

West Cork Home Focus Mental Health Service

West Cork Home Focus is an outreach initiative, which complements the West Cork Mental Health Services (WCMHS) by reaching people who find it difficult to access town-based services in the catchment area. The service is funded by the HSE and is managed on a day-to-day basis by the National Learning Network (NLN), which is part of the Rehab Groupⁱ.

The World Health Organisation (WHO) identified the West Cork Home Focus as an existing example of good practice of community mental health services with a rights-based approach. West Cork Home Focus is one of 25 services around the world that was identified by the WHO to include in their recently published *Guidance and Technical Packages on Community Mental Health Services: Promoting person-centred and rights-based approaches*.

What is West Cork Home Focus?

West Cork Home Focus was set up in 2006 as a joint initiative between the WCMHS, NLN, and other partner organisations. The service was initially funded by Department of Justice Equality and Law Reform via Pobal, and is now funded by the HSE. It involves a unique combination of inputs delivered by people with personal experience of mental health services, alongside professionals in mental health work and vocational training.

The aim has been to deliver a service to individuals and families in the West Cork area to

- enable them to enhance their mental health and wellbeing
- promote independent living skills
- increase levels of connection to their communities
- facilitate access to training, education, and employment opportunities
- improve their quality of life
- enable future planning

The service works with people in their own homes but also helps them to access community-based services. It operates 9am - 5pm, five days a week, and has supported individuals for 3 to 18 months.

The service is fully funded by the HSE and costs approx. €260,000 per annum – approximately €7,600 per person per year using the service. There are no costs to the individuals using the service.

The team is funded to work with up to 34 people and takes approximately 23 new people per yearⁱⁱ.

What is unique about West Cork Home Focus?

West Cork Home Focus emerged from the realisation that many people who live in a dispersed rural setting with poor transport links are unable to access mental health supports or vocational inputs.

The service works specifically with a recovery philosophy and places emphasis on giving people time, and on being practical, reliable, and flexible. It recognises the importance of peer support, which is built into the team structure. The service also reflects the 'stepped care' approach, which is outlined in *Sharing the Vision*, the government policy document for mental health.ⁱⁱⁱ

Home focus combines professional and peer-based expertise. It comprises a full-time Community Mental Health Nurse (CMHM), two half-time Rehabilitative Training Instructors, a part-time Recovery Support Worker, and a full-time Recovery and Development Advocate.

Many people using the service particularly value the fact that the team members are reliable and can spend time with them.

“I just can’t stress how important that is, to know that I have that connection there you know, and to know that they are good to their word and they will be up and they will talk to you, and they’ll spend two or three hours if necessary and things get sorted out. So the issues I had on Monday when I wanted to speak to the psychiatrist, I don’t feel it’s so urgent today”^{iv}.

The Impact of West Cork Home Focus

The impact on individuals engaging with West Cork Home Focus has been substantial in its first years. The *Having Choices* evaluation carried out by UCC in 2008 found that:

- **89 percent** reported improvements in their personal and social functioning
- **72 percent** reported improved social engagement
- **71 percent** reported improved independent living
- **69 percent** reported better mental health
- **40 percent** reported better links with community groups and support organisations

WHO Guidance and Technical Packages on Community Mental Health Services: promoting person-centred and rights based approaches

The WHO published [these documents](#) on 10th June 2021. Within the technical packages section are examples of good practices, including the West Cork Home Focus Service.

The purpose of these documents is to provide information and guidance to all stakeholders who wish to develop or transform their mental health system and services.

The guidance provides in-depth information to develop good practice services that meet international human rights standards and obligations, and that promote a person-centred, recovery approach.

It promotes the creation of mental health services that operate without coercion, that are responsive to people’s needs, support recovery and promote autonomy and inclusion, and that involve people with lived experience in the development, delivery and monitoring of services.

ⁱ RehabGroup, <https://www.rehab.ie/what-we-do/>

ⁱⁱ Sapouna L. *Having Choices*. An Evaluation of the Home Focus project in West Cork. 2008. Dept of Applied Social Studies, University College Cork.

ⁱⁱⁱ Sharing the Vision: a mental health policy for everyone <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/2e46f-sharing-the-vision-a-mental-health-policy-for-everyone/>

^{iv} Sapouna L. *Having Choices*. An Evaluation of the Home Focus project in West Cork. 2008. Dept of Applied Social Studies, University College Cork, page 76.