524 0139 or email communityfundraising@mqi.ie. As a member of #TeamMQI we will send you our official MQI t-shirt and pack. ■



You've Funded the Sunday Dinner Service for Another Year. Thank you!



Your support for this vital service has safeguarded it for another year. Thank you to all our MQI Family who responded so generously to our Lenten Appeal. It's because of you that people who are sleeping on our streets know they have somewhere they'll be welcomed every Sunday. You're making it possible for the staff at Riverbank to serve up hot, nourishing meals and offer the comfort of a warm shower and clean, dry clothes. This act of kindness and humanity is only possible because of you. ■



Merchants Quay Ireland
Homeless & Drugs Services

24 Merchants Quay,
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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.