

Áit Linn  
Annual  
Report

2015

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# Thinking of a future.....

*My name is Colin and I'm an alcoholic, correction – recovering alcoholic. It's been 7 months since my last drink and it's only now that I can say the "A" word. I always preferred "unquenchable"; a person for whom life's thirst could never be quenched. My first time walking into Áit Linn (which means Our Place) I was petrified and a very nice girl whose name escapes me now (I still forget things) made me a cup of coffee and told me I got the first one made for me, after that I had to make my own.*

*After making myself several cups twice a week for a month or so I began to think of it as 'Our Place' with me included – a home from home. It has since become my church, the place where I heal my hurt. I knew I had to stop drinking but was afraid of the withdrawal (I was drinking 1 litre or 1 and a 1/2 litres of vodka most days. My fears were quickly allayed as I was put on a reduction programme which went on for ages but let me down gently and when I was sober I went into the group programme with like-minded people trying to get well. I am still attending and still sober and quietly confident I will remain so with the help of everyone at Áit Linn.*

*Asking for help takes courage; no one likes to admit they need help. If you're reading this with a glass of your favourite thinking "maybe I too need help", you probably do; so come along to Áit Linn. You will be met with friendly, non-judgemental sterling advice and an individual programme tailor made for your needs because you're an individual but with the same problems as everyone else. Whatever you say there stays there, and saying them out loud makes them less of a problem.*

*So come on over and start the first day of the rest of your life. You've nothing to lose and everything to gain. Even if you don't get sober first time, the education programme at the start is brilliant and will really make you think. So I'll see you there, best of luck, you're not alone.*

Colin McS

# Annual Report 2015

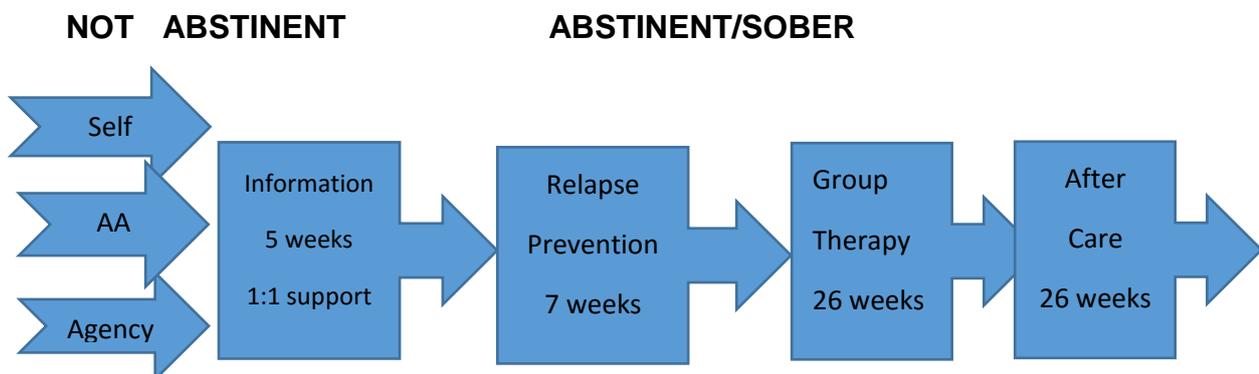
## Áit Linn: where we are now

Áit Linn was three years in its premises on Longdale Terrace at the end of 2015. The project as a legal entity had come into being in January 2012, moved into the premises in November 2012 and officially opened its doors to clients in early December 2012. As with all new projects the major emphasis in the initial years was about referral pathways and programme development, now the situation is about future proofing the project, meeting the existing needs and supporting an ever-growing number of clients.

It would be inaccurate to represent the project as having overcome all initial difficulties and being, as a result, in a position of stability and confidence about the future. This is far from being the case. The project lost its contingency fund in 2014, which had the impact of reducing the opening hours when there was a funding cut in 2015. That funding cut saw the financial resources of the project reduced by €30,000 from €150,000 to €120,000 to cover all the running costs, including insurance, salaries, rent, and amenities. This meant that the project could no longer offer a five day per week service. Two of the therapists' hours were reduced as was the manager's, and the project worker's hours were also constricted. In spite of this, or perhaps because the project made all the group programmes a priority over individual counselling sessions, the project managed to reach out and offer interventions and support to over 100 clients in the period from January 2015.

## What we do:

The following is a visual representation of where the clients come from, what they do in the project and how long it takes for them to complete the journey from alcohol mis-use to abstinence, and then sobriety. It does not, however, give any sense of the despair or misery being experienced by these problem drinkers or their family members. The health, both physical and mental, of all the family is where the project attempts to intervene to ensure a secure environment for any children, and a positive experience which can lead to recovery for both the problem drinker and their partner.



The project continues to receive referrals from both the Mater and Beaumont Hospitals, while a proportion come also through the local GP's, DePaul Ireland, the Child and Family Agency, the local Adult Mental Health Clinic and through word of mouth. When the problem drinker connects with the project they are supported to make a decision about their drinking and commence the detoxification process. They are encouraged to

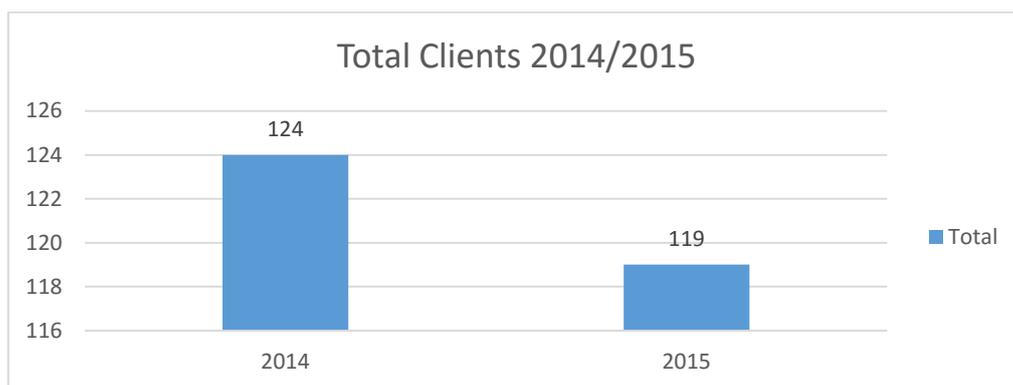
attend twelve weeks of psychoeducational sessions and are then accepted into a treatment group which has a minimum duration of twenty-six weeks. Depending on the client's own issues and willingness, there is then a further twenty-six weeks of aftercare.

*I have learned a lot on recovery and the physical and mental aspects in the information course. I find in the group you can unload your problems and talk about them without being judged. I find I can relax in Áit Linn and the people running the courses are very friendly. I need to come here and I am grateful for the support I am getting.*

*Billy – Client at Áit Linn*

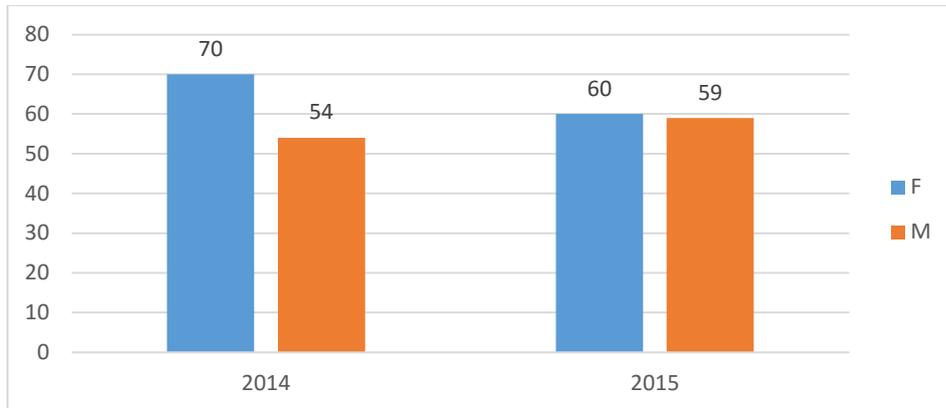
The client actively participates in deciding what is most appropriate for them and can leave at any point in the process, but most clients regularly continue to the end of the process. This process can take longer where there are issues of Institutional Abuse or where there are issues like Domestic Abuse or Child Sexual Abuse.

The facility of supporting the family member with education around alcohol mis-use was not significantly impacted by budget cuts, and the support group, in conjunction with some educational input around the effect of alcohol misuse on children has continued and grown over the past year.



So, the number of referrals for 2015 is only marginally lower at 119 in comparison to 124 in 2014. The effect of reducing individual counselling is, as of yet, not known but the project aims to ensure that certain specific cases are guaranteed individual support. This has applied in particular to the Child Care cases which have been referred from the local Child and Family Agency team where the children are already in care, or are on the at risk register and likely to be taken into care due to alcohol mis-use. In relation to this, as we go forward into 2016, it appears that one family will have their children home in the early New Year, while mental health issues are likely to bring another client back into court in spite of reduced drinking or full abstinence. The ratio of male to female clients has settled as being virtually equal with the women presenting at a younger age than the men, often due to concerns arising in relation to health issues, such as weight or an incident which has alerted them to being at risk of developing a significant problem with alcohol, such as an accident in the home.

## Graph of male to female ratio



### Our Programmes:

*I find in the group you can unload your problems and talk about them without being judged. I find I can relax in Áit Linn and the people running the courses are very friendly. I need to come here and I am grateful for the support I am getting.*

*Billy – Client at Áit Linn*

The demand for the project's programmes has increased over the past year and as a result there has been a degree of alteration in what programmes are offered and how. The psychoeducational programmes continue to be the best lead into the project, allowing new clients to get used to both the idea of group work and at the same time giving them exposure to information which is designed to encourage questions and reflection about drinking and its effects. Over the year, the capacity of the group room has been severely tested by large numbers attending the twelve weeks of these two programmes.

This is the stage when a client decides to be abstinent and this is supported by the information given, but also by the practical advice about reducing alcohol intake in preparation to visiting their GP to obtain medication to complete the detoxification process. Clients are actively advised against suddenly and abruptly stopping drinking due to the risk of seizures. On completion of the detoxification process, the client is offered the continuing support of the project by attending one of the treatment groups.

*...when I was sober I went into the group programme with like-minded people trying to get well.*

*Colin Mc - Client*

The treatment group on Monday mornings was filled to capacity by early 2015; this meant that there was a need to offer a second treatment group to offer the on-going support to those who wanted it. These clients were looking to remain abstinent as opposed to engaging in psychoeducation to solely reduce their drinking. This meant that the project developed a second treatment group with, initially, five clients which has now grown to almost full capacity.

The operation of two treatment groups, one on Monday and one on Wednesday, has meant that the psychoeducational programmes are offered in one continuous progression over twelve weeks. The attendance at this group remained high throughout the year with many clients happy with merely attending these and progressing into Alcoholic Anonymous or even approaching other services to derive the benefit of

attending a residential rehabilitation programme in places such as Coolmine Therapeutic Community, Barrymore House or Cuan Mhuire.

While the majority of the clients remained in Áit Linn for support in sobriety after the twelve weeks of the psychoeducational programmes, five clients were supported during the year in their wait for admission to these residential programmes. Their need for these programmes, over an outpatient programme, arises from their difficulty in managing not drinking during a period of regular attendance in the project.

The progression from Treatment Group to the Aftercare Group remains the same and overall, the number who would be entitled to attend the Aftercare Group is considerable. As it stands, there are seventeen clients who attend on a regular basis, weekly if they have only recently finished in the treatment group, fortnightly if they have a year completed and then monthly for those who are finished longer again.

This is a major point when the clients may disengage from the project as it is often too difficult to make the transition from their treatment group, where they know everyone and everyone knows them, into a group where sobriety is well established and they know no-one. However, for those clients who make the transition, it is a worthwhile experience.

*I suppose I have been addicted to alcohol for many years, but over the last twenty or so it has been very serious, two stints in substance abuse clinics, many blackouts, hospitalizations and periods of unconsciousness. ....my last visit to hospital brought me in contact with a nurse who recommended I contact Áit Linn. I arranged a chat and started to attend about two years ago and except for two short slips I have been alcohol free since.*

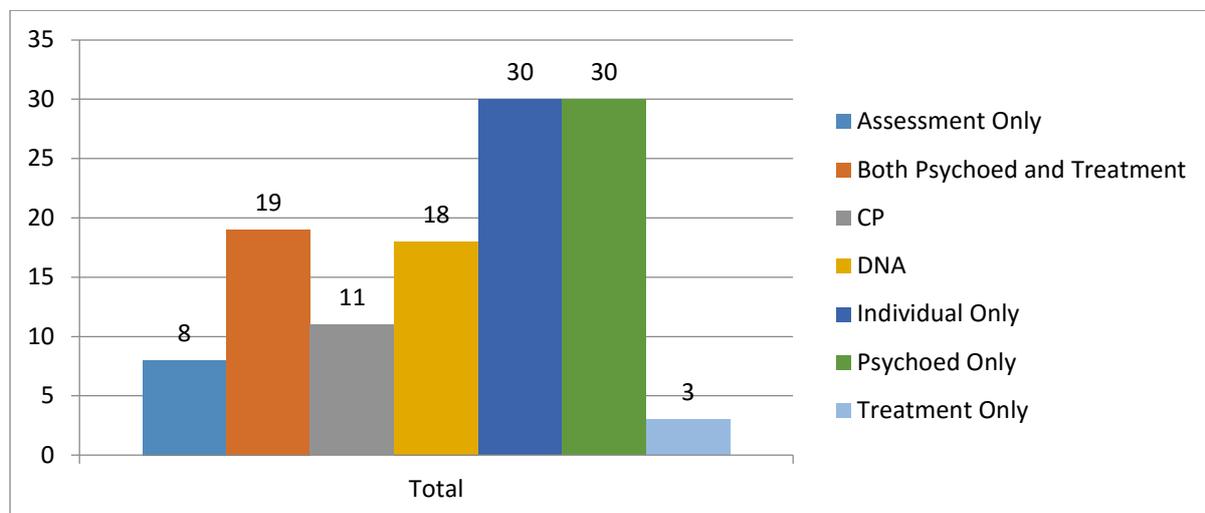
*Peter M. (aftercare group)*

The Concerned Persons' Programme has now got an established group of attendees. Some of these are there because a family member is attending the psychoeducation programmes or has even progressed into the treatment group. Some, however, are there because they need the support even though the problem drinker is not willing to attend or has attended but is not willing to continue with abstinence and has resumed drinking. In this situation, the group aims to support the concerned person to care for any children to the best of their ability by protecting the children as much as possible from the chaos of problem drinking. The profile of attendees in this group is that they are predominantly female, with young families and mostly struggling to make a decision about the viability of their relationships, in conjunction with debt and ill-health due to the stress of their living circumstances.

*The group has been a great help to me, the support I feel from the other members and especially the staff is unlike any I have ever received before. If I had to sum up the main thing I have learned through attending the Concerned Person's Group, it is that I had to change....and I am not alone.*

*Mary M. (Concerned Person's Group)*

## Graph of engagement of clients



## Activities over the year

The project initiated a social breakfast club once a month in 2015 and the clients engaged actively with this and after a short period made the suggestion that it would be helpful if there could be an Alcoholics Anonymous meeting held on the same day. Since then there has been a monthly AA meeting in the project which is open to all. It has proven to be a good introduction to the self-help group for the clients at all stages of the project's programmes, and has given a sense of connectedness to the wider AA community in the Dublin area. The clients themselves organise the meeting as is the usual practice and arrange to have a speaker whom they have heard at other meetings whom they believe can offer a good model of recovery and tell a positive story of life without alcohol.

The project also hosted a visit with Susan Scally, in the Drug Policy Unit of the Department of Health. Susan spent a morning with the clients, initially meeting a selection of individuals from the concerned persons programme. When she finished with them, she joined the Aftercare Group and engaged in a long discussion with them in relation to the need for alcohol services, waiting lists and lack of support services in comparison with the range of facilities available for drug users. The issue remains unresolved as the matter of exactly where alcohol is going to be placed in relation to HSE services and policy continues to be unresolved as this report is being written. However, the clients' reflection was, and remains today, that the expenditure on drug services far outweighs that for alcohol rehabilitation services. There appears to be no real willingness to offer services for those seeking rehabilitation and recovery for themselves and their families; although alcohol remains a major drain on health expenditure.

The project was also delighted to meet with the Minister for State for Drugs, Aodhán Ó'Riordáin who visited in early October. The minister met a client who had recently completed a community detoxification and was three months abstinent. The client gave the minister an insight into the difficulty of detoxification when drinking a large amount of alcohol and how things had progressed for him since he had stopped drinking. The minister then joined a mixed group of clients who were at different stages of recovery and listened to their various stories and their concerns around the future.

## The staff team:

There remains a small staff team of two sessional psychotherapists and a project worker/trainee psychotherapist working in the project and the project manager/clinical supervisor. One of the therapists is accredited with The Family Therapy Association of Ireland (as is the project manager), and two are accredited with Addiction Counsellors of Ireland. Sadly, the budgetary cuts meant that the project could no longer afford a third therapist, and thereafter one of the sessional therapists left the project to take up a full-time post with the National Counselling Service. At present, the project is looking to recruit a temporary sessional therapist to fill the sessional post that is vacant.

All of the therapists are fully trained in working with alcohol misuse and have extensive experience in either the public or private sector. Their training and experience ensure that they have supportive therapeutic relationships while maintaining good boundaries thereby mirroring positive relationships for the clients.

*The clients are very much at the heart of the service and there is a real collaborative approach within the service as clients are consistently consulted on the development of the project and the programmes needed. Clients regularly tell me that they feel Áit Linn is a safe place to share their concerns and get support. Likewise, I feel it is a great place to work, and I have always felt supported and encouraged in my professional development.*

*Ann D.*

## Students:

In 2015, the project supported the Dublin Simon Community, by offering training to their intern counsellor over a period of six months. There have also been two students from the Masters in Psychotherapy (University College Dublin) on placement in the project since June 2014 which concluded in June 2015. Currently, there is a student from the Clanwilliam Institute, who is studying systemic psychotherapy and the project has also given placements to students from the social care training programme in Dublin Institute of Technology. The project continues to be approached to have students from different courses in psychotherapy and social care. These requests are actively considered on the basis of supporting students who have an interest in addiction treatment and even more especially in a systemic approach to addiction recovery.

*I have found my time on Jobs Bridge here at Áit Linn hugely beneficial and rewarding. I have gained valuable experience in administration and have also learned so much about addiction and the recovery process. I began my placement here with little knowledge and experience and was encouraged and supported in stepping beyond my comfort zone and expanding my role and responsibilities. I now facilitate the Information and Relapse Prevention Programme and I have gained a great deal from this.*

*Ann D. acting Project Worker*

## The Project's Other Services:

The project continues to offer a walk-in clinic in Beaumont Hospital in conjunction with Liaison Psychiatry. The clinic itself offers brief interventions and supplies information to patients about alcohol misuse and treatment options. The patients attending are predominantly from the Accident & Emergency Department where they have been seen in relation to issues such as deliberate self-harm or alcohol withdrawal issues. The uptake into rehabilitation in this clinic is regularly high as the health of the patients' seen is always a significant issue and the fast intervention into a service at this point of awareness is usually very beneficial as motivation is high.

## The Way Forward:

The reduction in funding and the inevitable cut in staffing levels and therefore opening hours was a severe disappointment in 2015. While the project is delighted with its premises, it has already outgrown them. As there is increasing referrals from the Community Mental Health Services and DePaul, the hope of a bigger building is ever present. The current position means that at any one time there can only be a single group and one individual session taking place. It has also the effect of precluding any drop-in facility. It is hoped that the staffing level/funding will remain for 2016, this would enable the project to offer all the facilities that it has been offering in 2015.

Therapeutically, while we continue to work on the Quality Standards in Drug and Alcohol, we are hoping to gain additional funding from the Child and Family Agency to offer a specific programme for parents with problem alcohol use whose children are on the "at risk" register to enable them to work more effectively and productively with the Social Worker concerned and, if necessary, with the legal system of the Family Law Courts.

The prevalence of mental health issues in our client population has made the staff team consider offering a psychoeducational programme around alcohol mis-use and mental health. This dual diagnosis programme is in the early stages of development, but it is hoped that it will be ready before year's end and will offer support and education to both the problem drinker and a family member who could operate as "a spotter" of any deterioration of the problem drinker's mental health.

The staff team, with the support of the very able management board, will continue to develop both themselves and develop the centre's programmes to continue to meet the needs of the clients.

Financial Statement:

Year Ending 31 December 2015

<b>Opening Balance</b>	<b>8,680.57</b>
<b>Income</b>	<b>€</b>
Grant Income (DCC)	120,000
Other income	2,361
Charitable donations	<u>5,000</u>
<b><u>Income Total</u></b>	<b>127,361</b>
<b>Expenditure</b>	
Wages	95,058
IT	1,703
Rent	3,865
Printing and promotional materials	390
Audit Fees	1,250
Insurance	2,411
Fixed Assets	1,518
Utilities	2,886
Administrative and Sundry	<u>4,356</u>
<b><u>Expenditure Total</u></b>	<b>113,437</b>
<b>Balance as at 31 December 2015</b>	<b>22,604</b>
<b>Minus donation of 5000 for donor specified purpose</b>	<b><u>5,000</u></b>
<b>Balance Total</b>	<b>17,604</b>

*\*Full audited accounts will be uploaded onto the website on completion by the auditors.*

## And Finally:

The clients and staff would like to thank;

Brendan Kenny, assistant City Manager for his interest in the project, for our funding and his time for meetings.

Mary Taylor, Area Manager, and Bernie Roe from Dublin City Council for their very practical help in the past year,

Grateful thanks to the Board of Directors for Áit Linn for their wisdom and direction in relation to all of the project's activities.

And to Billy Gibson for being our voluntary handyman, and Maureen O'Sullivan, T.D. for her interest in the voices of the problem drinkers, whom no longer will be silenced.

We also wish Stephen Doyle, a valued member of staff until the November 2015, all the best in his future career.