

# Soilse News

## Celebrating Recovery

Welcome to the latest Soilse newsletter which sets out how September's recovery month went for Soilse and some of our sister services in Ireland.

It includes a review of some of the events as well as an interview with Jane Rowley about how the recovery movement emerged in England.

Events to celebrate recovery in Ireland are in their infancy compared to what colleagues abroad have achieved. For example, 8,000 people attended the recovery walk in Manchester. In Ireland, the recov-

ery events saw a welcome and fresh impetus for recovery and discussion of its importance.

Individuals and services should take real encouragement from the recovery events. They showed that many people do get their lives back together, do overcome active addiction and do become role models for others.

The work to celebrate recovery next year begins now. Come and join in with those who advocate and work for real change and better outcomes for all.

Gerry McAleenan  
Head of services, Soilse



**"My education started the day I gave up the drugs and it continues every day in recovery. Life is not a destination but a journey and it can be one you enjoy."**  
DJ

## Let's talk about recovery

More than 100 people from community and voluntary groups across Dublin's north inner city attended this ground-breaking conference organised by the North West Inner City Network (NWICN) which explored shifting the emphasis of drug treatment services to a recovery model.

Many more had to be turned away due to lack of space such as the level of interest in opening a discussion on recovery.

Martin Keane of the

Health Research Board put the case for re-orienting addiction services towards a recovery model.

Barbara Condon of Finglas Addiction Support Team shared insights from her research on individual experiences of recovery.

The third speaker, Aoife Davey, NDRIC co-ordinator, looked at how national policy around drug

treatment and rehabilitation supports a recovery model.

Workshops on 'recovery and services' and 'recovery and communities' brought valuable inputs from those attending.

Perhaps the most moving contribution came from DJ, who spoke about his journey to recovery from a life of drug use. DJ is a former Soilse participant who recently completed DCU's recovery coaching module.

If you would like an electronic copy of the conference proceedings, which includes DJ's story, email [info@soilse.ie](mailto:info@soilse.ie).



A Conference on the re-orientation of drug treatment services towards a recovery focused model



## Recovery in the UK

In recent years, recovery has moved to the centre of UK drug policy unlike in Ireland where the conversation is only beginning. What can Irish policymakers and addiction services learn from the UK experience? Soilse asked **Dr Jane Rowley** of Staffordshire University, an expert in addiction policy and strategy.

### How did the idea of recovery emerge in UK?

I entered the field in the late 1990s and at that time getting someone onto a methadone script was seen as a positive outcome. The workers I knew did not consider it likely that they would encounter people who would become drug free or move away from methadone and it was widely accepted that people were using illicit drugs 'on top'.

The idea that someone could expect to more fully recover, perhaps lead a drug-free life and see improvements in all areas of their lives, was a lofty ideal.

I remember a report in 2002 from the Audit Commission called *Changing Habits* which talked about very long waiting times between 35 days to over 100 days and that the sector in the UK was unplanned and piecemeal. It identified the lack of co-ordination between services and poor training leading to limited care management.

### Recovery benefits everyone!



Around the same time I saw David Best talking about drug treatment being like a house with no back door. The newly formed NTA put out a report called *Making the System Work* and waiting times were a big priority.

This heralded a slow but substantial change in the drug treatment system, not least new commissioning frameworks which meant other providers started to emerge with slightly more articulate

goals about outcomes for service users.

I think recovery as an organising idea didn't really take off until 2008-2010 although the ideas were around before this. Drug treatment was still largely political, linked to crime reduction and penalties.

### What were the characteristics of this new approach?

The newer approach began to recognise that we needed to address the multi-faceted range of problems people might encounter when trying to make changes to their lives and move out of chaotic using into a more integrated life with access to decent housing, employment, training, an investment in communities and relationship building.

The concepts behind recovery capital are not new but translate well into a common-sense approach around building opportunities for people to gain from access to asset-building opportunities.

It is also gradually recognising that the voice of people using services needs to be heard and not just with a little 'consultation' but with a real commitment to listening to peoples' experience. There is a real lack of literature that listens to the 'user voice' - there a few good examples but there is still not enough. So much work meant to support people out of chaotic drug use is based on assumptions about how they feel, what led to their current situation and what is 'best for them'.

### What sustains it?

We know initially that encouraging people to become more involved in their community and build resources to cope better with whatever situation they find themselves in can sustain recovery.

We know that it is better for a person

to feel more integrated in a community that to be outside it. This means making pathways into different groups, education, health and sport, social networks and so on will aid sustained recovery - and perhaps is more important than our previous focus on detoxification. I have lost track of the number of conversations I have had with people along this theme, 'in comparison to rebuilding your life after addiction - detox is easy'.

I think what sustains recovery is the

**"...the voice of people using services needs to be heard..."**

same as what sustains us all — access to support, social networks, meaningful activities and agency to make choices about our own path.

### What are the outcomes?

I think people should define their own recovery journey [but] I would hope that better health, housing, family relationship and social networks would be important parts of this journey. People need to more fully understand the consequences of their actions and for this to happen we need a consistent and credible message about addiction and treatment. Fundamentally, we need to work with people in recovery to share their message that there is a life after addiction and it can be a great life but it will not be quick or easy.

### What are the challenges around a recovery orientation?

The challenge is that people in addiction and recovery are not a homogeneous group - we cannot develop pathways that rely on assumptions about who, what and where they are from. There are many stereotypes about people in addiction.

We need to make services more accessi-

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## H.O.P.E. and recovery

The Matt Talbot Hope and Recovery Service was held on the evening of September 17, 2014, in our Our Lady of Lourdes Church, on Sean McDermott Street in Dublin's North Inner City.

The event was hosted by H.O.P.E. (Hands On Peer Education) to celebrate recovery from addictions. It was aimed at recovering addicts and alcoholics, those seeking recovery, and colleagues, family, and friends from the area. This was a spiritual, not a religious service and open to all. It was held in the community's church as the church has been a great support to families during the ongoing drug crisis. The service also included reference to Matt Talbot as he was an alcoholic from this community who found abstinence, and tried to help others.

At least 200 people attended the evening which was very positive and uplifting. The Lord Mayor of Dublin, Cllr. Christy Burke, opened the event with a talk on how alcohol has impacted this community. Father Richard then told the Matt Talbot Story. Jason Byrne and Terry Kavanagh sang as people lit candles, made a recovery wish, and got up to sing and dance.

Two recovering addicts who had been through the Soilse programme then spoke about what a drug-free lifestyle has meant to them, and five participants of the ACRG programme read poetry they had written specially for the occasion.

The event ended with a blessing and the release of HOPE balloons, followed by some food and chat. Excellent feedback was received from the community and it is hoped to make this an annual event.



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ble and acknowledge that we know a lot about a few people and need to know more about what others may want.

I have worked in services that have a client group that ticks every stereotypical box — homeless, rough sleeper, involved in criminality, acquisitive crime, violence, sex work — but they are also great artists, poets, brilliant trainers, cooks and parents.

We need to address the challenge of scapegoating one more visible group which denies help to the 1000s more who need some support. When sociologists talk about deviance, some of them say that behaviour becomes deviant when we label it so.

We need to move away from the labels and the drugs or alcohol. We need to say,

what might help this person take more control in their own life and move forward. And we need to provide services that can respond to this [with] mentors who understand not only theories of change and identity re-formation but also how to practically apply these to their work in supporting others.

### How important is it that service users inform the recovery agenda and response?

Absolutely vital. However, one thing that concerns me a little is that those people who are still involved in active addiction are losing their voice. Whilst I applaud someone for sharing their recovery journey and encourage them to do this, we have much to learn from everyone involved and need to work from a presumption of competence and not in-

competence. User activists should not be ignored in this dialogue about what the 'recovery agenda' should focus on.

The field has changed so much since I started and I remain convinced of peoples' capacity to change, to develop new skills and move forward with having an enjoyable and fruitful life.

I believe people [professionals] involved in this field should explore their own motivations regularly and ask themselves if they believe that people can change. If they do and they treat others with kindness and respect, people can gain enormously from this and those gains go both ways.

**"We need to address the challenge of scapegoating"**

## European RECOVER group meets

In September Soilse attended a meeting in Romania as part of the European RECOVER project which is developing modules facilitating access to learning courses for recovering drug users.

The meeting reviewed policy and practice on drug addiction and social inclusion in Europe. It also agreed to set up focus groups in each of the 5 partner countries to explore learners' needs in recovery, putting the service user at the centre of the process.

The focus groups will take place over the next few months and summaries of the key points will be compiled. This will be followed by an analysis of the data and the development of training modules to be piloted in each partner country.



Gerry McAleenan and Sonya Dillon attend RECOVER meeting in Romania

The countries involved in this European project are Ireland, England, Italy, Romania, Cyprus. Soilse is the representative group in Ireland.

You can find out more about the project on [www.recoveru.org](http://www.recoveru.org).



## Recovery Month - news roundup



Speakers at Recovery Walk 2014

### Recovery Walk 2014

The 3rd annual Recovery Walk took place in Woodquay Amphitheatre in Dublin on Saturday, 20 September. This year saw a big increase in the numbers who attended the day, which was full of entertainment, fun and positivity.

The walk was part of a number of national and international events taking place in September (Recovery month) to celebrate and support recovery.

Organised by a volunteer committee, the day was also very well supported by the Local Drug Task Forces. We would like to thank everybody who helped out and attended the day.

Barry Costello,  
Recovery Walk organising committee

### Talking in Tallaght

Tallaght Treatment and Rehabilitation Committee held an information session to introduce the theme of recovery and concept of recovery coaching in Tallaght.

Local services were well represented at the meeting which looked at how a recovery culture could be developed in the community and the role of recovery coaches in supporting this.

According to Grainne O'Kane, Tallaght Task Force Co-ordinator, the session provided value and insight and would help the development and direction of community work plans over the next year.



Recovering at the Soilse boot camp in Dublin's Phoenix Park

### Addicted on the radio

I had the great privilege of presenting a radio program over the summer on 103.2 Dublin City FM. The program focused on recovery and on the people who have recovered from addiction. The most popular programs were the ones with people who told their own story of recovery (Tom, Sean, Glen and Paul).

Within our psyche there seems to be a hunger for stories of change, of hope and of reaching our destiny. Maybe this is why the fellowship movement is so attractive for people, as it's a place where stories of hope and recovery are shared.

I witnessed another kind of fellowship down in the Phoenix Park at the Boot camp organized by Soilse, where I interviewed some of the lads participating. The place was buzzing with connections and you couldn't but notice the power of recovery.

Dr Tom O'Brien

### Food for thought

The North West Inner City Network (NWICN) runs a monthly 'Food for Thought' lunchtime session. September's theme was recovery coaching and how can it benefit our community.

Two recovery coaches (who are former Soilse participants) explained what the role means and the potential it has both for people with addiction issues and the wider community.

Services from across the north inner city attended and a significant degree of interest was shown in the process and the opportunity it gave to former addicts to use their experience and give something back to their community.

Recovery coaching has been pioneered in the north west inner city by Soilse with great success and is now also available in Gateway Women's Project. The innovative and worthy idea and training came from Finglas Addiction Support Team (FAST) which linked up with Dublin City University to offer a Level 8 module on this subject.

### Sticking the boot into recovery!

On a fantastic September day around 150 people made their way to the Phoenix Park for Soilse's boot camp. There they met instructors from Kickstart Fitness Tallaght who introduced them to a range of boot camp activities with an emphasis on participation and enjoyment. Such was the fun that even passers-by wanted to join in!

The bootcamp was an opportunity for services in the north inner city to get together in an informal way to celebrate recovery. It also demonstrated that there are many ways to recovery, that recovery can be fun, and that recovery can help develop the wellness and health of the individual.