

## **Mission Connect Article for October 2018 Herald**

### **Providing a safe and welcoming place**

***David Cuthbert***

**Director, Carlisle House**

Carlisle House is a residential substance treatment centre situated near the centre of Belfast. Our aim is to provide a safe, structured and therapeutic space for people who have alcohol and drug (including prescribed drugs) difficulties. People are referred to us by the community addiction teams from two health trusts (Belfast and Northern). We provide six places for each trust. The rehabilitation programme is residential and lasts between four and six weeks. We provide treatment for both genders over the age of 18 and around 100 people are admitted each year.

At the core of what we do is a vibrant ethos of acceptance, respect and compassion. People who are referred come from every walk of life, background and every profession. However, they have one thing in common: they have often suffered similar rejection and contempt from society, their communities, friends, and at times, their families. It's a common assumption that people who become dependent on substances wilfully engage in addictive behaviour. However, if we understood the complexities, the trauma and the loss for which the alcohol or drug becomes the solution, perhaps we would have a different view.

So, how does Carlisle House help? We have developed an integrated systemic approach that informs the whole range of psychological and pharmacological therapies that we offer i.e. group, family, individual, art, eco and creative therapy. The core elements of this approach are based on the development of a safe and welcoming place. We don't attribute blame, rather our aim is to provide the space for people to rediscover, celebrate and nurture who they are, and to expand their resilience and hope. Someone who recently went through the programme sent us this message: "It is my daughter's birthday today, the last birthday I spent with her was three years ago. I didn't think I would see another of her birthdays and yet here I am! I'm so happy!"

Another person commented: "I can't express enough what my stay in Carlisle House has done; it's not only enhanced my life, but has given me the basis on which to begin rebuilding it. I was lost before I came here and this caring environment has helped me find myself. This irreplaceable service has saved my life."

Over the past 26 years over 3000 people have been referred. Many of these people have transformed their lives, and are now reconnected with family, work, and their own communities. Staff often comment that you cannot work in Carlisle House and stay the same. The greatest learning for all of us is perhaps that there are no simple answers. Things become less and less black and white. Love overcomes everything.

We want to thank all of you who have joined with us, in your prayers, support and gifts, in creating a space for people to experience love, justice and healing.

**Please pray:**

- For the residents of Carlisle House and for transformation in their lives.
- For the staff of Carlisle House – that they would have wisdom, grace and compassion as they work with residents.
- For David as he leads staff and oversees the work of the centre.