

“Something had just clicked inside me . . .”

How Marie is Winning the Fight of a Lifetime

A formerly homeless mother of four is beating overwhelming odds to overcome heroin addiction – thanks to gritty determination, a deep love for her kids and the ‘whatever-it-takes’ spirit of Merchants Quay staff. Read about the positive changes you’re helping make possible . . .

Marie loves to laugh. You’d notice that first about this pretty mom with the sparkling blue eyes. And she’s not above laughing at herself, at finding humour in all she’s been through. Because on her journey toward a drug-free life, Marie has learned to face both good and bad.

She’s forthright about it all. The beloved horse she rode every night as a teenager, her devastation when he was sold. Out of school at 14 . . . troubles with drinking and smoking hash . . . the violence at home.

Now in her 30s, she seems to have lived a lifetime. In and out of treatment while her mother cared for her children, Marie had issues with multiple drugs – typical for heroin users – making it doubly difficult to stop using.

She hit rock-bottom before realising her true source of strength: her children. By then her mom was out of patience – the kids would always have a home, but Marie was on the streets. “She was a great supporter, and I’d be lost without her . . . I ended up homeless then and in the hostels. I used to have a photograph of me kids on the shelf and I wanted to stop taking [the drugs] but I couldn’t. No pride, no dignity – everything just goes out the window. So I decided I needed to get help.”

Like many of Ireland’s nearly 15,000 heroin users looking to break the addiction cycle, Marie faced an uphill battle. She’d decided to seek treatment, but was still surrounded by drug users at the hostel – including a friend who smoked heroin constantly. “I used to sleep with a T shirt over me face so’s not to smell it . . .”

Even at High Park, our residential treatment programme, it wasn’t easy . . . especially for a woman. Of every ten drug users in treatment, just three are female. Marie explains that it’s tougher for women “With children especially. I don’t think I could go through treatment knowing that my kids



Marie found strength in a photo she always kept of her children.
Photo by Steven Doyle

were in someone else’s house being looked after . . . it’s very hard on the mothers and I can only imagine what it’s like on the kids.”

She credits Merchant’s Quay staff for helping her stay in the programme. “They sat up with me ’til one or two o’clock in the morning and if you were going through something they’d ask . . . they won’t let you hide in any corner. With other places I never really got that.”

Marie remembers when she’d turned the corner. It was, she recalls, “when my kids came up to see me. I just started to realise that I want to be there for my kids. From that moment on I really started putting the work in.”

Today Marie is drug-free, in recovery housing and attending our aftercare sessions. She couldn’t be more delighted, summing it up with customary wit: “I used to ring High Park when I left and I’d be havin’ a chat with the staff and I’d say, ‘I want to come back.’ And they’d say, ‘We miss you . . . but we don’t miss you that much!’ I’d be lost without the support from Merchants Quay. I’m grateful that I got the chance to go in there. Me kids they are benefitting so much from it.”

For Marie, and for so many others, you are making a real difference. Thank you so much.

The Healing Hands of Sister Brid

Sister Brid O'Sullivan reflects on her life and her work as a nurse at Merchant's Quay, helping the homeless and those struggling with addiction problems in Dublin.

From the start, Sister Brid has been active as a nurse at Merchant's Quay. "My first day, I had lunch with a nurse who worked there. After lunch, there was an overdose. Somebody had collapsed. So we just grabbed the bag and went over and did CPR."

She found her calling at just 19, to the Franciscan Missionaries of the Divine Motherhood. These first years as a nun shaped her future, and Sr Brid trained as both a nurse and midwife.

Homes for the homeless. Food for the hungry. Recovery for those who are addicted to alcohol and drugs. Thanks for helping make it all possible.

In 1972 she set off to Africa.

Specialising in leprosy, Sr Brid worked as a nurse with four nuns from her Order in the swampy area near Lake Bangweulu, in Northern Zambia. There she helped upgrade the local health centre to a hospital with X-ray service, the community's first.

She recalls those years fondly, saying, "Africa was the cherry on the icing for the life I chose."

Africa was also where Sr Brid honed nursing skills that – combined with her ready smile and caring heart – would prove invaluable to Merchant's Quay Ireland, and she joined the medical staff in 2004, at our busy, Dublin-based outreach service.

Today Sister Brid sees over 300 people who turn to Merchant's Quay daily.

She's learned that their life stories of drug use, poverty, prison, loss and abuse aren't easily told. "Some stories are just so sad and very painful to listen to, so you can imagine what it's like for the clients themselves."



Sister Brid in action.

Photo by Steven Doyle

The Merchant's Quay philosophy of respecting clients – at whatever stage they're at – is crucial, she feels, as are services offered through needle exchange and Open Access facilities, like medical care and counselling, Sunday dinners, and practical help finding a home.

But the need far outpaces present capacity, notes Sister Brid, and not just in Dublin.

"We're referring people all the time to detox and drug rehabilitation, adding their names to the waiting lists. We need far more detox services in this country."

Merchant's Quay provides two Residential Drug Treatment facilities in Ireland: St Francis Farm in Co. Carlow and High Park in Drumcondra, Dublin.

Both have waiting lists.

A Day in the Life of a Merchants Quay Nurse

My name is Steven Doyle, and I joined Merchant's Quay as a full time Nurse back in April 2009. I work with Nurse Brid O'Sullivan – whose story you'll also find in this newsletter – and the rest of our medical team at MQI's Primary Healthcare Unit. We provide primary healthcare to people who are homeless, as well as men and women who have problems with alcohol or drug use.

As you can imagine, being homeless or having a drug problem is a challenge in itself. But a host of medical issues are related to addiction and sleeping rough, and as a Nurse, I see many of these.

I can honestly say there is never a dull moment. I might clean a wound or treat a minor injury, then see someone with an acute or chronic illness. Right now a big concern is treating chronic leg ulcerations. It's like a wound that won't heal, which is frustrating for us – and exhausting for our clients. We also test for blood-bourne viruses like Hepatitis C.

The issues are sensitive, but we always speak openly with the men and women we help – whether we're talking about safer injecting practices or the connection between healing and a healthier diet. By understanding the nature of their wounds and other illnesses, they can become an active part of the healing process.



Nurse Steven Doyle in a rare moment of quiet.

And once they feel better, many begin working toward a better quality of life.

"The issues are sensitive, but we always speak openly with the men and women we help."

I feel honoured to care for each and every one of my patients at the Merchants Quay Ireland. I can say from listening to their stories that there is a stigma around substance misuse

and homelessness. But when you sit down and hear the hardships they've gone through in their lives – and still go through on a day-to-day basis – you see beyond the addiction and homelessness and the real person shines through. They are some of the gentlest, nicest people and despite all they've endured, they have so much respect for the ones who care for them.

Nurse Steven Doyle is a dedicated part of the five-member medical team at the Merchants Quay Ireland Primary Healthcare Unit. He invites you to say hello when you're next in Dublin, and see the healing work your donations make possible. To arrange a visit, call us at 01 524 0115.

How you can make a Euro stretch a whole lot further!

By setting up a standing order, you help us to plan more efficiently and effectively so we can help more people.

If you pay income tax through the PAYE system your monthly donation can GROW 25% - 69% when we claim tax back from the government.

Monthly € donated	20% tax bracket Your donation + tax reclaim	41% tax bracket Your donation + tax reclaim
€21	€26 (€312 yearly)	€35 (€420 yearly)
€25	€31 (€372 yearly)	€42 (€504 yearly)
€42	€70 (€840 yearly)	€70 (€840 yearly)

To set up a standing order go to www.mqi.ie and download the form. Or ring us on 01 524 0160 and we will post a form to you.

From the Desk of . . . Tony Geoghegan

Why 'Housing First' Holds Promise for Homeless; the Vital Role MQI Will Play

Merchants Quay Ireland has been asked to play a critical role in The Homeless Agency's reconfiguration of homeless services in the Dublin area. The Agency – a partnership body of the HSE, the four Dublin Local Authorities and the Voluntary Housing sector – was established under the Department of the Environment to eliminate homelessness and the need for people to sleep rough in the greater Dublin area.

The reconfiguration will further this strategic aim in two major ways. First will be the 'housing first' approach, with an emphasis on accommodating homeless people directly into permanent housing – with necessary supports provided to ensure the tenancy can be sustained.

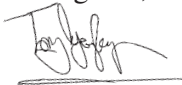
'Housing first' marks an important move from the current situation, whereby the homeless person is first housed in emergency accommodation – either a hostel or a bed and breakfast – then moved to transitional housing and, eventually, on to permanent housing. The benefit of housing first is it minimises the disruption for the person who is homeless and also lessens the duration of the homeless episode. All of the research and international evidence indicates that the longer a person remains homeless the more difficult it is to reintegrate into permanent housing and independent living.

A second way the reconfiguration will help is with extended day support services. One of the most significant service provision gaps identified, and central to the reconfiguration, is the need to have one open access support service that will remain open into the evening time. Currently all homeless support services in the greater Dublin area close at approximately 5.00 p.m.

To address this issue the Homeless Agency have asked Merchants Quay Ireland (MQI) and Focus Ireland (FI) to develop a joint extended day support service. To this end MQI and FI are working together to develop an operational plan for the new service, which will be based in one of MQI's or FI's city centre premises and will be staffed jointly by personnel from both agencies. Our aim is to commence a pilot programme offering an extended day service from 1st July 2010.

The challenge in developing this critical service is that there are no new funds for homeless services – a result of the current economic climate – so any expansion must be funded from existing resources. As such, we look forward to working with Focus Ireland in offering the new extended hours day service. And as ever, we thank you for your generous support of Merchants Quay Ireland, helping us provide quality and accessible services for all homeless people. If you have any questions about the program, please call us on 01 524 0160.

Warm regards,



Tony Geoghegan
CEO, Merchants Quay Ireland

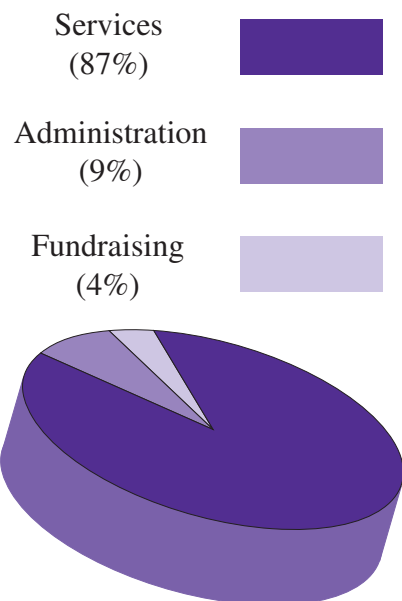


Tony Geoghegan

'Housing first' marks an important move from the current situation.

In the months ahead you may receive general mailings from us. Please know we haven't overlooked your past support: these 'batch letters' are a thrifty way to grow the work of Merchants Quay Ireland, so we can help more of those who need us. You remain a vital part of this work, and we are, as ever, so very grateful for your generosity.

2009: Where the Money Was Spent



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