

Oireachtas Briefing on Dual Diagnosis

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My name is Marie Oppeboen, I'm a Consultant Psychiatrist and I am the CEO and Co-founder of a new charity for Dual Diagnosis in Nenagh, North Tipperary called CARMHA. I am also a family member of someone who very nearly died from addiction but who is thankfully now in good recovery.

CARMHA stands for Connection And Recovery in Mental Health & Addiction. Our aim is to provide free, easy to access counselling and peer-support services for people over 18yrs with Dual Diagnosis as well as their family members within their own community.

Our mission is to provide a platform where people feel safe, supported, connected and empowered to start healing, take responsibility for their own recovery and live rich and meaningful lives as valuable members of our society.

Addiction and Mental Health go hand in hand, often due to common underlying risk factors such as trauma. There is now well-established evidence that those individuals who have experienced repeated, chronic, or multiple traumas are more likely to have more pronounced symptoms and consequences, including substance abuse, mental illness, and physical health problems

For these people the world is not a safe place, and that affects the way you behave, your ability to trust people & to engage with services. So, when you're experiencing exclusion, coercion, feeling judged or ignored by services or society, that often triggers past traumas, makes Addiction & Mental Health issues worse and reduces an individual's chance of recovery.

To address the enormous problem of Addiction and Mental health issues in our society today, along with all its associated issues such DSH/Suicide & Homelessness, it's going to take a public health approach, and we need to get the foundations right. And the one common starting point across all sectors should be: "first do no harm"

What we now see happening around the world as a solution to this, is the emergence of **"Trauma-informed services"** and **"Trauma-informed, Compassionate Communities"**.

What is meant by "Trauma-informed communities" is a commitment to engage people from all sectors in common goals (education, housing, healthcare, criminal justice, business etc). The first goal is to understand how toxic stress & trauma affects the community's well-being. The second is to foster resilience-building practices so people, organisations and systems no longer traumatise already traumatised people, but instead contribute to building healthy, resilient communities. This is at the heart of what CARMHA is doing.

CARMHA was founded as a community group in 2017 by my colleague Donal Ryan (who is an experienced addiction counsellor & psychotherapist) and myself, together with a group of people with first-hand experience of Dual Diagnosis themselves, family members and other community champions passionate about changing our responses to Dual Diagnosis in North Tipperary. We

established an international research network of partners from Norway, US, Canada, UK & Ireland, and a participatory action research project to establish local needs, engage community stakeholders and drive the development of a new, high quality service in our area.

So what we have done in North Tipp is to develop Real Solutions based on international best practice and expressed local needs. We have proof of concept, a big research bid on the way to formally establish our model to enable testing and scaling. We have secured a building and awaiting leader funding for capital expenses. We have huge support in the community with over 3000 followers on Facebook, and so many people volunteering and helping us out. There are many activities going on in our building already and we can see that it's already making a difference even without being fully operational yet due to a lack of funding.

The CARMHA approach has 3 components:

1) Improving Access to Help

- **Low/No threshold:** drop-in & outreach, possible with the valuable resources such as trained peer-support workers and volunteers
- **No Wrong Door:** people not turned away, helped to access other services if needed
- **Stepped Care:** which maximises efficiency in terms of resources and cost, and is about providing the least intensive and most accessible interventions first.
- **Out of Hours Service**
- **Modern Technology**

2) Providing Evidence-Based Care

- **Trauma-informed:** We ask what happened, not what's wrong with people. We create a safe, non-judgmental environment where service users have choice, a voice and are involved in every aspect of our organisation from development & governance at board level, to service delivery.
- **Recovery-oriented:** We focus on people's strengths & abilities, collaboration and creating a place of empowerment. We help improve social isolation and encouraging interpersonal and community connections through various group therapies and peer-led social and creative groups.
- **Integrated:** We treat addiction & mental health issues together in the same place, at the same time by the same people with experience of either working with addiction & mental health issues, and with fundamental qualities like high empathy, being able to work alongside experts by experience/peer-support workers and having belief in people's ability to recover.

3) Connecting & Partnering with the Community

- We have engaged the community in our development
- When you start getting to know people and the resources that are out there, it's easier to use them more effectively
- We are working closely with partners such as Ana Liffey, Novas' Community Detox Programme, Family Resource Centre, ETB (adult education) & Restorative Justice etc