

MARY'S BLOG

THINK CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE, THINK MACS



DID SOMEONE SAY PUPPIES?

Okay, so I need some help – maybe COVID19 is turning us all a bit bonkers, but should I be concerned that my husband Colin is serving our mothering dog steak and giving me toast!?

(It's all go in my house, aside from work we have 7 new pups. The vet said there would be only possibly 2! I did spend one of my Saturdays just sitting looking at them and it was probably, since the beginning of Covid 19, the most relaxing time I have spent - doing nothing and staying in the moment. The Buddha would be proud of me – no chattering mind in the presence of nature supreme.

And that brings me to my point, how are you getting time out from work and family? With constant zoom calls and working from home, which can in its part be good but also can at times be isolating. Interactions both in relation to work and just general banter and good fun are sadly lacking currently for many of us. I really hope you are finding ways to get some good human contact, from your friends and team members and maintain what makes MACS such a great place to work, the friendships and support we have. I am reminded of the old age – all work and no play makes Jack/Jill a very dull boy/girl.

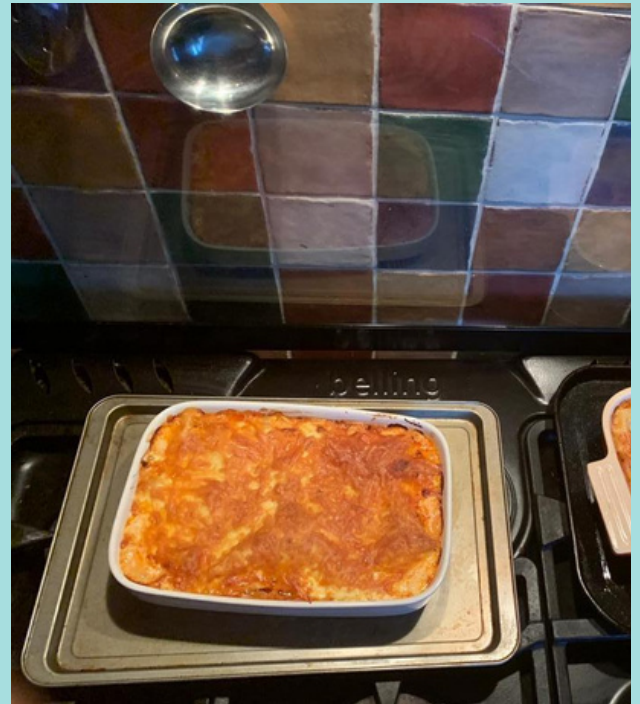
Belfast Floating Support

Paddy noticed young people struggling in the community particularly in relation to buying food. Paddy, being his caring self, provided the basics but then went further by making a killer lasagne portioning it out and having the team deliver to our young people most in need so at least they had one hot meal. Paddy this is the true spirit of MACS - showing the greatest of love and compassion.

Meliosa has been working with a 17 year old who had been homeless at the start of the summer. She stuck with this young woman every step of the way, so that now she is in shared accommodation and in school. She even got a new school uniform for the first time ever. In addition, she has been supporting another 17 year old young man, who smuggled in from Syria at the start of the year. He had no English at all, pretty terrifying, but now has passed his first exam in English. I hear his ambition is to become a nurse and no doubt with such determination he will succeed.

Sinead in partnership with **Led by You** and **Ground Works** based in Hydebank completed a six-week programme growing vegetables. This group of six young men use the space and time also to talk and explore attitudinal change in relation to offending.

Generally, the **Floating Support** team in Belfast have been astounded by the community response to the needs of our young people. Local individuals and businesses have provided food, beds, nappies, top-ups to phones and electricity to name but a few.



"Love
and
compassion"



Housing

In **Belfast Housing** 3 young people are moving out and have taken up the offer of our new approach – shared housing led by **Beth**. Isolation and loneliness is a scourge on our society and affects young people equally as the elderly. Any initiative that encourages our young people to live together is backed by me. (we were doing this 30 years ago – strange how things fall out of vogue and then do the full circle). The team also, have worked tirelessly to obtain asylum status for a young person, and I must say Belfast Housing have built up real expertise in this area.

What about this for a cracker, from **Lisburn**. Conor, one of our young people recently started employment as a trainee Good Relations Worker with Tides. What an achievement, and if that was not enough he wanted to give back to MACS – (well we do depend on each other to make life work) Conor decided to set up his own shoe box appeal, to help others. He raised money from friends, family and MACS staff to make up lovely gift boxes to distribute to those in need. **Lisburn Floating Support** have been working in close partnership with Housing Solutions and have amazingly secured 5 new tenancies over the last month.

In **Newry** one of our young people has had many challenges thrown at her over the last few months. In spite of adversity, she has stuck to her course and passed her GCSE maths with a C. The team mentioned how proud they were of her grit and determination. Another young person who has been in Newry housing for 18 months has successfully moved into her own NIHE accommodation, getting this type of accommodation in Newry is literally finding a needle in a haystack so well done to the team for their perseverance.

In **Downpatrick Housing** there was a very warm welcome for another asylum seeker Ezz, a 16 year old who travelled from Egypt to find safety. When he reached Downpatrick Housing he was amazed and confounded by the warm welcome, (in his culture males are not allowed to spend time with females on their own – so this was a real culture shock to him). Ezz is settling into DPK great and is making Egyptian breakfasts which I am reliably informed would give Nigella a run for her money. The team have expressed how much they have learnt from Ezz and visa versa, especially in navigating our banter! If you are on twitter/Facebook, I am sure you have seen all the crafty work being completed in DPK both inside and out – well done to the team.

Claire Sweeney made a very generous Christmas gift of a Ukulele to a young person in **Belfast** and a very special guitar was brought for a young person in **Newry Housing** which has transformed his mood and sense of self worth.



**TAKE OUT
BIN!**



Wellbeing



One of our young people got her top choice at Queens University, one of her projects was on mental health and speaking about MACS and the support she gets. A handmade storybook is about to be produced by the team and our young women – called “Extraordinary Girls” I for one look forward to reading about their journeys.

Even our young leader and Board member did a presentation as part of the Women in Tech Conference in early December.

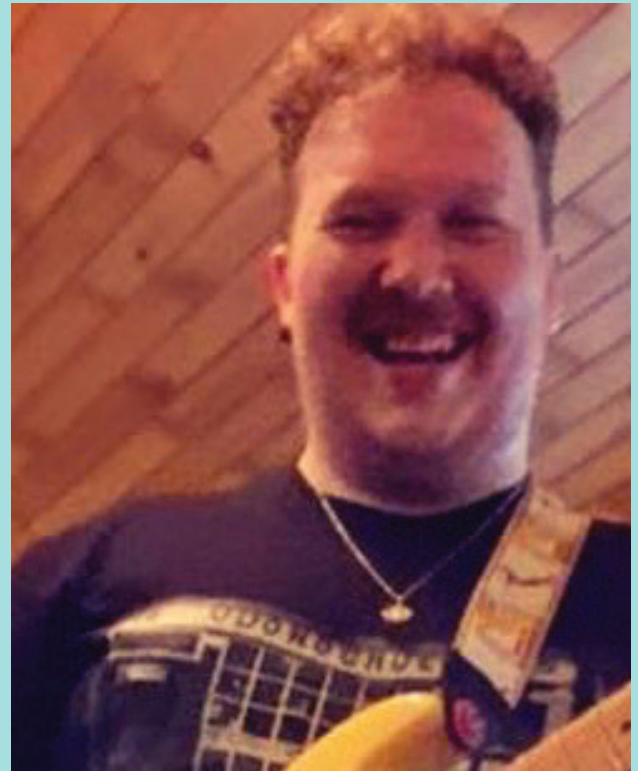
This presentation focused on her journey into IT and women’s contribution in science and tech. I am told she confidently presented to over 200 delegates. I am getting to know Eve a little bit in relation to her engagement on the MACS Board. I find her to be very bright, articulate and highly committed, and I know that she will ably represent the views of our young people at Board level.



Led by You & Muddy Paws

Led by You are also receiving the accolades. They were invited by the Princes Trust to do a presentation on our participation model, as they have heard that MACS were leading the field in terms hearing and implementing the views of young people.

One of our young leaders, Dean, rose to the challenge of executing the presentation and I hear that the very senior members who attended were very impressed by the standard and articulate way Dean was able to express MACS approach to young people's involvement. What an asset he is to MACS!



Muddy Paws was listed on the Social Enterprise roll of honour by NIHE and Work West for outstanding contribution throughout COVID 19.

Maxine was also nominated for her compassion and resilience towards dogs, young people, volunteers and customers.



Therapeutic Community

Over in the **TC** we have the wonderful news that one of our young children has moved to her new foster home. It is always difficult when any of our young people and children move on.

In addition, whilst MACS is a fantastic community of sorts and we have tried so hard to make My House a real home and not an institution, we are only part of the journey for our children and young people. Our main role is to find and prepare them for more permanent care and love.

I must praise **Tanya** who has been especially creative making a den under the stairs for our remaining young child – I think you will agree it is very magical.



Backyard Sleepout



The sleep out went virtual this year for obvious reasons – hence the term Backyard Sleep out - It was led by **Matt** and a team of staff who freely gave up of their time to rise to the challenge of doing a sleep out virtually and making it a tremendous success.

The team made up of **Amy** who did a virtual tour of streamvale farm (her mum kindly did a wonderful bedtime story – I see a career on TV). **Ciara** and her little girl Elsie treated us to a yoga special and the author Oliver Jeffers was a special guest on the night. The event was hosted by our host with the most **Iain**, and KoosKoos rounded off the evening streaming live music. Huge thanks also to **Beth**, **Ellie** and **Yvonne** who all gave their time and skills so generously.

So far we have raised 12,500, GO TEAM MACS!

Point to Ponder

I read an interesting article, taken from the book “The promise that changes everything – I won’t interrupt you – by Nancy Kline” The article was titled” If you would just let me finish!” I would say you know where I am going with this? Being an arch interrupter (Sinead you know how guilty I am) The premise of the article was that we need to give others the promise of not interrupting – thereby showing respect, consideration, time, love and ultimately the space to become the people we should be. I for one have to continuously grapple in this area and know that if I took the time to listen more, a lot of problems both in my life and work could be avoided – The question for all of us is – How do you listen?

I am so proud of myself – I have not mentioned Christmas once – bah humbug! Pet Peeve – People who wish one “Have a Merry Christmas” when obviously one’s life is falling apart! I kid you not as I write this a well-known TV presenter has just wished a family – “have a Merry Christmas” when their life is in utter turmoil.

And finally – It’s been a hectic/crazy year – but I can say without a shadow of a doubt MACS has been the best place to work and I would not in a million years want to work anywhere else. I work with a fantastic group of people both staff, volunteers and Board of Directors. I want to thank you with all my heart for the effort, commitment, at time long hours and kindness you put in to your work.

But it’s our young people and children who should get the final accolade – YOU ARE BRILLIANT!

Oh -- special thanks to Matt who always makes my blog look better than my actual writing skills.

