

Journey Home

A Photovoice Project

Focus Ireland Lived-
Experience Ambassadors

with Dr Maria Quinlan

Kintsugi

Kintsugi ('to join with gold') is the Japanese art of repairing broken pottery with lacquer mixed with powdered gold. As a philosophy, it treats breakage and repair as part of the history of an object, something celebrated rather than something to disguise.

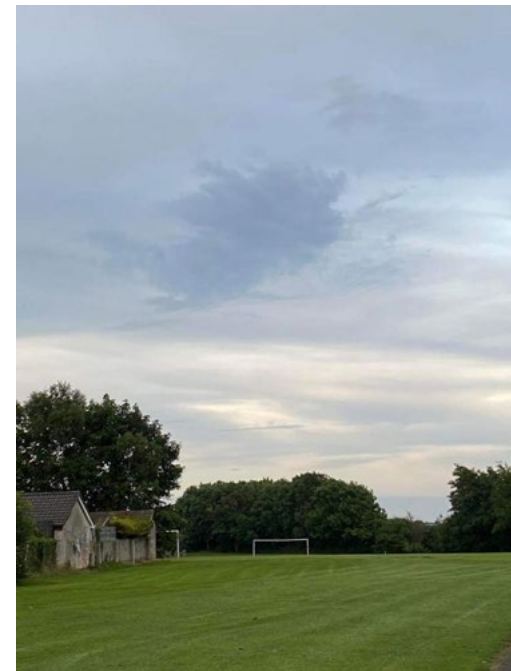
Not only is there no attempt to hide the damage, but the repair is literally illuminated.

Enso

Enso ('circle form') is considered a sacred symbol in the Zen school of Buddhism. Enso means a Mutual Circle or Circle of Togetherness. It is a universal expression of wholeness.

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Foreword



When I set up Focus Ireland it was with the sole purpose of supporting women experiencing homelessness. Over the years, the organisation has grown, and we now support people all across Ireland who are experiencing homelessness or who are at risk of losing their home. Our main goal is to end homelessness for all. Homelessness is not inevitable. It is a blight on society and should not be tolerated in any civil society. The lack of a secure home effects every part of a person's well-being from physical health to psychological well-being and spiritual growth. People who experience homelessness have the same worries, dreams, talents, and unique qualities as everyone else in society, but we 'other' them and this is perhaps one of the most degrading things we can do to people.

Our LEAP ambassadors are five people who generously work with Focus Ireland to share their stories so we can dispel stereotypes and to give authentic insights into what it is to experience homelessness. We are privileged to have Leap Ambassadors do this work and I have been delighted to meet with them and hear their stories first-hand. I am proud that customers are at the forefront of all the work we do, as we must remember the dignity and humanity of every person.

Photovoice is a research methodology that uses the medium of photography or video in a safe and therapeutic manner to access deeply held emotions in people who have experienced trauma. Homelessness is a trauma, and we are indebted to Maria Quinlan for her work in exploring the trauma our ambassadors have experienced. Art can reach into the soul in a way that words can't always do and the images in this book are powerful representations of what homelessness does to anyone.

This book should be seen and read by every politician and policymaker as too often we speak about numbers and statistics, but this book shows that behind every number, there is real suffering of a person. I would like to take this opportunity to thank Maria Quinlan for her work on this important book, which I think will be influential for years to come. We also owe our deepest gratitude to Stephanie, Scott, Kelly Ann, Paul, and Catherine for allowing us to share their 'Journey Home'. Their willingness to return to an unhappy time in their lives and to be so open about their experiences, is a beautiful act of kindness. I am sure, everyone who reads this book or visits the photography exhibition will be as moved as I am and will be as committed to end homelessness for all.

—Sr. Stan

Background

The LEAP Programme

In 2021, we launched LEAP (Lived experienced Ambassador Programme) which aims to empower people with a lived experience of homelessness to share their experience, insights, and knowledge to help inform our work, the general public and policy makers. It is a core element of Focus Ireland's strategy to ensure the voice of our customer leads our work and through this, we ensure that the services we provide align to the needs of our customers. The programme is supported by Bord Gais Energy.

We have five ambassadors who successfully completed a ten week workshop to prepare them for the role. The Ambassadors had story telling workshops with Geoff Power (writer and documentary producer) and a rights based workshop with the Chief Commissioner of IHREC (Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission), Sinead Gibney. Our current ambassadors are Catherine Keenan, Paul Geoghegan, Kelly Ann Byrne, Scott Buckley, and Stephanie Clarke. Since the launch, our ambassadors have featured in print and broadcast media and have also spoken to policy makers locally, in the Oireachtas and to EU research groups. They have spoken at corporate events, 'Raise the Roof' meetings and to many of our funders and donors.

Our ambassadors are also part of Focus Ireland working groups and we believe their experiential knowledge is helping us to develop our procedures and policies to better serve all our customers. Our five ambassadors have become an integral part of our work and their participation in 'Journey Home' is a new way for them to share their experiences and insights through the medium of photography.

Message from our Ambassadors

When the idea of photovoice was first discussed, we all thought it sounded like an interesting project and a new way to share our stories through a different medium. In 2021, we had worked together with a writer to help develop our own individual stories, so we believed there was nothing new we could learn about each other. We were all surprised to find, that not only did we learn more about each other, we also learned more about ourselves

Through the medium of photography, we tapped into our subconscious thoughts, and this created a richer and deeper tapestry of our thoughts and the emotions we experienced both while we experienced homelessness and as we transferred into stable accommodation. When we shared our photographs in the group settings, we spoke uncensored and unfiltered about the feelings they provoked. It was strange seeing our spoken word printed out, but it was better than writing something, as the spontaneity of speech was more honest.

Sometimes looking back on our time experiencing homelessness, it can be upsetting and can bring up difficult emotions. This project was a very gentle way of reflecting on these past experiences in a safe but deeply emotional way. We hope, that in doing this, we can share the reality of what it means to be without a home and that we as a society can commit to ending homelessness and the trauma it causes in people's lives. We also want to offer hope to people currently experiencing homelessness and let them know, that life will get better and to be gentle on themselves.



Catherine Keenan



Paul Geoghegan

Introduction

In this project I had the privilege of working with five members of Focus Ireland's Lived Experience Ambassador Programme (LEAP). Using a method called photovoice, we worked together over several weeks exploring the experience of homelessness.

Photovoice has several layers to it, it is a research method rooted in community activism which traditionally has been used to give voice to those who are often silenced or marginalised in society.¹ It is also a narrative therapeutic technique which has been found to assist in the process of post traumatic growth, a process whereby we make sense of traumatic events and reclaim our voice and agency.² A third important use of photovoice is advocacy—it has been used as a method of engaging with policy makers and the general public in a way which increases a sense of understanding and empathy regarding people's lived experience. In this project we aimed to draw on all these layers in order to explore experiences, reclaim voice and increase awareness.

As I worked on collating the Lived Experience Ambassador's photographs and words into this report, two images kept coming to me—firstly the image of broken china mended using the Japanese method of Kintsugi, where the cracks are mended using a gold lacquer. This process renders the breakage points a highlight of the piece, a mark of unique beauty, a one-of-a-kind golden constellation. The other image that resonated as I worked on this project is the Enso symbol, another Japanese concept roughly translated as 'circle of togetherness'. It is an open circle which is used in the Zen Buddhist tradition to refer to a state of enlightenment, strength, and the cyclical nature of life. For me, both are concepts which place compassion and wisdom at the centre, compassion for our own broken places and compassion for others.

Those challenges which crack us open in a way that increases our ability to be open-hearted and empathetic with others. Those breaks which widen our circle of compassion, our communities of kinship as Father Gregory Boyle puts it. The LEAP Ambassadors are an example of such a community of kinship.

We do not escape traumatic experiences unscathed. But with both practical and emotional help, support, and compassion—we can work on mending those places and those scars can be part of our strength and beauty. They increase our ability to be empathetic, to widen our circle of compassion to the outer edge of society, so that no-one feels that they are excluded, left at the margins. That is what I witness whenever I work with a group of people who have navigated traumatic life events such as homelessness, and is certainly what I experienced working with the Focus Ireland LEAP ambassadors.

Whether we are 'stronger at the broken places' to paraphrase Hemingway, or whether the 'wound is the place where Light enters you' as Rumi is oft-quoted as saying, is true for each individual who has experienced the pain of a traumatic life event, or not is a matter for each person to consider for themselves. Certainly what I found when working with the Focus Ireland LEAP Ambassadors is that there is a deep beauty and compassionate wisdom in their scars. They illuminate through the telling of their experiences, and their vulnerability is inspiring and beautiful.

—Dr. Maria Quinlan

Project Design

Photovoice

Photovoice is both a research method, an advocacy tool, and a narrative therapeutic technique which uses photographs, coupled with facilitated group dialogue and photo-captioning to give voice to people's lived experience of a particular issue. It has its roots in social activism and in feminist participatory methodologies—aiming to provide a platform for people who are often silenced or marginalised in society to share their experiences. In doing so it has been found to be a powerful method for empowering people who have often found their voices excluded in society.³

In the tradition of inclusive, participatory knowledge-creation, it is research by and with people rather than 'on' people. It is a gentle, person-centred and trauma-informed approach which gives participants control of what and how they wish to share elements of their experience.

Democratising knowledge-creation

Visual images and accompanying stories serve to create a space where marginalised voices can be shared. Grounded in theories that shift the locus of control from those in positions of power to those whose standpoints are less often heard, the process of photovoice attempts to dismantle the traditional research relationship by equalising the distribution of power between researchers and participants.

More traditional research methods tend to preference the researcher's voice—the researcher gathers stories and overlays them with their own analysis. Photovoice preferences the voice and knowledge of those with lived-experienced and provides a platform for people to tell their stories directly.

Post-Traumatic Growth

Photovoice has been used with people to explore their experiences across a range of topics, including homelessness.⁴ It has been previously used to both explore and raise awareness of the stigma often associated with homelessness, sexual violence, addiction and mental health challenges.⁵ It has also been shown to be a powerful tool in re-instilling a sense of power and agency—not only in reducing post-traumatic symptoms, but also in fostering what has been termed 'post-traumatic growth'. This refers to the process where a sense of self, personal power and strength is recovered through a person's process of making meaning of their experience.⁶

Using photographs to give voice to people who often feel unheard and unseen is a person-centred and co-created methodology that aims to be both a powerful and positive experience for the participants while also being an impactful way of providing deep insight into an issue for the wider society.



Kelly Ann Byrne



Stephanie Clarke

Photovoice Process

This photovoice project was conducted with five members of Focus Ireland's Lived Experience Ambassador Programme (LEAP). Four two-hour workshops were conducted over a period of one month, and participants took and shared close to 100 photographs and other visual images.

The photovoice workshop process incorporates five key elements:

1. Creation of 'safe-space'

Space where people feel comfortable to share their feelings and experiences.

2. Introduction to visual literacy

Creative exercises to introduce the method, and to help people to get comfortable using the visual to express their experiences.

3. Facilitated group discussion

Participants decide on themes to guide their photo-taking.

4. Sharing of photos

Each week the group share and explain selected photographs.

5. Final selection and captioning

Each person selects photos to share and is facilitated in captioning process.

Ethics and Safety

The project was guided by research ethics best-practice in this area—drawing on the University College Dublin (UCD) ethical guidelines, and the PhotoVoice Organisation's statement of ethical practice.⁷

The use of photovoice as a methodology brings with it particular ethical considerations in terms of participant safety, data protection, control, ownership and dissemination/sharing. Participants' safety and emotional wellbeing is the number one consideration of this project. Issues of safe inclusion and exclusion criteria were discussed with the Focus Ireland team in advance, and potential participants were identified, recruited and supported throughout by the Focus Ireland team.

Throughout each stage of the project participants were given the option of sharing their photographs, thoughts, experiences or of choosing not to. The primary aim of this project was to create a safe space where people could express themselves via photography to the degree that they wished to do so, without any requirement to share that with the other members of the group.

Dr Quinlan has received specialist training in the photovoice methodology from the PhotoVoice Organisation and adheres to the organisations statement of ethical practice, and the phased approach to achieving informed-consent. She has extensive experience conducting photovoice projects with people who have experienced trauma, and embeds a trauma-informed ethical approach in all her work.

Journey Home

The following photographs explore a variety of themes relating to the experience and impact of homelessness. The overall aim of this project is to let each of the LEAP Ambassadors photographs, and the narratives which accompany them, speak for themselves. There are however a consistent set of themes which we feel it is worthwhile to highlight. There is a shared nature to the experience of homelessness and the journey towards securing a stable home which will be explored in this section.

Focus Ireland as Family

Focus Ireland has stepped in and provided the kind of family support which many people take for granted in life, but which many of us do not have the privilege of. There is a wide body of literature which speaks to the role that challenging family-of-origin relationships can play in increasing a person's risk of homelessness. This is an issue highlighted within this project—both the impact of not having family support, and the role which Focus Ireland plays in providing that support for people. Focus Ireland not only provide the practical support of help and assistance in securing a home, but also provide the emotional support and non-judgemental compassion which is at the heart of a trauma-informed service. All of the ambassadors spoke particularly of how Focus Ireland's support is non-intrusive and respectful of a person's dignity and independence. Kelly-Ann's quote captures the experience of the group:

“I found over the years, sometimes...you're just not meant to be with, I wasn't meant to grow up with that family, you know? And I suppose I dipped in and out and I had reminders of why I'm meant to go this journey on my own. There were times when I did go back just wanting to have them around me and wanting to have family, but I ended up worse...it wasn't healthy. It wasn't good and it was very lonely. Focus Ireland are that family support that you know a lot of us don't have, or that we need. I think that's huge, the support from support workers to be able to help us link in with whatever other supports we need...a lifelong support worker that's always there, that isn't ringing you all the time or up at your door but is there. So, it's like that, the family support.”

The Impact of a Home after Homelessness

Stability, security, space to breath out and to move from hyper-vigilant survival mode to thriving – across the board the group describe the enormous relief of having a home. Having endured the trauma and instability of homelessness, each person spoke of the deep gratitude and thankfulness they feel at no longer having to worry about where they will spend the night. Stephanie's experience is echoed by the group:

“Top of the world type of thing...that's how I felt when I got housed from the hostels... when I was told that I was getting housed, I was very happy and just felt on top of the world. Not having to worry about where I was sleeping and being in rooms stepping on needles, watching people bang up. I don't have any addictions, so I was just really, really happy and really really relieved...I have my own home now...I've made it how I want it, got it painted and just designed it how I wanted it, and I'm really happy with it. Really happy where I am in my life at the moment with it. I'm so happy with the place I'm in now, and I'm very grateful for it.”



Scott Buckley

Having a home has provided a stable base for each person to begin the process of healing and recovery from various challenges they have experienced in life generally, and through their experience of homelessness in particular. Having a home, and the overall support of Focus Ireland's wrap-around services is enabling each of the group to begin to live life on their own terms—to reconnect with family; to go back to education; to find and use their voices and skills in service of those who need their support and advocacy. Having a home has enabled a process of recovery of the self, of putting the puzzle pieces back together as Scott puts it:

“I've been up and down...so it's just slowing putting myself back together if I can. It's just a puzzle. Trying to get stuff sorted out in my own personal life.”

Illuminating the Experience

The Lived Experience Ambassador Programme has provided the support and the platform through which each member of the group can share their wisdom and insight on the homelessness services in Ireland. Their work on this project illuminates the experience of homelessness for policy-makers, service providers and the wider public, offering deeply nuanced insight on the practical changes that could be made within the system that would help and those experiencing homelessness.

Echoing other studies in Ireland, the experience of homelessness is compounded by a statutory homelessness system which all-too-often strips people of their dignity, is lacking in compassion and appears to be lacking in any semblance of trauma-informed practice. Catherine echoes many others when she describes her experience.

“Parkgate Street was a bad experience. I'm coming here for help. I need help. It wasn't, most of it wasn't nice. They're doing their best, but their best isn't good enough. That will stay with me for the rest of my life.”

Alongside the lack of compassion is the practical lack of safety which many of the group have experienced within temporary homelessness services. With an apparent lack of triaging of people at the point of entry into homelessness services, young people leaving care and people in early stages of recovery are often placed in accommodation where active drug and alcohol use is happening. As Paul describes it:

“I think Dublin City Council (DCC) and the Government...this can be done better. There can be different services to suit different needs. I think DCC need to look at assessing people when they present as homeless and addressing their needs...and then finding a suitable service for them to go to...There's no proper assessment and that's the annoying part of it...people coming out of (drug) treatment and detox and they're being put into a service where there's a lot of addiction issues. And people coming out of social care as well...you've 18/19-year-olds being put in (hostels) and they are getting caught up in addiction...it's just so sad to see. They are setting people up to fail, that's the way I see it.”

“No daylight to separate us. Only kinship. Inching ourselves closer to creating a community of kinship...this circle of compassion. Then we imagine no one standing outside of that circle, moving ourselves closer to the margins so that the margins themselves will be erased. We stand there with those whose dignity has been denied. We locate ourselves with the poor and the powerless and the voiceless. At the edges, we join the easily despised and the readily left out. We stand with the demonized so that the demonising will stop. We situate ourselves right next to the disposable so that the day will come when we stop throwing people away.”

—Fr. Gregory Boyle

Scott

I picked this one because I think it's people on an ice skating rink, but the picture looks like they were falling, so it looks very quick. So it reminds me of being really stressed, when I came to Focus Ireland. But now, it's about stress management, so I've figured that out.



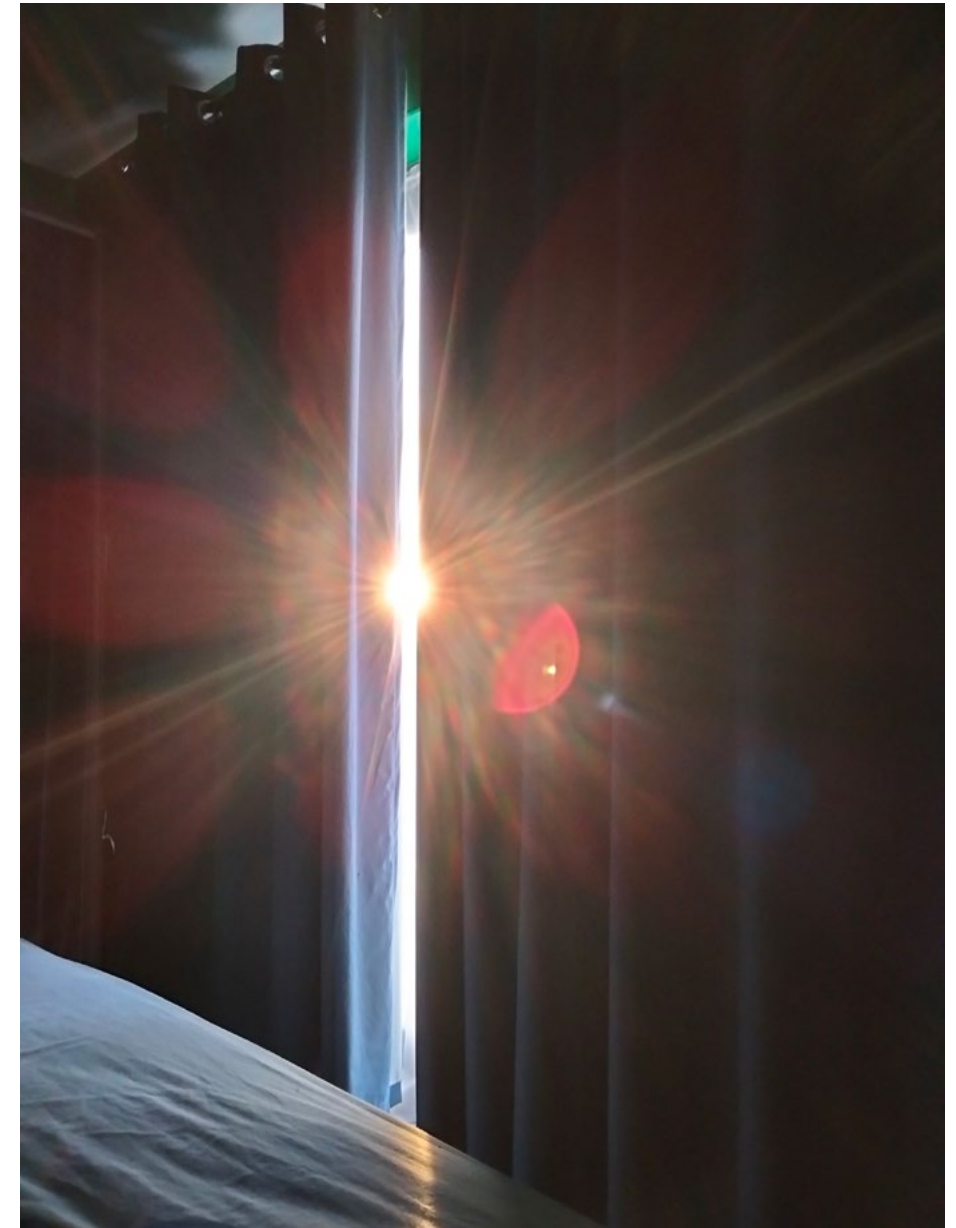


This picture is victory, you know, I've achieved it, accomplishments that I needed. When Focus Ireland gave me the empowerment of self-independence. That was a big one. Going to college when I was living on my own, getting help and supports. With Focus Ireland, if I had certain assignments and I didn't know what to do, they were there to help...and the staff members they were never like constantly on top of you. Like "what are you doing", "where are you going", they always let you go to them, not they go to you. That was the first thing actually I noticed about Focus Ireland. They were always like, "Alright, you just come to us when you want to", They never pushed you, not like other organisations that I've noticed. They were never in your face, like "what are you doing" "where are you going", "you can't do this", or "you can't do that", they were like, "do what you want but if you need help we're here". That was the main thing why I love them.

This is my old school. I was there between the age of seven to the age of 18 and through those years I was just constantly moving all the time. So, that was basically like a second home. And it's that little porch that's in it, you see there, we used to always go through there every Monday to go swimming. So just really fond memories of that. That was my second home. The teachers that work there they are just grounded, they're sound. Every September. It was like a joke. It was like, oh so Scott, where are you living now? It was a joke, but I just like...took it very well. I'd say, "I'm living in a mansion now". But I definitely felt supported. You could talk to people. I was very quiet as a kid, so I got confidence.



Where I live, I'm very lucky that the sun comes around and it hits that certain spot. This is the sun hitting through the curtain. Lately I'm just a bit depressed so I have the curtains closed...I'm kind of hidden...it was, like, two days ago actually I took that and I was on my laptop you know watching Netflix, blah, blah, blah, but I got really angry and Jesus, the sun, fucking hell, I was about to actually put the laptop down, go over to the curtain and just close it fully and then I was like oh Jesus, I think that's a sign for me to open them and get out.





My apartment. It's just a normal door, it can be any door, but I think most of us have that little thing of like, what's behind that door? What's going on? We don't know what's going on behind the door. So, that's just a big question. You don't know what's going to happen, or...you hear things, so...but it's something that you can't actually go through. It's very frustrating for us, most of us. So you just have to observe it and acknowledge it and...it's good because it secures you. It does protect you, but sometimes you can't know what's going on behind it.



This is a picture of priests, the Catholic Church and it represents secrets...I was in a very Catholic school, so I was brought up with Hail Mary's every day, you know, do the Rosary at home. It was drilled into us that God is good, this is great, you have to do this and they do help people and all, but obviously when you get older and you start to realise, it's quite dark. So, I don't hate priests, I just have a very, you know, sensitive feeling on the whole Catholic thing, I think most of us do.



This is one from recently and just... puzzled. I'm all over the place...so it's just slowing putting myself back together if I can. It's just a puzzle. Trying to get stuff sorted out in my own personal life. I tend to...you know push myself up and get on with it.



It says family, but there's no actual family in that. I never really had an actual full family portrait photo. I think some people out there do, but maybe some of us in this room don't, so...for me it's a bit frustrating as well not to have an actual, a full family photo. Being in care, that's one thing that I would like, everyone together, and happy.

This is a soldier helping a girl...Seeing a soldier help a kid. It's great, because there are poor kids out there, you're getting killed, so it's something that's quite serious in the world. When you see stuff like that, it's nice. There is hope in the world.





I was having my lunch one day and I sat out and I just took a picture of the water because it looked lovely, but you know, I just love the sea. I love to be out on it, and I don't live near it so...I wish I did. I love swimming...I just love the water. For me it's where I can relax.



A rainy day. I just looked at it, I like that picture. I took it from the bathroom window and it's just another rainy day. I think subconsciously I'm fairly used to the whole damp, wet weather, depressing weather, but it can be nice at times. I don't know, the way you see it.



This is an angel, a statue in a graveyard. There's something very...not spiritual...I don't know, lovely, nice. I've got a sister who died years ago. And we can't get her a headstone because in the graveyard babies plot you can only have two specific things. It's either a teddy bear or a love heart, it's a flat sort of thing, so you put it on the ground, but from a distance it just looks like crows on a field. To me it's frustrating. So seeing stuff like this angel, it's powerful.



This is near where my Da lives. I just walked past it there two days ago, I decided to take a picture because you see the building, it doesn't look damaged, it looks ok, but it just goes to show you that anyone that is homeless can sleep anywhere. In a way it's kind of powerful but it's not, because you know, you can't see people, well you can see people sleep outside the doors and all, but they can't go through the door. It's tough.



This is my mother and my brother. We were very close. I just looked back at that picture and said Jesus, my mother, she looks so proud of us. I never seen a picture like that before...I never seen her look so proud. She passed away when I was 14 and I was in Foster Care, it was a real smack in the face, but...I've been up and down. I think I know a lot of people that have been in Foster Care and they had their ups and downs with their parents and I think...some people assume that when you go to Foster Care that they never loved you and all that, it's like no... that wasn't like that. Just some people have difficulties with their mams and dads, but....There's always one parent that loved you more, a brother, or a sister.

Stephanie

That's where I used to live, before I was taken into care, that's where I lived with my mother, from when I was four to twelve. So that would have been a big part of my life. Also, kind of hard, because that was where I was taken into care. It was quite traumatising. But yes, that's where I lived with my mother and that's where I had a lot of experiences, and I had some friends.

I don't really have a great relationship with my mother, she still lives there. I wouldn't really see her that often.

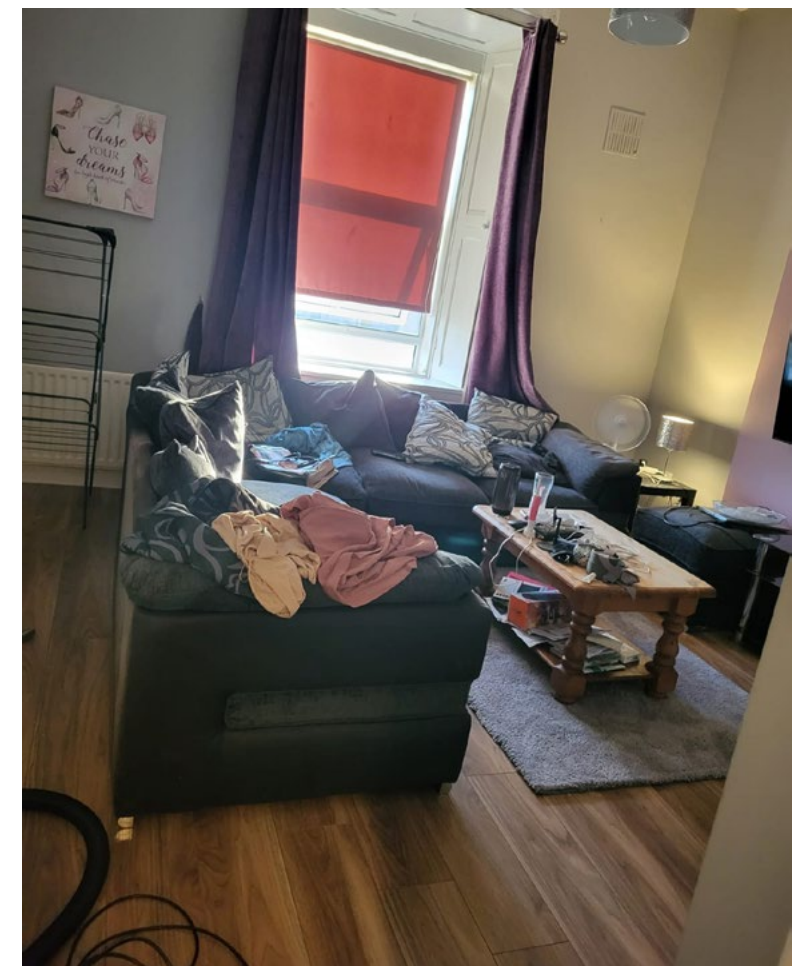




That's where I went to school, when I was like, very, very young, and also I lived around that area. It's an all-girls school now, it wasn't when I used to go there. It was mixed. It was kind of a good and bad experience with that school because I got bullied a good bit but I made a few friends as well in it...then I was moved to a Boarding School after that. It was weird going back there again. It was weird, because I hadn't been back really since that.

I was supposed to leave there before I went into care. I was supposed to go to a Boarding School, but I refused to go to it, I just didn't want to go to Boarding School. I was basically taken out of there about maybe a year or two before I was taken into care. I was told that I had to go to a Boarding School because of my learning disabilities in school, I was told I had to go to a special school. I just didn't want to do it, I didn't want to leave that school. So, it was hard. Even when I went into care they were still trying to get me to go to that Boarding School but I just wouldn't go. So, they basically just put me into a different school that wasn't Boarding School but it was still kind of a special school but it wasn't as extreme like, because the Boarding School they wanted me to go to, I just felt I didn't fit in, because I felt like they had more disabilities and problems than I had, because I just struggled with school work.

That is my apartment at the moment, that's now, because (the previous two photos) were obviously my past. It shows how far I've come and how happy I've become since then. Because I've had my own home and...I've made it how I want it, got it painted and just designed it how I wanted it, and I'm really happy with it. Really happy where I am in my life at the moment with it. I'm so happy with the place I'm in now, because I was living in a small bedsit before so it's such a big improvement and it feels like a proper home. Where with the other place it just didn't feel like home, it just kind of felt like a place to sleep. I'm really happy. I was really happy with that move. Because I was looking for a transfer for ages, but it just wasn't happening, but it eventually happened and I eventually got there, and...I'm so happy with it, it's so much space. And I'm very grateful for it because if I wasn't renting with Focus Ireland and was just renting normally, because it's town and everything I'd probably be paying a hell of a lot more because of location, so I am very grateful for everything.





I just thought this picture was like the top of the world type of thing. And that's how I felt when I got housed from the hostels. I was only homeless eight or nine months, but you know when I was told that I was getting housed, I was very happy and just felt on top of the world. Not having to worry about where I was sleeping and being in rooms stepping on needles, watching people bang up. I don't have any addictions, so I was just really, really happy and really really relieved. I could have been on the Council list for 10 or 15 years, so I'm glad Focus Ireland stepped in sooner. Talking about care, I think that helped a lot, my after care worker, we just link them in. So I was very grateful for that.

Catherine

That's a bench that I slept on the first night I slept rough. It always brings me back to that feeling, you know, that uncertainty of what's going to happen. What am I going to do?, where am I going to go?

It took me a while to go back up there, I do pass that bench, but I try not to even look at it. When I was trying to take the photo, I was...I didn't realise how much it would upset me...



Looking at it, even though I have come a long way from there...I never thought I would, when I was sitting there, all that came back to me, like what am I going to do? Where am I going to end up? You know? I still have that sense of...that dread, that awfulness, but I know I have come a long way.



That's my kitchen and my sitting room. There's a little balcony...I haven't got much furniture in yet. That's my front door and my hall. Even though we have our ups and downs...I have my son with me, I have that place at the moment.



The first time I stayed in a hostel, there was a girl beside me on drugs, and she was OD'ing and she was breathing funny and I looked over the partition and there was another girl on the other side coming in and she had addictions as well, and she was trying to rob the girl's phone and whatever she had. So, I had to run to the staff because you couldn't get a phone signal to get an ambulance...I never slept (while I was) there really.



I'm just so grateful for the support and help that I got off Focus Ireland and the place, I love it, and my son living with me, it's like...from that bench to where I am now, it's just amazing.....it is very healing. It really is very healing for me and I am going to make a home out of it for me, my son, and supporting the rest of my family.



That's my two sons (aged 9 and 7). When I was homeless we went to Eddie Rockets, we used to go there all the time...I was staying in hostels, my sister's sofa, wherever I could. And I used to enjoy going out with them.

I used to go into Parkgate Street to get a bed for the night sometimes. One day, I had nowhere to go, so I went there to Parkgate Street, and I asked them if I could sit there, I wanted to charge my phone, I was tired. I was tired and I just wanted to sit there and charge up my phone. I was meeting my son for dinner that day—I was meeting him in Liffey Valley and I didn't want to travel too far. I just wanted to keep my phone charged, keep in touch with the foster parents and make sure it was going ahead. So I was sitting there and one of the Porters goes to me, it's ok if you sit there, don't be worrying. So I says thanks very much, and I'm on the phone and I'm talking to my son. I'm on the phone talking to my son, who's only 12, I'm talking away, telling him I'm going to meet him up in Liffey Valley. I must have been on the phone for about half an hour. Then another man who worked there walked by and he looked me up and down, I told him I was on the phone to my son, but I didn't realise I should have said he's only 12. I meant, it's my son, please don't say anything, do you know what I mean? But he did, I'm talking away and he turned around and said "sure he can look after you can't he?" and my son said "Ma, who's that?" and I said to the man, he's only 12, and then he said "oh well then he can't" and walked off. Then my son's foster parent got on the phone and he said, "Catherine, he's gone to his piggy bank now to pay for dinner" after hearing that, he (my son) must have heard every word. He's a good young fella.

That will stay with me for the rest of my life, because I'm trying to get a place, to get my family back together and it's been going on a long time and then he just adds on, more or less, you won't be getting anywhere.

That's me when I was younger. It's a picture of me and my ex that I left, with my kids, when I was younger. It's kind of like, a lot to me, because I've cut him out. I cut him out of the picture.





That reminds me of when I got my house, paparazzi, a bit of news, it was brilliant.



That's me homeless. Like you're in a world, and it looks nice, and then there's a war, or whatever, and it's kind of two world's colliding. People dying on the street. It's like a war out there, like there is people dying on the street. I don't think people are taking it as serious as they should.



That reminds me of Parkgate Street, like they are defending themselves against us going in...Parkgate Street was a bad experience. Like why are you defending yourself against me for?, I'm coming here for help. I need help. It wasn't...most of it wasn't nice. They're doing their best, but their best isn't good enough.

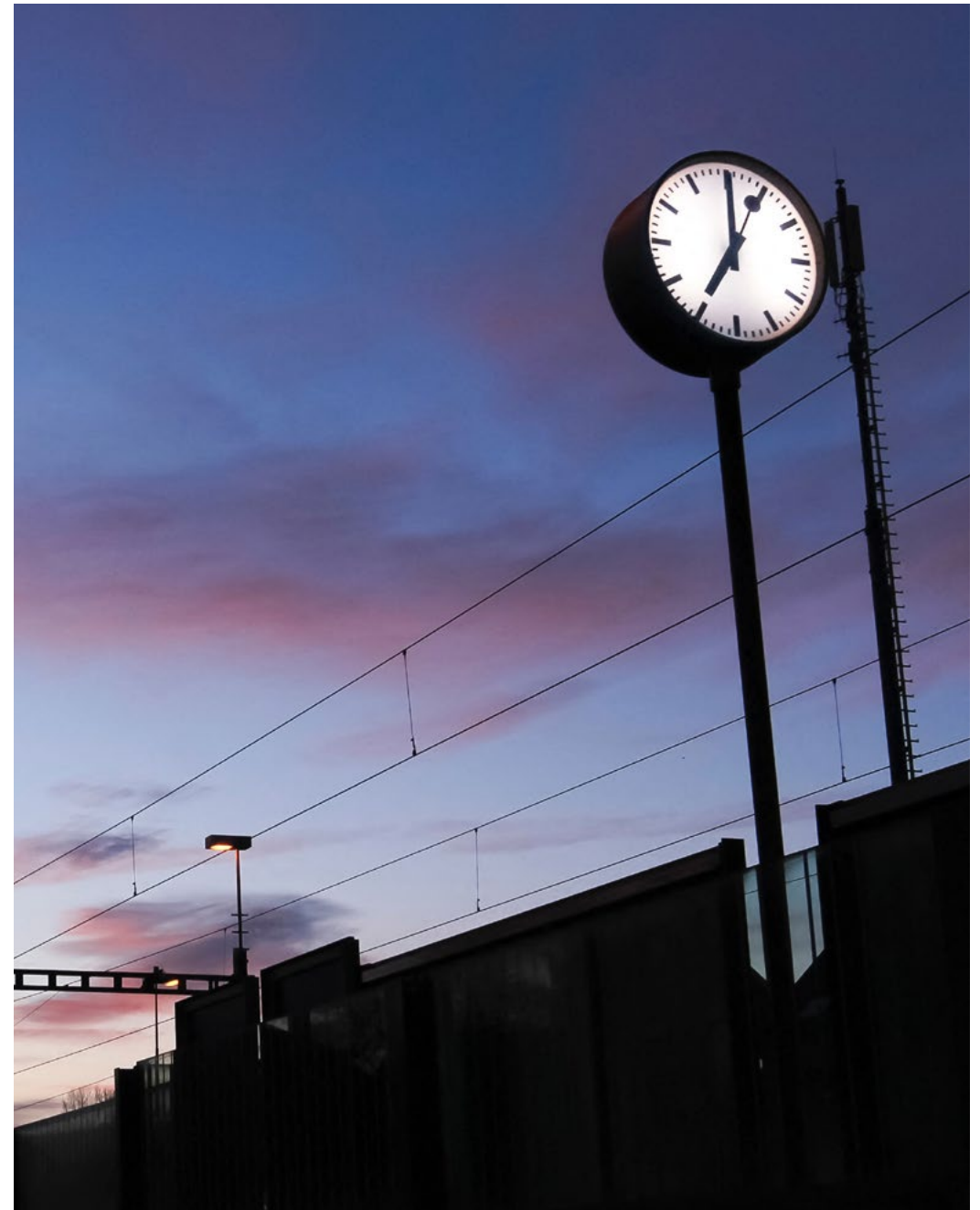
They used me being homeless to separate us (as a family), it was used, not that it should have been. We still could have met up and still could have done a lot, a lot of things, you know. Just because you haven't got a home doesn't mean that they can take your children from you, and use that as an excuse.



I love swimming and I feel a lot of freedom in swimming as well. You're kind of away from the world for a while.

Paul

The one here is a picture of a clock, and the clock is Focus to me, time. They made me feel welcome. And I was always able to connect with them. So that's what that gave me. When I did get my home I had an after care worker who was very good to me and she popped up to me a lot of the time. I'm very independent and had a lot of supports already, but I knew that's what she was here for and what she dropped up for, so, we just stayed connected, even over the phone.



And I did say, you know...if you don't hear from me I'm alright kind of thing, and when you hear from me you know something's up. So I got time, she was always there for me. I could ring her at any time, so the support was always there, I could ring anytime and I know she'd get back to me straight away and I knew there was a place I could go into if she wasn't available. So they were always there.



I also identify with this, that I could put my guard down (once I had my home) because living in Homeless services I found I had my guard up being in recovery.

So, I could let my guard down, if that makes sense? I could let it down and I could be me, and get back into education, so it gave me a sense of freedom, rather than having my guard up. Having a home let me slip the guard down.

And then this one, it would be when I got my own home. I could just see that as a sense of freedom, you know what I mean. The letting my wings down kind of thing and just be me.





This was outside where I work and I was looking after two lads that fitted into that box, and they were sleeping there for a few nights and I called the Guards numerous times and they wouldn't move them on. Not that I wanted them moved on, but I wanted them to get out of that environment because I was afraid that I was going to find one of them dead in it...they're in a box now, and is this their final destination? I put a picture of a coffin after it. From one box to another...

The two lads were scrawny little things and, you know, and that box is that, and it was just a real Adam and Paul scene. You know and my heart really went out to them, so for a couple of nights I was minding 46 people in the Hostel and then worried about these two outside as well. It upset me that the Guards leave them like that...it's in a lane, nobody would probably look in that box for days...my heart just went out to them, that that's the way they lived for a couple of days.



“Sometimes you need to distance yourself and create time alone, just so you can connect with who you truly are and what you want out of life.” —Anonymous

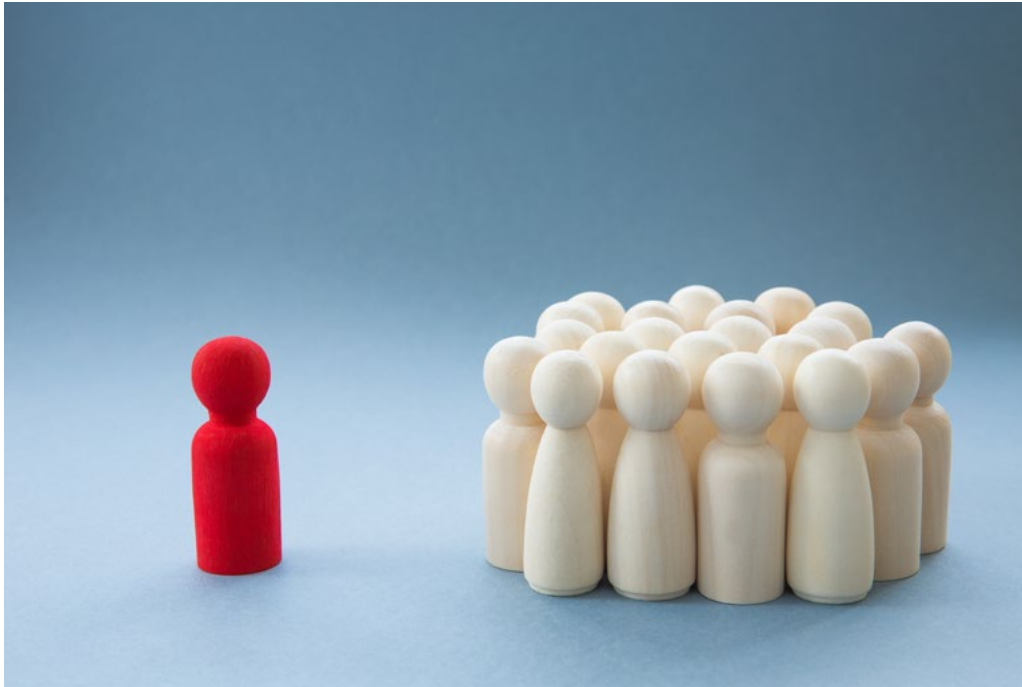
I'm big on my quotes and inspirational quotes and positivity, I love that, I find it keeps me in check with how I am and I do this a lot, I kind of zone out and get a little holiday or go off down to Glendalough and just check in with myself and reflect with myself and appreciate what I have every day. And also where I work, I work there as a reminder, but I also look after myself as well. Self-care is very important to me. To kind of get away and check in, you know, and reflect on what I want in the future as well, not just about my past, and what I have. And what I could have lost. So yes, I'm big on my quotes.

PAUL



This is something I drew as part of a (drug stabilisation) programme. I was at a crossroads, whether or not I could get into recovery. I was contemplating...maybe it will be alright just to be on prescribed medication and be off the street stuff...because I struggled with feelings and emotions...and I could see the other side of it...(that) you can live a life which represents the balloon...but the trains are coming to collide because I didn't know how to deal with stuff...so I was at a crossroads, and I actually failed on that programme. I was substituting alcohol for the drugs and I kind of had to reel it in and go and get support somewhere else and address the alcohol as well, because the alcohol was taking over the prescribed medication. The (train) on the right it's like I'm coming from that dark place, and the one on the left...there's light at the end of the tunnel kind of thing. The head was very messed up doing that. It was hard to explain, it was kind of hard to put stuff on paper.

I did do another one which was very dark and I didn't like it, so that was disposed of, but it kind of shows that there's a life there as well, you know, and I didn't want to kind of get into the dark side. But yes, I done that in stabilisation. I was still on a high dose of methadone and prescribed medication as well and just didn't know—personally I didn't know my arse from my elbow and I didn't know what I wanted, and I had to get more supports in my corner. To get where I needed to be. And that's what I done, but I actually failed that programme, that stabilisation programme. But they took me back again when I was drug free and I was able to kind of admit my denial because I was trying to hide the alcohol issue for a while and I had to kind of drop the ego about everything. Ask for help, I knew I couldn't do it on my own. I think that kind of brings me back to that place when I didn't know whether I was coming or going.



That one is...how I felt coming into recovery. It just stood out to me. After waking up to kind of being caught up in a world that I didn't know a way out of...and then kind of getting into social settings such as coming into this, and especially in recovery groups, not knowing what to say, how I'm feeling, being judged and, you know, and not being able to express them feelings...but I was able to do that on a one-to-one level but it just didn't feel right coming back to society. I thought, you know, I was being watched, I was being judged all the time and I knew deep down it wasn't the case, but they were feelings and emotions that I never dealt with, so I just kind of identified with that, it was kind of the pink elephant in the room kind of thing.



This is on my way home, and this is what annoys me...that there's a row of houses lying empty, and then you have people on the streets. And they're lying empty years and they are right behind Fitzgibbon Street Garda Station, lying idle there years. It's something that should be looked at, and there's thousands of these places all over Dublin. There's a solution looking at them in the face, and it's annoying. I know they're doing this Choice Based Letting and all but you know, it wouldn't take much to put a window and a door in them and have people safe. That annoys me just seeing empty buildings around, and the money they're pumping into hotels and B&Bs and...when you have these lying here. They're pumping millions into hotels and different organisations when the solution is under their nose. The opposite side of that is a Garda Station, you know, where safer could they be?

Inside each of us are two wolves.

One is evil. It is anger, envy, sorrow, regret, greed, arrogance, self pity, guilt, resentment, inferiority, lies, false pride, superiority and ego.

One is good. It is joy, peace, love, hope, serenity, humility, kindness, benevolence, empathy, generosity, truth, compassion and faith.

Which wolf wins? The one you feed the most.



I just love the story of this. It's about the wolf and the one you feed, is the one that wins and I know I have to feed the good one all the time, or you get dragged down to the evil one, but it's about me pulling myself back from it. So again, down to the positive quotes and affirmations I try and keep on, you know, who I feed, which is the good one. And...what I like about that picture, it shows even someone in their darkness can be good. You know...yes, that picture just stands out to me and again I have to kind of look at which one of them I'm feeding at any time in my life, not just from my addiction, it can be anything. You know what I mean, you can apply that to anything in life.

It's having a bit of empathy and compassion for people, but also checking in with myself, how I feel about things, I have to step away from certain things, and again having compassion and faith for people. You know, a bit of love for people. A bit of hope for people...generosity, if I'm feeding a few of them every day, it keeps me—my spirit good...I'm not perfect at it by any means, I can easily get brought into the other side of it, but it's about me, reflecting on myself, and how does this side make me feel, and if I can do that and talk to somebody about it, well then I'm releasing the power of it. So, I just love the story of that and I love that picture as well

Focus Ireland...I actually took that getting off the bus. I've a lot of gratitude for them. I know I've mentioned it a couple of times, I don't feel judged as a customer, you know, and that's what Focus Ireland calls us, the people that they work with...but they made me feel more like part of their family. They are very welcoming. I'm very grateful that I got my home through them, I was able to go back to education. I'm in my home seven years now, over seven years. It gave me the independence that I never had, you know, it was my first ever home in my name. I never had a home in my name, it was always on someone else's floor, or sofa surfing and stuff like that. Focus have empowered me and they've helped me voice my opinion on a lot of stuff. But the 'customer' thing I just don't get. I understand it, but I spoke to Sr. Stan about it and it all stems from the Café, people going in and they're customers, but I think Focus Ireland are bigger than that, and they're not just customers anymore, they're family. I just don't like that term. I don't. It just makes you feel that it's a business. You know, and I do have that opinion on services in Dublin, that homelessness is a business. The people that work in services...the numbers are probably more than homeless people, when you look at it. I think DCC and the Government...this can be done better. There can be different services to suit different needs.

I think DCC need to look at assessing people when they present as homeless, and addressing their needs...and then finding a suitable service for them to go to...We've had a teacher put into our service (where I work), a low threshold addiction service, that had to get up and go and teach every day, and that woman wasn't guaranteed a night's sleep...There's no proper assessment and that's the annoying part of it, you know and people coming out of social care as well. The Social Care system, you've 18/19 year olds being put in (shelters) and they are getting caught up in addiction...it's just so sad to see. People coming out of (drug) treatment and detox and they're being put into a service where there's a lot of addiction issues. They are setting people up to fail, that's the way I see it.

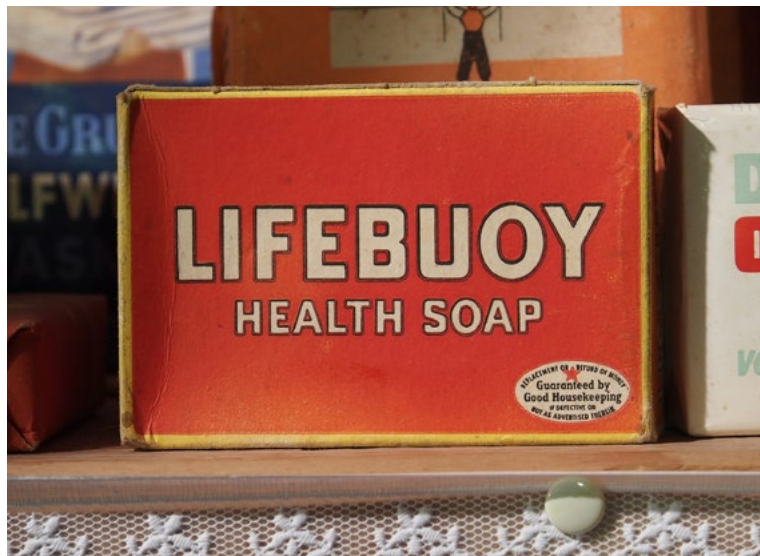


Hey
teacher,
leave
those
kids
alone.

I chose this as it reflects a past experience, the band is Pink Floyd, and the title of the song is 'Another Brick in The Wall'. The title of my past reflects and combines well with my experience I feel. I had this experience when I was roughly 11 years of age. I was in a classroom and my sister was put into our class for the day as her teacher was not in. My sister was roughly six or seven years old. The teacher that taught me at the time started to embarrass and make fun of my sister in the classroom. He then got a bamboo stick from his usual spot and proceeded to give me the 'ashes' as he would call them. He continued hoping I would break down in front of the classroom and my sister. As brazen and stubborn as I was, I did not give into him for whatever reason I don't know. He then proceeded to punch me in the head with a closed fist.

Looking back at this experience and reflecting on it. I now understand and feel that he orchestrated or manipulated this for his own reasons. May it have been for power, authority or pleasure for whatever reason he got from it. As I also witnessed similar situations with other pupils in the classroom, mainly males. I feel from this experience my attitude and confidence to learn diminished. As school continued, fear, anxiety, and anger grew inside of me and my willingness to learn in any educational setting had gone. I felt I could not trust the educational system and carried this into secondary school level. In secondary school my guard was always up and I could not build any relationships with teachers. I feel this stemmed from my primary school experience.

Anger, fear and anxiety still all resonated inside of me and I began missing classes and not showing up in school, mitching is what we called it. The led to me leaving school as a young teenager. Throughout my adult years I was always reluctant and apprehensive about returning to the educational setting. Writing this piece has helped me understand and recognise more why these feelings and emotions still resonate inside of me.



That's a childhood memory growing up with my grandparents and that bar of soap done everything in the house. Just the smell of it, it just brings back a memory of my grandparents and my uncles even, they'd shave with it, and you'd shower with it, they'd wash their hair with it, it would be washing clothes, it would be doing everything in the house and I remember you could go to the shop and buy a half bar of that. They'd cut it in half for you and you know it's just...I was asked a couple of years ago, (to pick) something that you can remember, or brings you back to a memory and that's what came back to me. Yes, it just reminds me of my grandparents and my uncles and stuff like that.

I have tattoos of Archangel Michael with wings out on either side of my legs and my back. It's real tribal and it represents (that) he picked me up when I was down and he holds me up on my back, you know it's just...it's something about wings...Archangel Michael is the patron saint of lost souls.

Kelly-Ann

This is a big huge tree here and I feel rooted, I feel grounded. With the help of Focus Ireland, stability, I have gained stability. A beautiful home which I don't take for granted. Because I know what it's like to go without, and I absolutely cherish my home.

The tree represents growth as well. It's all these branches and growing out of here, there, and everywhere. I'm growing. I'm growing, I'm spreading my roots and I think that's huge.





I'd be very spiritual. I think that's one thing that I suppose has led me through my lonely life. But also on the back of it, this would be very significant for me, and that's a person in the dark and alone, scared, and I would identify with that for many, many years. I still would identify with that person, but...the cross, Jesus Christ...you know I do feel that I was saved. I also did do a lot of work to save myself. So, that's where the cross would come in as...I didn't have the family, the physical family, or the support, growing up that I needed, but...I did always believe in God and the angels and things like that. So, then with the help of Focus Ireland that helped save me in many ways, emotionally, physically, and mentally, and my family. So that's a significant one.



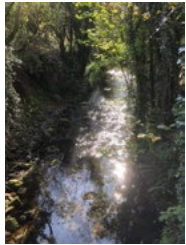
So...that's me, I know that's not actually me, but that is significant for me. From very young, from the age of 4 months going into foster care, and just feeling so lost, so alone I didn't, didn't know where I was...I didn't know...why I was here. Yes, just really, really lost, and I was very young and I was searching. I remember telling the story before where I used to literally go out of my foster house and go walking and go knocking on people's doors and...seeing if they had children and going in and asking can I play with their children...I was always searching, but I was subconsciously searching. I wasn't on a conscious level because I believe when we're children we live...mainly out of our subconscious, you know where we haven't got that conscious ability, that comes with age and life experience. That we're just free, we're living, we're being, and I was searching for love. I was searching for a home. That's what that photo is to me. I was searching for a home.



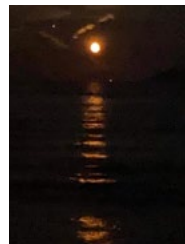
Feathers. I use feathers daily, as in...well if I see them daily. For me, it's guidance that I'm on the right path. So I'm present, I'm here, I'm where I'm meant to be right now.

A sunflower. I love flowers. I was out walking one day and...that reminds me of happiness and do you know sunflowers they grow so tall and they grow taller than the plants around them. If the plants are blocking them, they grow past them to get to the light.

So nothing blocks them, they are going where they are going and, they will grow taller if they need to get to the light.



That is my favourite place I go to. That's a bridge I'm standing on and it's so peaceful, you can hear the water and it's a very spiritual, it's actually a very spiritual practice. It's a very beautiful place, I love that.



This is my twin daughters, this is their christening photo, so one has wings because Jessica passed away on 14th February which was Valentine's Day of all days. So she is our baby of love. Within two weeks (of her passing) we had the christening. It wasn't my choice, but it was (my partner's) Mam's, and I wasn't there, like I wasn't there...I wasn't... you know, I was in coping mode. So...this would be very significant for me. We didn't even cut the cake or anything. The cake was given to somebody, but it was just a reminder of tragedy, survival mode, and a sad time.

I was on the beach one night and the moon was really, really red. And yes, just a reminder...the moon started rising. You could see it rising. Can you see like the path to...you know the path towards life.



I took that because, you know I'm able to make nice, healthy, home cooked dinners which, when you're homeless you know, you can't. So that's like huge.

I just had a Reiki, I love Reiki and I love, you know there's physical healing but there's also energy and spiritual, and see angel wings. But it's lovely to see the angel wings and then the light in the middle. So after my Reiki I go for a little walk on the beach before I go back to the chaotic home life, and it's really, really nice.





This is looking out of a window. I have a view now, a sense of purpose, I have a view of looking out, looking out onto the world as in what do I want to do?. I know who I am. What do I want to be? What do I want to help change, what do I want to create? And I think that's really powerful.

And in my safe place, I have my foundation, I have my home. I have stability and I'm able to look out now and help others.

That's like life, baby steps. Baby steps, wherever you want to go, you have to start somewhere and, take one step at a time and you'll get there. Life is the greatest journey you'll ever be on and that's very true. 'Keep asking and it will be given to you', 'Keep searching and you will find', 'Keep knocking and the door will be opened to you'. I love that, and it's very true, it's about believing what you deserve. When you believe you deserve it the universe will serve it.





This is significant. It's like a keyhole...and the girl is looking up and I thought God, we are the keys, like you know, we hold the key to the hole for the door. We unlock our destiny. We unlock our life. We create our life, we write our book, you know, so it's about empowerment.



This for me, I know it looks like a picture of my nails, but it's not. It's about, see the wheel, and I'm in control of my life now, that's powerful for me. I'm in control. I'm in the driving seat and obviously that's with the help of Focus Ireland and the stability and that as well...I have my hand firmly on the driving seat and I'm choosing where I go.

Focus Ireland are that family support that you know a lot of us don't have, or that we need. I think that's huge, and also the support from support workers to be able to help us link in with whatever other supports we need, I think that's huge as well.

My wings...I know, it's really, really dark, but there is a hint of light. They mean a lot to me, as in...I gained my wings while I'm still on earth. Most people gain their wings when they pass away. I gained mine while I'm on earth and I'm able to use them. I know I can give myself a hug, as in protecting myself. They cover my scars as well which is great, especially being a Mam and walking around and seeing other Mams and stuff, I felt I was really judged, the Mams seeing cuts all over my arm. You know they are there, but everyone else doesn't have to.



“Don’t give up on the person you’re becoming.” —Anonymous

I love this, don't give up on the person you're becoming. I think through everything I've been through, that's what's carried me through, my inner strength and knowing I'm a good person. That's one thing I've always said to myself. I'm a good person, I didn't do anything wrong. Growing up and growing up in the foster family and feeling rejected and I was physically abused, so...my legs were broken in two places. I felt that it was physically ingrained in me that there was something...it was physically ingrained that I must have done something, or there was something wrong with me. So I grew up with that kind of perspective from very, very young...that's still consciously putting in these positive thoughts every day. It's like, when you've been through trauma and you've been through pain and stuff, it's like a computer, our minds are on negative. Default. Negative. And it's about sticking that little memory stick in, trying to stick the memory stick in with positive thoughts, not old, because the old thoughts are there and the old thoughts are wrong. They're like foundations, so it's about trying to re-wire, and having to consciously go in...Making that conscious effort.



There was a time in my life where I just felt like I was being trampled on. Trampled on. Everybody was using me for their gain and that would be emotionally, physically, sexually, you know...I think it's very powerful.

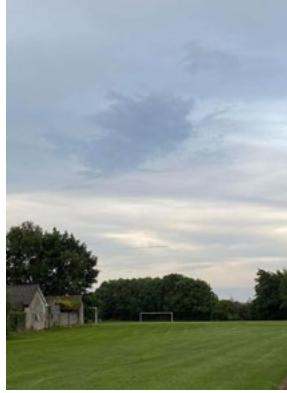


Throughout the years, for me I can feel desperation in that, the desperation of being in the dark and trying to reach for the light, and I think I've had that a lot over the years where there was a time when I nearly went under myself...but I've always been trying to reach for the light.

And then the second photo is about giving back. So, it's like a passing through, you know there's a giving and receiving. So...now I'm in a position that I'm able to give that life to others. So yes, it's pretty big for me.



I do art therapy, and absolutely love it, so that's just something I created, just that all is well and all I am, so I stuck positive quotes in there too... underneath it all I said to myself I think that's been the hardest thing, I think growing up, that's all any of us are just looking for, to be accepted. To feel like we're accepted, but I think when you get older and you start to learn about accepting yourself, I think it doesn't matter then who accepts or who doesn't, you have that...grounding love for yourself, you know, which is not...it's not easy to do, and...I'm not there yet, but it's a work in progress.



This photo is a huge reminder to me of myself and my children living out of suitcases and bags...when we were homeless, we didn't have storage and, you know, places to put our things, so that would be a huge...reminder to me of the uncertainty, the moving around all the time. The instability and just the chaos, the chaos of what it's like to not have a home, not have a stable place. You're always ready to pack your bits and go wherever you have to go.

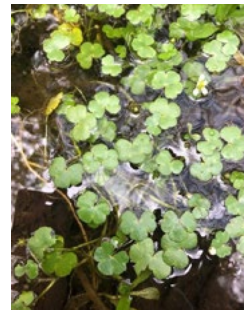
If you could zoom in on the sky—I don't know if you can see—up...there's an angel. So, these are things that I've noticed from very young and this would be my reassurance and my guidance and...just a reminder that I'm not alone.

My kids would have been quite small...that's the way we lived. Everything else went into storage, because you know you can't bring your home with you. Because we got thrown out. My ex-partner threatened the landlord and we literally...we got thrown out, we had nowhere to go...we could only bring the bare essentials with us.



That is a butterfly I took and it's on my trampoline, and if you can see behind it, that's my daughter...there's just something really significant about that photo...There's barriers, when you're homeless, but on the other side of the barrier is growth and it's a butterfly. It's a beautiful butterfly...when you're homeless, when children are homeless there's that barrier between them, of their growth and becoming who they want to be...that's really significant or me.

I love the sun, you know the sun setting and yes...it's behind the darkness, but it's still there.



I watch out for signs and you'll see in a few other of my photos of how I felt I've been guided, not having the physical and the emotional connection of people around me. But Robins and feathers, and ladybirds, and butterflies of course since my daughter passed away.

That's...for me it's, you know shamrocks and Irish and luck and...yes, that made me smile when I took that.

This (also represents) a barrier for me, there's the thorns and the bushes and there is just a lot of uncertainty in that and it's restricted. It's very restricted. But then there is a little blessing there with the Robin on its own. There is hope and hope is a huge word for me. I think I've carried hope through my 36 years of life.



It's just so tranquil...I will go there one day, to somewhere like that. That's a dream of mine, please God one day, that will become reality when the kids are older.



That's my back garden. That's my wall. My neighbours have lovely ivy coming over, but like I'm in my home now six and a half years and that was overgrown...so, me and my son cut through to just take the remainder off because we have doggies now, so to give them space to run around. But it's amazing what was underneath, and see all them like branches, they are cemented to the wall. The roots of them, it's...it's...very, very difficult to remove them, and it's something about underneath us all, our roots, our grounding roots, we're all strong underneath no matter what we've come through and I think it's through pain and make us stronger...there's something very earthing and grounding about that.

HOME \hom\ *n.*

a dwelling place together with the family; an environment offering security and happiness

This for me is what home means to me and what home means to...most people, or what it should mean. A dwelling place together with the family, an environment offering security and happiness, and that's something that Focus Ireland have given me and my family, that I can now look at that and say I have security, I have happiness. We have security. We have happiness as a family.

“Love is the light that brightens every heart’s darkness.”

—Brian McGill

And love. That’s one thing I’m so grateful for that I never lost, because I know a lot of people go through so much pain and it can make them hate everybody, hate the world. Now there was a time where it did happen to me and I was, excuse me but I was “fuck you, fuck you” to everyone, and it wasn’t everyone’s fault, but it was how I was feeling, but I’m so blessed that I never lost the love that I have inside me that... was my birth right as a child, no matter how my upbringing was, I’ve never lost the love inside of me which is my light that brightens very heart’s darkness.



I love these locks...there’s something about that was once me holding on, and that’s my kids holding on to me, and all we had left at that time was love. Literally...we just had each other.



And that's walking around my garden. I love hands. People's hands. That's my tulip. And a squirrel. I capture a lot of wildlife, when I'm out on my walkies. I love walking...that's great for my head, and just being away from everybody, being around nature, because I find with animals... animals, obviously don't judge you for who you are...there's unconditional love there with them, and you don't have to look a certain way, you don't have to act a certain way, you can just be, and they are just being themselves too. But a squirrel, he's in protection, for me he's in protection mode—his tail is up, and he's alert. So yes, it's always on the watch.

Even to do meditation in my house, closing my eyes, that's so hard for me. It's so hard to switch off, you know because I spent so many years in survival, protection mode.

“Those with a warrior’s spirit wear their scars with pride, they know what they have battled in the past, has given them the strength to face the future.”

—Anonymous

A warrior spirit wears their scars with pride. I have a lot of physical scars. One way when I was growing up, I used to, I suppose to cope with what I was dealing with, all the emotional shit...sorry for...but all the emotional stuff was, I had to take it out physically, so I would self-harm and things like that, and...but warriors with their brave hearts and fearless spirit they know what they have battled in the past and that gives them the strength to face the future. So it's that strength of turning your battles you've faced into creating a good future. That's huge for me.

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About the Author

Dr. Maria Quinlan is a sociologist who specialises in the design and use of creative, visual, and person-centred research methods which aim to facilitate people in sharing their lived experience. Maria is a multidisciplinary researcher who uses a variety of innovative participatory action research methodologies, including photovoice, ethnographic group interviewing and design-thinking to explore how people experience their world. She has pioneered the use of photovoice in Ireland, conducting projects across a broad range of topics—from people's experience of homelessness, addiction and mental health to people's experience of education and employment, particular in relation to issues of culture, mental-health, diversity and inclusion.

Maria was formerly Research Lead at the Applied Research for Connected Health Centre (ARCH) in University College Dublin, where her research focused on the implementation of person-centred healthcare, with a particular emphasis on service quality improvement and co-design methods. She is the founder of the Pink Flower Research, a research consultancy which focuses on creating actionable insight regarding issues of equity and inclusion, using person-centred, trauma-informed methods.

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