



ACET NEWS

Spring 2017

ACET (AIDS Care Education & Training) Ireland provides care for those affected by HIV, and education & training services on HIV and related issues.

Welcome to the Spring 2017 edition of ACET News!

Thank you for your ongoing support which enables us to provide care and education throughout the North Inner City, Dublin, and around the country.

See inside this issue for updates on **care, education**, local area news, summary of our **2016 activities** and more!

As always, feel free to drop us a line or catch up with us on [Facebook/ACETIreland](#) or at [acet.ie](#). If you are no longer interested in receiving this newsletter, or if you prefer it online, please let us know.



ACET are delighted to announce their new partnership with Amos Ngugi of Acts of Compassion Projects.

With the support of the PA Foundation and your generous donations, we have been able to pilot a project where Amos is delivering 1-to-1 supports to vulnerable migrants, impacted by profound levels of social exclusion and related health difficulties, in the North Inner City of Dublin. His counselling space was a brothel in the 19th century and is now a place offering hope and new beginnings for many of our newest citizens. Referrals are received through local churches, direct provision centres and through the positive reputation and rapport Amos has built up with the local community.

Even in the early stages of this project the impact has been startling. 75% of all attendees have reduced their sleeping tablets prescription during their time with the project and have

attributed this to Amos's support. All attendees have been linked to ongoing referrals in areas of housing, employment, education and counselling.

ACET have been working alongside Amos for 7 years delivering seminars to church leaders and offering support to individuals in Direct Provision. After many years of driving around the country and making links, it is fantastic to see this new stage of our partnership flourish. Mutual mentoring is ongoing and it is exciting to see the growth and development of these links between our education and care work. We are growing and developing this project in 2017 with the support of HSE - Social Inclusion.

Amos himself is an Irishman with a story of living within and across thresholds. As an asylum seeker in Mosney he took the lack of educational and vocational opportunities offered by Direct Provision into his own hands and walked 10km to the nearest town to present his credentials as a hospital chaplain. It is encouraging how many years on, he continues to dedicate himself to the welfare of his peers.

If you would like to support Amos in his work, our bank details are:

Bank of Ireland, O'Connell St, Dublin 1

BIC: BOFIE2D IBAN: IE82 BOFI 9000 3360 9597 90

Acct. 60959790 Sort code: 90 00 33

Standing order forms are available from the office.

Donate



It is your support that enables us to do all that we do—thank you!



One of the core pillars of ACET's work is **care**. Hansi Chisnall, our Family Support Worker, reflects on recent experiences on the themes of **loss, grief and death**.

On a surprisingly mild afternoon, I was walking back to my car and couldn't quite shake the conversation I had just had during a care visit. Sitting with fresh cups of tea, she suddenly, but rather casually, said to me, *"I think I'm going to die soon.... I think about dying a lot.."* She took a moment to pause and to look at the pictures of loved ones who had died before asking me, *"Do you think you get a premonition before you die... that your body knows?"* This wasn't the first time we had had this conversation. Death and loss permeate through very conversation I might have with her, as well as the majority of the individuals I meet with through each given week. It's hard to ignore the act or topic of remembrance when walls are covered in memorials, photos, mementos, how loved ones names never escape a conversation, never forgotten.

I started thinking about loss being this grey thread that runs through each of us as humans, **weaving us together in connectedness** whether we realise it or not. It seems to give us this universal language and partial understanding that perhaps is what makes me in any way feel qualified to sit there, in front of the person who recalls the death of nearly all of her children hearing about how she recently had to be admitted to the very same ward her sons died in. **Loss reverberates**, that familiar sting we all have a story about.

I have been reflecting on grief and loss lately - throughout today's Ireland, and especially in the ACET story. It is hard to forget that ACET Ireland was borne during the ultimate period of bereavement, during the AIDS epidemic in mid-90s (specifically 1992 in Dublin Inner City), and that our current work is **tending to the ashes** of that unforgiving pyre that ripped through so many lives and families. It left behind a legacy of grief in this city - resulting in names on quilts, names read in community memorials, names on tombstones, names spoken in family homes. Utter devastation.

I realise that most of my weeks are spent within the walls of Dublin homes, gazing upon frames of photos, hearing songs, stories and in shadows of lost ones. In the ACET care world, we are witnesses to this shadow of grief and loss; private audiences to storytelling laced with laughter and devastation. I have seen **how beautiful the spirit of survival can be**; how inspired I am continuously by what I have learned from others, and how precious a commodity people are to our clients more than all other things.

But the other big part of being witness to that loss, is to do what Irvin Yalom might call, **'imbuing hope and possibility'** within that space - that grey chasm.

To open up the reality of the ACET client care world, I will share real snapshots of what loss and grief look like on an ongoing basis in our work:

- **Remembering** loved ones who have died (children, siblings, parents, cousins, friends, neighbours) - showing us photos, playing songs, describing what was worn in the coffin. Remembering what was said to them, who was there, who wasn't there. Verses that were read.

- Talking about their own death. **Fear. Relief** of the idea of a 'heavenly body'. Struggling with the idea of what will happen to their children and how they will cope. Who will pay for their funeral? Will there be enough in the credit union? Writing out wills. How they want to be remembered. How they refuse to be bed-ridden like their parent was. How they escaped death when others around them did not. How they did not expect to be alive at 40. Not wanting to be alone when they die. How long do they have left? Will they see this Christmas?

- **Living** in the daily shadow and reminder of death - Being in the hospital where children/parents/friends died. Constant health and pain problems reminding them of their aging body that has seen too much in their life-time. Living beside graveyards where their many dead are buried. Walls of memorials in their home, strewn with pictures, flowers, mementos. Tattoos of names, dates. Sudden deaths in their communities, on their road, recognisable names on the news. Being told how sick you are by doctors, over and over again.

- Loss of **dreams**, independence, desires, hope, change in their community/country/world. Grief that HIV stigma still exists and follows them into the next generation.

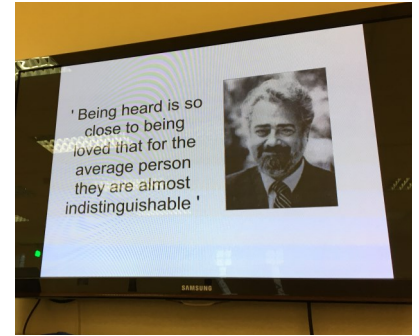
- Loss of **relationships** - through progressive diseases, estranged family relationship, an unexpected diagnosis. Loss of **faith, belief, respect, joy**.

I realise that this a lot of loss to name, but it's what lies behind walls of our communities and probably one of the bigger ongoing themes of the ACET work. By far and away, this is one of the biggest **challenges** I feel we face in ACET care work, but in truth, is one of the most privileged places to be invited into. Imbuing hope and offering genuine, exploratory, honouring and compassionate relationship is what ACET does. Loss might be a universal language we recognise, but **hope, respect and friendship** are the cloaks we place on our ACET family shoulders. This is how we want to sit together in that ultimate liminal space of loss - **surrounded by the light** of hope.

It is your support that enables us to do all that we do—thank you!

ACET's **Migrant-Led Churches** project started out as a means to raise awareness of HIV in a key setting for many migrants - their faith communities. It now delivers a broad range of activities that address root causes of HIV-related stigma.

One such activity is our HIV and Listening Skills training days, such as that which was recently completed at Living Waters church, a multinational church with Malawian origins, based in the North Inner City of Dublin.



ACET staff spent a full day training over 20 members who hold a range of leadership and membership responsibilities. Richard Carson brought the participants through the story of HIV, globally and locally. Every statistic, medical update or HIV testing opportunity is handled as an opportunity to challenge HIV-related stigma. The testimonies of church leaders living with HIV prove particularly powerful.

Vivienne Morrow Murtagh encouraged attendees to practice their Listening Skills using the Imago Therapy model, in which to truly listen one must leave your own world, cross over the bridge, and enter the world of the other. *"The only thing you bring with you is your passport"*, encouraged Vivienne as the disciplines of Mirror - Validate - Empathise were explained.

These training days with leaders and members of Migrant-Led churches encourage a culture of listening to challenge HIV-related stigma and all marginalisation. Pastors, married couples, even identical twins gave helpful feedback on their newly developing listening skills. *"I have been in Ireland 3 years and I have never seen anything like this. It's great! More churches need to do this"* commented one participant.

This project is supported by the MAC AIDS Fund.



In February, the Taoiseach's appointee, Kieran Mulvey presented his plan for the social and economic regeneration of North East Inner City Dublin. Entitled *"Creating a Brighter Future"*, the report identifies a community rich in resources which needs to be reimagined and equipped to reach its full potential. The emphasis is on a cohesive and integrated approach. ACET are actively involved in the North Inner City Community Coalition (NICCC), about which Mr Mulvey said *"I would place significant hope that this most welcome initiative will lead to a strong community wide representation in the future and establish the basis upon which existing service providers will work closely together ensure an integrated approach to service provision in the NEIC."* The NICCC hopes that the report is only the start of the process and that Taoiseach's original promise of a long term strategic plan with an appropriate implementation structure will be delivered and include a key role for the community involvement & input throughout the process.

A big **THANK YOU** to Trinity Church Network for their recent Sunday morning coffee bar in aid of ACET's work. This generosity raising a total of €628 will be invaluable in providing much needed summer respite breaks for young people and families by allowing them to attend Christian Camps where they can have fun, be stimulated & encouraged, relax and enjoy time away from their everyday challenges. Thank you, your support enables this gift to become a reality in people's lives.



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The Start of Something New....

One theme of our care work over the last few months has been an influx of new people being referred to us. Different stages of the year yield different levels of referrals, and this past Autumn/Winter has seen us meeting a lot of new people. **Andy Sloane**, our Adult Support Worker, explains, that meeting someone for the first time can be brilliant, inspiring, challenging, and nervy— all at once! Usually, in the first meeting, through listening to their story, and speaking about how ACET could work alongside them, the conversation runs on to sharing at a deeper level, and that opens the door to real connection with them and their context.

The initial stage of working with someone new can be challenging as we get to know their circumstances, learn what motivates them, and how best to support them. Sometimes, it may take a while before a person regularly keeps meetings we arrange. Lack of familiarity can be a major barrier, but perseverance and patience help overcome it. To use a horticulture analogy, this is the sowing season; putting in the work now in hope of future success. One of the people we recently started working with reflected, *"At first, I wasn't sure about you, but now I know I can call you and feel really supported"*.



Have you seen ACET's Liminal Space series of pictures on Instagram? The project is an attempt to tell something of the story of our work and help you to engage with and understand how your support enables our day to day work to continue as we care for individuals and families. A liminal space is somewhere that exists at the point between two realities. The old may have passed but the new has not yet come. The threshold between despair and hope, between darkness and light has been an ongoing home for our projects and a place where we have encountered beauty, meaning and miracles. These projects find their origins in a virus that changed the world but now also find definition in the many fault lines of societal injustice exposed by HIV. Through photographs and videos we will show you the liminal spaces of homes, streets, people and issues that have come about over our 25 years in existence and are made real by the work of our staff and volunteers every day. Why don't you take a look at

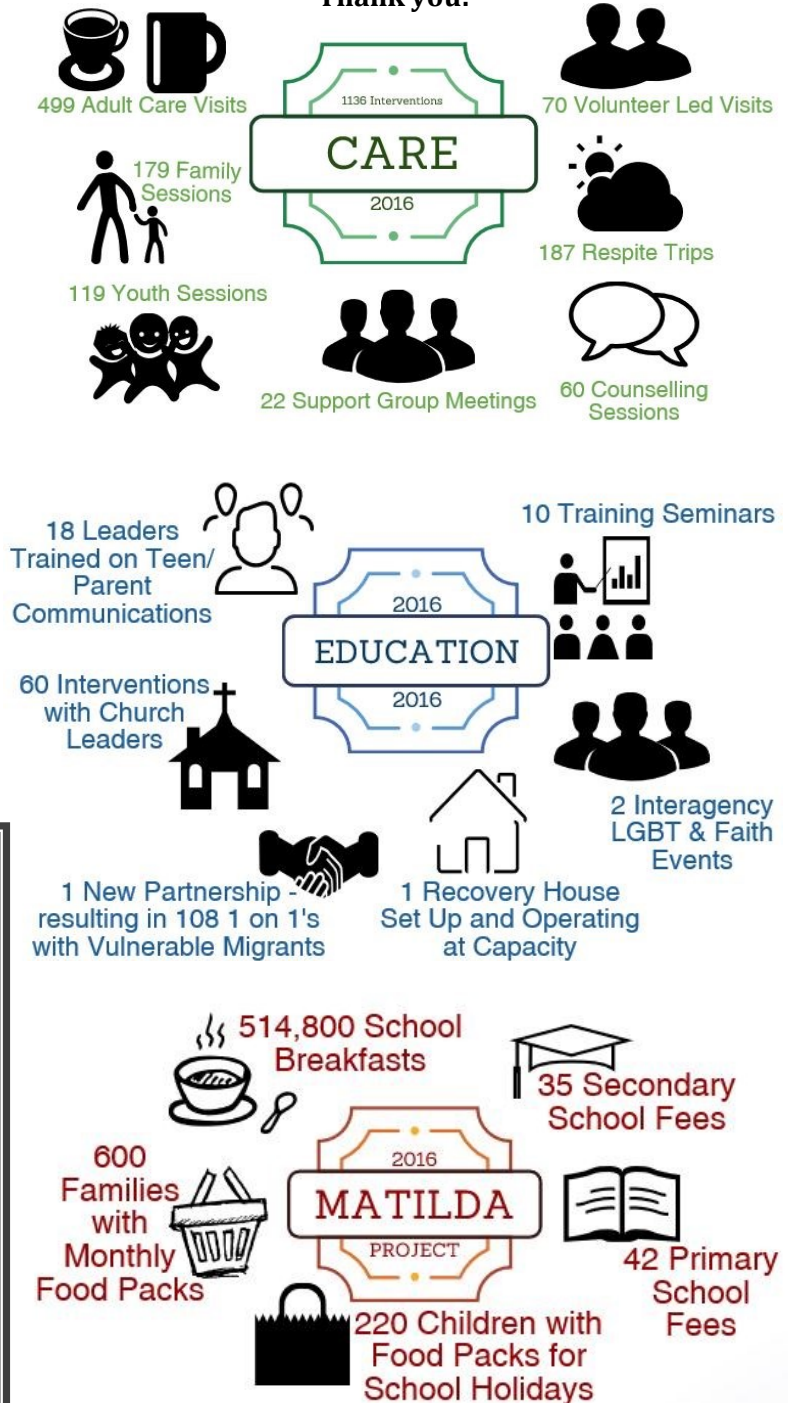
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Our 2016 Annual Report will soon be available with our AGM upcoming in May. In the meantime, here is a brief overview of ACET's work during 2016, all of which is made possible by your support.

Thank you!



Salesforce is among the leading cloud based CRM (Customer Relationship Management) software and it provides companies with an interface for case & task management. ACET has been a Salesforce user for almost a decade and we are delighted to be working with some of their staff as pro bono volunteers this year to upgrade and customise our systems which will allow us to work more efficiently in recording and planning our client care as well as communicating effectively with our supporters and funders.