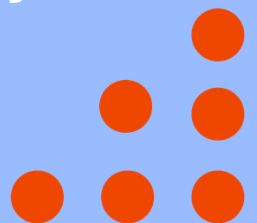


# St John of God Group Newsletter



Realising Potential & Possibility





# A Word From Our Group CEO



Dear Colleagues,

As we mark SJOG Week 2026, I want to take a moment to say thank you to all of you across Ireland, the UK and Malawi for the work you do each day.

This newsletter brings together stories and updates from across our services. It is a powerful reminder of the breadth of our work and the many ways our values of hospitality, compassion and respect are lived every day - in the direct services we provide and in the many roles that keep our organisation running behind the scenes.

What stands out most in reading these contributions is not just what we do, but how we do it. Time and again, we see compassion in action — in the small, consistent acts of care and support, in the respect shown to those we serve, and in the way colleagues support one another. Over the past year, I have had the privilege of seeing this first-hand across our services. There is a deep sense of pride, commitment and responsibility that runs through SJOG, and it is something we should never take for granted.

This newsletter also reflects the continued evolution of our organisation — from strengthening how we work together as One SJOG, to welcoming new parts of the Group, and shaping our future as a lay-led organisation while staying true to our heritage.

Importantly, it highlights why sharing our stories matters. Too often, the impact of our work is seen only by those closest to it. By taking the time to capture and share these good news stories — with each other and with our wider audiences — we help to build connection across the Group, strengthen our shared identity, and demonstrate the real and meaningful difference we make in people's lives every day.

I want to thank all of the teams and services who contributed to this edition. Your willingness to share your experiences, your initiatives, and your achievements helps bring our mission to life in a very real and human way. I hope you enjoy reading this newsletter and take pride in being part of a community that is making such a positive impact, together.

Thank you for all that you do.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jim Dwyer". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Stories From Across The Group





## **Award-Winning DigiCoach Programme Puts Digital Inclusion in the Spotlight**

We are absolutely delighted to share some fantastic news! St John of God Community Services – Liffey has been named a winner of the 2026 Innovation Award by the European Association of Service Providers for Persons with Disabilities (EASPD) for our ground-breaking DigiCoach initiative. Chosen from over 90 applications from right across Europe, DigiCoach stood out as one of just five outstanding initiatives driving real, person-centred change in disability services.

What began as a collaborative Erasmus project with atempo in Austria and TryCamps in Finland has blossomed into something truly special. DigiCoach trains people with disabilities to become School Assistants for Digital Education within primary schools, and has since grown to offer peer-support workshops and dedicated DigiCoach sessions that champion digital inclusion for all. The award was officially presented during EASPD's conference, Leading Change in Disability Services: Strengthening Capacity for Person-Centred Support, in the beautiful city of Porto on 14 and 15 May 2026. It's a proud moment for everyone involved.

Funded by Rethink Ireland, the programme initially welcomed nine individuals with intellectual disabilities supported by St John of God Community Services in Liffey and Kerry, alongside six people with visual impairments from Fighting Blindness, into paid roles as DigiCoaches. The impact has been remarkable. We've seen a surge in confidence and skill using accessible digital tools, more consistent communication, less duplication of work, and – most importantly – far more practical and meaningful digital participation for people with disabilities.

And the journey doesn't stop there. Thanks to a new CREATE 3 grant, DigiCoach is now scaling up. In 2026, we will be partnering with four incredible organisations – Enable Ireland, Muirosa, Corlann, and NLN – to hire 21 DigiCoaches across Ireland, representing a wide range of disabilities. Together, we're building a future where digital education and participation are truly open to everyone.





# DigiCoach Initiative



## **Seed Funding Projects 2026**

### **Evaluation of Pilot Stepped Care Model of Mentalization Based Interventions in Crisis & General Adult Psychiatric Setting**

Dr Mairead Doyle is a Senior Clinical Psychologist working in Cluain Mhuire service for almost 25 years, and now working with the Crisis Resolution Service.

Crisis Resolution Services and community mental health teams in Ireland are under growing pressure to deliver timely, evidence-based psychological support for individuals in acute distress, yet access to structured therapy remains limited and inconsistent. Despite national policy emphasising stepped-care, there is little guidance on which psychological interventions should be offered, creating a major barrier to implementation. Mentalization-based therapy (MBT) has emerged as a promising, scalable, transdiagnostic approach for individuals with complex emotional needs, particularly given its focus on improving emotional awareness and reflective capacity—difficulties commonly seen in crisis presentations.

With a strong evidence base and positive outcomes from recent Irish pilot programmes, MBT appears well suited to crisis and general adult settings. This study will address a critical knowledge gap by evaluating the need for, and outcomes of, a stepped-care model incorporating both psychoeducational MBT-introductory interventions and short-term MBT. By profiling referrals and assessing clinical impact, the research will provide the first evidence on integrating mentalization-based approaches into Irish crisis and community services, informing service development, strengthening policy guidance, and supporting future large-scale implementation of accessible, evidence-based psychological therapies.



### **EMPATHY-P: A Feasibility Study of EEG-Enhanced Multi-Modal Precision Assessment of Mental Health in Young People**

Dr Keith Gaynor is a Senior Clinical Psychologist in DETECT, Early Intervention in Psychosis Services. He is also an Associate Professor in Clinical Psychology in the School of Psychology, UCD.

Psychotic disorders, which affect about 4% of the Irish population and cause long-term social and functional impairment, are typically treated only after a first episode, as early identification remains

## **Seed Funding Projects 2026... continued**

limited and current symptom-based screening methods are highly inaccurate. CAMHS and Early Intervention in Psychosis services report a major gap in care for individuals who show early risk indicators but lack a clear diagnosis, despite evidence that factors such as service-use patterns, general symptoms, cognitive functioning, and EEG markers could greatly improve prediction.

With recent advances in affordable mobile EEG technology, this study proposes a cross-sectional feasibility project to test a multi-modal assessment combining EEG, cognitive testing, and clinical profiling in individuals at risk or following a first episode of psychosis, building on existing UCD control data. This approach could enhance early detection, reduce misdiagnosis, shorten the duration of untreated illness, and help identify those unlikely to transition to psychosis but still needing support. If feasible, the study will pave the way for larger grant applications and longitudinal validation of this innovative assessment model.



### **Strategies for the Sustainability of Community Mental Health Support Groups in Northern Malawi**

Catherine Mwale is a mental health nurse educator and has been working with St John of God University for 13 years as a Principal Lecturer in mental health nursing.

Families in Northern Malawi caring for relatives with mental illnesses face complex psychosocial challenges that threaten the sustainability of existing community mental health support groups, largely due to limited context-specific strategies that address caregivers' well-being, needs, and coping mechanisms. This study aims to develop sustainable strategies for these support groups by assessing caregivers' social, psychological, and spiritual well-being, exploring their psychosocial experiences and needs, analysing their adaptation and coping mechanisms, and ultimately codesigning practical solutions.

## **Seed Funding Projects 2026... continued**

Using a mixed-methods approach across four phases—quantitative assessment, qualitative exploration of needs, qualitative analysis of coping, and strategy development—the research seeks to generate an in-depth, culturally grounded understanding of caregivers' lived experiences.

The findings are expected to strengthen community-based mental health systems, reduce caregiver burden, and inform actionable, sustainable support structures, with results disseminated to local stakeholders and through high-impact academic publications.



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## **ADHD Medication in Childhood May Reduce Later Psychosis Risk - Landmark Study Finds**

**One of the largest studies of its kind challenges long-standing fears about stimulant treatment**

A major new study, led by scientists at University College Dublin and the University of Edinburgh and funded by the St John of God Research Foundation, has found that commonly prescribed attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) medication in childhood may lower the long-term risk of developing serious psychotic disorders, including schizophrenia.

Treatment with methylphenidate, the most commonly prescribed ADHD medication for children, before the age of 13 was shown to be associated with a reduced risk of psychosis in adulthood. At a time when diagnoses of ADHD are rising rapidly worldwide, concerns about whether stimulant medications might increase the risk of psychosis have fuelled public anxiety among parents, clinicians and policymakers. This new evidence directly challenges that narrative.

**Increased risk — and a possible protective effect**

Focusing on nearly 4,000 young people diagnosed with ADHD, the researchers found no evidence that treatment with methylphenidate, the most commonly prescribed ADHD medication for children, increased the likelihood of developing a psychotic disorder later in life.

## **ADHD medication... continued**

“We know that when children with ADHD are followed into adulthood, a small but significant minority develop psychotic disorders such as schizophrenia,” said Professor Ian Kelleher, Professor of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry at the University of Edinburgh and the study’s lead researcher, “A critical question has been whether ADHD medication causes that risk, or whether this is a case where correlation does not equal causation. Our findings suggest the medication itself is not driving that risk.”

The researchers found no evidence that treatment with methylphenidate increased the likelihood of developing a psychotic disorder later in life.

The results are likely to offer reassurance to families weighing up treatment decisions and to clinicians concerned about long term safety.

The study, published in *JAMA Psychiatry*, used advanced statistical methods to examine how natural differences in ADHD prescribing practices across Finnish hospital districts influenced later psychosis risk.

Analysing health data from almost 700,000 people born in Finland, the scale of the study makes it one of the most comprehensive investigations to date into the long term mental health outcomes associated with ADHD treatment.

“Overall, these findings are reassuring,” Professor Kelleher added.

“The fact that early treatment was associated with a lower long term risk of psychosis suggests these medications may do more than manage symptoms in childhood - they may also have longer term protective effects against severe mental illness, though this requires further research.”

The authors stress, however, that the apparent protective effect was seen only in those treated during childhood.

The same benefit was not observed among individuals diagnosed and treated during adolescence or adulthood.



## ADHD medication... continued

### Growing urgency as adult ADHD diagnoses surge

Dr Colm Healy, Research Fellow at University College Dublin and lead author of the study, said the findings highlight the need for age-specific research as adult ADHD diagnoses continue to increase.

“There are important developmental differences between the childhood brain and the teenage or adult brain. “We can’t assume that the effects of stimulant medication will be the same across different stages of life. Given the rapid rise in adult ADHD treatment, understanding these differences is now an urgent priority.”

The researchers say the findings underline the importance of early diagnosis, careful clinical assessment and evidence-based treatment, and provide a timely counterpoint to fears surrounding ADHD medication.



## Year of Compassion: Small, Practical Ways to Make Compassion Visible

2026 has been named the Year of Compassion across St John of God—an opportunity to make one of our core values more visible in everyday moments. Compassion is a call to action: noticing what is needed, protecting dignity, and responding with care. It shows up in how we speak, how we listen, and how we support one another—especially when the day is busy, and the pressure is real.

Our Year of Compassion also connects us back to the story of our founder, St John of God. In 16th-century Granada, he was moved by the suffering of people who were sick, poor, or abandoned, and responded in a practical way—opening a place of welcome and care where people could find safety, respect, and dignity. He also invited others to join him, urging: “Do good for yourself by doing good for others.” That same spirit—compassion made visible through action—remains at the heart of who we are today.

### Compassion as action: five simple prompts

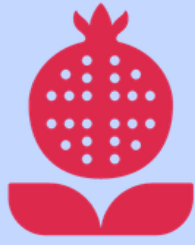
Across our internal communications and the Year of Compassion resources, a consistent theme appears: compassion is most powerful when it becomes concrete—when it is expressed through small choices, repeated often. These prompts echo what we see in the life of St John of God: noticing those on the margins, responding with practical care, and creating spaces where dignity is protected.

#### **In that spirit, action-based compassion can be understood as:**

- Noticing: being present enough to see people—their needs, strengths, struggles, and potential.
- Responding: choosing to act with care, even when it requires effort, patience, or courage.
- Empowering: creating the conditions where people feel safe, valued, and supported.
- Practising the small things: a kind word, a shared laugh, a listening ear, a gesture of support, a little extra time—small acts, repeated often, change cultures.
- Extending compassion: beyond those we support in services to colleagues, families, communities—and to ourselves.

### Creating Spaces of Care





## Year of Compassion... continued

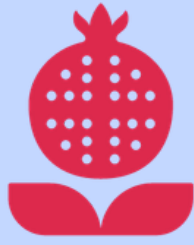
One of the simplest ways to keep compassion real is to notice it in stories. Recently, a colleague described an act of compassion that did not “fix” the past, but restored dignity in the present: making the effort to seek an apology on another person’s behalf, and offering time, respect, and attentive presence when it mattered most. It is a reminder that compassion is often made of ordinary materials—listening, steadiness, follow-through—and yet it can change how someone carries their life.

### What compassion is (and what it isn’t)

- Compassion is noticing. It starts with paying attention—without judgement—to what someone may be carrying (and what we are bringing into the room).
- Compassion is presence. It is the choice to listen with curiosity and steadiness rather than rushing to correct, dismiss, or solve.
- Compassion is a response. Sometimes that response is practical help; sometimes it is clarity, reassurance, or making a process easier to navigate.
- Compassion is not “lowering the bar.” It does not remove accountability; it strengthens it by pairing clear expectations with humanity.
- Compassion is not “fixing.” Often the most supportive thing we can do is stay alongside a person while they work through what is hard.

## Leading with Care and Purpose





## Year of Compassion... continued

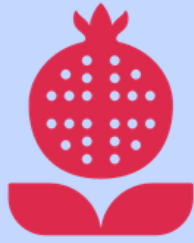
### Small actions that matter at work

- Use a steady tone. Under stress, people remember the tone more than the content.
- Name what you see. “I can see this is heavy,” or “It looks like you’ve had a difficult morning.”
- Ask one better question. “What would be most helpful right now?” or “What’s the next smallest step?”
- Reduce friction. Clarify who does what, simplify the handover, or remove an unnecessary step—small process changes can be deeply compassionate.
- Include people. Make space for quieter voices; check in with those who are new, stretched, or returning after absence.
- Protect dignity. Offer feedback privately; praise publicly; avoid assumptions.
- Follow through. Compassion without follow-through can feel like performance; even a short update builds trust.

### Compassion and accountability

- Compassionate accountability means being clear about what is needed while staying respectful about the person. It holds two truths at once: (1) the work matters, and (2) the person matters. In teams, this looks like setting expectations early, explaining the “why”, and addressing issues directly—without shaming, sarcasm, or ambiguity. Where possible, it also means asking what support or adjustment is reasonable so that standards can be met sustainably.
- Instead of: “This isn’t good enough.” Try: “Here’s what ‘good’ looks like, and what we need to change by Friday—what’s blocking you?”
- Instead of: “You always...” Try: “In the last two handovers, X happened. Let’s agree a simple fix for next time.”
- Instead of: solving it alone. Try: “Who else needs to be involved so this is fair and sustainable?”

# st John of God



## Year of Compassion... continued

### Self-compassion (so we can keep going)

- Compassion is difficult to sustain if we never offer it inward. Self-compassion is not self-indulgence; it is the disciplined practice of acknowledging limits, learning from mistakes without harshness, and taking steps that prevent burnout. Leaders who model healthy self-compassion—pausing, seeking support, setting boundaries—give others permission to do the same, which strengthens the whole culture.
- Take a reflective pause before difficult conversations (even 30 seconds helps).
- Use the “same tone” test: would I speak to a colleague the way I’m speaking to myself right now?
- Set one boundary that protects energy (e.g., a short break between back-to-back meetings where possible).
- Ask for help early rather than waiting until things are urgent.

In 2026, let’s make compassion visible—in our conversations, our decisions, and our actions. In doing so, we continue the story begun by St John of God: seeing what’s needed and responding with care.



## SJOG Housing Association Joins the Group

We were pleased to mark an important milestone in the ongoing development of the Group as St John of God Housing Association (SJOG HA) formally becomes part of the Group, on the 31st March, 2026.

This step is a natural progression in the long-planned transition to lay leadership across our services, ensuring that the mission and values of hospitality, compassion and respect continue to guide our work into the future.



## SJOG Housing... continued

SJOG HA will continue to operate as an independent, regulated Approved Housing Body, with its own Board and governance structures. Its role as a provider of secure, high-quality housing for people with specific housing needs remains unchanged.

### **So what does this mean for us as a Group?**

Bringing the SJOG HA into the Group strengthens our collective ability to support people in a more holistic way. Housing, health and social care are closely connected, particularly for those we serve, and this alignment enables greater collaboration across services while respecting the distinct roles each entity plays. It reinforces the idea of “One SJOG”, a shared mission across different services, disciplines and locations. It also offers opportunities for closer working relationships, shared learning, and a stronger collective voice in advocating for the people we support.



## **Strengthening Our Voice in Europe: SJOG Group & Hospitality Europe**

Across SJOG Group, our mission of hospitality, compassion and respect connects us not only across Ireland, the UK and Malawi, but as part of a wider European movement working to shape a fairer, more inclusive society.

One of the most important ways we do this is through our active participation in Hospitality Europe, a collaborative network bringing together the Hospitaller Order of St John of God and the Sisters Hospitallers across Europe.

A Shared Vision for People and Communities

### **Hospitality Europe exists to promote a clear and powerful vision:**

That access to quality, person-centred and rights-based care, particularly in mental health, is a fundamental human right.

**Through its position paper and manifesto, the network sets out a collective commitment to:**

- Upholding human rights and dignity in all aspects of care
- Advancing social inclusion and tackling inequality
- Supporting vulnerable people through holistic, community-based services
- Contributing to international priorities such as the UN Sustainable Development Goals
- Promoting innovation, research and shared learning across countries

At its heart, Hospitality Europe is about ensuring that the voice of hospittaller organisations is heard, at European level and beyond.

## Why It Matters For Us

Being part of Hospitality Europe is not simply about affiliation, it is a strategic opportunity for us to:

- Amplify our voice
- Contribute to shaping European policy and influencing discussions on mental health, disability, social care and inclusion.
- Strengthen collaboration
- Share knowledge, good practice and innovation to improve outcomes for the people we support.
- Access new opportunities
- Participate in European projects and funding initiatives enables collaboration on research, service development and innovation—benefiting both staff and service users.
- Stay connected to global priorities

Through Hospitality Europe, SJOG Group is actively engaged in conversations with European institutions and international partners, including the European Commission and the World Health Organization, ensuring our work aligns with emerging policy and practice.

## From Strategy to Action

The direction of Hospitality Europe over the coming years will focus on:

- Strengthening communication and visibility across Europe
- Developing a shared strategic roadmap
- Building stronger links between local services and European initiatives
- Encouraging participation in working groups, projects and campaigns



For SJOG Group, this means moving from awareness to active engagement, ensuring that our expertise, experience and values help shape the future of care at a European level.

### What This Means for You

Hospitality Europe is not an abstract concept, it is a platform that directly benefits our organisation and the people we support.

#### It creates opportunities to:

- Learn from colleagues across Europe
- Participate in international projects and networks
- Share our work and impact on a wider stage
- Contribute to shaping policy and practice in areas we care deeply about

#### Most importantly, it reinforces something fundamental:

That the work happening every day across SJOG Group is part of something bigger, a collective effort to build more inclusive, compassionate and person-centred systems of care.

### A Shared Future

As SJOG Group continues to grow as a lay-led organisation within a global family, our role within Hospitality Europe reflects our commitment to leadership, collaboration and advocacy.

By working together across borders, we strengthen our ability to respond to today's challenges—and to ensure that the values of hospitality remain at the heart of care across Europe.



st John  
of God



Malawi

## 4-Star Recognition for Excellence

We are honoured and thrilled to announce, during the Ministry of Health Integrated Health Sector Annual Review Meeting, both our Lilongwe and Mzuzu health facilities were officially awarded a prestigious 4-star certification by the Ministry of Health and Sanitation.

In a ceremony presided over by the Guest of Honour, Hon. Minister of Health, Madalitso Baloyi (MP), our services were recognised among the Top 10 Health Facilities in Malawi for Quality of Care, standing out among over 200 facilities assessed nationwide.

This remarkable achievement forms part of the Ministry's Stepwise Quality of Care Program, where facilities are rated from 1 to 5 stars by certified National Assessors. The rigorous evaluation process spans clinical services including inpatient care, outpatient care, mental health services, and emergency care, as well as leadership and management covering governance, human resources and expertise, patient rights and care, and risk management. It also includes clinical support such as medication management and diagnosis, alongside facility standards assessed through observation, interviews, documentation reviews, and direct feedback from our valued service users.

This recognition reflects our unwavering commitment to delivering exceptional healthcare, strong leadership, and truly patient centred services.

We extend our deepest gratitude to our dedicated teams, our partners, and the communities we proudly serve. This achievement belongs to all of you.



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Malawi

## Launch of the ME-Health Project

St John of God Hospitaller Services Malawi, has launched a three-year ME-Health project. The initiative is aimed at integrating mental health into the primary healthcare system within the Archdiocesan health facilities.

Funded by the Episcopal Conference of Italy, the project will be implemented in three deaneries: Dowa (Mtengowanthenge and Chezi), Mchinji (Guilleme and Ludzi), and Lilongwe (Namitete, Nambuma, and Mlale). The project key result areas include: provision of specialized care at the seven outreach clinics mentioned above, capacity building of healthcare workers and volunteers to strengthen their skills and knowledge on mental disorders and illnesses and social inclusion which focuses on empowering clients through support groups and livelihood skills.

The launch took place at the Mlale Community Health facility and was presided over by the Auxiliary Bishop of the Archdiocese, His Lordship Vincent Mwachwawa, alongside representatives from the Ministry of Health.

Before the official launch, Bishop Mwachwawa toured various pavilions with invited guests to appreciate the services offered by St. John of God Hospital.

This was followed by a Eucharistic Celebration to mark the official commencement of the project.





## Do Good Day - 8th March 2026

The 8th March is St John of God Day, a day to celebrate our founder and his legacy and continue to do #GoodWork in his name

“Do good for yourself by doing good for others” - Saint John of God

This year once again, colleagues, people we support and teams across our services marked the day with practical acts of kindness in their local communities, from warm clothing donations to community clean-ups and support for charities.

The marketing team collected warm coats, hats, gloves and scarves for the Wall of Kindness in Middlesbrough, installed help people experiencing homelessness or struggling with the cost of living. They found the wall nearly empty on arrival and were able to replenish it with donations from family and friends. As they finished, they supported a man with soaked footwear to choose new trainers and helped him change into them.

Elsewhere, The Minims and Woodhall teamed up for a litter pick, targeting hotspots identified in advance to maximise impact. Staff and the people supported said the day left them feeling proud to give something back to the neighbourhoods that support them.

Teams also opened their doors and shared their time: St John's Terrace visited a neighbour for a cuppa, helped clear a back garden, offered free car washes and volunteered to walk dogs around the village. At North View, colleagues thanked staff at a local day centre with gift baskets and arts-and-crafts, while Bede's Close combined a donation of essentials to a church food bank with homemade bakes for families supported each Saturday. At Villa Maria, residents and Sisters decorated handmade tote bags and gathered items for the British Red Cross to help raise funds for people in crisis.





**Do Good Day  
continued...**

Do Good Day highlights the power of small, thoughtful actions, shared across services and communities to strengthen connections and bring practical support to people who need it most.

Read more at: [www.DoGoodDay2026](http://www.DoGoodDay2026)



## Here to Help Supports the Next Generation of Counsellors at Newcastle College

Supporting autistic people effectively depends on professionals having a strong understanding of neurodiversity and how it can impact mental health. Through our Here to Help project, this commitment has seen the team deliver specialist autism training to counselling students at Newcastle College – and, following its positive impact, they have been invited back to deliver further sessions to additional cohorts.

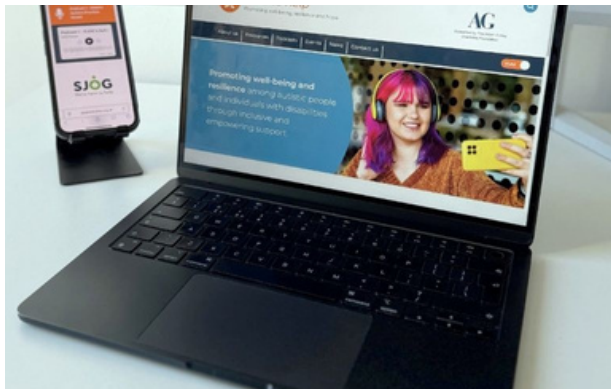
Most recently, the Here to Help team delivered specialist training to Level 5–6 counselling students, focusing on autism and suicidality within therapeutic practice. The session explored how future counsellors can structure therapy, adapt therapeutic communication, and provide neurodiversity-affirming support in clinical settings.





## Here to Help continued...

The training is designed to equip counselling students and professionals with practical skills, confidence, and compassionate, evidence-informed approaches to working with complex mental health needs. Sessions combine theory with real-world examples, enabling participants to apply their learning directly to future practice.



### **Reflecting on the training, Here to Help Manager Meryem said:**

“This training focuses on equipping counselling students and professionals with practical skills, confidence, and compassionate approaches to complex mental health needs. The engagement, curiosity, and openness shown by the Newcastle College students was inspiring, and it made the session both impactful and genuinely enjoyable.”

The Here to Help service delivers specialist training that supports professionals to recognise autism-related risk factors, understand communication differences, and develop meaningful, practical ways to offer support across a range of professional settings.

Alongside its work with education providers, the Here to Help team has worked with national charities including Samaritans, Cruse Bereavement Support, and Girlguiding UK, and has co-created training with local authorities, NHS teams, and police services across the UK.

Being invited back to Newcastle College reflects both the value of this work and a shared commitment to supporting the next generation of counsellors to deliver compassionate, neurodiversity-informed mental health support.

To learn more about Here to Help, visit: <https://www.here2help.uk/>



## Housing Team Celebrates AHBRA Compliance Success

Our Housing Team came together for a well-deserved lunch to celebrate a major milestone — achieving compliance with our regulatory standards. This was awarded by our regulator, Approved Housing Bodies Regulatory Authority (AHBRA) following an in-depth assessment of the St John of God Housing Association. This is an achievement we are genuinely proud of. It reflects the dedication, expertise, and consistent hard work of every member of the team. Without those individual contributions, we simply would not have reached this standard.

### How the AHBRA Assessment Works

The Standards Assessment is a statutory evaluation carried out by the Approved Housing Bodies Regulatory Authority (AHBRA). Its purpose is to determine whether an AHB meets the required Regulatory Standards across four key areas:

- Governance
- Financial Management
- Property & Asset Management
- Tenancy Management

AHBRA conducts its assessment programme on a continuous basis throughout the year, reviewing evidence, systems, and practices to ensure organisations are operating to the highest standards.

Achieving compliance demonstrates strong governance, responsible stewardship, and a commitment to delivering quality services to our tenants and communities.



## **Research & Innovation Hub – Launch and First Outputs**

In February 2026, St John of God University Hospital announced the launch of its new Research & Innovation Hub, a dedicated centre designed to bring clinicians, researchers and educators together to drive patient-centred research and translate evidence into improved care across the mental health sector. The launch of the Research & Innovation Hub reflects our commitment to strengthening care, education and continuous improvement. By investing in dedicated research capacity and deepening our academic partnerships, we are creating the conditions for patient-centred research to thrive and for learning to translate into better mental health services. Building on the Hospital's university hospital status, the Hub provides a single structure to support projects from design through to publication and implementation. This creates a clearer pathway for multidisciplinary collaboration and ensures research is more closely aligned with clinical priorities. Partnerships between teaching hospitals and universities are most effective when they support sustained collaboration and shared expertise. The Hub provides a focal point for clinicians, educators and researchers to work together on priority areas for Ireland's mental health system.

A number of priority areas are already underway, including new guidance on antipsychotic prescribing for women, research in precision psychiatry, and work exploring weight management for patients taking antipsychotic medication. Qualitative and service improvement research also remain a strong focus, particularly where shaped by the priorities of service users and frontline teams. The programme aligns with key national priorities including Sharing the Vision, developments in CAMHS, and early intervention in psychosis. A distinctive feature of the Hub is its commitment to lived experience, ensuring that service user perspectives inform both research and health professions education, including how medical and pharmacy students are trained. The first major output from the Hub has now been published in Schizophrenia Bulletin. Led by Caroline Hynes-Ryan and colleagues, the guideline on the choice of first antipsychotic medicine for females experiencing a first episode of psychosis represents an important step forward in sex-sensitive prescribing.



## Research & Innovation Hub continued...

It is the first guideline to prioritise outcomes that matter most to women and girls aged 13 and over, addressing a longstanding gap in psychosis treatment. The recommendations are supported by clear treatment algorithms and co-designed medicines information resources, helping clinicians and patients engage in informed, shared decision-making. Professor Dolores Keating, Head of Pharmacy at St John of God University Hospital, highlighted the practical impact of the Hub for clinical teams: “This Hub is a meeting of minds, bringing experts from different disciplines into one place with a shared goal of better outcomes for patients. It will help us move from good ideas to completed projects, published evidence and changes in practice that make a real difference.”



## Ten Years of Mental Health First Aid in Ireland

At the end of 2025, Mental Health First Aid Ireland reached a significant milestone, marking ten years of delivery across workplaces, schools and communities. Over that period, more than 32,000 people have been trained in Mental Health First Aid, reflecting steady growth in both reach and demand. At the same time, the programme also marked five years of Youth Mental Health First Aid in Ireland, focused on training adults who support young people. This has become an important part of the overall offering, supporting schools, youth organisations and communities to respond more confidently to the mental health needs of young people. Taken together, these programmes reflect a broader shift towards earlier intervention and more open conversations about mental health across different settings.

This milestone provided an opportunity to reflect on how the programme has developed over the past decade. What began as a relatively new concept in Ireland is now well established across a range of sectors. Training has been delivered at scale within organisations such as An Garda Síochána and through HSE-linked initiatives, as well as across education, transport, technology, finance, construction and manufacturing. The conference held at the end of last year brought together a number of organisations who have embedded MHFA into their approach. ESB is one example, having introduced the programme in 2019. It now has over 430 trained MHFAiders, with more than 330 active across multiple sites, supported in part through internal instructor capacity. As reflected by ESB's Health and Wellbeing Manager, Orla Gardner: "MHFA has changed the way we talk about mental health in ESB. Having colleagues and managers who are confident to check in, listen and signpost support means people do not have to struggle on their own. It sends a very clear signal that mental health is taken seriously at every level of the organisation."

A consistent feature of the programme has been its practical focus. Mental Health First Aiders are not clinicians, but they are equipped to recognise when someone may be struggling, offer initial support, and guide them towards appropriate help. Over time, this has contributed to a more confident and informed response to mental health across organisations and communities. Looking ahead, the focus is on building on this foundation. This includes continuing to expand access to training, strengthening instructor networks, and supporting organisations and communities to embed MHFA more consistently as part of their overall approach to wellbeing. There will also be a continued emphasis on developing Youth Mental Health First Aid, ensuring that those working with young people feel equipped to respond appropriately and early.



## **Evaluating the Volunteer Impact in St Joseph's Centre: A Mixed-Method Analysis**

St Joseph's Centre recently completed a research study in partnership with Dublin City University, *Evaluating the Volunteer Impact in St Joseph's Centre: A Mixed-Method Analysis*, examining the role of volunteers within its dementia care model.

The study, involving 75 participants across residents, day centre attendees, staff, families and volunteers, alongside a quantitative survey of 59 volunteers, provides clear evidence of the impact of the Centre's volunteer programme. With a team of over 120 volunteers, the findings show that volunteers play a significant role in increasing meaningful social engagement and reducing loneliness for people living with dementia. They also provide reassurance to families and support staff to deliver more personalised, one-to-one care, enhancing the overall quality of the care environment. The findings reflect what is seen in practice on a daily basis, with volunteers forming a core part of the Centre's approach to care and contributing to more consistent opportunities for connection and engagement.

Feedback from families highlighted the importance of the programme, with many describing it as a key factor in feeling confident that their loved one is supported, engaged and part of a community environment. The study also identified measurable benefits for volunteers themselves. Those involved reported improved understanding of dementia, with lower levels of anxiety and depression and higher reported quality of life over time, particularly among longer-term volunteers. From a wider perspective, the findings position the St Joseph's model as a practical response to growing demand for dementia care. With dementia rates expected to increase significantly in Ireland over the coming years, the study highlights how structured, well-supported volunteer programmes can complement clinical care and enhance overall service delivery. The report also points to the potential for this approach to be applied more broadly, particularly where there is investment in volunteer coordination and support. It aligns with national policy direction, including the HSE's Model of Care for Dementia, and contributes to ongoing discussions around sustainable, person-centred care.



In May 2026, St Joseph's Centre was honoured to welcome Minister for Health Jennifer Carroll MacNeill for a visit highlighting the important role of its volunteer model in supporting person-centred dementia care. During her time at the Centre, the Minister had the opportunity to meet with colleagues and volunteers, hear more about the unique model of care delivered at St Joseph's, and see first-hand the warmth, compassion and sense of community that shape daily life for residents and families. The visit also provided an important opportunity to recognise the volunteers whose time, presence and generosity make such a meaningful contribution to the Centre. Their involvement supports connection, companionship and dignity, helping to create an environment where residents feel known, valued and supported. Minister Carroll MacNeill commended the team and volunteers at St Joseph's for their dedication, compassion and continued commitment to enhancing dementia care. Her visit was a welcome recognition of the work taking place across the Centre and of the people who help make St Joseph's such a special place.

Looking ahead, St Joseph's Centre will continue to build on this work, strengthening its focus on meaningful, person-centred engagement and the role of everyday interactions in quality of care. There is a clear opportunity to position the Centre's model more prominently as an example of best practice in dementia care.



## **A New All Terrain Ambulance for SJOG Malawi**

Our most recent supporter appeal is focused on raising much-needed funds for a new all-terrain ambulance to support our community outreach centres in rural Malawi.

In the appeal we tell the story of Jeremiah – a 44-year-old farmer, living in Nsalu, with his wife and children. Jeremiah experienced his first episode of schizophrenia in 2010 and it was a very bad experience.

People beat him and tied him to a tree. He still has the scars on his hands and they are a constant reminder of that dark time. That first episode of schizophrenia was made all the more terrifying by the attacks that followed. He feared for his life and for his family.

Nobody should be punished for having a mental health condition. But for a long time, Jeremiah didn't get the care he needed. He experienced a lot of stigma, because at that time a lot of people in his community didn't understand. They relied on the advice of witch doctors.

In 2013, everything changed when Jeremiah was introduced to the St John of God outreach clinic. St John of God's outreach services operate in remote, hard-to-reach areas, using an ambulance to bring vital medical care into the heart of communities and Jeremiah says that it saved his life.

The team in Malawi explained that without the ambulance there would be no clinic. But today, the vehicle is old and no longer fit for purpose. It frequently breaks down, causing serious delays for patients in desperate need of treatment.

Soon, it will break for good and when that happens, the clinic may have to close forever. Jeremiah, who suffered a relapse when Covid forced the clinics to close between 2020 and 2022, knows firsthand what that will mean for him and for other mental health patients like him.





## **A New All Terrain Ambulance... continued**

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## **A New Sensory Room for Alexandra Manor**

Alexandra manor has existed as a respite care facility in Clane, Co. Kildare since 2007. It offers respite care to children living with an intellectual disability. Respite takes the form of a short term stay (2-7 nights) and 24 hour care is provided throughout to ensure children are well looked after and experience a real home away from home.

Alexandra Manor currently offers respite to 65 families. The respite stays are incredibly important to children and their families alike. The children get to experience new things and enjoy and



## **Sensory Room... continued**

change of environment, whilst the families are able to take a much-needed break and recharge. This enables them the time to take care of themselves too.

Last year Rachel Malone, Manager at Alexandra Manor, approached SJOG Foundation looking for help to raise funds to convert the garage at the property into a sensory room.

As Rachel explains; “Most people think of a sensory room as being a place for relaxation and meditation but in this instance it’s so much more than that. It’s a space that needs to be relaxing and quiet but also to offer activity and excitement; whilst also ensuring safety at all times.

“The garage was an ideal place for the room to be located but a lot of work needed to be done - replace the door, insulate the floor, walls and ceiling and also build internal walls to create zones.

The electrics were upgraded to accommodate the new heaters and lights that were installed. Our vision was to include a trampette for physical excursion as well as bubble tubes with bead lighting to create a fully immersive sensory experience for the children and adults – giving them touch, light and sound all the same time!”

The works are now complete and the brand new sensory room is ready to be enjoyed. We caught up with Rachel and she couldn’t be happier.

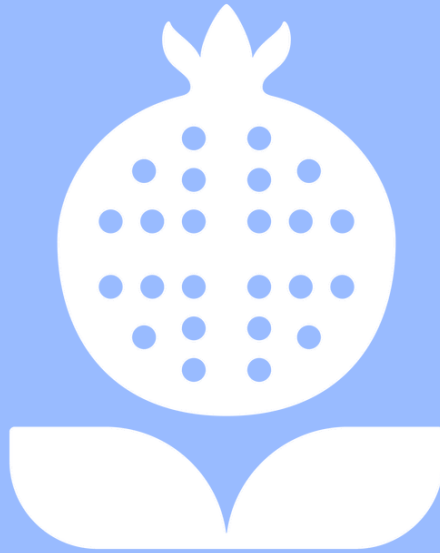
“We have included a television and activity board meaning the room is multi functional. It is a space where the children and adults can come into their own.

“When the weather is fair we try to take the children out and about but when it’s raining, and there’s nowhere to go – that’s when emotions can become heightened. This new room will see a massive reduction in behaviours and anxiety, it will give us that space and we’re so grateful to have it. None of this would have been possible without the funds we received from SJOG Foundation, and the generosity of Tony and the team at Haverford Ltd for completing the work for free.”



**Shinny Belle Buckley and Lexi Jane Walsh**





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