



# ACET News

## Autumn 2023

### Rain & Shine: care work in all weathers

In true Irish fashion, summer was a mix of rainy gloominess and surprising rays of sunshine. On those duller days, it can be hard to see past struggles of mental and physical health, financial uncertainties and difficult family tensions. The brighter days can make these challenges seem doable, and personal resources feel more within reach. The ACET care team work to be present both in the rain and in the shine.



The rhythm of care work has been laced with the usual opportunities for respite: days out to places like Glendalough, the National Botanic Gardens and other beautiful spots in nature. We also partnered once again with Dublin Family Outreach to support several Dublin 12 families to attend and make memories with each other and life-long friends at a family camp in Drewstown House, County Meath.



Ongoing hardships and themes we see are often around personal health and associated stigmas, financial concerns, family dynamics, processing historical and present-day trauma or loss, supporting loved ones in addiction and caring for older family members. A particular hardship for both ACET and

one family is the loss of a much beloved individual whom ACET has known and supported for nearly 20 years.

Preparing to go into the winter season can be daunting for many but summer is a helpful opportunity to practice recognising personal resources that are available, nurturing a framework of hope for what is to come. Winter can often test health, relational and financial limits, so we lay the groundwork together to be present in what is possible and good today, and what could be possible and good, or just okay, tomorrow.

A special thank you to Aishling as she finishes up maternity cover on the care team: it has been a blessing to have her in this role and we wish her a prosperous new season in her next one!

— Hansi Chisnall



Thank you for sharing our work! Enjoy our look back at summer respite (*this page*) and a report one year on about our partnership with Cairde (*pages 1 & 2*). We also have reports from Migrant Plus here in Ireland and Matilda Project in Zimbabwe (*pages 3 & 4*), and an introduction to a new partnership (*page 3*) Finally, we invite you to reflect on speaking and hearing, with Vivienne (*page 3*).

### Security and Hope: a partnership

ACET has been partnering with **Cairde** for over a year now with a project called **Oberih** (Оберіх), a Ukrainian word for an item of protection, denoting safety, security and hope. **Nataliya Marchenko is the Ukraine Community Development Worker** with Oberih. Here in conversation with ACET CEO Richard Carson, she tells us about her role:

**Richard:** Tell us about what motivated you to get involved in this project.

**Nataliya:** Firstly, I have been an immigrant in Ireland for more than 20 years and originally came from Ukraine. I have been working with refugees from Ukraine as an interpreter since the Russian-Ukrainian war started in 2014. At that time there was a very small number of people from Ukraine here. They were coming and telling about the problems in the east of Ukraine and I learned a lot from their experiences and journey to Ireland.

After the whole-scale Russian invasion I decided to leave my job in IT and step back into helping refugees who were coming here to escape a horrible war and danger for their lives.

I am now working on “Oberih”, the joint project of ACET Ireland and Cairde, funded by the HSE. The purpose of the project is to support Beneficiaries of Temporary

Protection (BOTP) coming from Ukraine to Ireland due to the Russian invasion on 24 February 2022. Through Oberih we are supporting refugees to access services in Ireland, providing advocacy and education to tackle problems with health inequalities and other related issues.

**RC:** What might be involved in a typical week?

**NM:** Usually we have new clients every day — they come with one question and we usually solve more than five. They find us via social media, our website or through word of mouth. I use different means of communication to support each individual. If needed I signpost them to different organisations. Our project is concentrated on health advocacy and solving complex problems which BOTP face. As a Community Development Worker I attend networking events, collaborating with different communities and non-profit organisations to gather more valuable information. I also create and deliver training on different topics such as stress management and employment support, and we run a women's club "Afternoon tea". At the moment we are working on delivering a four week conversational English course in medical terminology/the human body so people are able to feel comfortable when attending medical institutions.

**RC:** What do you find most rewarding about the job?

**NM:** Everyday is not the same, bringing different challenges; sometimes new requests require us to research in order to find a solution. Sometimes we need to work outside working hours to support our clients but it is rewarding when you can hear they have, finally, found answers for their problems and are happy, and don't need to go anywhere else for help. And also to hear how clients can find us, usually recommended by a friend. For me it is very important to know that I am doing my job well.

**RC:** Many of us know about local responses around Ireland that were supporting Ukrainians when the war started but what has changed, or stayed the same, over the last year and a half?

**NM:** From my everyday experience and observation, organisations and departments involved in support of BOTP have created a lot of different types of support. These services are improving every month. Ukrainian refugees have access to free English classes, subsidised third level education, immediate employment: the same rights as other communities in Ireland.

Refugees from Ukraine who came one and a half years ago have settled here. They are integrating into local communities, attending events and communicating with locals, and have opportunities to live with host families and learn more about Irish culture and traditions. They still need psychological support, especially the newcomers, and advocacy on their rights and entitlements as they are moving forward in their life here. We need to bring awareness to topics like women's health, domestic abuse and sexual exploitation, as these issues arise in all communities. Also we need to explore different routes to make the qualification recognition process smoother to deliver more employees to the job market.

**RC:** What do you think the future holds for the Ukrainian beneficiaries of temporary protection in Ireland?

**NM:** As the situation in the world is difficult, migration has been a major issue during the past decade. The whole-scale invasion of Russia to Ukraine is pushing the population to search for safer territories.

Ireland is offering refugees from Ukraine temporary protection during the period of the war. Even though it is a "temporary" location for many, it is still important to understand and support individuals in everyday life: employment, medical systems, childcare, cultural development, communication, legal issues (rights and entitlements, responsibilities to obey the law). The government of Ireland has already implemented strategies to make the process of integration of Ukrainians as smooth as possible. However I can't emphasize more the role of community workers and non-profit organisations who are helping make the strategies and initiatives work.

From my experience of working with migrants and Ukrainian refugees we need to focus on improving their level of English, educate on women's and sexual health and HIV, promote volunteering among them (it will speed up their integration), and find how we can learn from the experience of other communities who have integrated into Irish life. When we focus on fixing the emotional and psychological state of BOTPs it will be much easier for them to dive into different aspects of human needs and activities.





## They did not say...: pondering Jeremiah and affirming words

Often we wish we hadn't said something or we wish we hadn't spoken out of turn. There can be a risk. However the opposite can be true. Recently I was reading the prophet Jeremiah where he says "and the people did not say". Israel was obliged to speak but did not. Israel was a community of utterance that failed to speak at a particularly critically difficult time in its history. This passage in scripture does not say what precisely they should have said or to whom they should have spoken. The important piece is that they did not say, so someone did not hear.

I was with a friend last week and she was telling the story of how when she got on a plane, the steward greeted her and said "Are you sad?" My friend took out the photo of her recently deceased husband and showed it to her and said, "This is why I'm sad: I have just lost him". The steward continued to converse with her. My friend said she so felt seen and heard by the airline steward, and that it had changed her journey.

There are times to speak out about injustices et cetera but this is not that kind of speaking. Rather this is the kind of speaking that creates an important moment of human connectedness. Later in the week I witnessed that same friend compliment someone on their disposition, another's clothes, and yet another her beautiful smile. I noticed how positively each one responded. It appeared in those moments that their souls were enlarged, just because someone had 'said' and another had 'heard'.

And pondering the Jeremiah passage I realise **the difference it could make in our world if we more often said the gentle, complimentary, validating, affirming word.** We so need true human interaction, the encounter of human essence to human essence. This can be brought about by simply saying something beautiful, kind, gentle and generous to another. This can change something profoundly in our being as the sayer, and in the being of the one to whom it is said.

— Vivienne Morrow-Murtagh



### Migrant Plus: Three Issues affecting Health and Wellbeing

As we are heading towards the end of the year, three issues catch our attention, as they have an impact on the health and wellbeing of migrants.

First, after a quite unusual period of hot weather, **cold weather is coming our way**, with the predictable impact of this change on health.

Flu vaccine campaigns have started. This vaccine is now administered conjointly with Covid-19 vaccine, which makes sense as a rational use of resources and a way of facilitating immunisation access. But there is need to make sure that vaccine hesitancy observed at the height of the Covid-19 pandemic will not impact on the seasonal flu immunisation uptake. For migrants, targeted campaigns need to be reshaped in a way that takes into account learnings from past mistakes.

Second, **economic hardship** continues to severely impact migrant communities, with the cost of life and housing shortage being the top concerns. These two factors result in migrants giving low priority to preventive efforts to seek better health.

Third, at the community level, faith groups play a key role in contributing towards mental health and wellbeing of many migrants. Unfortunately, **many faith groups are suffering** from the lack of availability and prohibitive renting costs of warehouses they commonly use as places of worship. A number of groups or churches have ceased to operate; some have moved to online activities and in both cases, this results in a drop in the level and quality of support they normally provide to their members.

### A new partnership with UK charity Chiva



Chiva specialises in enhancing the health and psychosocial wellbeing of children, young people and adults living with HIV. **Aishling McCormack**, our Adult Support Worker maternity leave cover, has now finished her role and is stepping into a new position and exciting opportunity to develop and coordinate an age-specific project for young people and young adults living with HIV in Ireland.

The project aims to collaborate with clinic teams, social workers, and community workers to provide psychosocial and holistic support outside a medical model. Aishling plans to carry out one-to-one work and home visits, organise local peer group meet-up events and residencies, and facilitate different workshops around HIV, sexual health, and self-empowerment — as well as collaborating with Chiva and local organisations to create arts engagement projects.

We are very excited about this partnership and look forward to seeing the delivery of this fantastic project.

Photo from [chiva.org.uk](http://chiva.org.uk)



**MATILDA PROJECT**



## Matilda Project: Fostering Self-Sufficiency

We're working to bring more self-sufficiency to some of the poorest families in the 11 villages served by the Community Care Programme run by Willard.

### Chickens

Four poultry Income Generating Projects (IGPs) are now running. We've discovered that some supervision is needed for the boys who have chicks, to ensure they take care of them. When one of the Home Based Care volunteers agrees to take responsibility for an IGP the outcome improves significantly.

One of the destitute families (*right*) led by a grandmother who is almost blind and her son, who is terminally ill, with the support of a volunteer sold their first batch of broilers and made a profit of \$103. This income every two months is transformative: they had no income. The volunteer's work is acknowledged with three of the chicks. The volunteer ordered more chickens and they were delivered in August. A batch of 50 chicks with two bags of feed to raise them to the point of slaughter costs \$210.



### Groundnut harvest

As well as volunteers each receiving five kilos of maize seed as a token of appreciation before planting last year, a small number were willing to try growing groundnuts, so were given groundnut seed as well. Several harvested a good crop. Those, including Edith (*left*), were very pleased with the harvest. A by-product of growing groundnuts is that they fix nitrogen into the soil, which is important for plant growth.



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