

ACET News

September



Summer: Back Together* *some changes may apply

This summer had that familiar vibe of 2020: some freedom once again but with a question of how long it could last. What hasn't changed from last year is the appreciation and gratitude for those moments that we have longed for, especially during the first half of the year when we tried to convey our best presence and support through screens and phones.



One change was the return to meeting in person, whether it was in client homes, gardens, cafés or parks. This was something to indeed celebrate, as the need for connection face to face and being physically present with each other can add such a rich layer to care visits and outings. **As respite has always shown us, a change of scenery and a bit more privacy can really offer someone the opportunity to access a different mindset and allow some safe time to reflect and process what has been going on for them.** What didn't change was that we could still have laughs, make memories and consistently be inspired by the resilience and authenticity in the stories that we bear witness to with our clients.

What changed from pre-pandemic summers was the intensity and pace of summer activities. Respite and summer days out had more self-supported elements, happened in smaller numbers and were in mainly outdoor venues. Some individuals preferred the virtual support or "from a distance" a bit more than before.

Over the summer our increased care visits with clients added to our awareness that for most, mental health has undeniably been greatly impacted by restrictions, challenging home circumstances, isolation and the long lockdown through the winter and spring. A number of clients have experienced relapses and discussed significant increases in their drug and alcohol use just to cope with daily life. Debts have been accrued with mounting pressure to pay them back and at unreasonable amounts. This has in some cases coincided with extreme forms of drug-related intimidation and threats at a community level. Domestic violence and family feuding are increasing issues that we encounter. Many communities and families have been impacted by suicide. Isolation, Covid fatigue and depression have been a theme of most of our care visits. Through all of this we are extremely grateful to be able to be present with clients but unfortunately there are no quick or easy answers to such devastating traumas and bereavements.



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AVAILABLE TO EVERYONE, EVERYWHERE.

**I WANT A PEOPLE'S
VACCINE, NOT A PROFIT
VACCINE.**

#PEOPLESVACCINE



Vaccines: One for Everyone in the Audience?

There is one for everyone in Ireland — all the over 16s have been offered a vaccine at this point, and most have received their second dose already. Covid vaccines have been shown to help inhibit the development of variants of the virus but if there aren't enough people vaccinated, then variants are much

more likely to develop and transmission is increased.

While much of the northern half of the world has received or been offered vaccines, the global south is far behind. Although Irish people have generously donated over one million vaccines to some of the world's poorest countries through the UNICEF-led COVAX programme, this campaign does not aim to increase vaccine production and because the vaccines are not available, COVAX is falling short of its target to inoculate 30% of the adult population in 170 countries.

ACET is a member of the **People's Vaccine Alliance Ireland**, calling on our government and others in the EU to “temporarily suspend intellectual property rights at the World Trade Organisation for Covid vaccines, treatments and diagnostics. This will help break Big Pharma monopolies and increase supplies so there are enough doses for everyone, everywhere.” Ireland should also endorse the World Health Organisation Covid Technology Access Pool to enable sharing of knowledge by pharmaceutical companies in order to help increase vaccine production. Ireland is not yet officially supporting either of these initiatives.

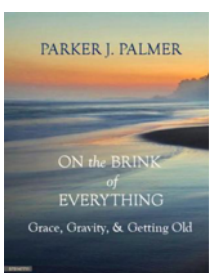
On the People's Vaccine Alliance website there are several ways to stand with them: by signing a petition for the Irish government, tweeting politicians or adding images to your social media to increase awareness. For more information and to get involved to help fellow humans, go to <https://peoplesvaccine.ie/>



On the Brink of Everything, Or Three Feet in Front of You

I have just been listening to the American singer Carrie Newcomer's beautiful song *On the Brink of Everything*, which was inspired by Parker Palmer's book of the same title.

On the brink of everything seems how many of us have felt during the pandemic and perhaps are still feeling.



In his book, Parker Palmer speaks about the advice of his friend, Greg Ellison. Greg, who is the founder of the non profit organisation Fearless Dialogues, recommends that Parker does what his great aunt advised him to do. This is perhaps something worth reflecting on.

When Greg was a little boy he asked her how he could change the world. She told him that while he couldn't change the world, at any moment he could change what's within three feet in front of him.

Greg, in his workshops, encourages people to carry a tape measure with them all the time, either literally or imaginatively, to change for the better what's three feet in front of them.

It could be tidying the table, putting groceries away, being kind to the person in front of you, or just attending to the circumstances that you find yourself in.

This can yield lots of small successes instead of the discouragement, impotence, disempowerment and disconnection often triggered by the cataclysmic horror stories on constant stream on TV and social media.

Simply bringing more hope than despair, it can help take us back from that feeling of being on the brink of everything.

— Vivienne Morrow Murtagh is ACET's counsellor and supervisor



Covid-19: What's Next?

The Covid-19 pandemic has had an impact on various areas of people's lives: social, religion, education, economy, health and more. In order to tackle the rapid spread of the virus, public health measures have been implemented, and consequently people were obliged to change the way they live. Luckily, because of the effectiveness of Covid-19 vaccines, hope is now revived; the current trend is to gradually lift the restrictions. But it is still unclear if we are definitely heading to the end of the pandemic as there is still a risk of new variants outbreaks.



However, even if the pandemic ends, things will not revert automatically. In the way people live, relate, navigate and access public services, or practice their religion, a quick return to 'normal ways' seems difficult to envisage, at least in the short or even medium-term. Likely, some of the changes deriving from the restrictions imposed during the crisis will remain or be adjusted for the foreseeable future. Therefore, one of the challenges will be to find or devise suitable ways of doing things, for instance when working with vulnerable or marginalised people.

Nobody knows exactly what the future will be, but it seems reasonable to anticipate that when working with individual clients and communities, there will initially be times of trials and errors, learning from failures, and continuous adjustments until we find the best ways of achieving the goals that were set.

— Yvon Luky, Migrant Plus, luky@acet.ie



The Long and Winding Road

Recently, a number of people have asked me how the team in ACET got on through Covid, as if it is all now in the past tense. While there is certainly some light at the end of the tunnel and the proposed re-openings over the coming weeks point to better days, there is still much to be done.

Working on HIV for almost 30 years, we've discovered that pandemics make inequalities worse at every stage - beginning, middle and end. Our perceptions of what is 'normal' and even 'new normal' can be as distant from the experience of our neighbours as it ever was in this ever-shrinking world. The need for dedicated and gifted people to be with those individuals and communities most marginalised is as acute now as it was before Covid.

This newsletter outlines the stories of our ongoing work encountering hope and new beginnings. Whether it is globally through the Matilda Project, locally through Migrant Plus or in our ongoing care supports for those living with and affected by HIV, we are assured that patient presence where trust and conversations can flourish.

— Richard Carson is ACET CEO

We were incredibly blessed and very overwhelmed with the response last year to our hamper fund. It was a joy to be able to provide bags of food, toiletries, supermarket vouchers and small gifts to all the people that we had missed seeing for the previous 10 months. The surplus funds went toward meeting further hardship needs into the new year: traditionally the period following Christmas is difficult for many of our clients.

Please keep an eye on our social media and other communications as we are making plans now for **hampers 2021**.

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/ACETIreland>

Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/acetireland/>



One Pandemic Following Another: Covid Update for Zimbabwe



On 17 August the Johns Hopkins Covid dashboard gave the previous 28-day case numbers for Ireland as 40,607 with 41 deaths: in Zimbabwe it was 34,356 cases, with 1,412 deaths.

This highlights the difference between high coverage of vaccinations and an excellent health service, however stretched, in comparison to a very under-resourced health service and approximately 10% vaccination rate. Winter (June and July) is always flu

season in Zim, but now Covid season too. With warmer weather people are doing better. Is that less time indoors? Less energy wasted trying to stay warm? God knows.

Late August figures for Zim are 20,144 cases reported over the past 28 days, and 998 deaths: a big improvement. This translated into a death or two every couple of days from the 11 villages Willard's project, ACET CCP, serves, with several of the volunteers extremely sick with Covid. There has been huge distress and grief, not least because attendance at funerals, which is as socially demanded as in rural Ireland, was strongly discouraged by government.

One death in July was of the grandfather of a boy (*left photo*) who is a double orphan, living in the care of his grandparents. Martin is nine years old and in poor health, although he has not tested positive for HIV. He and his grandmother were tested for Covid. Thankfully he was negative, but the grandmother was positive, although asymptomatic, and was put into isolation facilities. She was released a week or so later after testing negative and is now back with Martin in the village. Matilda has been providing a food pack each month to Martin since Covid started, and to 365 other vulnerable children, at a cost of approx. €14.50 per pack. Photo on the right shows one of the children collecting a food pack.



This is the horror of Covid piled onto the HIV pandemic: children who have lost one or both parents are now at risk of losing their guardians and being bereft all over again.

Willard repeatedly asks for our prayers for the situation.

— Wendy Phillips, matildaproject@gmail.com

Summer Care Work, continued from page 1:

In addition to our ongoing work on presenting care issues with housing, finances, addiction and health our response to these additional and emerging issues have included:

- the resumption of accompaniment to appointments and medical visits for clients to access their medication and speak with their medical team.
- linking clients with addiction and respite support in services that have continued to operate.
- offering family supports to some extended family members who are very isolated and were not linked with any other service.
- providing logistical support for clients who wanted to get a Covid-19 vaccination: everything from reading appointment texts, arranging transportation to vaccination centres, to getting their covid certs to provide care in indoor safe and confidential spaces.

We are certainly not facing into an autumn feeling the refreshment that the summer months sometimes bring but with schools starting, restrictions lifting and many clients acknowledging where their support needs are at we are hopeful we can continue to engage in practical and meaningful ways and collaborate well with other services to provide the best integrative care for clients as we move forward.

— Hansi Chisnall and Olivia Corbett are ACET's care workers

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