



DEPAUL

Homelessness has no place

Community Befriending Impact Report 2021

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A Roundup of the Year

This year's Depaul Community Befriending Impact Report is written during a summer when society has fully reopened and people across Ireland are once again enjoying meeting up, attending events and taking holidays. Our participants wholeheartedly embraced the resumption of in-person activities. Demand for events and outings increased by 79% making this a rewarding 12 months.

Along with the increased attendance at events, we observed a change in thinking among the men who use the service. People who availed of 1:2:1 link-ins but rarely attended events not only began to join in the activities, but started to shape and design the kind of events that were offered.

Kick starting group activities of course also allowed us to access one of our most effective tools, peer support. Introducing new referrals to the service to long-term participants creates a nurturing environment where newbies are able to avail of the wisdom that long-term participants have gained. Community participants thrived in their tenancies and I'm happy to report that 100% of tenancies were sustained.

As ever, the Community Befriending team is indebted to the volunteers and partners without whom our work would not be possible, but I would especially like to thank our funders for continuing to believe in the work of the team and for supporting our Mission:

“To end homelessness and change the lives of those affected by it.”



Warmest regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Tina Hawkins". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Tina Hawkins

Depaul Community Befriending Coordinator

The Impact of Your Support

Depaul Community Befriending encourages and helps people to discover their potential, seize opportunities, and develop a stake in the community through a range of interventions and activities. The small team operating from Back Lane in Dublin 8 builds confidence in the long-term residents of the hostel by encouraging them to participate in events, supports short-term residents at the point of moving on through capacity building and acts as an extended family for community participants who have re-established themselves in the community. With your support this year **47 men participated in the programme in 2021, an 18% increase on the previous year.** The increase in engagement in the service was driven very much by the fact that having spent extended periods in isolation, the men were now eager to attend in person events where they could meet others.

The men really pushed themselves opting for outdoor activities that took them out of their comfort zone. The group hiked Bray Head, took a boat trip out to Ireland's Eye and had regular coffee mornings, games of soccer and gardening sessions in Back Lane's picturesque garden. Kayaking was an activity the Befriending team never would have considered for all sorts of reasons including health and safety, but the men were determined to try it and it was the most popular event of the year. In total **23 events took place, a very noticeable 28% increase on 2020.** The events were always full and the team had to enlist additional volunteers to manage the numbers! There were **131 sign-ups for events in 2021, an enormous 79% increase on sign-ups in 2020.**

Community Befriending Outcomes

Together with your help in 2021 we:



men to develop their stake in the community.
an **18%** increase on the previous year.



a **14%** increase in
comparison to 2020



As well as getting out and about, the men more than ever wanted to be involved in decision making and the planning of the events. Depaul aims to increase service user's opportunities to meaningfully influence service design and delivery and Depaul Community Befriending is a wonderful vehicle for service user engagement. The service user led Social Committee meets quarterly so that the group can agree on what events will take place over the coming months. All meetings have an agenda and minutes are taken.

Outside of the events the men began to see themselves differently and developed clear boundaries. A participant who worked in catering changed jobs and moved into retail where the hours suit him more and the work feels less stressful. Another participant who secured his own tenancy last year is in his early 70's and has recently joined a drama group.



A Volunteer Led Approach

As well as being service user led, Befriending is of course volunteer led. To meet the increased demand for events and activities more volunteers were required and 24 people volunteered in 2021, a 9% increase on the previous year. 6 of these volunteers were from the European Solidarity Corps (ESC). The ESC is a programme which helps young people volunteer in projects throughout Europe. Every year Depaul makes opportunities available in its services through Leargas who manage the programme. In 2021 the volunteer agreement that volunteers work within was updated to include volunteering with Depaul Community Befriending for the year. This ensures that a regular stream of 6 new volunteers will come on board each year creating more stability for the programme.





From the Basque Country to Back Lane

Irene, who was a Befriending volunteer in 2021, is from Basque country in Spain. Already established in her career as a dentist, her dream was to take a year out and volunteer overseas. She discovered Depaul through the ESC. Depaul's vision, mission and values spoke to Irene and so as she was just about to turn 30 she decided to take a sabbatical and travel to Ireland to volunteer with Depaul in Back Lane and with the Depaul Community Befriending service.

Restrictions were in place when Irene began volunteering. Social distancing was still required as were face coverings and in person meetings with participants were not permitted for a period of time. This is where remote service delivery came into effect. Through video calls Irene connected

with participants online, built trust and established relationships. She met participants online regularly, shared recipes, did crosswords and quizzes and just talked to people about how they were feeling and how their day was going.

When restrictions eased Irene was matched with a community participant who had just moved out of Back Lane and they began to regularly link-in with each other in person. They enjoyed coffees together, met in the park, went for walks and attended events, a highlight being a walk to the summit of Bray Head. Reflecting on her experiences volunteering with Depaul Community Befriending Irene stated that she was firstly very grateful to Depaul for giving her the opportunity. Initially, during lockdown, it was challenging but she adapted quickly to remote ways of working and things got much easier. She learned how to be creative so that she could keep reaching people and keep building relationships with Befriending participants when they needed help most. Then when restrictions eased it was so enjoyable and rewarding to finally meet people in person.





New Developments through Collaboration

Depaul believes that a joined up response is needed to prevent homelessness and to achieve the best outcomes for service users. Internally the Depaul Community Befriending team works closely with staff in Back Lane accepting new referrals on an ongoing basis and getting updates on how the longer-term residents are doing. Externally the team are in constant contact with healthcare professionals working with the men, with social services managing benefits and with new and existing employers. Depaul's Community Befriending team is part of the Befriending Network Ireland (BNI), an umbrella organisation for befriending groups nationwide. Through BNI the Depaul team began using "Hi Digital" a step-by-step course designed for anyone who needs a bit of help developing their digital skills. It consists of free online courses covering the basics of the internet, how to use digital devices and social media. These courses have really helped to upskill the men, enhance their day to day lives and combat isolation. The courses are also an excellent way for volunteers to engage with their participants as they can walk them through the different modules and provide help when needed.



Stephen's Story

Stephen was born in Meath Street in the heart of Dublin's Liberties. He has spent most of most of life living in the area, apart from a few spells on and off living in England where he worked on building sites. Due to ill health and sadly suffering multiple bereavements in a short space of time Stephen moved into Back Lane and was a resident there for several years. During this time there he trained as a tour guide and with his extensive knowledge of Dublin's inner city he led groups of tourists on interesting tours around town. In 2019 with the help of staff in Back Lane Stephen secured his own apartment and moved back to independent living. Stephen enjoyed his regained independence and began volunteering with Depaul's Homeless Health Peer Advocacy Programme (HHPA). HHPA is a volunteer led service that supports people who are currently homeless to better understand their healthcare needs. The Befriending service was always made available to Stephen and although he participated very little he appreciated the phone calls and invites to link ins and events.

During Covid things took a turn for Stephen. He had a fall and sustained a serious injury and spent 3 months in hospital. When he was discharged from hospital restrictions were still in place and he became very isolated. Depaul Community Befriending has no end and the service is available to people for as long as they need it and people always have the freedom to refer back for support. The Befriending team reached out to Stephen and invited him to attend an event. He then became a very active member of the group participating in kayaking, games of football, trips to museums, to parks and to the beach. When asked to reflect on his time with Befriending since re-joining the group Stephen said:

“I have been on several fun filled days out with Befriending. When I went kayaking on the Liffey with the group I enjoyed it tremendously. It was ideal for me as Covid was around and I was in recovery from an operation and had spent nearly all my time alone. Befriending is a very good way to get to know new and interesting people and has helped me through some lonely times. You meet non-judgemental people who always welcome you with a smile.”

Thank You!

The past year has shown us how integral Community Befriending is in preventing homelessness. Our volunteers pivoted quickly to online service provision and some of the new techniques employed will stay in place in the long term. However we know for certain that there is no substitute for in person gatherings. The sense of intimacy, connection and empathy that they provide is invaluable, this is what Befriending is all about and it is made possible by you. Thank you.



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