

A photograph of a gravel path leading through tall grass and weeds under a blue sky. The path is in the center, flanked by dense vegetation. In the background, there are trees and a blue structure. The sky is clear and blue.

THE LIVED EXPERIENCE OF ADDICTION



Merchants Quay Ireland
Homeless & Drugs Services

A photovoice project by
Dr. Maria Quinlan and Patrick Bolger

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Foreword



“This is the beginning - from ‘I’ to ‘we.’”
— John Steinbeck

The impact of addiction can be all encompassing. Its effects are chaotic, traumatic, and can catch families and friends in fierce and uncertain ways. People lose decades of their lives to addiction. Sometimes, they lose their life to it.

‘The Lived Experience of Addiction’ is a snapshot of people’s lives in Ireland today. Addiction exists. It is part of Irish life in multiple tragic ways. Despite its prevalence, addiction often exists between the lines in Irish society, unspoken and in silence.

The impact of that silence is profound.

The people who come to Merchants Quay Ireland can be embarrassed, shamed, and regretful about their addiction, while the families we work with have to draw on great courage to reach out for help. When I tell people where I work, they often tell me stories of addiction, whether their own or that of a family member. Sometimes, it is the first time they have told anyone.

If we cannot speak about a problem, we cannot address it. The problem weighs more heavily. The isolation that accompanies addiction is not just for people facing substance abuse. It affects family and friends too. The stigma and silence surrounding addiction drives people away from the very support they need.

The hope for this project is to begin a conversation. Ireland needs to start talking honestly, openly about addiction. It is in beginning to share these stories and their reality, that we begin to understand.

Addiction is part of the human condition, a health need. It is often a response to trauma or an attempt to cope with the complications of life.

The people who took part in this project come from different backgrounds, different parts of the country. Some are homeless, in active addiction; others are in recovery; there are also families coping with loved ones in addiction. What brings them together is their experience of addiction. Our hope is that, in time, people can read these stories, and understand that they are not alone.

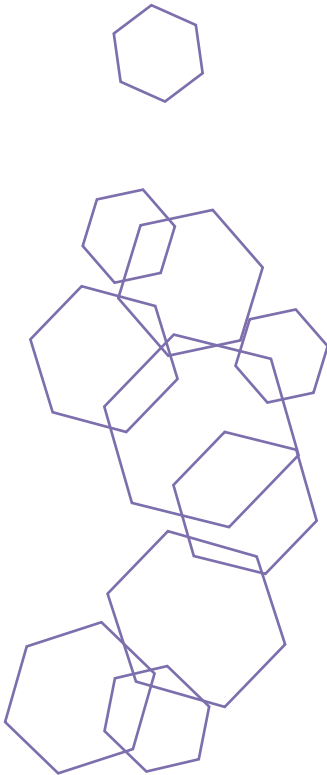
M Scott Peck wrote that “love is an act of will - namely, both an intention and an action”. The same can be said of compassion. We can choose, as Ireland did for many years, judgement and exile; or we can choose compassion and understanding, to accept people where they are at.

I want to express my profound gratitude to all those who took part. Photovoice can be a difficult process as it is often a new way to examine old wounds. Nonetheless, for those who take part, it can be a healing process. Thank you, too, to Dr Maria Quinlan and Patrick Bolger for their expertise and gentle guidance throughout the project.

There is power in this book. Despite having worked in Merchants Quay Ireland for many years, I found myself moved by the experiences shared. The sense of fear and darkness that comes with addiction, contrasted with the light and the hope of recovery.

All of us have an important role to play in creating a society where we feel safe enough to ask for help and safe enough to share our experiences without fear of judgement. Our hope is that this project contributes, even in some small way, to helping create that society.

Paula Byrne
CEO, Merchants Quay Ireland



Introduction

It has been said that shame dies when stories are told in safe places. This project aimed to offer space for those who have experience of addiction, either directly themselves or that of a loved-one, to safely share their stories. In this project we worked with three groups of Merchants Quay Ireland (MQI) clients and families to capture their stories using an innovative method of participatory photography known as photovoice.

Photovoice is a research method where we use photographs, and group discussion, as a tool to tell our stories and to give voice to people's lived experience.¹ Photovoice's roots are in social activism and it aims 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 tool in empowering people who have often found their voices excluded in society. This methodological approach aligns with MQI's mission and values of collaboration, openness, compassion, non-judgement and integrity - showing dignity and respect for people's unique lived experience.²

The photographs and stories which accompany them within this report are intimate portraits of how people live with addiction, and how they recover their lives from its grip. From the stories clients have shared we can see that addiction is all-consuming - it controls, dominates, exhausts, brings chaos, destruction and contaminates all parts of a person's life. For participants within this project who have experienced addiction, drugs provided temporary shelter; they were a refuge from pain and suffering, often rooted in childhood trauma. Those caught in its grip talk of it providing a false-freedom, a false sense of safety and security. Those with a loved-one in addiction talk of being drained, controlled and emotionally worn-out by it.

On the other side of addiction, we see a portrait of life re-emerging from the darkness, from the chaos. Acceptance and recovery provide a powerful sense of release, a powerful sense of expansion and

freedom. The constant sense of being on-edge is replaced with a sense of peace, a sense of getting one's life back.

For participants on all sides of addiction there is a safety found in using their voices - to share their stories, to set boundaries, to ask for help. There is a safety in being heard, and MQI has provided a safe harbour for them;

Merchants Quay is like that lighthouse that I went to....it's a safe environment, somewhere safe I had to head to, when I had nowhere to go to. [Joseph]

I'm getting more empowered by being here in this group [in MQI] and I think that's what I'm trying to say with this photo, the flower symbolises that. Just being closed and then being able to open and share. [Mary]

The shame and stigma associated with addiction are powerful silencers. The wider community has an integral role to play in creating a context where people can feel safe enough to ask for help, can feel safe enough to share their stories, without pre-judgement. In providing a platform for people directly affected by addiction to share their stories, this project hopes to shed light on the reality of addiction - and in doing so to increase the sense of compassion and empathy all of us in society have for people who are affected by it.

Project Design

For the purposes of this project, we have brought together our respective methods from the worlds of visual sociology, ethnography, and feminist qualitative research on the one hand, and visual art, documentary and photography on the other. Together we have adapted our respective methodologies to design an innovative approach which aims to provide people with the space and tools to express and share their experiences in a safe and creative way. The base methodology we have used for this project is photovoice, and we have adapted it with the addition of a more in-depth ethnographically-informed approach to capturing narratives, and a therapeutically informed approach to the facilitation of the workshops.

As with all participatory research methods, there is an organic flow to how we have adapted the photovoice methodology and to how each group within this project have engaged with it and made it their own. Photovoice is a flexible, participatory research method in which participants use images and group discussion to identify and share their experiences. 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, photovoice preferences the voice and knowledge of those participating in the project, providing a platform for them to tell their stories directly.

Photovoice has been used with people to explore their experiences across a range of topics, including homelessness and addiction.³ Photovoice has been previously used to both explore and raise awareness of the stigma associated with addiction, homelessness, sexual violence and mental health problems.⁴ A recent review of its effectiveness in the field of mental health research found it had the capacity to illustrate the experience of shame and stigma, while empowering groups who are often marginalised.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

In the tradition of inclusive, participatory knowledge-creation, it is research by and with people rather than 'on' people. 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.

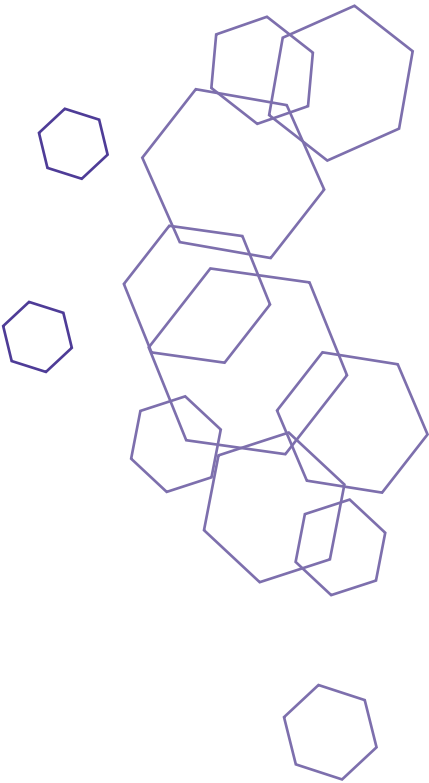
Participants and process

This photovoice project was conducted with three groups of MQI clients - a group of people who have taken part in the High Park rehabilitation and recovery program (n=3); a group of family members who attend the Riverbank family support group (n=4); and a group of people who are receiving support for addiction from the Riverbank team (n=3). In total 10 people who use MQI services participated in this project, five women and five men. Overall seven two-hour workshops were conducted, and participants took and shared close to 100 photographs.

The photovoice workshop process incorporates five key elements;

- **Creation of 'safe-space'**
Space where people feel comfortable to share their feelings and experiences.
- **Introduction to visual literacy**
Creative excersises to get people comfortable using the method.
- **Facilitated group discussion**
Participants decide / agree on themes to guide their photo-taking.
- **Sharing of photos**
Each week the group share and explain selected photos.
- **Final selection and captioning**
Each person selects photos to share and is facilitated in captioning process.

Like all qualitative research, this does not aim or claim to be a representative sample of the experiences of those who have lived at close quarters with addiction. Rather it aims to provide nuanced insight into a complex multi-layered phenomenon. By including people who are at various stages of their recovery from addiction, as well as family members of those experiencing addiction, we get to view addiction from several angles. The impact of addiction on the sense of self of someone experiencing it directly, and the impact on family members.



Ethical considerations and approach

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 MQI team in advance, and potential participants were identified, recruited and supported throughout by the MQI teams.

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. We have received specialist training in the photovoice methodology from the PhotoVoice Organisation and adhere to the organisations statement of ethical practice, and the phased approach to achieving informed-consent.⁷

To ensure that the group was supported from a therapeutic perspective, Zoe Dillon, MQI Mental Health Nurse sat in on the workshops with the clients currently seeking support for addiction, and Will Carroll and Brian Murphy, from the MQI team provided support to the family members who participated in the project, and to the High Park recovery group throughout the project. Carol Casey, MQI's Head of Fundraising and Communications, attended all of the workshops to provide extra support and guidance to participants.

The Lived Experience of Addiction

The following 75 photographs explore a variety of themes relating to the experience and impact of addiction. The overall aim of this project is to let the 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 addiction and recovery which will be explored in this section.

The experience of those in recovery or currently seeking support for addiction

Six people at various stages of recovery from, or help-seeking for, addiction shared their experiences with us in this project. Three have been through the MQI High Park rehabilitation facility, and continue to attend aftercare programmes, and three currently receive support from MQI's Riverbank services.

Their experiences highlight the contraction and isolation from others and from the self which addiction can result in, and the contrasting expansive, connected nature of recovery. The imagery used by participants to describe their experience of addiction includes rusted hand-cuffs; derelict buildings; narrow paths. In contrast recovery is represented by images of expansion. These include images of nature – sunsets, swans, trees, views from the top of a mountain, wide paths; and images of growth and creativity including paintings; cooking; and educational achievement. The process of recovery is represented by images of safety, support and progressing on a journey – these include for example life buoys; lighthouses; climbing ladders and mountains.

These images provide an external visual which participants have used to explore their experiences of addiction and recovery in a deeply nuanced manner.

Addiction contracts, isolates, destroys

When we look through the narratives which accompany the images within this report, the words and concepts that we find repeatedly associated with addiction are fear, isolation, destruction, chaos, decay, feeling stuck and trapped. As one participant describes it 'addiction is the opposite of connection' – to both the self and to others. For participants in this project addiction is associated with a loss of self, a false sense of reality, a false sense of connection, and a false promise of freedom;

...addiction is a false freedom. We take drugs to escape, but we actually go nowhere....It is just an illusion, an illusion of freedom. You think you are going somewhere but actually internally you are just stuck inside, and....you are going nowhere....decaying. [Joseph]

....you are caught....in a rut, you don't know what direction you are going in, you don't know what direction life is going in....you are stuck. [John]

I thought that I could only be creative in partnership with that substance for ages. [Eve]

For the participants, drugs and alcohol are described as being a perceived way out of painful reality, a means of coping with painful experiences; a means of suppressing difficult emotions – often rooted in childhood trauma. The search for safety is a consistent theme – participants talk of being in flight or flight mode, of feeling under threat, and of seeking solace, protection and relief in drugs;

I've always expressed it as it's like a key going into a lock....When you're rushing at the door and there's someone behind you and you're trying all different keys and your panic is building, and you get the right key and - ahh, you turned the key. And that's what that drug did for me. Because most of my life, I'd be running around, in either fight or flight. So, when I took that drug, I was able to go ahhh. [Joseph]

I was bullied harshly as a kid....I don't like to go back to think about myself as a kid or anything like that.... at 13, I had a close family member pass away in traumatic circumstances and it was a huge loss for me, and since then, I've just had a massive rage in me, just anger... so I ended up lashing out, and doing bad things to people, fighting and stuff like that....Drugs came into everything, to kind of suppress everything, drugs made it worse as well. [Jason]

I went through stuff with my father when I was younger, violence and stuff like that....my dad put me in hospital when I was younger... [Mark]

The search for safety from fearful reality, and painful emotions, drives behaviour which isolates as a means of protection.

You see me and you don't see me, I am in the shadows....I am hiding in plain sight. I am not revealing myself. I have gone through life like that. There is most definitely safety in that – you can see me but you can't see me....on my own, always on my own....I've always been that self-reliant, it has always been there as a kid, because I have always relied on myself. But it can be a double-edged sword because sometimes when you're just struggling you find it so hard to reach out to people. [Joseph]

Drugs and alcohol provide temporary relief from pain, but ultimately extract a very high price for the false sense of safety and connection which they provide;

....addiction, it smashed me, it really – mentally, physically it took its toll, it did, and the environment I came from and the fear in me. Yeah it really took a very severe toll on me. [Joseph]

My head was....caved in, it was – things were getting too much on top of me. [Jason]

I used to smoke a lot of cannabis on my own and just kind of like go into this other world which was....super isolating. [Eve]

Recovery – expansion and hope for the future

If addiction is characterised by images of contraction, destruction, fear and decay, recovery is symbolised by the opposite. We have images of expansion, safety, hope, creativity and growth - trees; sunlight; participants standing on the top of a mountain; painting; lighthouses and life buoys. In recovery there is a return to self and a return to safety – participants talk of feeling again, of experiencing life fully. They talk of being back in college, back connecting with family members. Finding connection through education and creativity, and of building self-esteem and self-confidence through being of service to others, and through the cultivation of self-compassion. They express feelings of pride in their recovery journey, as the shame and stigma of addiction is lifted;

Seeing what I have achieved over this year, I did a Gaisce award, I've got a certificate in coaching....It's good, I don't mind giving myself self-praise anymore, I used to say – 'oh you're filling your head full of shit now', but I believe in myself and I believe that I'm a good person and I feel like I'm going to do what I want to do in life and hopefully it will have some impact, the career that I'm going to have. [Jason]

Today is different, today is different and it's okay, it's okay. I'm finding it's okay to be me, and it's okay in my own skin. Something I never could feel, never wanted to be, I always wanted to be someone else.... but today I don't, it's okay. [Joseph]

Where addiction contracts; recovery expands the horizon, life is once-again full of possibilities;

This is kind of what my recovery is like at the moment. There is a big path....it is bright, it is colourful, it is beautiful, the sun is shining....is that the path I'm on?, is that how big my life can be?....I want my future to look that big....that's the ambition I have for myself. I want to get there; I want to have a great life and achieve all the goals I want to have. That's how big my future looks there. [Jason]

Recovery brings true freedom, to enjoy the simple things in life - replacing the false-freedom, false-connections that the participants associate with addiction;

I went down to Aldi yesterday, and it's just family, food, freedom, that's what I call it, 3Fs that's what it is, just go home and make some dinner....The fact that you can just go do that, instead of just going getting cans or whatever and stressing about shit, just doing something normal, just make some food. So I have the freedom to do that [Shane]

In recovery the mask is lifted and you can safely be yourself, just as you are, without a need to protect via isolation;

The clean time is great, I am not doing the drink and the drugs, and that's huge....but the experience, the feelings that I have – it feels like real life at the moment. It feels like I am living a real life....I was playing a character, that I thought I wanted to be. [Jason]

As Joseph describes, where drugs and alcohol may have been used to escape painful emotions, and as an outlet for coping with anxiety, they have been replaced with other; healthier; sources of comfort and security such as the expansive feeling of hiking in nature;

The hiking is an outlet. Hiking is the only thing, even though I've been in relationships that have had that connection that drugs gave me, that took that negative energy, that builds up constantly, the stress, worry that constantly builds up....that energy that drugs took away, the hiking does that for me, and that's the only thing I've found....the hiking really does it. [Joseph]

Joseph also describes the safety and protection provided by the healing space within High Park;

....[I was] full of anxiety and not knowing where to go and coming to High Park it was like ...a safer environment, it's like that lighthouse. It's somewhere safe. High Park is the total opposite of what I have come from. The madness I come from, compared to the safety here. [Joseph]

Participants speak of recovering aspects of themselves hidden by their addictions – for example Jason talks of discovering a talent for painting;

I didn't know I was good at painting. I didn't know I was good. it just shows you what you can do, when you're not consumed with drugs and that kind of life, and your head's just – you've kind of got blinkers on. I didn't know I could paint a beautiful picture like that, and I was very shocked that I did. And that's true of my recovery, it just opens up different alleyways for you to go down. [Jason]

Rebuilding the self is an important part of the recovery journey as described by participants. There is a sense of building up one's self-confidence, and self-esteem through small wins, small achievements. For example Shane describes how helping out in the High Park kitchen helped build a sense of pride;

....you're proud of little things like cooking in here, I never say that about myself like – that I'm proud of something. Wayne [the chef in High Park], wrote on my feedback, 'I am proud of your achievements'. It is just good to hear like; you never hear that off anyone like, I don't think. I never did anyway. [Shane]

Shane also echoes other participants who stress the importance of self-compassion and mindfulness in building the self-awareness required for sustained recovery;

I practice mindfulness....I am up in my head and when I first came in [to High Park] people were telling me to love myself, or to compliment myself – I thought go away out of that, that's insane like. I actually do it now, and you feel it working. Like you just stop yourself and go – what the fuck am I even thinking about all this torturing myself?. I just start thinking of good things in my life. It takes practice but it works. [Shane]

The ongoing journey of recovery

Represented by images such as mountain-climbing and ladders, there is a strong acknowledgement amongst participants of recovery as a journey, and of the effort which must be maintained and sustained in order for recovery to be successful in the longer-term. Recovery is not seen as an end-point, but rather as an ongoing process;

....that is where I feel I am at now in life. Cleaning my life up, cleaning up relationships, cleaning up....I am working at cleaning things up, all the time, making myself better. Making myself a better person, making life better for myself, rather than going backwards.... Climbing the ladder. The ladder represents life. You're always climbing, climbing, climbing to try and get to the top. Especially when you're at the rock fucking bottom. I'm sure many of us have been there before. [John]

Recovery takes effort, the 'work' of healing is integral to the participants and takes commitment; time; and the support of professionals;

....I've done a lot of work on myself coming to High Park, trying to understand....going on this journey and discovering myself; I have more tools on my belt, not to be reactive to everything, hurt, pain, if someone says something. It's okay, and that's recovery at the moment....it's never-ending. [Joseph]

....there are things out there that can save your life, you just need to look for the right things. There's help out there, things that will save your life, give you the tools to help yourself. No one's going to help you if you don't help yourself....If you put the effort in, you get it back. [John]

[MQI have]....shown me how to help myself. If you actually have the effort to help yourself, they will go ten steps ahead of you to help you out. If you want to get off the stuff, whatever you're doing, all you have to do is talk to someone in here and they'll help you out with treatment centres. It's all about putting the effort in though. [Mark]

Recovery also takes consistent maintenance – it is not an end-point, rather it is an ongoing process of using healing tools to ensure you don't slip back. Healing is described as tentative – with participants seeing themselves as a consistent work in progress;

....if I make one bad decision.....drink, drugs – I'm left with the consequences and I'm looking down the barrel of a gun. There's life or death in it. [Joseph]

....and obviously caution as well because the slightest thing can tip you off the edge and back in again. [John]

While participants acknowledge the wounds that they carry from their addictions; there is a strong sense of hope in their recovery. Hope in the possibility of sustained progress, of reclaiming themselves and their lives;

I am young and I am a bit damaged from my addiction but I am still standing. I am still going, there is beauty around me, there is beauty on me. [Jason]

....there is always light at the end of every tunnel, no matter how dark the tunnel is, there is always light if you keep looking for it, eventually you get there. The sun keeps breaking through, there are loads of clouds but there is still the sun. [John]

The experience of family-members

The experiences of addiction outlined by those who have experienced it personally are reflected in many ways by the family-members who participated in this project. Four mothers of people in various stages of addiction and recovery shared their experiences with us. For them, addiction is similarly characterised as destructive and all-consuming. The same fear, terror, and search for safety and protection is echoed in their images and words.

Where their perspectives perhaps differ is in terms of the relational aspect of their experiences - they are all mothers with children who are, or have been, in addiction. There is a deep, visceral sadness in their images and words as they describe the struggle to reach acceptance, to access support, and set very difficult, painful boundaries with their children. Three of the mothers have adult-children who are in active addiction, and one has an adult child who is in recovery having been through the MQI St Francis Farm rehabilitation programme.

Their images of addiction include closed doors; pulled blinds; destroyed furniture; items being submerged in mud, drowned. The words they use to describe the chaos which addiction brings into their lives include danger; drowning; feeling trapped, mired; contamination; cancer; infection; terminator. They are 'battered and bruised' by the process of attempting to manage their child's addiction – and face a Sophie's Choice of protecting themselves and their other family-members, while trying to support their child in addiction. There is a heaviness of grief and exhaustion in their words.

But there is also hope, and a sense of becoming, a sense of empowerment through the process of acceptance, letting-go and of setting boundaries. Here the support they have received from MQI is seen as integral for helping them in that process. The ability to share their experiences with other parents, and to receive professional guidance and support from the MQI team has played a powerful role in their own healing and recovery process.

This recovery is represented by images of flowers tentatively blooming; the growth and creativity of knitting clothes for expectant grand-children; and gifts celebrating their children's progress in recovery.

Addiction consumes and destroys

Similar to how addiction is described by those who have personally been caught in its grip, the parents who participated in this project describe addiction as an exhausting, all-consuming, destructive force. It creates fear and chaos, and takes up all available space. As Emma puts it, you end up feeling 'battered and bruised' in the process.

The parents speak of the fear and anxiety that their child's addiction brought into their lives – they have had their emotional and physical safety compromised;

....it used to fill me with dread because my son was part of a gang....he ended up getting into debt and we had our windows smashed, our door kicked in, two cars wrecked, I was beaten up twice, my husband was beaten up. My kids were intimidated in school. [Eileen]

....the fear and anxiety and dread....cleaning, caring, making sure everything is okay....you're tiptoeing around the house, because when my son is drinking it's like....you're the guest and he's taking over control. [Mary]

It was bringing such chaos into our house. It was like.....we had worked so hard to build our house, to create the home, and then there was this awful stuff that was happening inside it that was destroying it and tearing it to pieces....it was like a cancer that was inside our home, tentacles reaching and twisting and strangling us... [Amelia]

Again echoing those who have experienced addiction, the parents also feel a sharp sense of isolation;

....having to protect yourself so much that you're actually closed, you're rigid. And you're not able to connect to other people. And that's what it was like for us....it's sinking, submerged.....sinking into the mud. [Amelia]

....you're putting on this mask all the time, but deep down inside there's a lot of pain. [Mary]

The parents express deep sadness, pain and heartbreak in attempting to support their child through their addiction, while also trying to cope through the process of setting difficult boundaries. The inter-personal conflict and breakdown of relationships is a particularly painful aspect of their experience;

....worn and tired and at the same time there's determination....so it's all these different emotions going on and you're like 'Okay, I'm actually strong when....I'm voicing how I feel and I'm being honest.' But then....it's just like this mad rollercoaster of emotions....will there ever be an end to them? Sometimes I feel hopeful and sometimes I just revert back again. [Mary]

I do love him, of course I love him. I do love him – but I don't like him at the moment and I haven't liked him for a while....I do love him, of course, he's my child, I gave birth to him....I looked after him until he was 18, 19. He is 27 now and all he causes is....he is like the terminator walking through the door. [Emma]

The parents express a difficult mix of emotions – there is a deep struggle to stay safe, but to maintain connection with their child. They describe the huge strength that is required to set safe boundaries;

....you hear a knock on the door and it's, will I open the door? It's kind of a conflict. She might be coming back, it might be good. And you're thinking 'I want to see her', and then 'Oh no, maybe I don't'...I've opened that door a couple of times to the most dangerous things....you have to protect yourself, so the door is symbolic of protecting yourself, it's your home....For me as well too, I've a grandson who I have to protect. So, I have to be extremely careful of who I open that door to or what I open that door to. Or emotionally how much I open myself to my daughter. Which is tough going. [Amelia]

Hope, pride, recovery

The sense of expansion which recovery brings and the overall sense of hope for the future is again echoed by the parents in this project. Eileen, whose son is reaching a year in recovery, describes the sense of freedom, ease and expansion that comes with not having to be consistently on guard, not having to protect yourself from the chaos and destruction of addiction;

....we have relaxed, we didn't realise it. We can leave money lying around again....When I knit now I can just switch off. So it just represents hope....I wouldn't have been able to knit before [when my son was in addiction], I wouldn't have had the concentration, I wouldn't have been able to focus. [Eileen]

There is a strong sense of pride in her son's recovery, while again echoing the idea that recovery is a tentative on-going process;

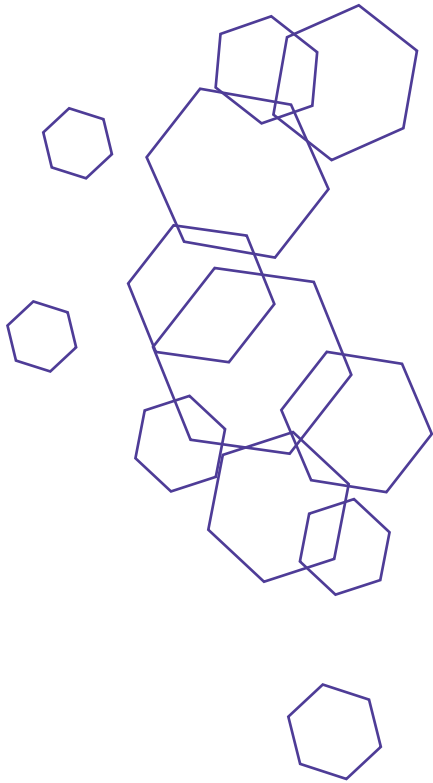
My son made me [a clock] when he was in St Francis Farm last year, and instead of all the taking, he actually gave me something. And the thought that he actually applied himself enough to make it meant a lot....he's going to be a year clean tomorrow...so we got him a voucher so him and his girlfriend and his little boy can go out and have a meal together. Because I think he deserves it...it is a big deal. So, I suppose that signifies achievement. We all deserve a bit of praise somewhere along the line....I just feel proud of him and I haven't felt proud of him in years. So hopefully he'll keep it going. [Eileen]

While the other parents who participated in this project still have children who are in active addiction, they maintain a sense of hope, and find strength in the group support offered by MQI. For example, Emma describes seeing a flower bloom in the midst of what appears to be a dead plant, and how it represents the idea of not giving up on her son, that there is always hope of recovery;

So, there obviously is hope isn't there?....When I saw that I went – that is the first time maybe that I've seen hope. [Emma]

Mary also describes the process of regaining hope, power and a sense of control on one's life, and of her own recovery process;

God knows where this journey is going to end but I just think it's me on a journey....it's just like I'm discovering who I am and what my needs are and for years I've been like this closed person just looking after everything and fixing and managingit's just that I'm getting more empowered by being here in this group [in MQI] and....being closed and then being able to open and share. [Mary]



Jason





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That's my cake, I was one year clean on Wednesday, the 4th. I'm just proud of the clean time that I haven't done drink or drugs, I'm proud of that. But it's more that I'm proud of the person I am today ...that's huge to me. Being able to hold a conversation with people, I wouldn't have been able to do that a couple of years ago. I was bullied harshly as a kid, you know, I had a bowel problem that I couldn't control up until the age of 12, kids are savage like... I was 16 stone as well at 16 years old, I was a heavy, heavy kid. So, kids used to be slaughtering me out of it, slagging me... It wasn't nice for me, and it still isn't nice for me to say or think about, I don't like to go back to think about myself as a kid or anything like that.

Then, at 13, I had a close family member pass away in traumatic circumstances and it was a huge loss for me, and since then, I've just had a massive rage in me, just anger... so I ended up lashing out, and doing bad things to people, fighting and stuff like that. I quickly realised that the more I lashed out, the more angry I got, the more mad stuff I done or kicked up in school and threw books, the more of that I done, the more people didn't go near me, you know, I got protection out of that. People were like well don't go near him, he's a bit mad, so I kind of fell into that and I ate that stuff up all the way to 16, 17, 18, 19. The older I got the worse things I would do to protect myself. I know now it was never me inside, but I was so, so afraid of being bullied again and being put down and stuff like that... that fear in me of being put down and being made a show of in a group, that was strong inside of me. So I would nearly do everything to not feel like that.

Drugs came into everything, to kind of suppress everything, drugs made it worse as well. When you're getting into that type of life, you kind of want to do madder things, and get more respect off the wrong people and get more praise

off the wrong people. So, I got accepted by these people, these drugs lads, I got a lot of acceptance off them. But when I came to the age of about 20, 21, I don't know if it was maturity or I don't know what it was, just a turn in life, all the things that I was doing, it didn't agree with me, they wouldn't sit with me. I felt really bad for all the people that I have hurt over the years and it was eating me up inside. So, I couldn't deal with that, I couldn't deal with the guilt. So, I left that but I couldn't deal with it. I was still scared, I still kind of went back to that boy again because I didn't have any of that stuff around me... but the drugs never went away, I was doing massive amounts of drugs from the age of 15, 16 all the way up.

I knew myself that I wasn't that person and I knew I was a good person inside because if I wasn't a good person inside, I wouldn't feel remorse or guilty or anything about these actions that I was doing and stuff. But I kept using the drugs, to kind of take away all them emotions and all the childhood emotions. I couldn't deal with it.

My heart was aching, my head was sore and I just couldn't, I couldn't deal with it, until I had to go and get help, until I came through High Park. Then just being capable of seeing the change in me now... seeing a person that's going to go to college to do social work and to help families that are struggling. Seeing what I have achieved over this year, I did a Gaisce award, I've got a certificate in coaching. And just the type of person I am when I'm meeting people, the type of people I like to be around. It's good, I don't mind giving myself self-praise anymore, I used to say – 'oh you're filling your head full of shit now', but I believe in myself and I believe that I'm a good person and I feel like I'm going to do what I want to do in life and hopefully it will have some impact, the career that I'm going to have. This cake is just the start of the cakes I'll get.



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This was Sunday, I was working as a steward at Croke Park for the All Ireland Final. It was great to be there. Even if they didn't pay me, I would have been happy enough to be there. It was a great experience. It was the second match I have gone to and actually experienced a match. I have experienced things this year. The funerals that I went to this year, I experienced the funeral. Any other funeral I would have went to, I would have been fucked up on drugs going into it or after it and I don't even remember it. Most of the matches I've gone to in the past, I would be locked before I got in there and used drugs while I am in there. So, I never really felt anything, any of these experiences I have had this year, now I am feeling everything. Literally like you feel bad feelings, good feelings, you can feel them. Like they are creepy crawlies on you, you know, you feel them that much.

I got goose bumps... the amount of emotions I went through, watching the match was unbelievable. You had joy at the start, you were buzzing and you were ready to rock and halfway through it, fucking Cooper gets the red card and it's like 'Ah bollocks'. And at half-time you relax and take it easy. Then you are up again and the match kicks off again, they start getting on top and then they go one point up and you are going 'Fuck, you have lost'. And you get the

point back, lovely. Then we have the point at the end and you have the last kick, the last second of the game, you are waiting there like that and then he misses 'Ah fuck....' And then you have to do it all over again. So, it was every emotion, up and down all the way through it. It was great to feel it. I was wrecked after it, emotionally drained nearly after it because you feel all them things.

I went to another match; it was only a local match. It was a cup final there a couple of months ago. Same feeling – I knew all the lads on the pitch, watching them all, up and down 2:1, 3:2 – it was a great match and I walked away from it saying 'That was the best match I have ever watched'. I have watched Champions League Finals and stuff like that, but when I look back on it, obviously I was drinking and doing drugs watching them. So, to not be drinking – that is what I am saying, with this year, what I am experiencing over this year. The clean time is great, I am not doing the drink and the drugs, and that's huge... but the experience, the feelings that I have – it feels like real life at the moment. It feels like I am living a real life. Where I didn't think I was – I was playing a character, that I thought I wanted to be. That's the way I looked at it.



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This is kind of what my recovery is like at the moment. There is a big path, you know, it is bright, it is colourful, it is beautiful, the sun is shining. There are people on the path there, there are people in my life that are good now. It is just -everything about that picture with the trees spaced out evenly, you know, it is kind of like mapped out and that's how you can see where you are going. That's where I was going with these pictures – roads. That is my recovery.



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You could scratch out some of them arrows or some of them words that say playground, stuff like that. I could write in acceptance, I could write in happiness, I could write in fulfilled life, that's the direction I'm going, where that man is. He's heading up that road, the trees are there, the scenery is there, he looks positive. It looks like a positive pathway to go on, and that's the route I'm going, I'm going to go up that route - of having happiness, of having acceptance of myself. Having a fulfilled life, that's where I'm going with my recovery.

I was kind of thinking with that, is that the path I'm on, is that how big my life can be? The other path was small, but that's the kind of opportunity - I want my future to look that big, that's where I'm going with this, that's the ambition I have for myself. I want to get there; I want to have a great life and achieve all the goals I want to have. That's how big my future looks there.

So, this would be my addiction, this is my addiction side of things, you know, very thin road. You can't really see where you are going, the grass and the stuff is kind of - is coming over the edge, it felt like my head a bit. My head was getting caved in, it was – things were getting too much on top of me. The thin road, compared to the wide road in the park. When you are in addiction, you are on a thin road, you are not really going anywhere compared to where the big roads and big opportunities are that are happening in life, it is broader, it is a bigger road, there are more people on the road and that is the one I am going down at the moment. So, this kind of represents the bad side, the addiction side of where I was at.



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This is where I would have done a lot of drug use. A lot of selling, a lot of hanging around as a young fella as well. When we started cracking on, after about 14, kind of doing a lot of bad stuff, it led me over to this place, because this is where the lads would hang around. A lot of lads have horses and a lot of lads would be smoking weed, a lot of older lads would be drinking there and stuff like that. So, I was attracted to this place. Those windows weren't always boarded up, that door wasn't always boarded up. You can go into the house; it was only boarded up the last two or three years.

So, this place represented a lot of negative things. Just stuff like guys sleep there, it was savage like. But then, I looked at it as well, in a way....I kind of looked at it as – it is a house, it's damaged, I am young and I am a bit damaged from my addiction but I am still standing. I am still going, there is beauty around me, there is beauty on me, it is a lovely day, you know. The sun is shining in the background, the sun is shining on me. And, the house kind of represents me, where I am at, at the moment.



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That's my first day in college. I was bit nervous going in, full of doubt Sunday night, full of doubt, I didn't sleep well, Sunday night, I just doubted myself... are you going to do this?, is it worth your while?, are you good enough to do this?....just doubting myself, doubting myself, thinking is it too long?, are you too old to go back to college?, you're going to be finished at 28. Would you not just get into a full-time job now? – you know, all these doubts about starting college. I didn't sleep well over-thinking stuff like that.

When I got in there that morning, I did the opposite, I got in there – it's just like the self-sabotage switch went on in my head from Sunday night. I got in there, felt around and then I said, 'no, I'm too good for this, this is only part time, this is not real college, I'm only doing this two days a week. No point in doing this, this is not really college, only a community college doing part time'. So, the self-sabotage was there, the doubt, just get out of here quick. But I was

aware of it, I went into my aftercare day programme at Station-One, and I let them know how I was feeling through the whole process from the night before all the way until I left the gates.

Trying to sabotage what I really want – that's happened to me a lot. When pressure comes on, or if I think failure's happening, I could run, I don't like the feeling of it so I'll get out. And I know that's an old behaviour of mine, and I have to stick with this. I'm trying to switch – saying that I'm anxious about it to I'm excited about it, because they're nearly the same feeling, aren't they? So instead of saying I'm anxious about going to this, I'm excited about going to it. So that's how I'm switching it now.



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You know when you think back to when you were kids, that park has loads of little trails all around it and stuff like that, but I remember that tree, we used to climb that tree. And I remember years ago, running through those trails as a kid, how happy I used to be. The park itself, my family used to always bring us over to the park, there used to be a big gang of us, there's loads in my family, and being able to run through the park and happy as a kid. I was a happy kid, I remember that, I remember back then how happy I used to be. And to be able to go back at 24 and walk through the same path and through the same little trails, the happy person that I am now, it's great.

Yeah, there's been a lot of shit...there is a lot of negativity in my past, but there's a lot of amazing stuff going on in my life at the moment, a lot of good stuff, and there was a lot of good stuff in my childhood. I had a movie-like childhood, if I had to explain it to you.

My parents come from big families, and we all live close by – there's cousins everywhere. I never didn't not have a friend, I always had company....they brought us everywhere as a big family....and I did have an amazing childhood, and I do have an amazing life now.

I can get caught up in the negative of being, 'oh poor me, or, woe is me, I had this and I had that', but I was walking through that park and saw that tree, and I was like, no, look where you are, you're doing well, you do have a lot of opportunities coming up. You do have an amazing life at the moment. So, it was a good feeling, I kind of ground myself. With the negativity, with all the thorns around it, there's still a big tree there standing, and I'm that tree still standing, with all the negativity that I did see around me – I'm still standing.



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These are some achievements that I got over the last year, since I left High Park. The one at the top – obviously it's a great one, it's the one for completing High Park – a huge one for me. To come through this place and to get broken down and remoulded again, get my head shook and put things in perspective. They did a lot for me in here, I learnt a lot in here. I came in here and jumped in and ran with it. I got a lot out of it - from being in here I was able to get the Gaisce award, the bronze President's Award. I didn't know what it was when I was doing it, but when I got to the awards ceremony of it, it was actually – it was a lot bigger than I thought it was going to be. It was deadly, in Phoenix Park, and it was a big thing, I didn't invite any of my family members or anything because I didn't think it was that big of a thing. It was huge, and everyone's family members were there, it was a big thing. There were speeches, there was a fella actually out of Merchant's Quay, he was there, he made a speech and....it was powerful. There was a lot of other people making speeches there, and I thought this is actually an achievement.

The third one, I'm really proud of that one, it was with the Beacon of Light, the FAI and the South Dublin County Council, called the Breakthrough programme. It's a programme run for men who suffer with mental health, it runs for 12 weeks and it's a combination of the Beacon of Light, which provide a service of counselling, one session a week for the 12 weeks, and then the FAI team up with us and we do one session of football, get the lads to do one session of football for 12 weeks. And I took part in it, it was brilliant. So, on a Tuesday you go see a counsellor for an hour; and this is all free as well. On Tuesday you go see a counsellor for an hour....and on the Wednesday you meet up in the Shamrock Rovers stadium and you do a training session with FAI coaches – it was brilliant.

You don't have to be in addiction, there were only two of us in addiction, the rest of them were suffering with anxiety and depression and stuff like that. You could see the change in the lads, from the first week to the end – even the change in myself. I was nervous about doing it

as well, and we all went in and everyone was open and honest....and a lot of young lads as well, which is not common. I didn't think it was common, but then the more I'm going through this path, I think a lot of lads my age do share if they are asked. The oldest person on that was 28, all the way down to 19, and everyone on the first day, we did a focus group, and everyone took part in it, some stepped back, some didn't. But towards the third or fourth week, everyone was open and honest and chatting about stuff, and you could see the benefit of it.

Then the presentation of it was huge as well, the Lord Mayor of Dublin was there, that was down in South Dublin County Council office in Tallaght, big huge thing. My family and all came, there was a doctor there that did all the data from it, tracked us from week one to week 12 and saw the progress of it. We got tickets into the match again for the Shamrock Rovers match on the Friday night, they gave us season tickets for the rest of the season. It was brilliant. I already signed up two lads to do it now after Christmas. It's just going to get bigger and better, that programme, I think...because lads will do it, you get them in with a common interest like football. All the lads will just go in, talk about football, but then you do the counselling on the other side of it which will help them as well. I'm in a group chat with them 12 lads, still in a group chat, still chatting. Some of them are after getting jobs, going back to college. It's huge, I thought it was a very good programme to be a part of.

With football I think you get a lot of lads just finding it easier to chat. Get them in, game of ball, everyone gets to know each other then you can have a chat with them after when they're familiar with each other. I thought it was brilliant. And then I get to be a mentor on it next year with the lads. For the next lads to help them through – it's brilliant....That cert says I can go in and coach under 6s to under 9s. You get something out of it at the end, you can go in, you have a cert there to say I'm qualified to coach under 6s and under 9s. So yeah, it was brilliant.



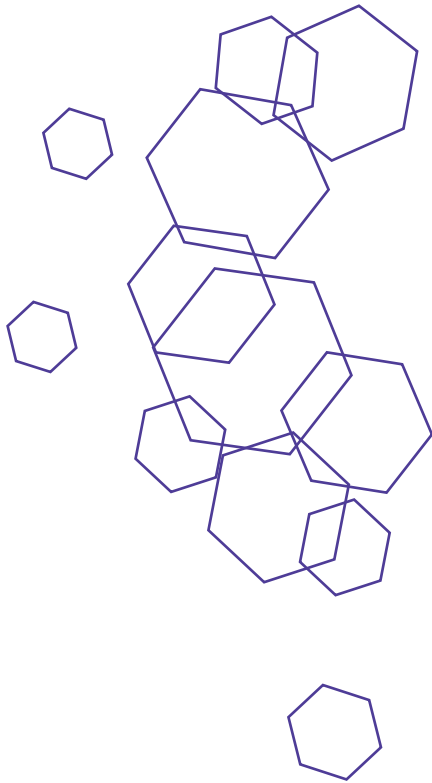
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That's a picture I painted; I didn't know I was good at painting. I didn't know I was good. I did painting years ago in school for third year or something, but I do it every Friday now in my day programme. There was a picture on the wall similar to that....so I said, look, jump into it and see what the craic is with it. It took me a long time - it took me about four or five weeks to paint that. I was proud of it; it shows me that I have hidden talents in there that I don't even know about yet. But with addiction, you're just consumed – your drugs, your money. When you kind of

break out of that chain, loads of things just start happening for you. I can paint now; I can take a picture. All these other things that I never knew I could do. I've painted three pictures and I've only shown my ma them....so yeah, I was happy with it, it just shows you what you can do, when you're not consumed with drugs and that kind of life, and your head's just – you've kind of got blinkers on. I didn't know I could paint a beautiful picture like that, and I was very shocked that I did. And that's true of my recovery, it just opens up different alleyways for you to go down.



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Joseph

That's me and my cousin as babies. My ma and his ma are sisters, my da and his da are brothers, and we live two doors away from each other. So every cousin he has, I have....so the two of us had the same upbringing. I was in addiction and there he is, he has his own company and stuff like that. Everyone's different - me and him have had such parallel lives, we're nearly the same people, and you grow up – but I went to the addiction side of things and he cracked on with life and has a family now and has his own company and stuff like that. But you can't blame the kids, you can't – like, a kid comes into this world and it's happy and it has all opportunities and it goes around carefree and stuff like that, and things happen to shape the kid, I've seen things that he didn't see.

I always used to compare myself to him, why am I not like him?, I've had the same upbringing as him. But when we

actually sat down and shared our stories, and when I shared with him about my addiction, he said to me, jaysus Jason, I didn't know you'd seen these things, I didn't know you felt like this, I didn't know you went through that. And it just shows you that, though I do compare myself to him, that we are completely different. I see things differently to how he see things, I feel things different to the way he feels things. Things might impact me different than they'd impact him. And that's why I wanted to put in that picture, because the two of us, same road, same upbringing, same people all of our lives, same aunties, same love that we got off all our aunties and uncles – yet I went that way and he went the other way. There's no one to blame, really.



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That was taken a few months ago in the Mourne Mountains, up on Slieve Donard. It was after being a hard hike. You climb down in to the centre there, and then you come into the left and then you come up to the gap in the wall and then you follow the wall up. I looked back and I kind of thought to myself - wow, that's how far I have come in my recovery, you know. It has been tough, it's been a hardish climb to get up here....and I looked back and I just thought, the people the way they are, they are staggered you know, like some are separated, some are together; some are finding it harder than others do to get up the climb. And the wall, the wall really caught me as well like. You know, it is a journey, it is continuous... that wall goes on for 30 miles across the Mournes. And, yeah, it just caught me a bit like. How far I have come, how hard it has been, but in a way, you know, there's joy in the experience – tough but in a nice way, kind of. People are climbing at their own pace.

I was in Normandy back in July and that is from Pointe du Hoc, somewhere that I have heard about for a long time. I've read books and seen war films about it. Something I have a passion for is history and that is one of the German bunkers at Pointe du Hoc and you can see the shell damage from the main guns....and I just thought to myself, that's a bit like me – damaged like from addiction, in regards to certain aspects, you know, but still functional. Still fuckin' functional, still standing. It took direct hits off the RAF – probably a 15-inch gun, direct hits off a 15-inch gun, but it is still there and it is still functional. And it is still standing. I was just kind of blown away by it.



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I noticed these about two years ago and I walk by them two or three times a day....addiction is a false freedom. We take drugs to escape, but we actually go nowhere. And even though the cuffs are made of stainless steel, you know the weather is taking its toll on them, decaying them to rust and all that. It is just an illusion, an illusion of freedom and it is chained to a tree. A tree symbolises growth and greenery and change. But the cuffs are just chained, they are not doing what they are designed to do,

and it is going nowhere, just going nowhere. They are deteriorating over time....and it just struck me, it is a bit like addiction. It is false, you know. The combination of the tree, the life, the busy environment, all the packaging of life underneath it, the bottle, the Coke can, the drinks can. But the cuffs symbolise going nowhere and that is what addiction does, it is false. It is false really. You think you are going somewhere but actually internally you are just stuck inside, and just like the cuffs, you are going nowhere.



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That is me on a bike with my helmet, my jacket and my gear....that is how I've always seen myself. You see me and you don't see me, I am in the shadows. You can only see the outline, the appearance of a bike, but there is a sinister aspect to that photograph. The man in black, kind of like. I am hiding in plain sight. Even though I have the front of my helmet up, I still have my dark visor down and it is a lot like what I have been through in life. You see but you won't see.

All you can see is the rider and the bike but you can't see who is under it. There is a bit of comfort in that for me, because I am not revealing myself. I have gone through life like that. Recovery is from the inside out, recovery has helped me to journey inward.

There is most definitely safety in that – you can see me but you can't see me. So, I am keeping people away, and I know that – that kind of intimidates people. I learned that as a kid....when people fear consequences, they respect stuff. They stay away....and there is an element of that,

definitely, keeping people away. Knowingly playing up to that....Life has taught me well. In a way that came from wanting to protect myself, I learned as a child. I was bullied in school and I learned that when you stand up to these people and they fear consequences, they back off and I had become a bit of a master like. Giving subtle hints of – look, body language, keep away. I decided that people would know there was some threat there – they just know there is something sinister boiling there and it keeps people away.

It is also very protective. I can kind of try and let people in if I can but most of the time, I will keep you out there.... it goes back to the hypervigilance. It is very tiring, and that is why I can't be around people all the time. I can interact but I have to remove myself because it is very tiring. I get so tired, because it is constantly being switched on. And I need to come away, and that is what the hill walking does for me.



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I look at this and I think it's really like recovery, what decision are you going to make, you have so many inviting invitations. You are clean, you've Lisdoonvarna, Aillwee Caves, you have all these choices in life, and take away the

names and they are all the choices in recovery. Some are near and some are far....and sometimes you're spoiled for choices....where will I go, which turn will I make?



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This blew me away because I got off the bike and I parked the bike, and I stepped back and I looked. And there's a guy working on his trawler; the green trawler; the lighthouse and then you have the harbour; the life-buoy on the wall, and it's a safe environment. The bike is there as well, close to the edge so... am I going to be able to get back on that bike? Is that bike going to tilt over?, there's a danger in it as well but it's a safe kind of picture. It just seems everything fits, I just thought boom, everything fits, and the ship, the boat comes into the safe harbour to offload its catch. And the lighthouse, if you're lost at sea... Merchants Quay is like that lighthouse that I went to. High Park, it's a safe environment, somewhere safe I had to head to, when I had nowhere to go to.

The contrast to where I come from, it was like I found myself, I use the phrase rudderless, clean but full of fear, full of anxiety and not knowing where to go and coming to High Park it was like that. That's why I think I came back, it's

a safer environment, it's like that lighthouse. It's somewhere safe I can say – if I go there I know it will all be alright. And that is what it was for me for ages. I remember sitting in here saying I can't fucking do this; I really can't do this. They just want me to talk about stuff I can't identify with. But I didn't want to go back out there, I didn't want to go back to where I came from and that's what kept me here. I kept telling myself, 'that door is not locked, go down and let yourself out'. Because, you know, addiction, it smashed me, it really – mentally, physically it took its toll, it did, and the environment I came from and the fear in me. Yeah it really just, it took a very severe toll on me. And maybe this is why I am attracted to all the stuff in this picture. It is the total opposite of what I have come from. The madness I come from, compared to the safety in that photograph, everything has its place.



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This is the Mourne. I just gave my friend my phone to take it. I suppose it's me, it's symbolic of where I am standing. On my own, always on my own. I am a lone wolf, by nature. I can be with people but I like to come away from them. I liked the stillness and it was a great view. I like the rocks and the whole lot and I just thought...I was looking at it later on and I was thinking - I've always been that self-reliant, it has always been there as a kid, because I have always relied on myself. But it can be a double-edged

sword because sometimes when you're just struggling you find it so hard to reach out to people. Yet people see me standing there, so serene and I have it all together but they don't know what's going on, they don't know. Am I one foot away from coming off that ledge, or am I safe and secure?...people look at me, bike, car, has it all together. But it's only outward appearance, internally....you just don't fucking know, really like, you know, I can hide it so fucking well.



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This was a photograph I took back in July, on the Normandy coast, it's a place called Longues-sur-Mer. I love history, I've always been drawn to human conflict and the human spirit when it's backed up against a wall. There's something in me that, that appeals to me, you know, I've always been drawn to wars, conflict and the history of it and....strategically I like to know, what humans are like. I think there's something like that going on. I don't use the word spiritually lightly, it's like something deep inside me is looking for that connection to make sense of my life, of the chaos in my life. Because I can look at what happened with human conflict here, and how deep the human spirit is and what we can overcome. It relates to me.

To me, that gun belched out death and destruction, but there's something alive in it, at this angle. The eyes, it's like a character out of a child's book. In my photographs, there's an element of darkness in them, there's an element

of danger – it's kind of like recovery, it's all fun and games, it looks nice and all, but one bad decision in recovery, as regards drinking, picking up a drug, and I'm staring down the barrel of a gun.

It looks like it has eyebrows, the two eye sockets....it just looks so human. And the angles of the encasement around it, the concrete bunker....it just blew me away, it looked alive – it really looked alive....it spoke to me. It's like a living creature, even though it's a manmade, inanimate object – it was made for death and destruction. Now.... it looks like a child's toy. And just as I said, relevant to recovery, it's like, as an addict – and I know as regards to the way my mind works, if I make one bad decision, as I said, drink, drugs – I'm left with the consequences and I'm staring, I'm really looking down the barrel of a gun. There's life or death in it – in a smiley face sort of way.



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This one kind of represents – freedom, it's where I am today. I started climbing from right down in the sunshine down the end, I took that path all the way up, and basically, it's just embracing where I am, how far I've come. A prison officer said to me a long, long time ago, he said, if the only tool you have is a hammer, all your problems look like nails. I really understand that today, you know, my hammer at the time was anger. And it got me into so much... and going on this journey and discovering myself; I have more tools on my belt, not to be reactive to everything, hurt, pain, if someone says something. It was never physical violence that bothered me, it's the power of the words that cut me – I'd no defence against words, the power of the word, it would sting me and I'd be enraged, the rage of a child, and I'd destroy. Break and damage, break, damage, you know, that's what I did. Today I have more tools in that belt.

It's been a hard journey, really, really hard, and I've overcome a lot of things. I've had a kind of tough upbringing... my father was involved in stuff that complicated things straight away for me as a child. The police would be in my house because they wanted my da, and he was always under surveillance. They couldn't get

my da, so the kids always got it. All my life it's been pressure on me, pressure on me, pressure on me, pressure on me. And maybe – you know, for years I blamed that uniform, seeing that uniform. I'll use a word here, pathological hatred, that's what I had. No matter what fear I had, that uniform got me raging where I wanted to kill. I didn't care, and that's coming from fear, because everything in my life, when something bad happened, that blue uniform was there. I understand today they're not all bad, but they're few are far between, and my experience has taught me that. I've seen the badness; I've been stopped on the street as a kid and abused. You know, four or five-years-old, the first time I was in a police car I was five, I was on a piece of waste ground 100 yards from the house, and because of my name, who I was, they put me in a police car. And I remember being in the back on the police car and I was so small that I stood in the back seat and looked out the back window. I could see my ma was running up and calling after me – they drove me to the police station because of my name. And that's what it's been all my life, always struggling to be heard, to be seen. And that's kind of what I'm doing now. It's freedom, letting that anger go. Very angry, very angry all my life. I've had reason, but misdirected, the anger has been (cont.)

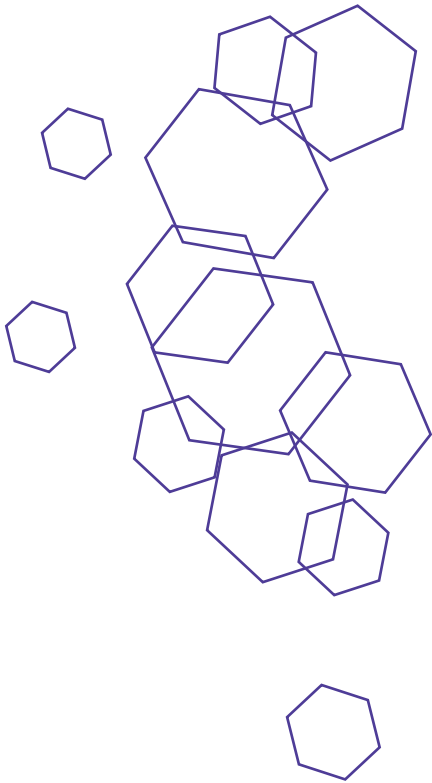
misdirected. I also turn it inward and destroy myself. Suppress everything, hide everything, because to me, if I showed stuff like that, it was fear. Very fearful existence, self-centred fear. And when you're coming from self-centred fear, everything is a reaction in life. As I said, smacks wouldn't do it, but the power of a word would destroy me, cut me to the soul. For years I couldn't understand that – and it was the reaction of a seven or eight-year-old child that was coming out of a man's body... the outcome really wasn't good, coming from that kind of trauma. I don't really speak much about my father; you know. ...there were good times, and I don't blame him, life doesn't come with a handbook, I understand that today. They did their best, tried to protect me and all. But we had outside forces through my father's career – the consequences are horrific for children, getting caught up in that legal machine and raids from an early age and associating the blue uniform with the trauma in the house – pathological hatred. And then me feeling all that negativity and me blaming them for everything. It's your fault, it's your fault. That's feeds off the anger. And it's just, it's not good, you know.

But today it's different, today I've done a lot of work on myself coming to High Park, trying to understand... I've walked around all my life with an audience, I'm not allowed make a mistake, I'm not allowed be human, I'm not allowed show emotion. You have to be this way, you have to be that way... You can't live like that, you can't really live like that – horrific, horrific state of affairs... all I knew was rage. I felt anger; I felt sadness, that was about the range of my emotions for years because I was a block of ice. Really, I built that proverbial wall to protect myself, but also, it kept people, good people out. It's no way to live. Today I have changed that a lot, you know, it's an ongoing journey. We never get there, what I've learned in recovery, we never get there. It's constant, it's not perfection, it's constantly moving. There's no end goal. It's not like you climb that mountain, and get to the summit, and it's over. It's constant, every day. If someone had said to me, you can live your life, the rest of your life without taking a drug, I'd have said fuck

off, what the fuck – but I understand it. One day at a time, that's how it works, one day at a time and one day adds up into weeks, to months, to years.

And the funny thing about it is, when I was growing up, when I took that drug for the first time, even though I had the intelligence, I was told not to touch that drug, I understand the power of that, I've always expressed it as it's like a key going into a lock, it was. When you're rushing at the door and there's someone behind you and you're trying all different keys and your panic is building, and you get the right key and - ahh, you turned the key. And that's what that drug did for me. Because most of my life, I'd be running around, in either fight or flight. So, when I took that drug, I was able to go ahhh. And that's what hiking does for me. The hiking is an outlet. Hiking is the only thing, even though I've been in relationships that have had that connection that drugs gave me, that took that negative energy, that builds up constantly, the stress, worry that constantly builds up. ...that energy that drugs took away, the hiking does that for me, and that's the only thing I've found, that and the gym does it as well. But the hiking really does it.

When I climb a mountain, I leave all the negativity up there. I come down drained, and I come down with a whole different perspective... just standing up on that wall there, master of my own destiny, master of my destiny. For the first time in a long time the choice is mine, I have the choice. I have the power.... it's been a long time for me to get it, looking for acceptance off people, filling that low self-esteem through never saying no to anybody. All that outside stuff, today I don't have to do that. Today is different, today is different and it's okay, it's okay. I'm finding it's okay to be me, and it's okay in my own skin. Something I never could feel, never wanted to be, I always wanted to be someone else, someone else... but today I don't, it's okay. It's okay, and that's recovery at the moment. As I said, it's never-ending.



Shane



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I just thought it was a bit trippy like, yeah. I don't know...it is obviously clear glass. You can be seeing clearly...there's a warped look of it, the way you see the heads like coming around. I love finding stuff viewed through lenses like.

You put on an image, you are in your head...the drugs, the drink and all, putting on different faces. Maybe that is what I was doing. I don't know who I am.

When you start your life, all I know is selling drugs and drinking, that is all I know. I don't know [what life's like without that] – so I have to find that like. I spent so long doing that. No, it is not clear at all, I don't know what to be at like, I don't know what I want to do. I have a million different ideas about what I want to do...It is overwhelming, like when you are thinking about the future, are you going to succeed? Panicking then and saying – will I even fucking bother like in the first place?

I have my days like. I practice mindfulness. I even think, say playing ping-pong and all that is mindfulness. You get a rhythm in it. All the little things. I am up in my head and when I first came in [to High Park] people were telling me to love myself, or to compliment myself – I thought go away out of that, that's insane like. I actually do it now, and you feel it working. Like you just stop yourself and go – what the fuck am I even thinking about all this torturing myself. I just start thinking of good things in my life. It takes practice but it works. I think it works, I always do that... I went to bed there the other night and I didn't have one bad thought in my head. I don't know how I didn't. And I was like – what the fuck am I after doing today, making myself feel like this, like in a good way. It was a weird feeling, because I never go to bed happy. I always have something on my mind. It is overthinking, it is like making a fucking movie of everything. Things that haven't even happened yet, things that have happened and I will be thinking about other things that like would have happened within that. What people think of me like or what they are saying. It is mad.



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Burgers for dinner, that's just a fresh meal – those burgers will feed everyone, everyone has prepared them – they are not just out of a packet. It's great skills, teaching people to make proper dinners, nice burgers, fuel for the day. Everyone was looking forward to that. Some people don't have a fresh meal every day.

I worked in the kitchen [at High Park] and I liked it. I liked it more than anything. I was just down with Wayne [the High Park chef]; he was doing my assessment - telling me how I done in the kitchen. So, I really enjoyed it, yeah. I done well. I didn't poison anyone. I learned a few things off him, how to marinade the chicken and all that, like. Before I came in here, it was cheese toasties, and cereal.

It is good for getting back to yourself and it is good for confidence as well. You are cooking, you are feeding 13

people in the kitchen...you have a responsibility, so it is good to know that you can do it. I got it done. The gaff didn't fall apart. So, it's something to be proud of. In addiction you are not proud of fuck all like. You think you are. You are with people and you think they are taking you under their wing, kind of shit like. I always knocked around with older lads when I was younger, and they always said like 'Chill out with us, bro and do this' they were teaching me all this shit, but they really didn't give a fuck like. I thought they did, and you get let down. But you're proud of little things like cooking in here, I never say that about myself like – that I'm proud of something. Wayne, wrote on my feedback, 'I am proud of your achievements'. It is just good to hear like; you never hear that off anyone like, I don't think. I never did anyway.



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There is one of the boys in there playing the guitar, everyone gathered around, listening to real music, played live and just – to see him doing that and knowing he has a passion for it and all. Happy out, watching him do his thing. He was amazing, unbelievable, the whole gaff was hopping. He is brilliant, just a natural fucking joy like, endorphins going all over the gaff, in a good way like.

Good sober times. You don't need to get out of it, to have a good time - all that is fake. All this is real, you get a

connection with people in High Park saying the exact same things like because everyone knows exactly what you're on about.

There is a lot of friendship, it is not like when you are outside and everyone is just fucking talking about themselves. They don't talk to each other, egos and all. Everyone is in here just lets loose like. Just does their thing. They're not fake. So, that is good, just a good buzz, just the lads natural high. It is good energy.



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That is me there painting....usually I would draw fucking people in jocker. I was in bits and falling apart – that's me, that's how I felt at one point. So, I think I need to go over that altogether and do something new, do something fresh. I have it half done now, but I am just going to go over it, because I don't like it at all. But that was me, my old brain, my brain naturally putting out what it always puts out. It looks like some scarred head alien man.. That is what it looks like to me.

Just a face. Just me. The first thing that comes into my head when I get a pen, is to just draw that straight away, just a normal face, real simplistic....it's a scribble, but it's centred as well, it's just real simple, I like real simple stuff. I don't know, sometimes you put too much detail into shit and you ruin it....that's the way I look at it. Faces tell a story all the time, that's what I usually like to draw or take pictures of. People, it's powerful.



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This is my girlfriend's niece in the buggy, we always take her out, when her ma and da are off, we take care of her a bit. I went down to Aldi yesterday and got a lot of food, and it's just family, food, freedom, that's what I call it, 3Fs that's what it is, just go home and make some dinner. Just make some good food. The fact that you can just go do that, instead of just going getting cans or whatever and stressing about shit, just doing something normal, just make some food. So I have the freedom to do that, to go shopping if I want...not dodging a guard or people for money or whatever, just float down, not a care in the world. Bring the little one as well, she's in there, you can only see her feet there. She's gas, have her in the trolley and all, just giving her stuff to hold and she's throwing it miles away, so funny. That's just all it is.

That's meant to be the Ireland flag, I'm proud to be Irish. There's an Ireland flag in there - green, white, orange. Chicken, sweet potatoes and carrots and a bit of broccoli. Wayne [the chef in High Park] showed me how to cook the chicken and all, and I was doing it at home yesterday – sealing in the chicken, adding the soy sauce and chilli sauce. So I done that yesterday. Ah it's deadly, I'm chuffed that I know how to do that now. It's good. Just cooking food, yeah. It's good.



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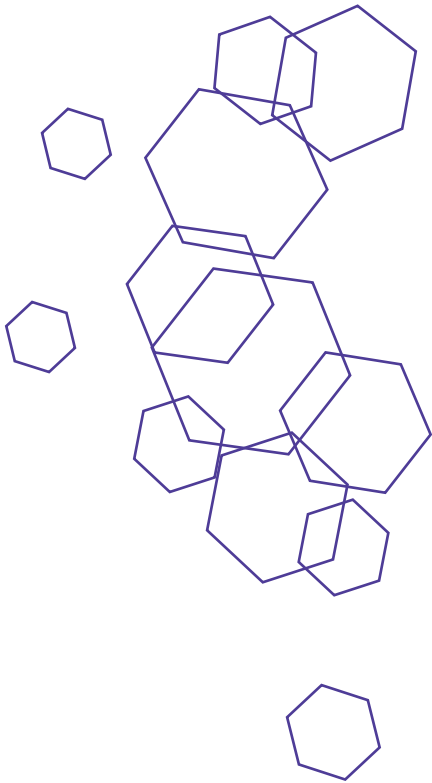
There's a black swan there, in with a lot of white swans, so that'd be me and my family. In my family, I'm not even the worst, in my family – but I've been a little bollocks to them. Following the crowds the black swan, doing bad things. That's all people following, following bad stuff....people following the crowd, that could have been me as well at one point, just doing what everyone else is doing.

Sense of freedom it was, just real relaxing looking at the swans. Nice day, just walking down by the water, feeding the birds – really simple stuff. Like usually, you never think of doing it, it's like oh fuck that, but it's actually real relaxing.

Yeah, that'd just be me there, me and my family....they keep saying – they're not used to me being sober all the time. They're always asking me – they rang me there the other morning, I was only awake, I was like, what's up, and they were like 'what are you doing, you better fucking not be out of it', and all this....they're just kind of getting used to me being sober all the time. They'd be questioning me a lot....but I'm happy out, just connected back with family, it's good.



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John

That was real nice. There's some light and some darkness, it's beautiful. So nice walking around there, mesmerising. It's real nice and relaxing, fresh air, just nice view, can't beat it. You'd want to see the moon as well, it was huge, I thought

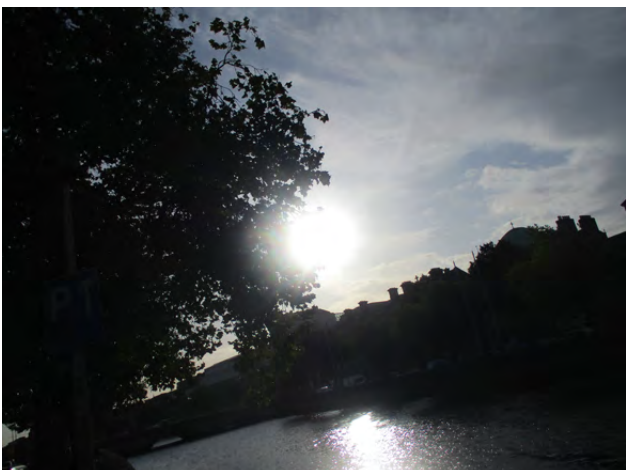
it was deadly. Freedom again, just freedom, floating around. Space meets the earth....I've a more artistic head on me, I'd notice that kind of stuff all the time.



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'Cleaning in Progress' caught my eye because that is where I feel I am at now in life. Cleaning my life up, cleaning up relationships, cleaning up.

I am only back seeing my son as well, after seven months, due to my addiction and stuff like that. So, that is another relationship that I am determined I will clean up because I don't have a father in my life, and I don't want that happening with my son. He doesn't have a choice, he's stuck with me now! So, that is why, just the 'cleaning in progress' part resonates – and obviously caution as well because the slightest thing can tip you off the edge and back in again....but, that is where my life is kind of at, at the minute. I am working at cleaning things up, all the time, making myself better. Making myself a better person, making life better for myself, rather than going backwards.



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This is light. Obviously, everyone needs to see the light, because if you don't see the light you are stuck in a rut. You are stuck in the dark....So, there is always light at the end of every tunnel, no matter how dark the tunnel is, there is always light if you keep looking for it, eventually you get there. The sun keeps breaking through, there are loads of clouds but there is still the sun.

The light breaking out from the dark. It just shows you that the light's there, you just need to look for it. What drives you to the light?

The different directions of the arrows, it's – when you are caught sometimes in a rut, you don't know what direction you are going in, you don't know what direction life is going in. So, you are kind of stuck, looking at all different directions and which direction would be the best direction to go. So, that is why I took that photo, different directions of life.



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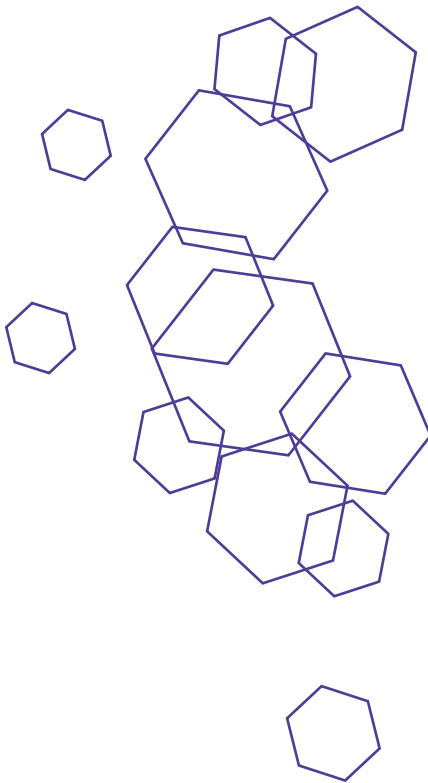
Climbing the ladder: The ladder represents life. You're always climbing, climbing, climbing to try and get to the top. Especially when you're at the rock fucking bottom. I'm sure many of us have been there before. Obviously, climbing that ladder: That ladder is a long, long ladder. It keeps going further and further. The further you go, the better you are.



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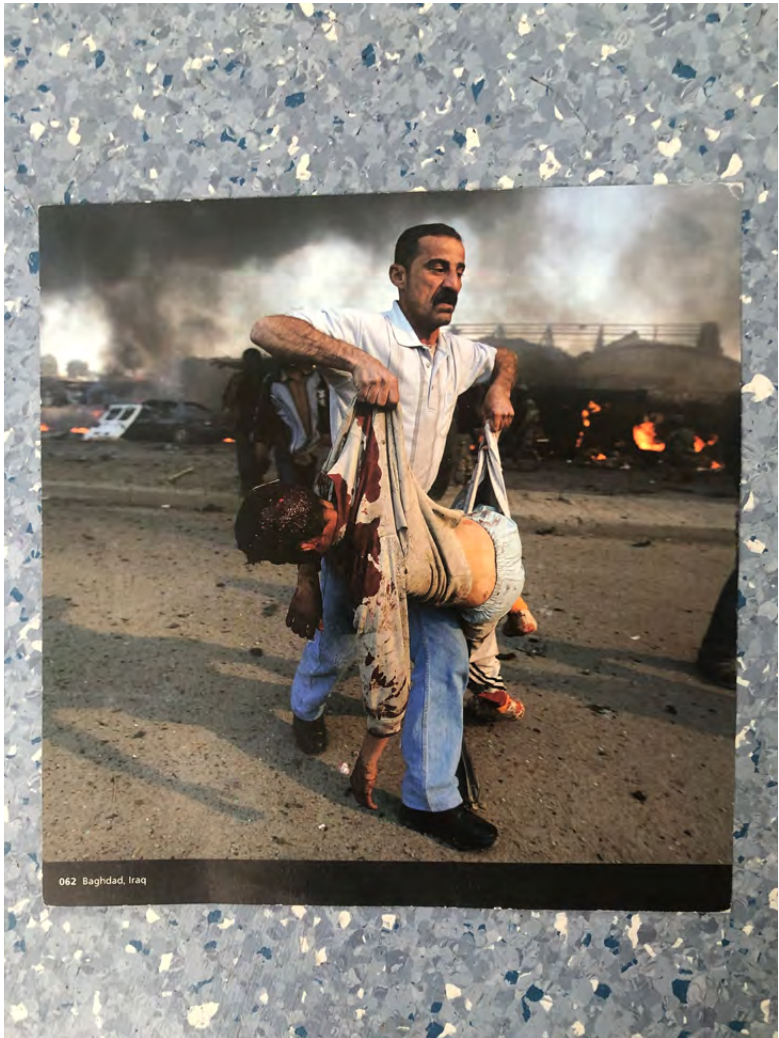


Mark

There are safety things out there. You need to look for them, there are things out there that can save your life, you just need to look for the right things. There's help out there, things that will save your life, give you the tools to help yourself. Whereas, obviously it's a life buoy, it will help you not to die in the water; but it's kind of the same thing. There's things out there; there's services; there's tools out there that can make your life better. Save your life, almost.

I'm from Kildare, so I didn't really know that much about services up in Dublin. When I was homeless before I was just in tents, living very rough. And it was actually my ex-

girlfriend that...She knew that I was trying and trying to trying to better myself, so she actually went and looked up facilities in Dublin. She knows that I spend time in Dublin, so she looked at Merchant's Quay, so I came here then and met Antoinette. Mammy Antoinette obviously showed us there's this, there's that, you can do this. And she reckons that we're reliable. If you put in some work, if they see that you're putting in work, they'll help, and will go ten steps further then. No one's going to help you if you don't help yourself. That's it. If you put the effort in, you get it back.



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I picked that to show stuff I went through when I was younger. The stuff I went through with my father when I was younger, violence and stuff like that. It just spoke to me, it looks like a father carrying his child, it looks like

the child is dead, to be honest. It just caught my eye....it reminded me of when I was younger, my dad put me in hospital when I was younger.



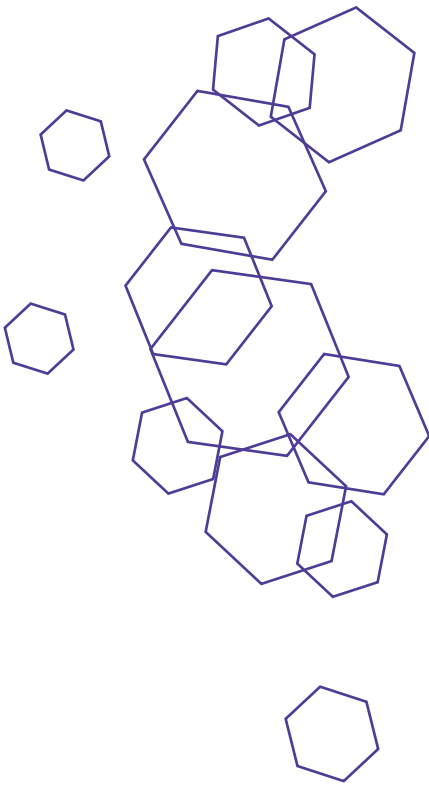
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I took this photo just to show the river flowing....It is all flowing one way like, it means life is going to flow that way anyway, you just have to get on with it. That is the way I see it. Before I even left this building, I knew I was taking

that photo....It was just something that struck me, the flow of life basically. Don't let the current drag you under. That's it.



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Eve

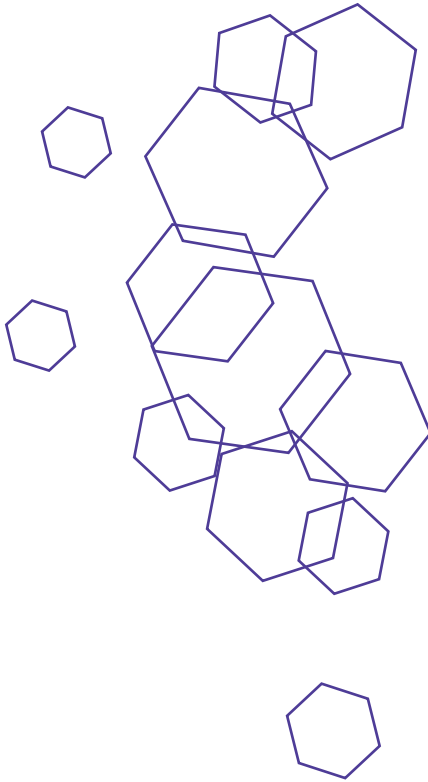
The roots, you can never hold your roots down.They always pop up.You can't hide your past.You just learn how to deal with it in different ways.That tree certainly can't hold its roots down, it's ripping the ground up. I just thought it shows how powerful it is, do you know what I mean? Concrete can't even stop that.The roots are a symbol of the past you can't hide it.Well you can hide them like but you can't hide them forever.

It's all about putting the work in. Basically, you help yourself and they'll help you here [at MQI]. I didn't bother for ages,

I wish I had. But now that I am bothered doing it the last few months, they are really helping me.They've showed me how to help myself. If you actually have the effort to help yourself, they will go ten steps ahead of you to help you out. If you want to get off the stuff, whatever you're doing, all you have do is talk to someone in here and they'll help you out with treatment centres. It's all about putting the effort in though.



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Eileen

How I have been experiencing reality for quite some time is signs just really jumping out at me. At the moment I'd say I'm still really searching for meaning behind the moment as opposed to being in the moment. And so, words always have meanings.

Manage the feeling and take the opportunity. It takes time. I've been in the twelve steps for a long time and that first step is really admitting that life is unmanageable. So, I suppose this is kind of like that word of moving on from that because how my brain or mind can interpret all of these signs can just be like really terrifying. Words are really important for me.

It's the experience of addiction. So, there's no label. So, it's like moving through. I used to smoke a lot of cannabis on my own and just kind of like go into this other world which was really amazingly creative but also super isolating. I thought that I could only be creative in partnership with

that substance for ages. So, it's just really weird for me to be given the opportunity to see that I have this thing that wants to come out without that.

I have Google photos and I used to go around taking loads of photos and then Google has its own kind of like consciousness these days, and at the end of the day sometimes it would have created these collages for me and I'd go back looking through them.

I don't have a device at the moment. It's giving me a lot of freedom because that was another experience of addiction for me that I'm still trying to manage. Addiction to information. Seeking more and more knowledge. More and more guidance. How can we know exactly what's happening right now? Just even listening to Russel Brand and thinking he has the fucking answer like. Really, that addiction to YouTube and healing channels and stuff like that.



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That is my son's first shoe and that is a runner he is wearing at the moment....I have all their first shoes....I was just thinking over the years all the hassle that shoes caused in our house, because he used to say 'I need money for me runners' and of course, us thickos would say 'Okay' but he was buying drugs. And then, my daughter, there is only 15 months between them, she went out and got a job in McDonalds to buy runners and stuff as well, or a Dubs

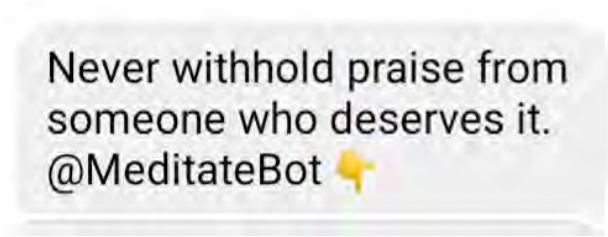
jersey and he would rob it. He would take her runners and sell them. And he did it to my other son as well. So, as a result I used to have a bedroom full of runners. I used to have to lock the door and put the runners in and if they were going out, they got their runners out.... Things are good with him now and....this is like his journey. The tiny little foot to here.



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That's a voucher I got for my son, he's going to be a year clean tomorrow, and he loves Sports Direct, so we got him a voucher and vouchers for Hard Rock Café, so him and his girlfriend and his little boy can go out and have a meal together. Because I think he deserves it, and he would probably buy runners anyway. So, I think it is just kind of – if he passed a big exam, or his driving test, we would have done something. So, we have a card at home and yeah, I am going to write it tomorrow. He is coming in tomorrow and we'll give it to him and it is a big deal. So, I suppose that signifies achievement.

After the journaling exercises we did in the support group at Merchants Quay, any time I see things that resonate, I write them down. And that just popped up and I thought 'Yeah, that's the way it should be'. Back in the day when my son was giving me trouble, if he did something good, I would say, 'if he thinks he's son of the year now because he did one good thing' kind of thing, you know, and I wouldn't give him credit, but this just hit a nerve with me. It's right, if somebody deserves praise, give it to them. We all deserve a bit of praise somewhere along the line so I just thought I would include it. I just feel proud of him and I haven't felt proud of him in years. So hopefully he'll keep it going.



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There's a page on Facebook about our area it's all flowery and all the people that set it up don't live around here anymore, and they talk about the good old times and if anyone puts something negative up they won't allow it to go on the page type of thing....But some kids put up a picture of runners for the laugh....so it started a big discussion....But that actually used to fill me with dread because my son was part of a gang....he ended up getting into debt and we had our windows smashed, our door kicked in, two cars wrecked, I was beaten up twice, my husband was beaten up.

My kids were intimidated in school and my daughter had her phone number put up in a phone box with 'if you want blow jobs ring this number'. And when I saw that picture it brought that back....It didn't last long but I suppose I'm thinking back thinking jeez we did put up with some shit, it was like a blur at the time but it's getting clearer now kind of. It's more like a bad story kind of thing. So thank God we're working towards a....well I won't say happy ending, I don't know how it'll end. But it's heading the right direction.



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My masterpiece. My daughter's pregnant. I knitted these and I couldn't have done that a couple of years ago, there's no way. It's a sign of hope, because....she was very affected by my son's behaviour. And the fact now that she's having her little girl and she's so happy. I'm knitting away for her, there's sparks coming out of my needles at this stage!

I suppose it's hope. It's a new life and it's her happiness as well. And my son is delighted because he always felt guilty about her:

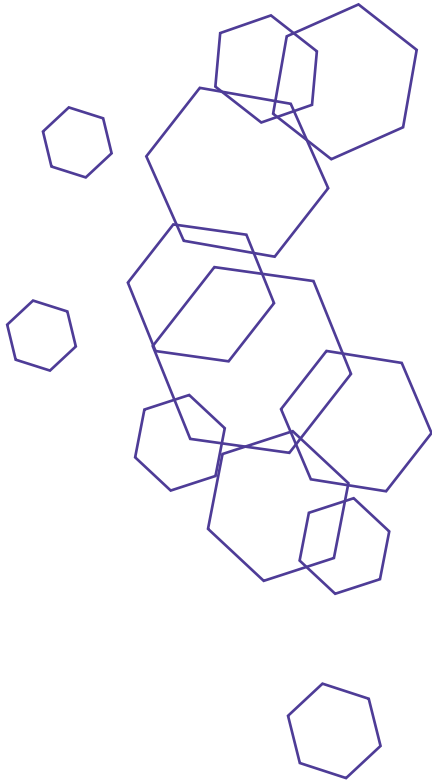
I wouldn't have been able to knit before [when my son was in addiction], I wouldn't have had the concentration,

I wouldn't have been able to focus. Because I had all the hassle in the house with him. When he was in the house there was hassle, and when he was out of the house there was hassle. When he wasn't around the area there was hassle from his gang. So it was just relentless. I kind of was afraid to leave the house because of what I'd come back to. And then when I left the house I was afraid to come back in.

When I knit now I can just switch off. So it just represents hope.



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Mary

My son made me that when he was in St Francis Farm [rehab facility] last year. And instead of all the taking, he actually gave me something. And the thought that he actually applied himself enough to make it meant a lot. Then I came back and looked at this photo again and I thought yes this signifies since the time I got that clock we've had happy time. And then I looked again and saw the €20 note underneath, that was my other son....I owed him €20 so I said 'It's under the clock.' Behind it

there are Ticket Master tickets for my other son going to gigs and I thought janey, when my son was in addiction and was coming into the house we never left money lying around. And if he got those Ticket Master tickets he would have taken them and sold them. And it just kind of struck me. You can start doing... we have relaxed, we didn't realise it. We can leave money lying around again. I just started off saying it was a present and then the more I looked at it the more positivity I found.



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This is Henry, my grandson calls it Henry, and he's always looking for Henrietta. It's the happy face and the little bowler hat, and for me it's the mask outside. And inside is the stomach, which is where....everything you hoover up to clean is pushed inside. I know it has to be emptied, but for me it's like all the emotions, the fear and anxiety and dread. And the long hose is like you're just going around

cleaning, caring, making sure everything is okay, and you're putting on this mask all the time, but deep down inside there's a lot of pain. And that is, as a child growing up being the oldest, my job was to keep the house clean, always keep it clean. Keep eleven pairs of shoes polished on a Saturday. And I just got on with it and smiled and forgot what it was like to play and have fun.



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I love flowers, I just love them, and the closed bud is....I just think it's beautiful and it just opens and it's like the light switch has gone on and God knows where this journey is going to end but I just think it's me on a journey. And bit by bit....there's one that's open, and then there's another one open behind that. And it's just like I'm discovering who I am and what my needs are and for years I've been like this closed person just looking after everything and

fixing and managing. I think with my son's addiction, his alcoholism, and his gambling in the early days....it's just that I'm getting more empowered by being here in this group [in Merchants Quay] and I think that's what I'm trying to say with this photo, the flower symbolises that. Just being closed and then being able to open and share.



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The blackout of pretending, because my son's living at home at the moment and he's just moved in with us in the last four months. And it's like I'm just terrified of the darkness that's in the house. The house was full of light and it was a loving home and all the rest of the children won't come and visit because he's there. So the blackout blind is actually my fear with him living in the house. And then the candle just happened to be there, so it's like a

contrast of two things. On the one hand it's black and there's this little bit of me trying to find a way. Which I did yesterday morning, I was able to confront him about his drinking in the house, that I can't have it anymore, it's uncomfortable. And I wouldn't have been able to do that before. So I suppose the candle is that bit of hope. So if I have to throw him out I'll be able to get stronger and do it, because I just don't have the heart to do it at the minute.



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They're just shoes that are worn and tired and at the same time there's determination, I think, because they're on the white rug. They just happened to be left there and I just took the picture and I thought 'Okay, so the shoes are heading in some direction.' Also it's the contrast of the two, the hard leather and the softness of that rug. It's like you're walking on egg shells on the one hand, and you're trying to be strong on the other. The shoes are actually my husband's shoes and he was exhausted....he's exhausted and he just left them there, because I'd be very conscious of them being dirty or whatever, on a white rug.

It actually feels like at the moment you're tiptoeing around the house, because when my son is drinking it's like he thinks this house is boring, it's like you're the guest and he's taking over control. And so that's what that is about, it's like control. So I suppose the morning after, I confronted him about his drinking, so he's four months, five months in the house and I just can't do it anymore.



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The colours of red, green, yellow and blue are healing colours for me. So red would signify, I suppose, danger in some ways, but also our foundation, who we are, our roots, our family, connection whatever. I do meditation and the green is like healing, the green of nature and everything. All the little colours in between are all the emotions so it's like a rollercoaster.

On the one hand you have the yellow, which signifies power, where we hold all our emotions in our stomach. And then you have purple where it's kind of a spiritual colour. And then you're back to this loss of power again. And so it's all these different emotions going on and you're like 'Okay, I'm actually strong when I'm in the blue colour because I'm voicing how I feel and I'm being honest.' But then the red comes back in again. So it's just like this mad rollercoaster of emotions... will there ever be an end to them? Sometimes I feel hopeful and sometimes I just revert back again. And I think that's to do with the fact that my power was taken from me by my mother when

I was very young and that's why I'm so angry with her at the moment. And I just can't get past that.

So I know that it affects me with my son, because I'll become that child again. Because I would have seen my mother when she was drinking, and picking her up from places and bringing her in the car and trying to fix her... and so there's all that anger, trying to be a mother to my mother, if that makes sense. And then I'll think because of that, my own children suffered, because I was focused on her instead of them.

My mother was the centre of my life but in the wrong way....In a negative way. And I feel that somehow...I just think not only have the children suffered, but my husband has suffered as well. So now....I mean we've been together since I was 17. He's three years older than me. But he was my hope. Yeah, and he still is. So he's put up with a lot. Because he's had to endure, I suppose, my brokenness.

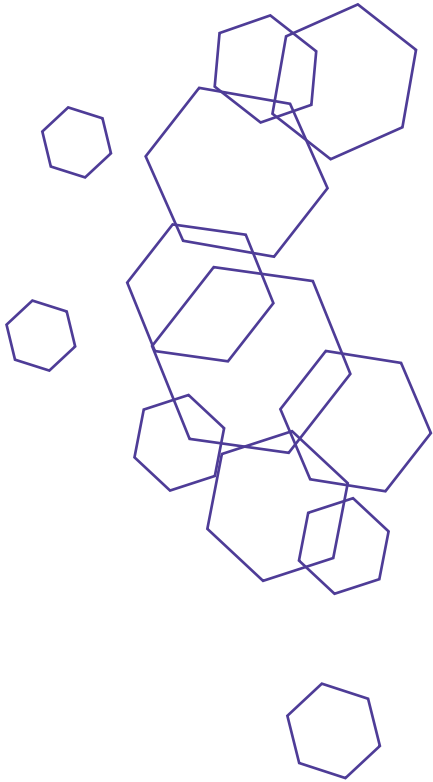


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I was doing a class today and I just looked down at the floor and I thought 'My God, this is the exact pattern of addiction.' Because when I look at my siblings it just

reaches out so far to other members of the family, like aunts and uncles and brothers and sisters and nieces and nephews. It's just like a mire.

Emma



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I was in a friend's house over the weekend and I was out her back garden, and I just happened to look up and I saw those pipes and the main one going up there reminded me of a life, my son's life. And coming off it, I remember somebody saying it is like the M50, you know, you have to keep going straight but some people come off it...and that's just what that reminded me of.

I just looked up and I saw it and I went....well all the pipes actually go back into, if you look at it, go back into the main

pipe – they are all coming back at different angles and whatever. That is what it signified, just all about him when I was looking at it, and all the different things. Maybe in a year or two, it will just go straight up and there won't be any more bits off it. It might go straight, some day, I don't know.

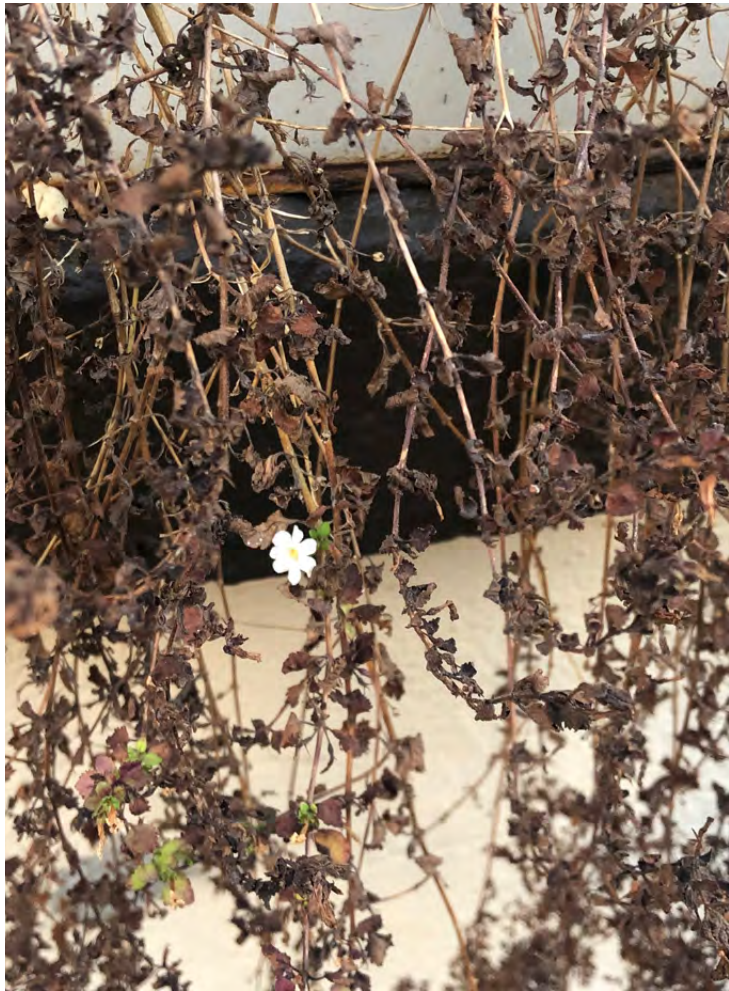


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'I do not like you', and I don't, I don't like him [my son]. I just walked in somewhere and this sign was there and it was like as if it was – I actually got a fright when I saw it. It was like it was meant for me. And I was in a random place, it was in a shop - not to buy, but it was hanging up and I just felt....it was scary....'I do not like you' and I don't like him. I had to look at it, I'd say ten times.

I do love him, of course I love him. I do love him – but I don't like him at the moment and I haven't liked him for a

while....I do love him, of course, he's my child, I gave birth to him....I looked after him until he was 18, 19. He is 27 now and all he causes is....he is like the terminator walking through the door. So, I don't like him at the moment, 'I do not like you', and I did have to read it over and over again. And it was strange walking in and seeing something like that. It was like somebody put it there.



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In our support group [at Merchants Quay], they are always talking about hope. And, I was in a friend's house and I was out in her back garden having a cigarette. She has a big plant pot on the windowsill....she came out to me and I was talking away and I said – you know you want to get rid of that thing, it is all weeds. It is dead, and she went back inside and I went 'Oh God, look there is a flower on it' and it was big, it was that size and I started poking at it, to see if was there something else.

So, there obviously is hope isn't there? And it did make me think that they are always going on in there [in the support group] that there is hope and acceptance, and I'm

going 'there isn't'....So, I looked at it and went 'there is hope'....But I was actually sad looking at that. Really, really sad looking at that. Because it was a monster and they were all hanging, dangling down – and it was just that one little thing, so maybe that is hope. Maybe. I said to my friend 'get rid of that, it looks awful'. So, it did make me think, you know, it did make me think because I would see that and I would say 'ah here, throw that out'. I would put it in the bin.

So, yeah, hope. When I saw that I went – that is the first time maybe that I've seen hope.



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That is a sharp's bucket that my daughter would use for her medical condition. We would have two of them in the house....and I often look at it and I actually googled the dictionary, I googled what does 'Danger' mean. And I actually wrote it down. 'Destroy by Incineration' - incinerate is to put it in the fire or whatever. And then, down the bottom, that says 'infectious substance'...So, on Sunday night, I had such a shitty weekend that that's the way I felt. Danger. Destroy by incineration. Contaminated.

Yeah, so that is the way I felt about my son [who's in addiction] and probably about myself, 'danger - keep away' like. Infectious. Destroy by incineration, the words are just so strong. Contaminated. Awful. It is very strong and yesterday, I just googled the words, because I was going - like what do they mean like, you know?. I needed to get the meaning of it. I can remember trying to - like when my son was at home, the first three or four weeks that he

was okay, I can remember showing him them and going 'Look, do you realise what your sister has to do every day like?' And look, I remember saying to him, 'Look at the words' and he was going 'Yeah, sure like'...On Sunday I was looking at it going that is my life. That is the way I feel. And they are horrible.

I just think the words on it describe everything. The way I feel....you know it is very hard. That was Sunday morning and I was going to watch the Dublin ladies in the pissings of rain with my daughter and I am trying to, you know... make it ok - it is just not fair.

I thought it was just so overpowering....I felt terrible taking that photo....I felt sick taking it....and looking up the words but I never would have done that, look up a word...but I just did. And it was helpful, it was very, very helpful and I wrote it down, you know. The words.



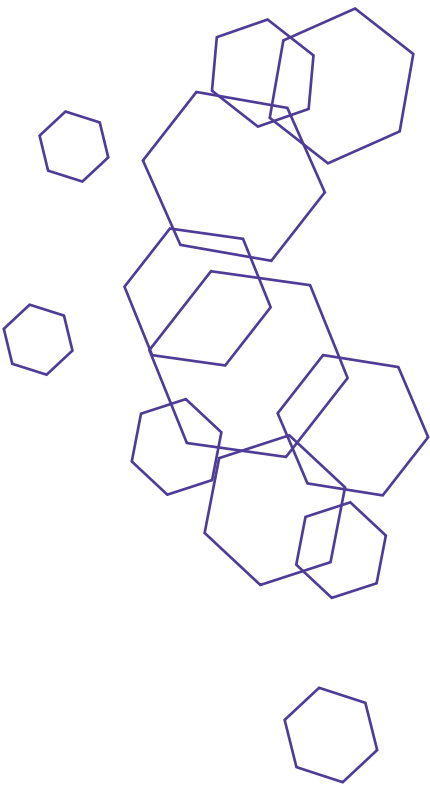
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I love flowers and I would spend all my money on flowers if I could. I love fresh flowers. And I just have a little thing with three vases, and my husband and I were after having a barney on Saturday [about our son who is in addiction] and I was sitting there and the sun was shining in, kind of through the windows, and I took that photograph. I didn't mean for it to turn out black and white but it just did.

So, yeah, it is black - but we had just had a barney and it was about our son, so yeah, I was kind of thinking 'Oh God, I wonder why it turned out black?'....But I thought it was nice with the little bit of light coming into it....normally I am the one that gets up and runs away, but my husband did.... he said 'Ah here, I am not listening to this'. So, I sat there with my flowers.



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Amelia

It's an old phone and it is in a garden, a friend of mine has it in her garden....just looking at the phone, it reminded me of the school or the hospital or whatever calling you. I had that last Thursday. That sick feeling that you are afraid to

pick up the phone. So, that is the reason I took this photo, and it is old....and it looks battered as well. Bruised and battered.





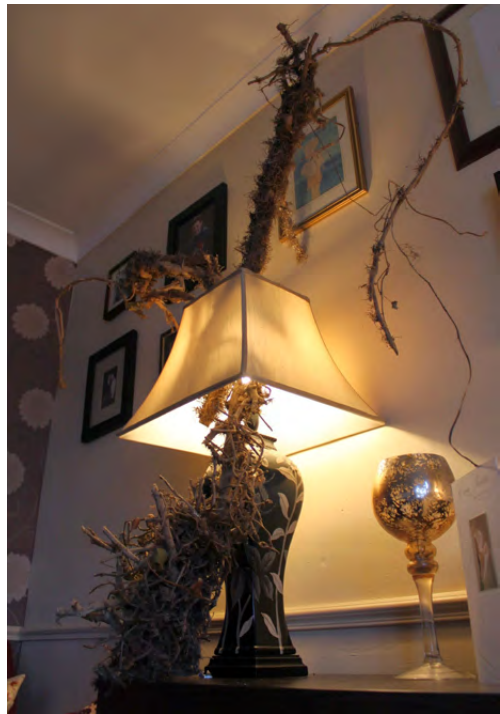
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These ones are actually more considered images. They were ones that I took years ago. I think it was 2012/2013, and I was struggling then because I couldn't express it in words, the experience of addiction, of having two daughters in addiction. It was bringing such chaos into our house. It was like... we had worked so hard to build our house, to buy our house, to create the home, and then there was this awful stuff that was happening inside it that was destroying it and tearing it to pieces. And that was Ivy that had been growing on walls outside and I was cutting it all down and, it was shortly after my mum died and it was discovered that she had cancer. I was all mixed up at the time, this was like the cancer was growing inside her and killed her but it was like a cancer that was inside our home, tentacles reaching and twisting and strangling us.... here it is in the middle of my bed, where you're meant to be safest. I took photographs of it all around the house in different places.

This was it bursting through the small doors. Bursting through the doors, but it was like bursting through the structures, you know the routines of your day, because they do destroy the routine. You know, everything that you try to build up they would just destroy it. You work hard, you earn money, you buy things, and next thing they're gone, they've disappeared or they're broken. Because mine seemed to love smashing the place up.... Yeah, so that was it again in the middle of my nice kitchen,especially the kitchen everything is nice, in it's place, compartmentalised, and this was like pow, wham. It's full of dirt and muck and contamination.

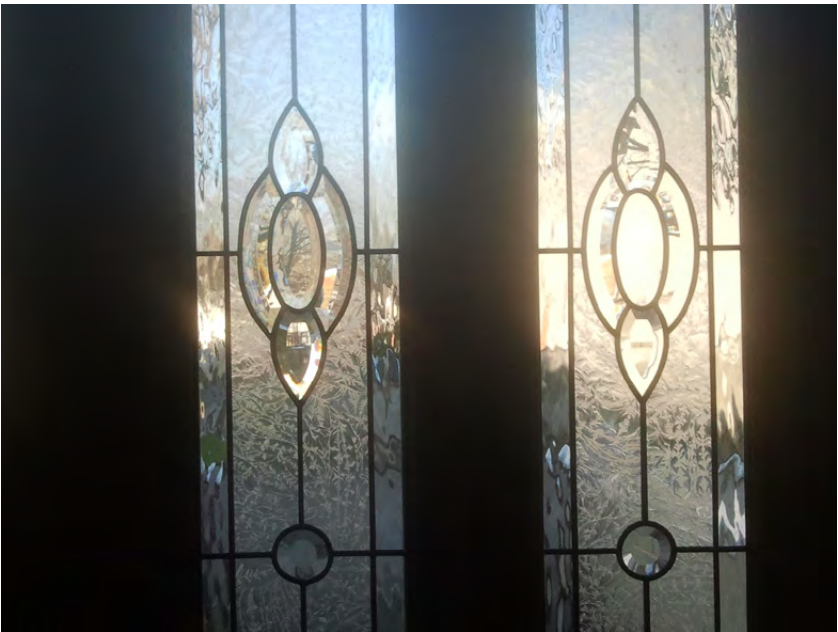


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There it is again, well another bit of it. In the living room, up through the light. The nicely, carefully painted, curated living room.



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Ah, the door....you hear a knock on the door and it's, will I open the door? It's kind of a conflict. She might be coming back, it might be good. And you're thinking 'I want to see her', and then 'Oh no, maybe I don't.' I do open the door and next thing uproar, war has broken out. And I've opened that door a couple of times to the most dangerous things. I remember once I was woken up by somebody hammering at the door at 5 o'clock in the morning, half asleep like. I looked out the window and I saw this friend of my daughters and I go down and opened the door and I said 'Jesus, what happened to you?' And he comes in and he's covered in blood. I let him into the kitchen.

The worst thing I could have done, he was out of his head, my daughter had attacked him, she'd banged his face, broken his teeth, smashed his cheek bone with a hammer, and he wouldn't let me call an ambulance. He wanted to hold me hostage. So I had to talk him out of it and eventually he calmed down. I wanted to drive him to the hospital, he wouldn't let me. He went out again. But that was after an hour and a half. This is the kind of bizarre stuff that happens in your life, bizarre and dangerous stuff... and the door; like the phone, holds many terrors. And yet you're always hoping you're going to open the door and it's going to be good.

I suppose as well that's also symbolic of the doors in my consciousness. The doors keeping things hidden, closed, shut away. And I cannot think too much of certain things, I cannot allow too many thoughts, because there's just too much there, there's too much, it's overwhelming. And once you open that door and let it in you can't control it, you can't close it then, you can't put it back. Because even once you've seen it it's in your consciousness and you've got to deal with it in some way. Even if you do try and push it back away there's a lingering there. There's contamination. A nagging anxiety. Or there's that dread. It's all there. So you have to be so careful of what you open and what you close.

And then it's opening the door to the person in addiction, how much do you keep closed away from them? Because you have to protect yourself, so the door is symbolic of protecting yourself, it's your home, and a doorway to your home is a doorway to your heart. For me as well too, I've a grandson who I have to protect. So, I have to be extremely careful of who I open that door to or what I open that door to. Or emotionally how much I open myself to my daughter. Which is tough going.



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That's our couch. You can see the stab marks on it. Where one of my daughters had a knife, came up and threatened my husband and she stabbed him and then went in and destroyed the two couches, just slashed at them and threw stuff around and that, so there was a lot of damage. That was the living room that the icky ivy branches had been in, that was five years later. That was very difficult.

I was bringing a grandchild up to the house....he'd have been about twenty months. I was on my way up and my

husband rang me. He said where are you? and I said oh five minutes away. He said don't come up, don't come near the house. And I had to stop. Luckily my grandson was asleep in the car and I had to stop....My husband was really panicked, really scared....and again with the protection, you're like, I can only protect one person here, but I really want to go to my husband. I really want to help him. I couldn't because I had to protect my grandchild.



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Again this was back to 2012 and I was still, I was in that space of thinking of how I had tried to create my life and how I had tried to create security for myself and for my kids and how addiction and the experience of it was overwhelming our lives, and how we were drowning in it. So, I just made those things out of wire and brought them down, put them in the sea. I took loads and loads of photographs.

That's being drowned by it, and also being separate. See the way the things are separate, so just having to protect

yourself so much that you're actually closed, you're rigid. And you're not able to connect to other people. And that's what it was like. And that's what it was like then for us....it's sinking, submerged and while those wire things look strong, they're not really. They were quite flimsy and also left there long enough in the salt water; they'd rust and disintegrate. And they were sinking into the mud as well.



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The attic. It was our grand-nephew's room. He's grown up now, our niece was very young when he was born, she was already into drugs in a big way then. So we played a major part in his life. Because of the constitution, she had primary rights over him until the children's rights amendment was passed and we could not get guardianship because she fought us all the time, even though we were the primary carers and we were looking after him, we were providing everything for him, we were bringing him back and forth to school, but that meant that she had say over everything. Absolutely everything.

So, we only became guardians early 2017. He was born in 2001 so that meant for sixteen years, we were living under the control of the niece in addiction who also has mental health issues....So, she controlled everything. Because she exerted control by threatening him. She'd ring looking for money and she'd have our grand-nephew in her place and we'd say no, we can't give you any money, we don't have any, and we've been giving you money constantly and just can't. She'd say, 'oh, well, okay, so the baby won't have any milk then'....it was just constant. Then when he was staying with us, she would make these random phone calls and

if we didn't do as she wanted, she would say, 'okay, I'm on my way up, tell [him] to pack his things, I'm coming to get him'....and she would come up and she'd cause a huge scene and the poor child would be so upset. So, he's full of huge anger. He has nothing to do with her. But every so often she slips in underneath, she phones from an unknown number, she writes him a letter and posts it, she gets in the street and talks to him. And when she does, he withdraws for a few days and then explodes with huge anger. And this is the result of the anger. And he's a really, really good guy. He's an adult now.

He'd be tortured, emotionally tortured by her. So, that's what that photo is about. And it's about, as well, too, like, we have no support. No support. Like it's okay now, because he's independent, but when he was like ten, eleven, and he was really, really going through really tough times, I'd ring social workers because his mother had a social worker and....he was nice, he was sympathetic, but there was nothing they could do for us. Nothing. Because well, you know, my niece is the mother, so she gets all the support.



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Well that was just his bag, his schoolbag and it's the same thing. School, responsibility, getting him up every bloody morning. Yeah and actually the bag, I was thinking of the heavy burden my grand-nephew has to carry. When you're talking about Adverse Childhood Experiences

(ACEs), all those are ACEs there, he has loads of stuff there that he has not even dealt with, he has talked a little bit but he won't go to counselling or anything. So, eventually in time he'll have to deal with it.

About the Authors

Dr. Maria Quinlan is a collaborating research fellow at University College Dublin (UCD), and Head of Research at the Institute of Integrative Counselling and Psychotherapy (IICP). Maria is a sociologist who specialises in the use of creative, person-centred research methods which aim to facilitate people in sharing their lived experience. She is passionate about putting the participant at the centre of the research process and using methods which aim to empower people to become co- researchers and to share their stories. Maria is a multidisciplinary researcher who uses a variety of innovative participatory action research methodologies, including photovoice and video-ethnography to explore how people experience their world. She was formerly Research Lead at the Applied Research for Connected Health Centre in UCD, where her research focused on the implementation of person and family-centred healthcare, with a particular emphasis on service quality improvement methods. She is the founder of the Pink Flower Company, a research consultancy which focuses on creating actionable insight regarding issues of equality and inclusion.

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Patrick Bolger is a writer and visual artist who has over twenty years' experience in the production of still and moving images. Patrick works with a range of high-profile national and international clients on photography and documentary projects. His work is ethnographically-informed, embedding qualitative life-course interview methodology to explore the lived experience of participants within his projects. He has collaborated with Maria on a variety of research projects which use both photovoice and video-ethnography methodologies, facilitating group discussion and guiding participants in the use of visual methods to find their voice and tell their stories.

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Support

If you are struggling with addiction, help is available.

In Dublin, Merchants Quay Ireland provides a comprehensive drug and alcohol service in our Riverbank Centre in Dublin 8, including crisis support, primary and mental health care, and safer injecting advice. They can be contacted on (01) 524 0924.

If you are interested in accessing detox or rehabilitation services, you can contact:

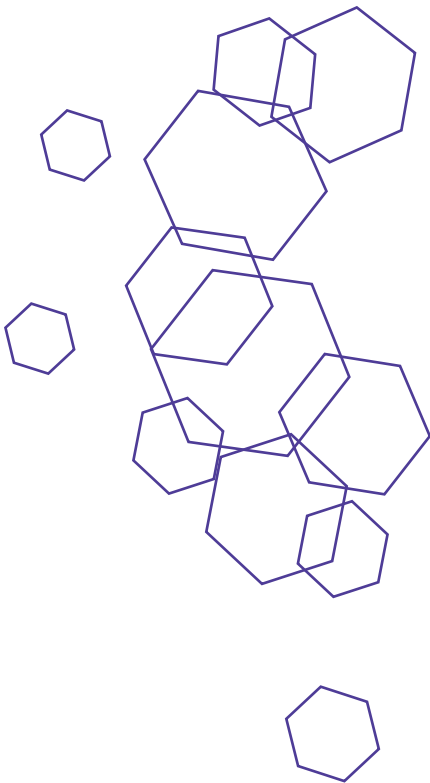
- MQI St Francis Farm Residential Detox Centre in Tullow, Co Carlow:
Tel (059) 9186761 or email info.SFFdetox@mqi.ie.
- MQI St Francis Farm Residential Rehabilitation Centre in Tullow, Co Carlow
Tel (059) 9151369 or email info.sffrehab@mqi.ie.
- MQI High Park Residential Rehabilitation Centre in Drumcondra, Dublin 7
Tel 01 837 7883 or email info.highpark@mqi.ie

If you in the Midlands, and living with problematic drug use, you can access our Midlands Drug & Alcohol Treatment Supports (DATS) Service by calling Orla on 086 793 4920.

If you are in Wicklow or South Dublin, you can access our East Coast Community Recovery & Integration Supports Project by calling 0404 34009 or email cris@mqi.ie.

If you have a friend or family member in addiction, you can contact Merchants Quay Ireland’s family support group in Dublin by calling Will on 086 183 2343 or in the Midlands by contacting Amy on 086 602 9012

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