

Áit Linn
Annual
Report

2016

A Few Words from Maureen O'Sullivan TD

A Patron of Áit Linn

I believe all we can hope for in life is to make a difference and that's where Áit Linn scores highly. Áit Linn has made a real difference to those battling addiction and those on the recovery journey.

We know Ireland has an unhealthy relationship with alcohol and while the majority of people will not become addicted, it will be a nightmare for those who do end up becoming addicted and a nightmare for those who love them. We know the statistics on the harm and cost of alcoholism and problem drinking - alcohol related road traffic accidents, violence, deaths, illnesses, public order and so many examples of human suffering for the alcoholic and those who love him or her. It is reckoned, in economic terms, that this costs some 3 billion euro yearly.

That is why services and spaces like Áit Linn are vital for those ready to start the journey in to recovery.

The statistics speak for themselves – the numbers of referrals, the numbers engaging in the project and the increase in those numbers over the past two years.

The recovery journey has been complicated for many with the increase in poly drug use and the increasing use of tablets – all of which makes services like Áit Linn more and more vital.

Áit Linn offers a range of services in a safe, supportive and calm space with committed, hardworking staff and a dynamic dedicated clinical manager!

The programmes are realistic, focused and practical and they don't end when the person ends their formal relationship with Áit Linn as Áit Linn continues to be at the end of a telephone call for anyone who needs their support.

Áit Linn has shown itself to be inventive and innovative in responding to needs as they arise, for example the programme in the Polish language.

Part of my own work in the North Inner City section of my constituency of Dublin Central, having chaired the Drugs Task Force, is now in Prevention and Education. I know the value of community based engagement with young people in organising awareness programmes and I acknowledge the work done by Áit Linn with a local school. I believe that is the way forward in relation to raising awareness, informing, developing skills and competencies in our young people so we don't see increasing numbers in addiction.

I was both honoured and humbled to be at the Graduation Ceremony and listen to those, supported by Áit Linn, who are in recovery. I wish them all well as they continue living in sobriety. And I wish their loved ones well as their lives have been so impacted by addiction.

The work of Áit Linn would not be possible without the staff and the board and I acknowledge all they do, on very limited budgets.

My very best wishes to all in Áit Linn.

Chairman's Foreword

2016 was the fifth year of Áit Linn's existence. From modest beginnings in 2012, it is now firmly established as a highly professional, effective and trusted support for problem drinkers and their families in the Ballymun and wider North City areas. This is reflected in the significantly increasing number of referrals – from hospitals, GPs, the AA, community groups and concerned persons. Referrals in 2016 were 50 percent up on 2015 and four out of five of those referrals went on to actively engage with the service.

What is most gratifying is to see the lives of problem drinkers and their families being totally transformed as a result of attending Áit Linn's treatment programmes. A highlight of 2016 was a joyous celebration for 15 long-term sober "graduates" of Áit Linn held last September. The attendance at that event by Minister of State, Catherine Byrne, Maureen O'Sullivan TD and Senator Aodhán Ó Ríordáin was also hugely encouraging and we greatly appreciate the support of these senior politicians; hopefully there is a growing realization in the political establishment of the real need and tangible benefits of locally focused alcohol treatment projects such as Áit Linn.

Despite the major increase in demand for its services, Áit Linn has continued to deliver high quality treatment, aftercare and family support programmes throughout 2016; nobody who asked for help was turned away. This is due to the tremendous energy and commitment of the dedicated staff. However, Áit Linn is now running at close to full capacity within the limits of its budget and available accommodation.

On behalf of the Board, I would like to thank the staff for their exceptional work in genuinely transforming the lives of those who pass through the doors of No. 1 Longdale Terrace. I would also like to thank my fellow board members for giving their time voluntarily to providing guidance and good governance to the project. Finally, this project would not have been possible without ongoing funding from Dublin City Council, for which we are very grateful.

Michael O'Grady

Chairman

Annual Report 2016

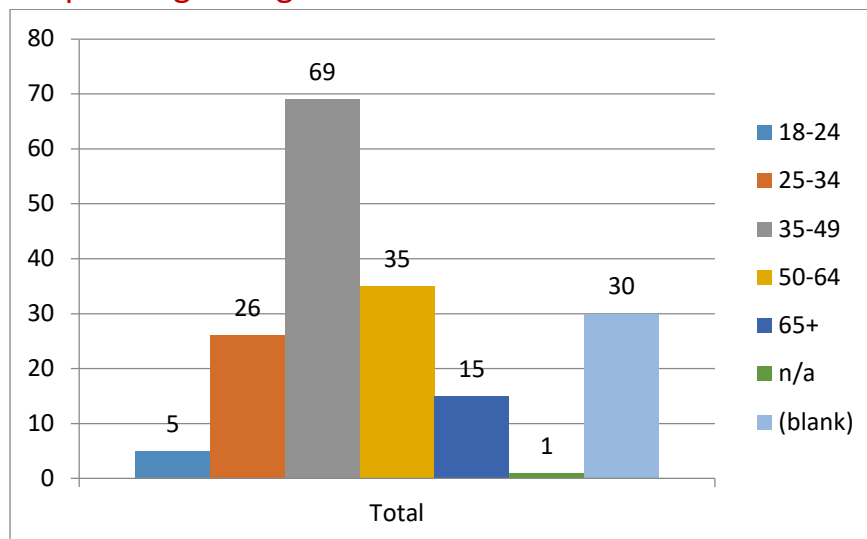
2016 has been the fifth year of the project, and in many ways it has been a memorable one. Firstly, fifteen of the clients participated in a graduation ceremony which was attended by the Minister for State, Catherine Byrne, Senator Aodhán Ó Ríordáin and a patron of the project, Maureen O'Sullivan TD. Secondly, the referrals increased during the year by fifty percent and the client uptake increased by forty percent, so some days it seems that the building is bursting at the seams. There was a period of re-adjustment for clients and staff with significant staff turnover in the initial part of the year. But this all settled after April and although the project has been very busy, there has been a good atmosphere and strong working relationships have developed.

Referrals

This year saw an increase in the number of referrals by 50%, there were 124 referrals in the 2015 period and this year that number increased to 181. These referrals come from various places, such as GP's, Social Workers, employers and other organisations such as the local Adult Mental Health Clinic. The relationship with Beaumont Hospital and the Mater Hospital is a consistent feature in our work, with many of the clients having significant histories in both facilities. This does not mean that every referral comes to participate in the project but out of 119 referrals in 2015, 108 engaged with the project and this year out of the 182 referrals, 145 engaged with the project.

The age of the referrals remains within the usual parameters and the use of more than one substance is the reality in many cases. There have always been a proportion of clients attending who use more than alcohol, and over time this has grown, but in all cases, the project would consider alcohol as the drug which disinhibits to the point of other substances, such as cocaine, being used. The older population of clients have in many cases left this polysubstance misuse period behind but the younger clients still report use of both licit and illicit drugs in conjunction with their drinking.

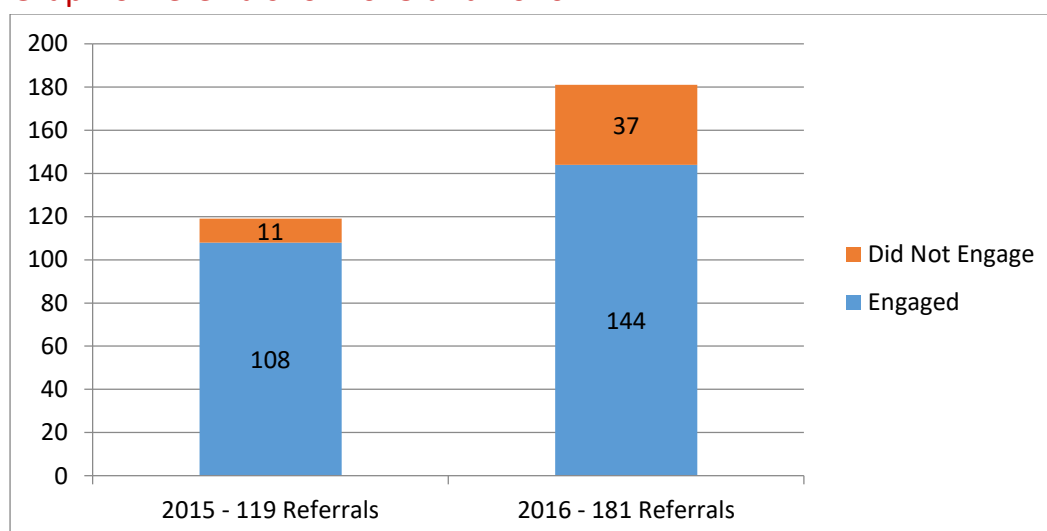
Graph of Age Range of Referrals for 2016



Substitution of tranquillisers for alcohol after many detoxification attempts has the effect of making recovery more difficult and the availability of these, both from GPs and from the street makes it an issue which requires medical intervention in terms of withdrawal. In these cases, clients are referred to other services which can supply a supervised detoxification process in either a community or residential setting such as Cuan Mhuire. This has been the case in several cases during 2016 when the substitution has been of such a level that the client has developed a second dependency.

The Numbers

Graph of referrals for 2015 and 2016



These referrals are in the project in various combinations: some people are attending for individual psychotherapy only, and some are only attending for group work. Many others are attending for both group work and individual psychotherapy as the need arises. However, the following is a breakdown of the numbers attending each group. The individuals change over the year but the numbers remain the same, this is because as people complete one phase of the programme, they move to the next, if they so wish.

Psychoeducation Group: 15 Monday Treatment Group: 10

Wednesday Treatment Group: 10 Aftercare Group: 17

Concerned Persons Group: 12 Polish Programme: 6

Clients waiting to join a programme: 15

Clients receiving individual psychotherapy only: 10

There are no clients who are attending more than one treatment group but there may be clients who are completing the psychoeducation programme and also in a treatment group.

The Work:

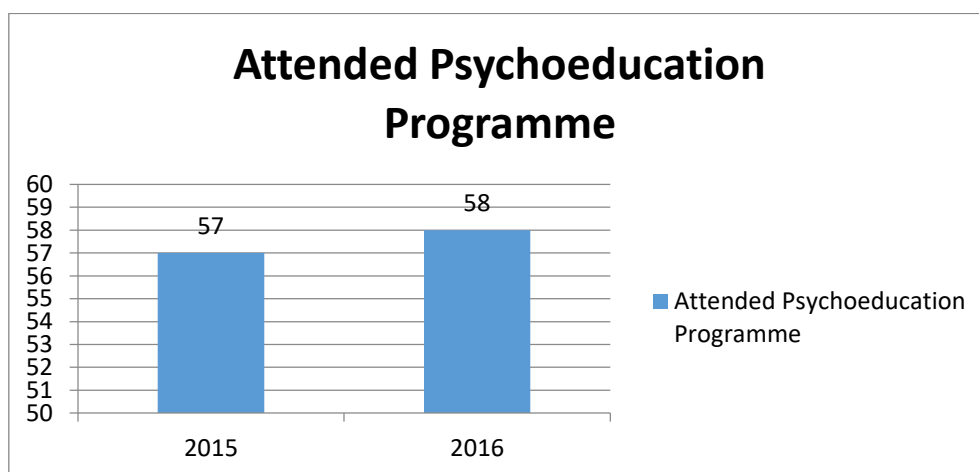
The project has developed a rhythm of working over the past number of years which facilitates the size of the building. All groups are run in the mornings and individual clients are seen in the afternoons.

The initial contact after an assessment for a new client is the **Information Programme**, which is the initial stage of the psycho-educational programmes run by Áit Linn. This programme gives evidence based information to allow the client to come to their own conclusions about their drinking. It covers all aspects of drinking behaviour and effects in relation to roles, relationships, health, finances and legal issues. The offering of information with no objective to discuss more personal and confidential issues, gives the psychological space for the client to review their drinking, in terms of amount, effects and outcomes. There is no pressure in this group to talk but as the clients get more familiar with the presentations and the presenter, they become more engaged with the material and with each other, agreeing or disagreeing with each other and the content of the presentation. At no point, does anyone on the staff team identify the client as an alcoholic, or even alcohol dependant, this realisation is the clients to make. Therefore, some clients only identify

themselves as needing to reduce their alcohol intake and at the end of this particular programme, leave the project on what could be identified as a harm reduction plan, having decided to reduce their weekly intake and the number of days drinking. Over the year, this programme has run four times with an average number attending of c.15 clients.

It is the ethos of the project to give the client skills and support in dealing with the rigours of daily life without alcohol for a minimum period of seven weeks before any significant therapeutic work of depth begins and this is done in the seven week **Relapse Prevention Programme**. This period is then spent gaining insight into the relapse process and how to deal with triggers and cravings. While this programme demands abstinence, no personal revelations which could destabilise the client and lead to a relapse are expected, rather the client is encouraged to operate in the here and now, deal with the tasks of daily living and practice abstinence; in a similar way to how they practiced drinking previously. This is the point when support becomes significant and the familiarity of attending group, the group interaction and staff availability for psychotherapeutic interventions is most important. Regularly, this is the point when there are further self-discharges; the evidence of the person's ability to remain abstinent for almost three months convince them that the matter has been successfully dealt with, and alcohol is no longer their problem. Regularly these clients return after a brief period and a brief relapse to re-engage again and this time to follow treatment through to Aftercare.

Graph of numbers attending psychoeducation programme 2016 in comparison with 2015



“I’ve learned a lot..... Nobody is critical or judgemental.....Everybody has their own stories”

The experience of being in any group is often daunting for clients but the feedback from the psychoeducation groups and the experience of participating in these prepares clients to join a Treatment Group, regardless of their initial qualms.

“I found it hard in the beginning to settle into group..... It keeps me sober and keeps me accountable to myself..... Found it helpful talking with other people who were sober for a longer period, helped us settle in.”

Treatment Groups

The two treatment groups are on Mondays and Wednesdays with the Aftercare Group on Thursday mornings. The **Monday Treatment Group** is our original Treatment Group which grew out of the initial psychoeducational programmes that Áit Linn ran in Ballymun. This group has run with c10 clients consistently since January 2014. The consistency within the group has been largely due to this group having had the same therapist since its commencement, who has built a strong and honest relationship not merely with the individuals in the group but with the group as an entity in itself.

“I could not imagine doing this by myself – really value the support”

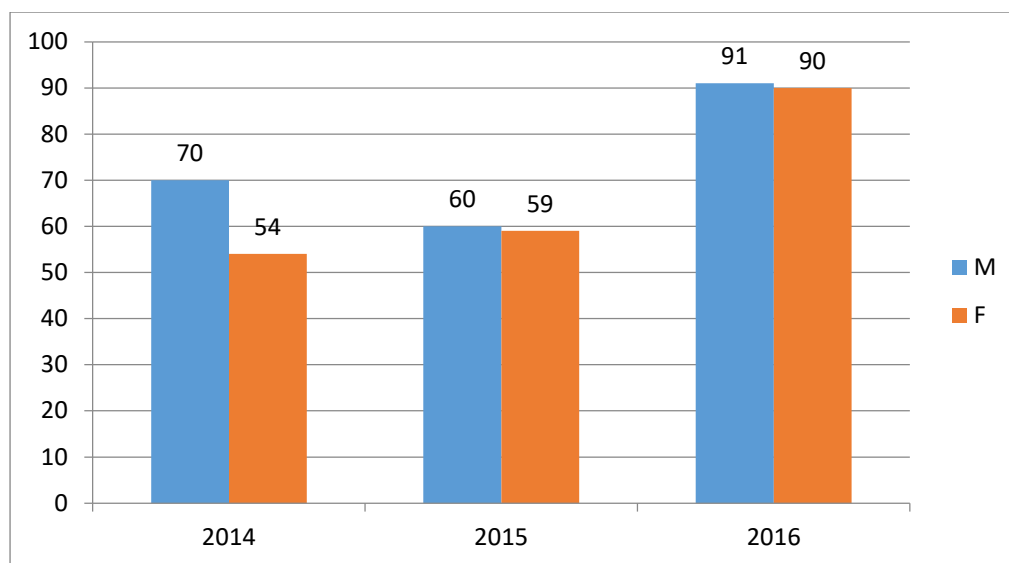
During the year, the **Wednesday Treatment Group** went through several changes and has finally settled with a new therapist since late spring /early summer. This group has reconfigured and is working well. When the new therapist came, the group set about developing a group contract and group rules which are revisited regularly as new members join the group. This has given the group a strong ethos and good working environment. This group has now grown and has also got 10 clients who have consistent attendance and are

committed to recovery. The support and interest of the group members in each other's progress and development has produced a dynamic group that is already showing results in terms in consistent sobriety.

"We feel accepted and understood. It's a safe place to share what's going on in my life so I don't pick up that drink."

"I was old enough to know the facts about drink, drugs and how they all impact. But it didn't stop me becoming dependant on drink. I was just having the crack with the lads at first. I didn't even like the drink until I developed this unquenchable thirst".

Graph of male: female ratio 2014 - 2016



The Aftercare Group

This year saw the group grow to unsustainable numbers and many of the conversations with the clients in this group were about whether they should leave the group or not. It appeared that it would be very difficult to facilitate the group if all seventeen group members were to attend on a regular basis, but thankfully some members of the group reduced their attendance to

fortnightly thereby creating the physical space in the rather small group room for new clients to attend weekly.

“I still smoke and drink too much coffee but one thing at a time. I now have more realistic goals so there is less chance of falling flat on my face and failing, and then beating myself up over the failure. You’ve got to mind yourself, be good to yourself, accept your shortcomings but continue to try and improve yourself”.

The group has offered significant support to each other around issues such as serious ill-health, bereavement and addiction in the family. What has been significant for everyone is the level of openness and honesty which exists in the group. This allows people to admit to what they regard as personal failures, such as an adult child falling into addiction, or a relapse due to the utter unexpectedness of a life altering experience. The shame of relapse or any perceived failure has often left clients isolated and repeating the old patterns of drinking, but these group members re-connect quickly with the project and re-establish sobriety.

The difficulty for many clients about the Aftercare Group is that there is often a pressure from family members or employers for a client to finish and just “get on with it”. In the project’s experience, the longer a client receives support the less likely there is to be a relapse and the more likely that the client will function better in all contexts, but particularly in the family. This is shown by the increasing ability to deal objectively with the problem, and to manage their own emotional response to the problem and move towards a resolution, even if it needs to be a difficult one.

“I didn’t want to be sitting around with a group of people but once I came, the support I experienced kept me coming back”

Three clients from this group ended their formal relationship with the project this year and thereby created space for three clients to move from the Treatment Groups to Aftercare. It is expected that another group will move in early 2017 and that more people will feel confident to officially leave the

service, but that they will continue to believe that “...the support feels accessible, you can pick up the phone if you need to” regardless of graduating.

One of these clients has volunteered to come back and promote Alcoholics Anonymous in the project. This is in response to the wishes of the clients who experienced the monthly AA meetings during 2015/6 and derived benefit from them, in both sharing at the meetings and from the social aspect as well.

“It feels intimate without being intimate, and the social element is important and makes it easier to keep going”

The Concerned Persons Group

This group has grown and different issues have arisen over the past twelve months, as the parents of a client who died were members of this group. This death brought the consequences of problem drinking sharply into focus for the whole group. It made those whose family members were in recovery profoundly grateful for each little step taken to achieve sobriety and those whose family members were still drinking very aware of the inherent risks of this behaviour.

During the year, several new clients came to the group and these were attending for problem drinking in either adult children or elderly parents. This was a new client group and the distress and pressure for these family members was as significant as those who were here for a partner or sibling. The increase in young adult drinking shows the problems facing many parents whom are conscious of the difficult path their children are going down and often are in the position of giving up their lives in attempting to control and cure their adult children's drinking.

The concerned person who is attending to support or encourage an elderly parent to come into recovery is in the difficult position of seeing the impact of heavy drinking both on the drinker and their partner, and is constantly fearful of falls and accidents. This situation is extremely emotional with the concerned person unable to distance themselves from the chaos of the drinking due to respect, loyalty and gratitude for a happy and healthy upbringing.

Other Developments

The project ran the full psychoeducation programme for TravAct in 2016. This was done by releasing the project worker one morning per week, who travelled to Clonshaugh and ran the programme in TravAct's own premises. This had been done before with the North-eastern Drug Task Force and had been deemed successful, so it was a pleasure to support another service in educating clients about alcohol mis-use.

The project initiated a Polish language psychoeducational programme in September 2016 and there has been a consistent uptake for this. Often the clients on this programme have good business/functional English language skills but do not have good psychological or emotional language and therefore find it difficult to fully participate in the projects' normal groups.

Finally, the project ran an education programme in Trinity Comprehensive School for transition year students; this looked in a general way at addiction and the burden of parental addiction for young adults and adolescents. It touched on the fact that often when a parent was unable to function, a young person could be a carer to the parent or even a carer to younger siblings. This was run on the school premises and took place after the October Bank Holiday for five sessions.

The Graduation Ceremony

September 8th 2016 was the date when fifteen of the clients who had achieved a minimum of twelve months sobriety were given their medallions and certificates. The ceremony was held on the premises with major concerns about the weather as there were thirty plus guests invited. In the end, the rain stopped, the Minister arrived, the past and present staff and board members were there, and the presentations went ahead. It was a wonderful event and much enjoyed by all present. The project was very honoured to have Maureen O'Sullivan TD, Senator Aodhán Ó Ríordáin and Minister Catherine Byrne present to appreciate the wonderful success that the clients were making in their recovery.

The Staff

The staff of the project has worked particularly hard over the past twelve months, due in part to staff shortages and to the increase in the number of referrals. There have been few clients waiting for an initial assessment for longer than three days and the only delay in putting people on programmes is that the size of the building places restrictions on the number of people who can attend at any given point and the number who can be in group is equally limited by size.

An acknowledgement of all the staff, both former and current, for their determination and belief in the necessity of the work is warranted. Despite the size of the location, and the budgetary cuts, the staff has always been engaged in developing the project with the objective of offering a quality service to the clients.

The Board

The board met eight times during 2016 and three new members joined to support the work. As some of these are former clients, it is believed that they will add to the expertise of other board members to ensure that the project remains clearly focused on clients' needs. A grateful thanks to all the members of the board who have been engaged with and supportive of the current work and all developments during the year.

And Finally

The clients, staff and board of the project would like to thank Maureen O'Sullivan TD, a patron of the project, and all in Dublin City Council for the support in terms of funding and premises during 2016.

Statement of Finances for Year Ending 31 December 2016

Opening Balance	€22,605
Income	€
Grant Income (DCC)	120,000
Other income	3,500
Charitable donations	<u>30</u>
<u>Income Total</u>	€123,530
Expenditure	
Wages	93,566
IT	2,621
Rent	3,890
Printing and promotional materials	236
Audit Fees	1,375
Insurance	1,675
Fixed Assets	3,332
Utilities	3,955
Administrative and Sundry	<u>4,578</u>
<u>Expenditure Total</u>	<u>€115,228</u>
Balance as at 31 December 2016	30,906

** Full audited accounts will be uploaded onto the website on completion by the auditor*

Goodbye my friend

Here we are again, just you and me, my old friend. But bad news today. I have decided to walk away, to find me again. This time together had to end. We've been together a long time now. Through some crazy shit you've always been there for me. You've helped cover up my insecurities, helped me face hard times and it has been fun. Some laughs, some fights, some midnight strolls and new experiences, doubts.

In fact I can't remember the last time we were apart, but it's changed, it's not fun anymore. Because when I think of you, it's not just us any longer, it's the monsters waiting to come haunt me when you are not with me, anxiety, depression, anger, fear these are the ones who won't disappear without you.

So I will admit I need you more than I can bear, so I need to learn to face these on my own. It's going to be hard but it has to be done for my future my family and my 3 sons. But don't feel bad it's not you it's me, I need to be a dad, to rise up, face them one on one. I will admit I will miss you and will think of you sometimes, you'll always be around, but holding someone else's hand I could go on and on, fill pages more but the fact is I just can't do this anymore. So goodbye alcohol this is for the best. Hopefully this is a weight off my chest and I pray it lasts and that I find something new. I don't ever want to come crawling back to you.

Goodbye

(Written and submitted by a client of Áit Linn)

***All content in italics are client comments and reflections**