

DESPAIR

HOPE

PIETA HOUSE

is preventing self-harm
and suicide in Ireland



The Ireland Funds continue their commitment to addressing the issue of suicide and self-harm across the island of Ireland. Over \$700,000 has been given to organizations that are addressing the issue and shaking off the stigma of a topic that touches so many Irish families. According to a recently published Global Health Survey 2011, almost a quarter of Irish people have had personal experience with mental illness or been affected by suicide in their age group. In any one week, 10+ people will die by suicide in Ireland and even more will self-harm.

Pieta House is one organization addressing the issue of suicide and self-harm that has received support from The Ireland Funds' 2011 Grant Round enabled by the Promising Ireland Campaign. Founded in 2006 by Joan Freeman, a practicing psychologist who has dedicated her career to working with those who are suicidal, the organization has helped nearly 4,000 people in Ireland. Pieta House now has almost 60 therapists and staff and in 2011 opened two new Centres in Ballyfermot and Limerick.

What Makes Pieta House Unique?

By focusing on the immediate needs of people who are in crisis, Pieta House provides key care to families and individuals who once had only their local hospital to turn to. Pieta House is not a long-term counseling service although they ensure that clients who need these longer term resources can access them. Whether referred by a doctor, family member, or friend, clients receive intense counseling and one-to-one therapies. Clients in crisis can often be seen the same-day they contact Pieta House. Once engaged, the pace of the treatment is highly individualized for each client though a typical engagement would be between four to six weeks. Most importantly, services are entirely free of charge. The cost to Pieta House to provide these services at their five centres across Ireland is over €1.3 million annually. Over 80% of their operating costs must be covered by fundraising and donations. This is why funding from sources such as The Ireland Funds is so vital.

Addressing the Stigma and Changing Ireland

Founder Joan Freeman explained how difficult it has been in Ireland to talk about suicide.

"Historically, Ireland has had a particularly complicated and difficult relationship with suicide. Despite an improved awareness of suicide in Irish society through personal experience and National Office of Suicide Prevention research, there still appears to be an unwillingness to openly discuss or debate the issue. In the past, a stigma attached to suicide led to under-reporting in coroner reports. Every day more people die through suicide than road traffic accident, yet suicide prevention budgets do not reflect this. With suicide in Ireland on the rise, it is very clear that there is a need for services like Pieta House. In 2009 there were 527 reported deaths by suicide, an increase of 24 per cent on the previous year. I feel that attitudes need to change if Ireland is to properly deal with the issue of suicide.

One of the obstacles to Pieta House is getting people to see that behind suicide is not always a psychiatric issue but is a reaction to a very human experience. We see that most people who come to us have no psychiatric history but are reacting to a life event such as bereavement, or a relationship break up, bullying, all those sort of things. It's trying to get that message across because there is still a stigma attached. Once people start realising what it is, then we can do something concrete about it."

The Ireland Funds have assisted Pieta House with a grant focusing on providing one-to-one counseling services for children and adolescents under the age of 18 at their Dublin location. This grant is enabled by our donors' gifts to The Ireland Funds Promising Ireland Campaign. But more than just the grant, The Ireland Funds have helped Pieta House look at itself in a new light. Joan Freeman said of this support, "The wonderful news is that the Promising Ireland Campaign is actually saving lives. Our attitude towards ourselves has changed dramatically because of The Ireland Funds. Before we saw ourselves as a charity, we no longer think of ourselves as a charity. Now we like to ask people to invest."

PIETA HOUSE ULTIMATELY AIMS TO ESTABLISH ADDITIONAL REGIONAL CENTRES THAT WILL ALLOW THE ORGANIZATION TO PROVIDE SERVICES WITHIN 60KM TO EVERY PERSON IN IRELAND.

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