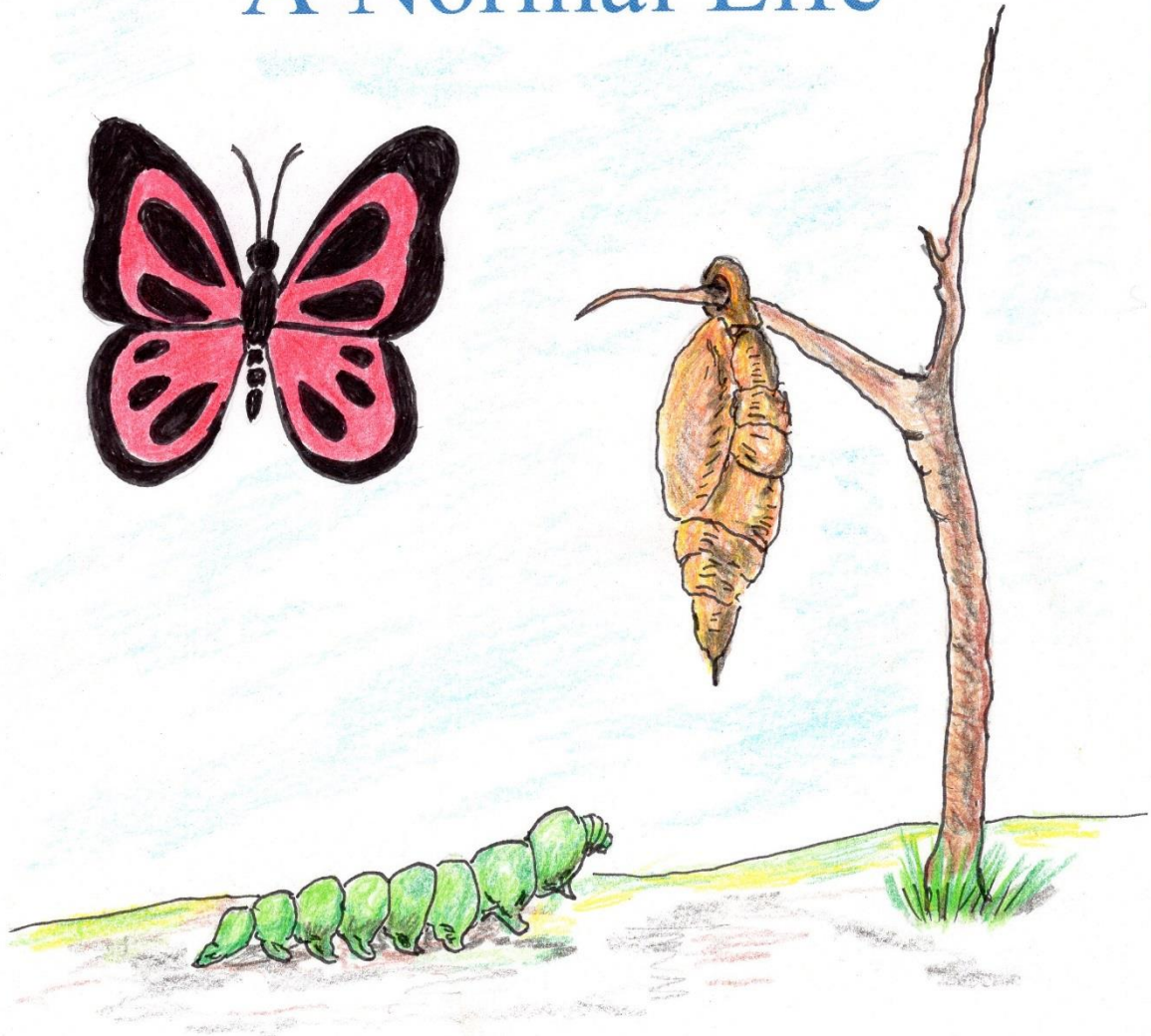
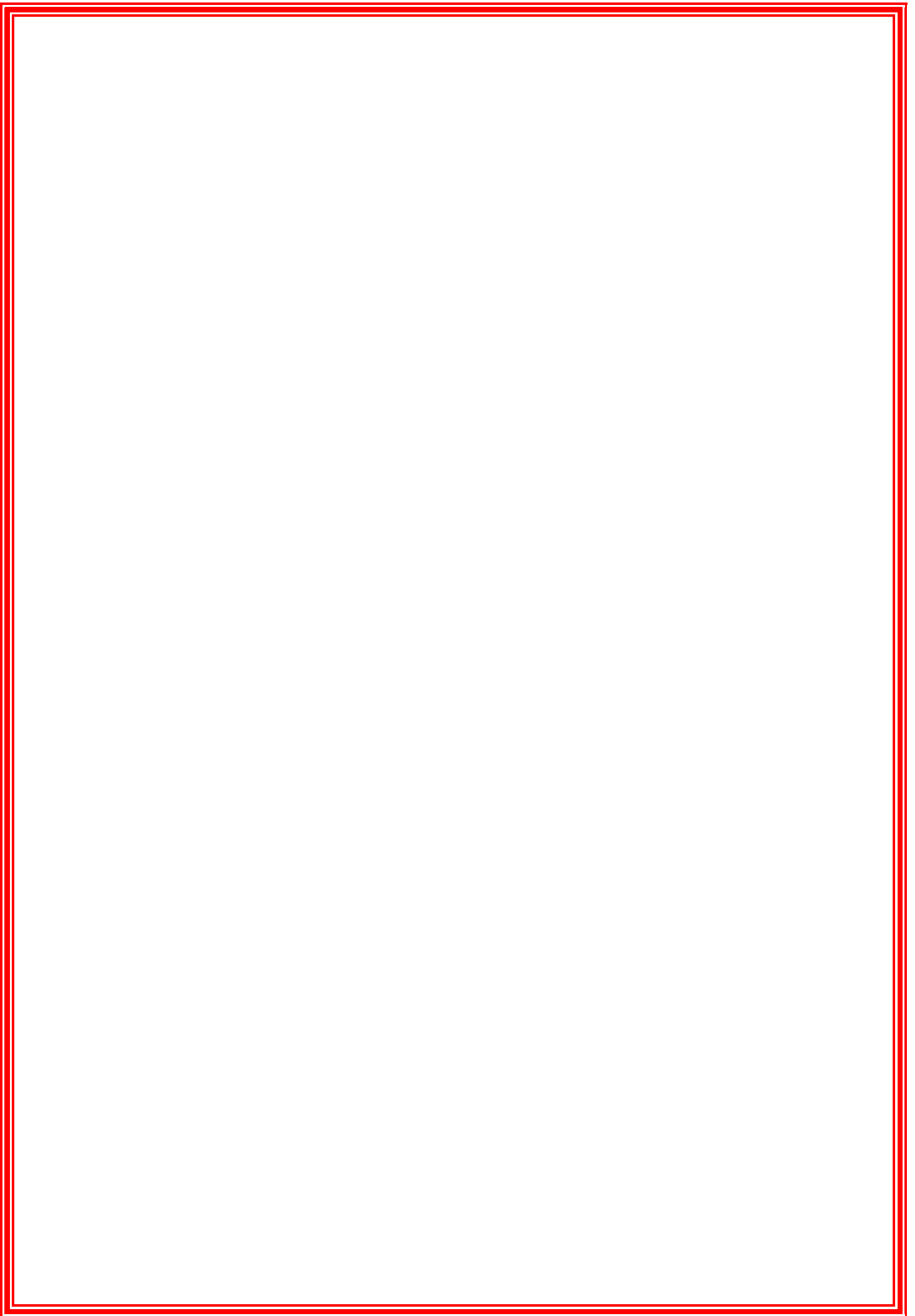


A Normal Life



Stories of Recovery as told to the students of
New Cross College by the clients of RASP





Acknowledgements

This book was created thanks to the combined efforts of the clients and staff of RASP Community Rehabilitation Centre and the students of New Cross College.

The idea behind this book was to educate our students about the dangers of alcohol and drug addiction. We could think of no better way to do that than to ask the people who have been on that journey. We also wanted our students to meet and interview the wonderfully inspiring clients of RASP and learn how they had managed to overcome their addictions and turn their lives around.

When we initially approached RASP General Manager Pat Hanna our project was little more than an idea. His enthusiasm, patience and encouragement as the project progressed was invaluable. We could not have completed this project without his help.

The clients of RASP who spoke to our students gave freely of their time. We hope that our book has done their remarkable stories justice. Their patience, kindness and honesty has left a lasting impression on our students and taught them more about addictions than we could ever have hoped. It has also taught our students about determination, resilience, courage and the strength of the human spirit in the face of seemingly insurmountable challenges. The contributors to this book have left a lasting positive impression on our students and all of them have been enriched as a result of this project.

Special thanks to Pat Hanna and all the staff at RASP. Mr John Finn New Cross College for his wonderful artwork and his help in setting up our initial meetings. Miss Aoife Traynor for her technical expertise and the teachers in our English Department for their proof reading. Finally thanks to the wonderful clients of RASP, without them this book would not have been possible.

Ciaran O Doherty
JCSP Librarian
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Cappagh Road
Finglas

This initiative covered the following JCSP Statements

English	E1 Personal Experience Writing E3 Creative Writing
CSPE	CSPE1 The Individual, Community & Society
Cross Curricular Statements	CC36 Positive Communication CC38 Relationships: Self & others CC3 Working with others CC6 Cross Curricular Project
SPHE	SPHE1 Alcohol & Smoking SPHE2 Legal & Illegal Substances

Sinead's Story

I have been in recovery for 9 years. I have two children a boy aged 27 and a girl aged 29. I left school aged 13, I had struggled with dyslexia and I can remember a teacher slapping me in school because I couldn't read. My childhood was very difficult. My father was an alcoholic, he was controlling and aggressive and I grew up in fear of him. My father discouraged me from

showing my emotions telling me not to cry. As a result I found it extremely difficult to find the language for my emotions.

“I learned that drugs can ruin your life and it can be very hard to recover. Also it can be just one thing that makes people change their lives. In Sinead’s case it was seeing her daughter crossing the street when she saw her drugged up mother”.

Karl Hennessy New Cross College

As a teenager I began dabbling in alcohol, aerosols, cannabis and magic mushrooms. I was a teenage mum and at 20 I started getting into drugs on the rave scene. I started with ecstasy before progressing onto heroin and by the time I was 24 I had been on heroin for 2 years. Heroin started to take over my life and I found that I reached a point where I couldn’t get my kids out to school. At this point I began getting into relationships with men who were involved with drugs.

“All I ever dreamed of when I was using was of a normal life. Just to be OK”.

In 1997 I went on methadone and it was at this point that I started committing crimes. The Garda would regularly raid the family home but never found anything incriminating. During this period my daughter went to live with her grandmother. Shortly afterwards my son also left the family home. Drugs were now starting to seriously affect my health and I developed septicaemia. I was given the last rights whilst I was being treated in hospital. I considered taking my own life as I felt that I was getting into a deeper and deeper hole and I could see no way out.

I remember one day my daughter coming down the street towards me. I was still taking drugs at the time and when she saw me she crossed over. This incident finally gave me the strength to start turning my life around and I entered into recovery. I sought help and a General Assistant sent me to see a counsellor who was in recovery himself. This counsellor gave me options and more importantly hope, something I only realised afterwards.

“The addiction is in your mind, drugs are not the addiction”.

In 2008 I went into detox, entering Cooldara in Cherry Orchard on a 6 week recovery programme. Unfortunately I was asked to leave after 10 days after I had taken Valium. I returned to rehab a second time, suffering a stroke which left me unable to work for a period. On this occasion I took heroin the day I left rehab.

“Sinead’s story is amazing, she is very brave. She almost died but she was still able to pick herself back up and beat her addiction. Congratulations to her on graduating”.

Ava Tennyson New Cross College

On February 6th 2009 I took drugs for the last time, having made a commitment to enter into recovery. I started attending Narcotic’s Anonymous Meetings on a regular basis having first started attending as part of my detox sessions. I was 50 days clean when I attended my first meeting. I got strength and power from the meeting through the fellowship and support of others. As a result I then began attending regularly.

Through Narcotic's Anonymous, I became involved with SOILSE an education based abstinence programme. SOILSE expects those taking part on their programme to be drugs free. I attend NA Meetings at RASP every Thursday. I enjoy helping other people at these meetings, particularly women. Through my association with NA I attend two NA Conventions in Ireland every year. In 2016, I attended the NA Convention in Portugal. I found the experience very inspirational and I felt that the convention gave great hope to everyone that attended.

“Even though Sinead had a tough childhood she still managed to turn her life around when she became addicted. She realised that there was help out there and she went and got it”.

David McDonnell New Cross College

Through my recovery I have repaired my relationship with my own parents. So much so, that they came to live with me for 6 months whilst my father recovered from illness. I also realised that my father has his own problems. He was abandoned by his mother as a 7 year old child and survived an accident that killed his brother and his best friend. He has never been able to free himself from his past and still drinks to block out his demons.

Whilst attending SOILSE I completed FETAC Levels 3, 4 & 5. I then completed a Diploma in Drugs & Alcohol Work, a Degree in Social Science and a Master's Degree in Public Policy. I complete my degree at the same time as my daughter and we graduated together. I now live at home with my daughter after we rebuilt our relationship. “I feel very grateful, I have an amazing life. I don't have a lot of things or lots of money, but I have an amazing life. I'm free, I'm free from addiction”.

An excerpt from "Late at Night"

Lyrics by Philip McGauley

*Four in the morning when they arrive
Pull off the covers to my surprise
Name address have you something to hide
Just checking mate that you're still alive*

The body hurts bad

The head is weak

I'm starting to smell

I'm starting to stink

Liam's Story

The RASP Smart Fit Programme has helped my recovery in a big, big way. I am currently homeless and living in a transition house. You can get bored very easy. I was cross addicted to alcohol and drugs. I will be 1 year clean next week.

I began drinking alcohol aged 13, trying to be a hard man. I was drinking vodka and wine. My father had died through alcohol aged 55. I took his death very badly. We had got on great. My mother had died of cancer aged 43 and I had also lost 2 sisters. My father's death brought everything back.

"If I thought there was alcohol in the Liffey I would have jumped into it".

I was always a heavy drinker, I blocked everything out with drink. I then moved on to drugs. I started smoking hash when I was 15, I never really liked it. Then I got to know people in discos and for a very long time I

started using ecstasy, speed and acid. At that time cocaine was a rich man's drug.

I started using cocaine around the age of 19. I would order it 3 days in advance. I was working at the time but I began missing days at work. The cocaine was having an effect on me but I didn't see it, I was blinded by my addiction. At that point the world revolved around me, it was me, me, me. I was getting people to do things for me, I started stealing. When I was 25 I lost my job as a result of my addiction. I blamed my employers but it was my own fault.

I was 34 when my father died and I went seriously heavy on the drugs and alcohol. I was drinking very, very large amounts of alcohol. I was stealing alcohol from shops, I wasn't eating. When I went into treatment for the first time I weighed 9 stone.

"I learned from Liam that addiction can cost you everything and it can happen to anyone. He also gave us great advice about not giving in to peer pressure".

Mary Doyeni New Cross College

I spent 3 months in Cumann Mhuire Athy Treatment Centre in Co. Kildare between November 2016 and January 2017. I completed a 3 month programme for alcohol addiction, but when I came out I didn't follow what they recommended. I rushed back into work and once I had paid my bills I used the money I had left to go on the rip again and on the drugs. I was relapsing and I started missing my meeting.

When I relapsed I hit the drugs and alcohol even harder. I realise now that guilt and shame played a part. My head was going round like a washing machine. I felt I had let my family down. I lost everything this time. My 3 kids, the house, the car everything. My engagement fell through as well.

At that time it was just complete devastation and destruction. I wasn't hanging around with the wrong crowd, I was part of the wrong crowd. I was taking bags of cocaine. I would waken up with the pillow stuck to my face with nose bleeds. I would get up go straight to the fridge and open a can then another one. That's addiction. I have done things to myself, harmed myself with alcohol and it's still legal. It's killing people all around the country. I was still living at home at this stage. My partner was living at her sisters until I moved out.

“Being in addiction is hell, it's destructive and devastating”.

By the time I went into treatment a second time in Kildare I had lost everyone and everything. I was homeless. No one came to visit me this time. Looking back, I thought I had done a good programme the first time. But I had only done half a programme. I did 6 and a half months there the second time. I knew what they were doing, they just kept saying to me, what's your rush? As an addict you have to earn patience, you want everything now. Keeping me there 6 months was the best thing that ever happened to me.

You can't beat addiction on your own. You have to want it yourself. The addict has to realise they need help. You have to want to do it for yourself, not someone else.

“I have met fantastic people in recovery, they would do anything for you. We are all the same”.

When I saw the flier for the RASP Smart Fit Programme I thought that programme's for me. I'm into sports, especially the GAA. It's brilliant for the head. I do the gym on Monday and Friday. Tuesday I attend fitness class

where we learn about the muscles. Wednesday is massage and computer classes and Thursday is addiction studies which I find very interesting.

I feel great now, I'm in fantastic form, especially since I started attending RASP. I'm back seeing my kids at the weekend. After treatment I built myself up gradually. I didn't know what to do or where I was going. This course was the best thing I ever did. I will do this level and go on and do the higher level after that.

"I found Liam's story very interesting. He lost everything through addiction, but he finally got help and he is in recovery now. What he did was really inspiring".

Abbie Cunningham Kinsella New Cross College

Addiction took everything away from me. I asked for help, it took me 2 attempts but hopefully I'm on top of it now. I still get compulsion, but I fight it. I pick up the phone or I go to a meeting. I know where I'm going now, I have options now. The people here are absolutely fantastic. They offer lots of support.

You have to be aware of triggers and deal with them. I had to ditch my old friends. I realise now that they were only addiction buddies. Not one of them ever came to visit me when I was in recovery. I have a new number now and I have made new friends in recovery. They are the best friends I have ever had. We support each other.

Before we finished Liam spoke to our students about the dangers of addiction. Active addiction is hell. Drugs are mind altering substances that can make you do terrible things. Prevention should begin with education, students should be made aware of addictions. Don't go down the road of addiction. Talk to people, friends, parents or teachers. If you see someone with a problem help them if you can. Never feel under pressure to take anything, always listen to your heart. It is telling you No.

Michael's Story

As a child growing up my father was an alcoholic and there was violence at home. I was born into addiction and I grew up with it. At the time I saw my father as a monster but I realised after that he needed help. Unfortunately there was no help in Dublin at that time. In the end up I left home at age 14.

"It is only when you listen to someone like Michael that you really understand the terrible damage that drugs can do to people.

Mary Doyeni New Cross College

I joined the army aged 17 and I served for 6 years. I liked the army, I liked the discipline. I then went to work at sea on a ship called the Kilkenny. I loved the sea, I remember hearing the whales at times when I was on the ships. I also worked as a galley boy on the Kildare - Rosslare - Cherbourg - Le Havre route. I then trained as a mechanic, I loved bikes. I went to work as a mechanic in Roxham, Norfolk in England. Whilst I was there I was drugs free.

"I don't think people with addictions should be sent to prison. Instead they should be sent to places like RASP to help them recover". We learned that in Portugal, addictions are seen as a medical problem and not as a crime. That is a good idea and something we should think about doing here in Ireland".

Mary Doyeni New Cross College

I came home for my father's funeral and began working with my brother. I ended up back on the drugs and as a result of my addiction I spent time in

prison. I was sent to the Bridewell and while I was there I went through withdrawal. That was an experience I wouldn't wish on my worst enemy. I was kept in a padded cell for the first week and that was the worst period. It was 3 months before I got my proper sleeping pattern back.

“After my last prison sentence I decided no more. I'd had enough of prison and I was getting old”.

As a result of my battle with addiction I lost contact with my family. I was determined to get my family back and regain their trust. I knew that the only way that I could do that was to stop lying. I always remember my father telling me “you cannot trust a liar”. It took time but I am back in contact with my family now but I acknowledge that it is not the same.

“What I have learned from this is that doing drugs doesn't only effect the person that's doing it. It also effects the people around you”. No one would deliberately chose to become an addict. Michael lost contact with his family and it took him a long time to win back their trust.”

Josh Bradley New Cross College

I have been attending RASP every day for 17 months and this is the only centre where I have felt a real family vibe. My interests now are music and art. I also play guitar and ukulele, I have even played gigs. I realise now that recovery is a journey and you have to want to do it yourself.

Teresa's Story

I have worked at RASP for the last 10 years and I am the Community Employment Supervisor. I was working for a multi-national company before I came here. I enjoyed the work so I retrained. My job involves managing support workers and key workers. RASP is funded by the Department of

Social Education, the Department of Education and Skills, the Department of Health and the Dublin North East Task Force.

Initially I worked with groups who were in addiction for a long period of time. I am currently working with the 18-24 year old group for the last 2 years. There are 9 in the group. In a number of cases cannabis addiction led to other addictions and then involvement in crime. I interview people at intake, a lot of our clients were early school leavers. My job involves setting up one to one meetings with clients and setting goals on their road to recovery.

“Most people end up doing drugs because of peer pressure”.

Here at RASP we run a range of in-house courses. Our 18-24 year olds have a great success rate getting into employment. We encourage our older clients to get involved in education and they find employment that way. If our clients show an interest in a particular career we will link them to an appropriate course and RASP will fund that course.

“Teresa made me realise how easy it is to get mixed up in drugs. How you can become involved even though you never intended to do that”.

Carl Geoghegan New Cross College

The most common form of addiction now is tablets, which cost €1 each. People are taking 6 tablets at a time and they soon build up a tolerance. Some people taking these tablets have no recollection of what they did. When you are young you want to experiment. You need to know the damage drugs can do, that you could become addicted. You can overdose, do embarrassing things in front of your friends. You need to be mindful, your brain is still developing. It's illegal, you can end up on charges. This can affect your career as charges appear on Garda vetting.

“Young people try drugs because their friends are doing it. You may buy it and then you are doing drug deals. Drugs are very expensive, you may be entering into a world where you run up drug debts. Also the drug scene now is much more violent that it used to be. You may be asked to hold something for someone to settle a drug debt. You are now in much deeper than you ever intended. Yet at the outset all you wanted was a joint”.

Drugs are a criminal business, these people are smart, they pick on vulnerable people. Drug use is now being normalised. It is alright to have a joint in the same way as it is alright to have a drink, but the harm being done isn't being highlighted.

There are 100 Community Employment places for people in addiction in Ireland. On the programme people work as employed participants in rehabilitation. Their job is to work on themselves and their recovery. Participants taking part in the Community Employment programme receive an extra €20 per week allowance on top of their social welfare. It is more for the under 24's. However many of the females who take part in the programme need childcare and it costs €15 which can be a disincentive to coming on the CE programme. This can create a gender imbalance on the Community Employment programme and this block to recovery has been highlighted around the country.

“There are so many different reasons for people ending up in addiction. One rule does not fit all”.

Occasionally when working with clients there are bouts of anger, but it isn't common. People are here because they want to come and when they complete the CE as a continuum of care they can join our aftercare programme. People have left the programme as their time is up and others

have died. That is sad because you build up relationships. We get clinical supervision to help the staff manage any stress and sadness that can occur in working in this field of addiction.

“Teresa explained how easy it was to become addicted to drugs. She told us, how in many cases cannabis led to addiction to other drugs. But, she also showed us how help is also out there and she told us about some of the programmes that RASP organised to help people who were trying to recover from addiction”.

Roy Baker New Cross College

When a client goes into residential treatment and becomes drug free it gives them so much more opportunity”. When they have come back, they are actively living their lives. Doors begin to open for them. It is a slow gradual thing, but you begin to see the change in people. They are more alive, able to make better choices, many people embrace education as the first time they were in education it was a horrible experience. When that happens there is great job satisfaction.

RASP Competition Entry

Let's Talk about Drugs

National Youth Media Awards Ceremony 2018

Escaping Reality

First off started with the papers and blunts, then it turned to a few little nasty stunts.

Fifteen years young with the cans of Dutch Gold, got these few joints rolled hope these pills take hold.

Double dropping yokes to escape reality, bodies in one place minds in another galaxy.

Heart rate increasing eyes to the ceiling, jaws start to rattle no escaping this feeling.

Then I fade to black so I'm given some white, few lines from the bag now I'm feeling alright.

Cotton mouth kicking in room starting to spin then I smoke this joint before my heart gives in.

I'm alone now thoughts flowing through my mind and I realise now I've been left behind.

Can I find a way out my minds in doubt stuck in this life time to branch out.

Cathal's Story

I attend RASP 3 days a week where I work as a support worker. I have completed 1st year Level 7 Certificate in Addiction Studies. I wanted to find out why I was drinking. I have now stopped drinking and using drugs. I had friends who stopped drinking but didn't deal with themselves. I wanted to understand why I was doing what I was doing. I would like to go on and complete the degree.

I started drinking at 13 with beer, cans and spirits, my father was an alcoholic. The alcohol led to drugs. I became addicted to alcohol and drugs, including cocaine ecstasy and weed. I also used recreational and prescription drugs, tramadol and solpadene. I became ill aged 28 due to an alcohol related illness. I had bleeding on the stomach and inflammation and I had to get a bag in my stomach. But I continued drinking until I was 32 before I realised the damage I was doing. In the A&E the doctor told me I would be dead before I was 50.

“I learned from this experience that those fighting drugs and alcohol addiction are not people that we should look down on. It takes a very strong person to come out of such a dark place. Cathal is obviously a very intelligent man who wanted to understand his addictions as well as overcoming them”.

Martha Brennan New Cross College

I would go on 4 day drink and drug sessions. I was working in the banking sector at the time. I was spending my entire wages on my addictions. At the start I was paying my bills but that eventually stopped. My relationship fell apart and I lost my house. I went to Australia and went on a year long bender. At age 28 I had lost my health, my relationship and my job. I had been drinking nearly every day, the drinking led to drugs and the drugs led to depression.

“For 15 years alcohol and drugs were an escape for me, from not liking myself and my responsibilities. But eventually they stopped working. Then at that point it was make or break. I decided I didn’t want to do it anymore. I wanted a better life”.

When I first started with alcohol it was a relaxant. I would be paranoid before I went into a pub, but the alcohol would relax me. However it led me to a dark place. The weed would leave me isolated with no motivation, it would stop me from doing anything. The weed then led to ecstasy and ultimately cocaine.

“When I was addicted I didn’t want to cope with life”.

When I turned 30 I knew I had to make changes. When I first went into therapy I realised I had problems with low self-esteem. CBT helped me to find new ways of coping and setting and achieving goals. Talk Therapy also taught me how to talk things through. I realised that addiction had cost me everything, my health, piece of mind, home, relationship and I had no money.

“There are young people in our area who drink and smoke weed regularly. I realise now that any of them could become addicted and mess up their lives through addiction”.

Martha Brennan New Cross College

“When I was in addiction I would go off it, but I kept going back to it. I was trying to fight addiction by myself. I isolated myself and I would end up drinking alone. I would go on benders and that would lead to anxiety. I became involved here when I saw an advert for RASP in the local dole office. I had been trying to fight my addiction by myself. The AA scared me, I thought there was another way. I started the Community Employment Scheme as a Support Worker, working with young lads who had addictions. A lot of those lads had the same experiences as I had. In many cases there was lots of trauma from early childhood.

“It was inspiring for me to meet a man who has gone through alcohol and drug addictions and who went to get help and who is now in recovery. It is also inspiring that he is now helping others in addiction to recover”.

Simone Daly New Cross College

At RASP I work on setting weekly goals, exercising and being part of the local community. The education also helps to keep me focused. There are a lot of great people at RASP and they offer support and they have ended my

isolation. CBT leads you to challenge negative thinking that leads to anxiety. I find that thinking makes me much more methodical, exercise is also a great help and I can always meet someone for a chat.

I feel much better now, everything has flipped on its head. I now know why I do things and I have better coping strategies. I am a much happier person, life is easier now. I have mended my relationships with my family and ex-partner and my health has improved dramatically. I have a lot of hope for the future.

An excerpt from "Late at Night"

Lyrics by Philip McGauley

People walk by in the dead of night

Stare at the mess

Is he all right

He's out to the world

He's properly high

If we don't do something he's going to die

Maybe he's hurting

Maybe he's sick

Let's call an ambulance

Make it quick

Please move on

Please just go

I just want to listen to my radio

Four in the morning when they arrive

Pull off the covers to my surprise

Name address have you something to hide

Just checking mate that you're still alive

Joe's Story

I attend RASP three or four hours every day. My addictions were weed and ecstasy. I started smoking weed in 5th year. At that time I was sneaking into night clubs and I began using ecstasy. I also used MDMA which I smoked and coke. I was always trying to get the best high. The tablets cost €5 each and I was taking two or three at a time. When I took ecstasy my heart would be racing. I would be sweating and my jaw would be grinding. I felt that when I took drugs I became more confident and talkative but in reality I was just making a fool of myself. I took five ecstasy tablets on my birthday and I remember constantly biting my lip. When I woke the following morning my lip was badly swollen.

At school I was into basketball and gaming and I was in the higher group throughout junior school. But I was then put into LCA and I was no longer able to see my old mates in school. I then started going out to clubs with the LCA lads, I was just trying to fit in and I became a victim of peer pressure. But there was also the attraction of trying something new.

“You always have friends when you are taking drugs, but they aren't real friends”.

But I lost my real friends. To this day I would still like to go and meet with my old mates and just enjoy gaming with them. But they saw me in some awful states. They literally, took drugs off me and threw them away. At the time I was snapping, but looking back now, I would have done the same thing. When I think back now I remember that bills were always an issue at home. When I was taking drugs I remember thinking if I wasn't spending money on drugs I could help my family pay our bills.

“The drugs were causing me to have panic attacks along with paranoia”.

When I was using drugs in my teens I didn't hang out with my younger brother. I wasn't there for him and he started selling and holding drugs for other people. I remember one time I discovered ecstasy tablets and coke in my younger brother's room. It's bad enough seeing yourself in addiction, but it's even worse seeing your younger brother going through it because it ruins your life.

He agreed to hold €30,000 worth of drugs for someone shortly before he was due to go on a trip to Amsterdam. He hid the drugs in the local park until he returned. But he was stitched up and whilst he was away the drugs were stolen. The whole thing got very scary with threats being made and a pipe bomb was thrown at our house. In the end up my step-dad resolved the issue. He gave my brother €7000 to pay to the dealer.

“What I really liked about Joe is that he thought about his family. His family were struggling to find the money to pay their bills and he was thinking if he wasn't spending money on drugs he could help his family out with the bills”.

Jamie Dunleavey New Cross College

I dropped out of college and I was on the dole for six months. At that point someone recommended RASP to me. The first thing I realised when I came here was that no one was judging me. I could have serious conversations with staff and clients. The staff had gone through the same things that I was going through and they would encourage and support me. If I wasn't coming here I would still be under the covers smoking my brains out every day.

Here in RASP they want you to get a job where you can make good money. If you want to, you can educate yourself further here. They encourage you to

push yourself. I have completed courses on Anger Management, Stress Management and Music Production and they have opened up paths for me to complete other courses.

“They want you to make the best of yourself here”.

I am interested in doing loads of things now. I enjoy the social aspect to sport and exercise. Afterwards you feel energised, I regularly cycle out to Raheney, it gives me a bit of me time. I would like to go back to college and do barbering or design. Ideally I would like to start my own business. But what I really want to do is educate myself and keep learning.

“Joe got into drugs when he was younger to fit in with the crowd. He warned us not to give in to peer pressure. I learned from him to stay away from drugs because you can lose your friends and family”.

Jamie Dunleavy New Cross College

I'm feeling grand now, I have a lot more confidence, I have come out of my shell. I know I can go out now and not take drink or drugs. But I know that if I take a drink or two the temptation is there to take some drugs. But I realise now that if I can get through one day I can get through the next day.

An excerpt from “Late at Night”

Lyrics by Philip McGauley

Sun comes up

Dawn of a day

*I know I can't be here
I know I can't stay
Where do I go
What's in store
Pack up the kit
Get away from the door*

*A girl going to work around 8:30
Comes across something lifeless and dirty
She got a little closer
Saw it was a mess
Another victim of homelessness*

*You know it's wrong
You know it's not right
To sleep in doorways late at night
The sun goes down
The street is dead
People pass by going home to bed*

Anne's Story

I was one of seven children. My father was a chronic, high functioning alcoholic and my mother took a lot of valium. As the eldest child I looked after the rest of the children. I first started taking drugs when I was aged 16. I started with hash, then LSD in TY. I was trying to impress other people. As a child I was always trying to impress others, particularly my father who was never happy with my achievements.

"I don't blame my parents for my addiction. I made the choice."

I started taking ecstasy in the 1990's it was huge in Dublin at the time. I started secondary school in 1989. Since then 107 people I was in school with have died from drugs. No one at home was checking what I was getting up to at that time. I began using heroin (then called Yak) without realising it was heroin. I was using heroin to come down off ecstasy. Shortly after I started taking heroin I took ill on a holiday in Spain. I only realised later that I was going through cold turkey. I had become addicted to heroin within 3 weeks.

“During our interview Anne said to us, Show me your friends and I will show you your future. That stayed with me”.

Leon O'Brien New Cross College

Looking back some of my darkest days were with drugs. I was dying slowly. I was paying to die. My low point was when I came into some money totalling €22,500. Shortly after, my daughter, who was an Irish Dancing World Champion wanted to attend a competition in Belfast. I went to withdraw money and there was nothing left in my account. I had to tell my daughter we couldn't go. I had spent all that money in seven weeks. I took my daughters to their grandmother and asked her to keep them for a while. I then went back to my house, locked myself in and went cold turkey.

“While I was doing cold turkey a drug dealer tried to contact me as he hadn't heard from me, I was ignoring his calls. He text me he had got new stuff in and called by and dropped some bags in through the letterbox.”

When I look back now I realise I wasn't there emotionally for my children. I have two boys and two girls. Emotionally I was absent from their lives. It is only now that I am building that relationship. I hurt a lot of people when I

was in addiction. I broke my mother's heart taking drugs. I was a nasty person, I didn't care.

"It is clear that heroin is highly addictive and hearing about the damage it does first hand is incredibly eye-opening". Anne's story is amazing and she needed great strength to overcome her drug addiction".

Nathan McConvey Willis New Cross College

When I made the decision to try and get clean I had to get rid of my phone and stop socialising with my "friends and dealers". I realise now I had no friends when I was in addiction, I only had acquaintances. I got clean off and on. But if you build a sandcastle it will eventually fall down because it has no foundations.

"I was shocked to learn how quickly you could become addicted to heroin.

Anne became addicted to it within 3 weeks without even realising she was taking heroin. I found that really shocking".

Nathan McConvey Willis New Cross College

When I got clean I had foundations in the form of counsellors and keyworkers. I realised that these people were happy and they weren't taking drugs. I wanted that, that became my new addiction. The counsellors were there when I cried or got angry, their strength kept me going. This place saved my life. I came here 16 months ago. I was broken, I had no self-esteem. But I have a wonderful life now. The important thing is to be happy in yourself, to get back to the moment. I now play ukulele in two bands. Yesterday I got my hair and nails done, I would never have done that before. I realise now that the world is your oyster.

“Anne said her darkest days were when she was taking drugs. She said that drugs were killing her, that she was paying to die. I was shocked to hear that. It made me realise how drugs can ruin your life. It was great that Anne was able to get clean in the end”.

Karl Hennessy New Cross College

Robert's Story

I started smoking hash aged 12 then moved on to speed aged 15 and E's aged 16. I wanted to try things, I was a punk originally but then I started raving for the better buzz. I left school after Junior Cert and went to work with my father in his fruit & veg business for three years. I then went to work at Tree.com.

“During the 90's the only thing I thought I was good at was drugs. During that time I could only tell you I was good or bad, I couldn't tell you why”.

I was on the rave scene for seven years and during that period I was smoking now and then. In 1999 I began smoking every day. I worked through most of my addictions and I only stopped working when I went on methadone.

“I learned that you can lose your family, your home and your job through drugs. It can simply be because you got in with the wrong crowd at the start when all you wanted was a smoke”.

Karl Hennessy New Cross College

I had completed a City & Guilds Course in Software Testing but I couldn't get a job. During interviews people knew something wasn't right. I realise that now. I did detox in St. Michael's Beaumont. I was in a positive frame of mind at the time so the detox wasn't too bad for me. I also attended Trinity Court for 4 years, I was working for the City Council at the time. I must have seen 50 doctors while I was there. One doctor gave me tablets which completely knocked me out. I discovered they were for schizophrenia. The doctor told me he gave them to me because I told him I was hearing voices. But I had only told him what I was thinking.

“Robert worked hard to overcome his addiction. It couldn't have been an easy journey. Fair play to him”.

Andrew Nicholl New Cross College

I kept myself off drugs for almost 2 years but then I started back on the hash again. I thought I would be able to control it. But at that stage I wasn't aware what being addicted fully meant.

In 2006 I relapsed after a relationship broke down. I ended up back on the rave scene smoking heroin. I was in emotional pain at the time. But during my time in rehab I had learned about myself. I tried to control my addiction.

“On methadone I was like a government sponsored addict”.

In 2007, I went back to college and I completed a 2 year course in Computer Systems & Networking. I wanted to get educated and rebuild my life. I was offered a place at Sunderland University but I discovered soon after that I had a diabetic eye disease so I didn't go. I let that eye disease dictate my life.

Between 2012 and 2014 I was involved with the Donnycarney Youth Project. I went through eye surgery and at the time I was in a really dark place. I felt I

would never get off methadone. I was doing nothing, just smoking my days away until about two years ago.

“Meeting Robert was eye-opening. Before this if I saw an addict I assumed it was their choice. I realise now that no one choses to become an addict”.

Nathan McConvey Willis New Cross College

But I was getting bored and I thought I'm better than this. I deserve more. I wasn't living I was existing. Those feelings had been building up inside me for a while. I wasn't taking part in my life. I was sick of every day being the same.

I spoke to my doctor who put me in touch with RASP. I have been here four weeks now. I am still on methadone which I receive once a week. It doesn't get me stoned it just stops the withdrawals. I will be coming down from 50mls to 45mls next week.

“You are selfish when you are an addict. You don't realise what you do to people”.

I have started rebuilding my life, I am a lot more positive. I have a sense of purpose every day now. When I come to RASP I am surrounded by positive people and being here gives me time to think about what I want to be. I have started trying to learn how to play the ukulele, because I love all good music from punk to classical. It isn't easy but there is a good atmosphere in the room. Here at RASP I am among people who want to get on with their lives whilst being drug free.

Pat's Story

RASP celebrates its 25th Anniversary this year and the Minister of Education will be attending. Pat is the Managing Director at RASP and has been working there 10 years. RASP will have up to 20 clients at any one time. It runs morning and afternoon sessions. Afternoon sessions are for 18-24 year olds. These sessions work towards stabilisation and progression and RASP work hard on programmes, group therapy and counselling. Clients attend RASP voluntarily and all services are free. Through Community Employment Programmes clients can receive extra dole if they attend drug programmes. RASP works hard to create a caring environment. Over the years it has become much more "kind central". There is now a continuum of care model. You can always return if you need additional supports.

"Recovering from drugs is not about taking away the drugs. The addiction is still there. It is about finding out why you started taking drugs".

When it comes to dealing with drug addiction Pat supports the Portuguese model, which has decriminalised drugs and views drug addiction not as a crime but as a health problem.

"My experience at RASP was eye opening. It made me realise that anyone can become addicted. I also realised that if you are drinking or taking drugs you are self-harming. No one chooses to become addicted".

Nancy Kuti New Cross College

In many cases clients are methadone users, a less damaging legal drug. Those at risk of overdose are given methadone which they usually get once

per week. When clients attend RASP all their drugs belonging to them are checked in and locked away until they leave.

Many people who take drugs can stop. But when you can't stop, it's then that it becomes a problem. Cannabis when it first appeared was maybe only 10% strength. Those who took it would end up with the giggles. However modern cannabis is a much stronger drug. Much of it is home grown and 100% strength and people smoking cannabis now are getting the biggest highs of their lives. Add to that the fact that dealers are spraying cocaine onto the leaves and it is not hard to see why it has become even more of a gateway drug.

“I learned that many people use drugs to forget about the pain or hardships they are going through. As Pat said “addiction is trying to deal with pain in a very ineffectual way”.

Fiona Kareem New Cross College

Addiction is a way of anaesthetising pain. In many cases difficulties have been ongoing from an early age as a result of trauma in early life. Addiction is trying to deal with pain in a very ineffectual way. So before they can take their place back in society people need to heal. The final question I asked Pat was what he enjoyed most about his job.

“The best thing about working in social care is helping people. It is beautiful to help people”

Rosie's Story

I have been clean for 2 and a half years. I was addicted to drugs and alcohol. I started RASP after a member of staff in the Methadone Clinic recommended it to me. I had been avoiding here for a long time. I had done

other clinics but this one sticks to what they say they are going to do. RASP has had a lot to do with my progress.

As a child my mother and father drank. My father was violent towards me all my life. He battered me every night. I had 5 brother and sisters and I reared them. I wouldn't let my father beat them. I would take the blame and the beating. At that time I would go out every night and take drugs and alcohol to escape the violence. I left school at 14 and I was in Youth Reach until I was 18.

“At 18 I was on different types of drugs, starting with hash, ecstasy and then heroin. I was taking drink on top of that”.

When my daughter was 6 months old she was diagnosed with meningitis. I blamed myself for her getting sick, but before I got pregnant with her I was off drugs and alcohol. I was with my daughter every day in the ICU for 4 months. But I went back on the drugs and alcohol. The doctor put me on diazapan but it didn't help. I began appearing at the hospital with drink taken and at this point Social Services became involved. My sister was my children's secondary carer and she took them. But I see my kids every day.

“Only last year I forgave myself for what happened to my daughter”.

My daughter now attends St. Joseph's School for the Visually Impaired. She is progressing well and she is becoming more independent. My son is also doing well in school and they have inspired me to push myself.

“Drugs don't only effect the person taking them, it effects their family and friends as well”.

Cian Mooney New Cross College

I stopped taking drugs 3 years ago. I stopped because the effect was getting weaker and weaker. I couldn't afford to get more drugs to get a bigger high so drugs slowly faded out of my life. I could easily give up the drugs because I knew I had the alcohol. When I look back now half of the friends that I had when I was 18 or 19 are dead now. That's 20 or 30 people who died from overdoses. At the beginning the doctor started me on 90mls of methadone. But I was determined to get that down and 1 year later I am down to 45mls.

"I used to say I wanted off alcohol for my kids. But now I want off alcohol for myself".

The social workers knew my main problem was drinking, so I made a deal with them. I could see my children on my own if I agreed to do a breathalyser test before every meeting. I have never failed that test. I can socialise now without drinking.

"I feel 100% now. I was very depressed before I came here". You lose your family and friends in addiction".

The social workers wanted to know how I was doing so well. They loved it when they came down to RASP. The progress I have made at RASP has resulted in me getting greater access to my kids. I'm here in the mornings, I attend meetings here and I go to the gym in the evenings. I have filled up my days.

“What I learned from meeting Rosie was that it is never too late to turn your life around. I think she was very brave beating her addiction. She showed that she wanted to be there as a mother for her children”.

Charlie Murphy New Cross College

I didn't have a plan before I came here. Now I want to do the Addictions Studies Course. I would like to come back and work here or maybe volunteer. I'd like to do counselling. Before I came here, when I was addicted I was isolated and on my own. I integrate here, we are like a little family. The loneliness is gone now. I wouldn't go backwards again. I have too much to lose now. I am into yoga now, I even took the class this week. I like what I'm doing now, I'm happy with myself. I have got my family and friends back now because I am clean.

Frank's Story

I first started drinking and taking tablets aged 11. My attendance at school had been poor and I left aged 13. As a child my parents would be drinking at home and that led to late night rows. As a result many days my parents would let me stay at home. I started taking hash but gradually I became immune to it and began looking for a better high. I got fed up smoking hash and I wanted to try something different, something better. That led me to heroin having tried everything else. I then became addicted to heroin.

“It was my own choice but I was with people who were getting high and I thought I would like to try it”.

My first job was with a firm that made windows. At that point I was smoking hash every day including at work. I was in and out of work through my 20's

but I always made money. But as my heroin addiction became worse I began selling drugs. I fell out with my family. I realise now that my family couldn't help me and whilst I tried to fix things I couldn't whilst I was in addiction.

Throughout my period in addiction I made four attempts on my life. After my last attempt I spent seven weeks in John O'God's heavily medicated. I was on heavy medication for a year after that.

“Addiction can cost you everything. Frank lost his family, tried to take his own life and became involved in crime. But he had the strength to change direction and get his life back on track. He is happy now without drugs”.

Jamie Moore New Cross College

When I was in addiction I spent every penny I had on drugs. I once robbed a car and I was caught. I spent a few days locked up and that taught me a lesson. I never robbed a car again. But after that I went even heavier on the drugs. I thought I was cute when I was on the drugs and that I was getting away with everything, but people knew what I was doing.

“I found the talk eye-opening. Frank spoke to us about his drug addiction. He started taking alcohol and tablets aged 11 and ended up on heroin in his 30's. Frank's story was very inspiring. It was amazing how he turned his life around and got himself clean. It is sad to see the damage that addiction can do to people and their families and friends. No one would chose to become addicted”.

Niamh Keegan New Cross College

I tried methadone and felt that it was good at the start and it helped if you followed the doctor's advice. But I was still in addiction and in addiction I abused everything. Drugs had completely taken over my life. As an addict, I

had enough drugs for months in advance. I was self-medicating using drugs and tablets that I got on the streets. When I got tablets from the clinic, I would take 1 and keep the other 3. I would also sell tablets or swop them for weed with other addicts.

“As my tolerance level got higher I needed more drugs. I would take larger amounts in my search for a better high”.

During that time I thought I was OK, but other people knew I was out of it. I ended up in a room in my mother's on my own thinking the world was out to get me. Looking back now I realise I had no friends when I was an addict. You don't have friends in that world, you just use one another. You aren't even a friend to yourself.

After I made the 4th attempt on my life I made a conscious decision to get off drugs. I said to myself, either kill yourself or get on the bandwagon. I met a keyworker who came up with a plan to help me overcome addiction. I had an easier time than most coming off drugs and I know that was rare. I know I was one of the lucky ones.

“I realise now that drugs can take anyone, it doesn't matter who you are. I also learned that addiction can do terrible damage and it is clearly very difficult to recover. Frank had a drive and determination in him that gave him the strength to stop using drugs”.

Jodie Larkin New Cross College

Since I became involved with RASP 17 months ago I have been coming here three times per week. I am now part of the Task Force that works with the Garda and TD's helping to allocate funding to addiction services. I am much

more positive now. My mind is at peace. I managed to get myself out of this mess. I realise I was lucky because a lot of people don't.

Kevin's Story

I grew up in Ballymun and started smoking aged 6. I moved to Coolock where I quickly started missing school. When I left school at 12, I had no education as such. I had the bare essentials in reading and writing but I could get by. I ended up with a crowd that were using cannabis. I then moved to London aged 18 where I gave up cannabis and started drinking. I spent 6 years in London.

I started taking E's when socialising and they affected my sleep pattern, I would be lying wide awake. I was then introduced to heroin. I started taking this to help me to sleep and come down off the E's. Within weeks I was addicted to heroin. At the time I was paying €40 for a bag of heroin. It was calming me down but it was very addictive and I quickly went from 1 bag to 2 bags per day.

"I learned from Kevin that I should choose my friends wisely and not to get in with the wrong people".

Ryan Buckley New Cross College

I was a chef at the time and I was starting to leave work to get heroin to avoid withdrawals. In the end up I had to leave work as I wasn't functioning properly. My habit was becoming worse and I started selling heroin to fund my addiction.

I then spent 3 months in jail for possession of heroin. However during that time I was taking drugs for 2 of the 3 months. When I came out it was all the same people and all the same friends. Drugs had too much of a hold on me, heroin doesn't let you go.

I had 3 children, we were evicted from our home and ended up homeless. I took more drugs to cope and manage the situation, but in reality I couldn't manage. My partner was in addiction also. We were co-dependants, if one of us gave up the other didn't. The temptation was always there, we were holding each other back. We split in the end, we both got off drugs.

“To be honest, the worst thing I did on drugs was that I wasn't there for my kids. But I have a great relationship with my kids now”.

Finally I entered into recovery, but I relapsed for 6 months before I got off drugs completely. It took me 3 years but finally I reached the moment where I wanted to get drugs free. Whilst I was in the clinic I saw people going in and out of RASP and I asked how I could get on the programme. I was then referred by a doctor. At RASP I started looking at my life and what was happening. I began working on myself. I began learning about addiction and learning about surviving without drugs. I realised that life could be better.

“Reading Kevin's story it was very inspiring to see where he was and how bad it was and how he has managed to recover. It's great to see the outcome but his story really shows how drugs can disconnect you from the world and your family”.

Charlie Murphy New Cross College

In my recovery I argued with the doctor to reduce my methadone. I wanted off methadone. I was fed up running around after methadone and drugs. I

was on 80mls of methadone and that would leave you zombied. When you are coming off drugs you haven't got a connection to yourself, everything is fuzzy. You are not in the real world.

“Recovery helps you to appreciate life more”.

I did a counselling course at one stage where I got to understand myself better and where I went wrong in my life. But the course became too much for me. It was bringing up too many memories. I wasn't ready for it at the time.

RASP gives people opportunities and helps them to achieve their goals. RASP has supported and helped me. Pat is like a second father to you. I have been here 4 years as a volunteer. I feel brilliant now. I have been off everything for 8 years. I'm at Maynooth now doing a Diploma in Arts on Addiction Studies.

“I learned from Kevin's story that drugs can destroy your life and that if you do it even once it can easily take over your life”.

Josh Smithers New Cross College

I now work with clients in RASP one to one. I understand where they are coming from. I can empathise with them. I asked one client I met on the street to come over to RASP. I worked with him and helped him get into college. He is completely drug free now.

Maria's Story

I work as the Accounts Administrator in RASP. I am the first point of contact here in RASP greeting clients and answering the phones. When I first started here I knew very little about addictions. There are 20 clients involved here at any one time.

“Maria helped us to understand how an organisation like RASP runs successfully. She explained how she makes sure all visitors are paid and the accounts are correct and kept up to date. She also told us how much she enjoyed her job. Especially when clients started to recover and began making a better future for themselves”.

Charlie Murphy New Cross College

All the grants that come into the project pass through the accounts department and we are audited at least once a year. I am responsible for making sure all visitors are paid. This includes tutors, counsellors and those running computer, drama and yoga classes and so on. I also oversee all equipment purchases that are made.

“When you see the people do here and the time people put in, you realise the great work that goes on here. This year we have seen a lot of our clients return to education or go back into jobs”.

If clients don't come into RASP they are expected to explain why. They would have to produce a doctor's note for example. Some clients are going through the Court System when they first arrive here. RASP is offered as part of the legal process. Clients must be free of addiction in order to take part. Usually you can see if a client is still taking drugs when they arrive. If that happens they are sent home. At times, clients can get upset at being sent

home. But they meet with Pat at a later date and he decides if the client can return to the programme.

“Maria does a very important job at RASP making sure counsellors, tutors and other visitors are paid”. She explained all the very things she does as part of her job. She also spoke to us about how easy it was to become addicted to drugs these days as they are much stronger than they were in the past. It was very interesting to see what goes on in the background”.

Patrick Clarke New Cross College

I enjoy my job and it is great to see people moving and bettering themselves. The clients overall are very friendly. They are trying to turn their lives around and realise they are getting help here.

Patsy's Story

Growing up, I was a functioning alcoholic. I started having problems with drugs and alcohol aged 13. My mother didn't know what to do when I would come home high. She was afraid to go to the HSE in case she would lose me. But in the end she had to let me go for the safety of the other children.

I left home at an early age and I was looking for a second family and that was how I fell in with the street gangs. I became addicted to cannabis which became a stepping stone to heroin and cocaine.

“I was one of seven lads who grew up together. Four are dead, one was shot and the other one turned his life around.”

When I left school I couldn't read or write. There was too much going on at home with my father's drinking. What I seen at home convinced me that drink was a drug.

“I realise now that many people first start using drugs as a coping mechanism”.

Rhyce Scanlon New Cross College

I began taking E's on the rave scene. Then I started to take coke during the day and I would smoke heroin in the evening to get to sleep. At this point my drug habit was costing me €600 per day. In order to feed my addiction I turned to crime robbing Securicor vans and selling drugs. I moved to Belfast at one stage but I was ordered out of the city and I returned to Dublin.

Shortly after this I was sentenced to 12 years in prison and I was there between the ages of 17 and 29. When I first went to prison I discovered that it was only my real family that came to visit me. Not one of my gang mates ever came to visit me, not once.

“I was really shocked at how quickly you can become addicted to heroin”.

Jamie Dunleavy New Cross College

While I was in prison I got my education. I completed my Junior Cert and Leaving Cert. Six months after I was released from prison I started attending RASP. RASP is a stepping stone to get back into society and back into the workplace. I am the Chairperson on the Client's Forum, speaking for clients on various projects. Since I have been in recovery I have completed the Addiction Studies Course Level 7 in Maynooth. I am now working on a degree with the Open University on Social Health Care and Social Policy. Doing my degree gives me structure, it keeps the brain working.

You lose everything when you are on drugs. Your emotions go, my emotions only came back when I was in rehab. At the end of the day it is down to the individual to change their life. Help is out there, you only need to ask. Thanks to the support from RASP I have managed to break the chain of addiction in our family.

"I can't thank RASP enough."

I am married now with 2 children and I am playing the role of breadwinner. My parents know now they have their son back. I am reconciled with my parents. Anyone in recovery wants their family back. I am trying to get back to being Patsy.

An excerpt from "Late at Night"

Lyrics by Philip McGauley

This looks good I crash out here

Nobody about the coast is clear

*Out of the cold on to the ground
This is not cool this is not sound*

*It's starting to snow,
It's starting to rain
My eyes are heavy,
I'm starting to drain
I need to be hidden
I have to hide
I need to be safe
I must survive*

*You know it's wrong
You know it's not right
To sleep in doorways late at night
The sun goes down
The street is dead
People pass by going home to bed*

