



# National Forensic Mental Health Service Newsletter

Winter 2025

**NFMHS**

National Forensic  
Mental Health Service



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## Note from the Editor

Welcome to the Winter 2025 edition of the NFMHS Newsletter.

Winter is often a time of reflection and renewed focus, and this issue captures both—highlighting the progress made across our service in recent months and sharing updates on the developments that will guide us through the winter and beyond.

Our aim with each newsletter is to provide clear, timely, and meaningful information for patients, staff, families, and carers. This edition brings together contributions from teams across the service, showcasing their hard work, commitment, and ongoing efforts to support high-quality care within the NFMHS.

I would like to thank everyone who contributed to this issue, and I hope you find the updates both informative and encouraging as we continue our work together.

*Simon Bergin*

Editor & Communications Officer



Get in touch at

**[Comms.NFMHS@hse.ie](mailto:Comms.NFMHS@hse.ie)**



## Update from the Head of Service

Welcome to the Winter 2025 edition of the National Forensic Mental Health Service (NFMHS) newsletter. This edition provides an update on key activities across the service over recent months, as well as an overview of our planned developments for the remainder of the year.

My sincere thanks to Simon and all the contributors for assembling this information so that our community remains well informed.

### Recruitment

Over the summer and autumn months, the HR team has continued its significant recruitment efforts across the service. A wide range of roles have been advertised and filled, including posts in general services, maintenance, social work, mental health nursing, occupational therapy, and forensic psychiatry.

We are grateful to all staff involved in supporting these recruitment processes and in welcoming new colleagues to the NFMHS.

### Flooring Repairs and Opening of the Brandon Unit

In August 2025, essential flooring repair works began on the Kippure Unit. To ensure continuity of care and patient safety, a number of patients have been temporarily relocated to alternative units.

Also, as part of these works, and in response to ongoing flooring repairs across the service, the Brandon Unit has now been registered with the Mental Health Commission as an approved centre.

Patients from the Arderin and Barcam Units have been temporarily accommodated within Brandon to support this transition. All flooring repairs remain on schedule for completion by the end of Q1 2026.

### Mental Health Commission (MHC) Inspections

The Mental Health Commission has now concluded its inspection cycle for 2025. The NFMHS participated in three inspections over the past five months:

- Focused inspection on seclusion practices: 8 July 2025
- Annual inspection: 12–14 August 2025
- Brandon Approved Centre Inspection: 11–13 November 2025

I would like to acknowledge the professionalism, dedication, and collaborative spirit shown by staff during this period. Your commitment to upholding regulatory standards and delivering high-quality care has been deeply appreciated.

Finally, on behalf of the Area Management Team, I want to express our heartfelt thanks to every member of staff for your continued dedication, compassion, and professionalism. Your collective efforts ensure that our patients receive the highest standard of care.

With warm regards,

**Pauline Ackermann**  
**Head of Service, National Forensic Mental Health Service**



# LATEST NEWS

## Calypso Presentation of "A Christmas Carol" 10<sup>th</sup> December 2025



The NFMHS Recreation Department was pleased to presented Calypso's "A Christmas Carol". Special thanks to Michael Ford, Sam Ford and Sinead Murphy who put on a fantastic performance for patients.



# LATEST NEWS

## World Mental Health Day 10<sup>th</sup> October 2025



On World Mental Health Day, NFMHS Ireland held mental health and wellbeing events and activities for patients and staff, and was delighted to welcome Lou van Laake from Shine: Mental Health Support, Advocacy, Education and Angel Arrogante, Jack Healy and Jack Dempsey from Irish Pensions & Finance.



Staff also had the opportunity to explore the NFMHS Walled Garden & Orchard. Apples were ripe and ready for collecting and enjoyed by all.



## LATEST NEWS

### Patient Barista Training Graduation



On the 28<sup>th</sup> May 2025, 20 patients graduated from the patient barista training programme. The patient barista training programme is a 6 month programme where patients develop new skillsets and a qualification.



The training programme is a collaboration between the NFMHS Catering and Occupational Therapy Departments and Java Republic. A representative from Java Republic presented each graduate with a certificate and Keep Cup.





## LATEST NEWS

### Louis O'Brien celebrates 50 years of service in the Central Mental Hospital, NFMHS



The Therapeutic Security Team organised a surprise celebration for one of our care officers Louis O'Brien. Louis has been working in the Central Mental Hospital, NFMHS since 1975.

Colleagues enjoyed a memorable afternoon with cake and stories on hand to mark the occasion.

Congratulations Louis on 50 years of service!





# LATEST NEWS

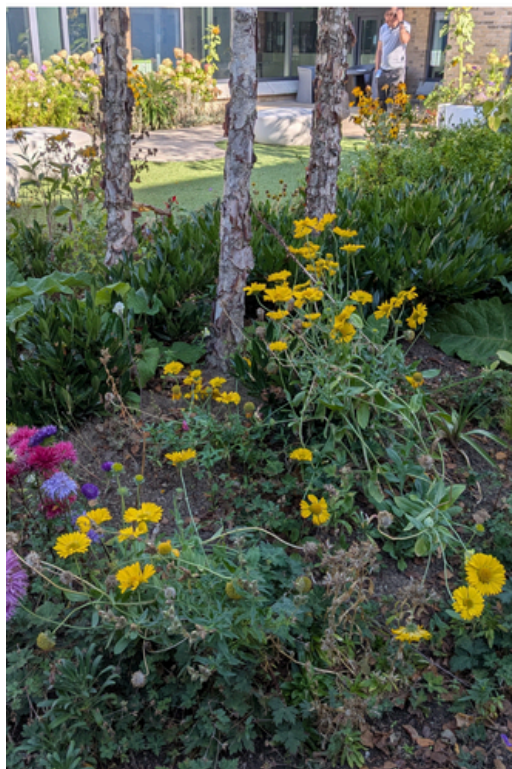
## Walk around Kippure Garden

by Simon Bergin, Communications Officer



On a sunny morning in early September, I took the opportunity to take a walk around the garden area in Kippure Unit.

I was pleasantly surprised to see the wonderful array of flowers still in bloom, and took the opportunity to speak to two patients who have been at the forefront of developing the garden area.



Both patients had no previous gardening experience prior to starting the project, and carried out experiments planting flowers on different sides of the unit.

Well done everyone involved in the Kippure Garden!





## HSE UPDATES



**Top up your  
protection**

Flu and COVID-19 vaccines

Get your Flu  
Vaccine and  
receive a free  
goodie bag!

### Flu and COVID-19 Vaccines now available in NFMHS

Please contact the Primary Healthcare Dept to book your vaccine appointment

[Stephen.Edge@hse.ie](mailto:Stephen.Edge@hse.ie)   [tracey.hoare@hse.ie](mailto:tracey.hoare@hse.ie)

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### Climate and Sustainability Learning Hub

Supporting staff and communities to  
care for people and the planet





# MENTAL HEALTH COMMISSION NEWS



## Guidance for Irish Mental Health Services on the Adoption and Implementation of a **Human Rights-Based Approach to Care and Treatment**

October 2025

The Mental Health Commission (MHC) has published landmark national guidance for all Irish mental health services, setting out how a human rights-based approach must become the foundation of care and treatment across the sector.

The new guidance developed by the MHC on foot of a recent collaboration with the World Health Organization, the Department of Health and mental health service providers – follows an extensive consultation process involving over 350 service users, families, carers, and staff.

You can access the document [here](#)





# NFMHS Garden Project







## What is the Recreation Department?

We help activate patients, both on the units and off the units.

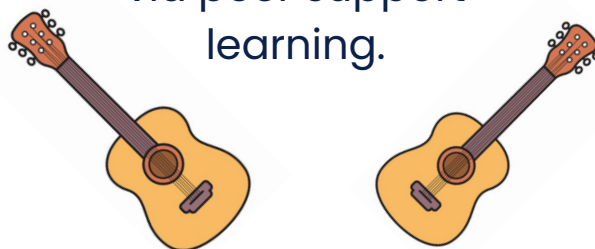
We facilitate and co-produce education courses that assist patients with their recovery.

We look after the gym, sports hall, and organise band practise.

## Do you want to learn the guitar?

Lessons starting in January.

All lessons will be given via peer support learning.



Contact the recreation department to express your interest.

## 2026 Calendar Competition

Are you into art, music or poetry?

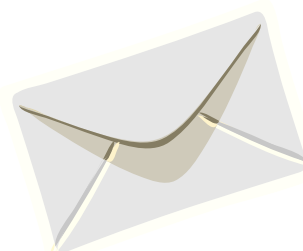
Do you have something that represents the NFMHS?

Would you like to contribute to a calendar for patients for 2026?

All submissions to the recreation department.



## Suggestions Wanted

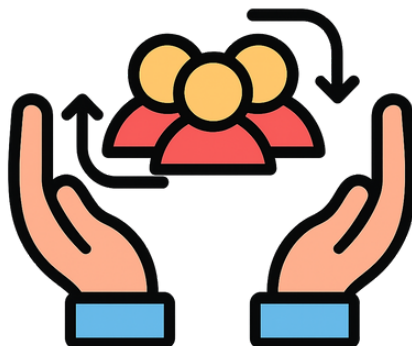


What would you like to see from the recreational department?



# Promoting Family and Social Networks:

## Pillar 7 Activity in the Social Work Department



Our Social Work Department is committed to supporting individuals and families to navigate their involvement with the NFMHS. With a holistic and person-centered approach, our team offers a wide range of Pillar 7 services designed to promote recovery, connection, and empowerment to patients and their families. A snapshot of just some of the Social Work Pillar 7 interventions are detailed below.

### **Family Information Days**

Our Family Information Days provide a welcoming space for loved ones to learn, ask questions, and connect with professionals. These events include presentations on mental health, NFMHS pathway, carer support, and more. Families leave with practical resources and a deeper understanding of how to support their loved ones.

### **Home Visits and Family Engagement**

We aim to engage families from the point of admission, providing information, psychoeducation and emotional support, often in the home environment.

### **Supported Visits**

We offer Social Work supported visits in specific cases such as when families must communicate difficult news to their loved ones or if a family member requires extra support to attend visits.

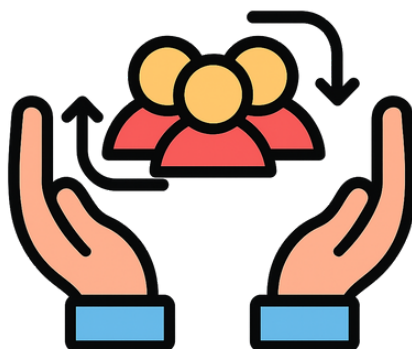
### **Child Visits**

Our aim is to facilitate safe meaningful contact between patients and children in their lives, including child visits where appropriate. The use of thorough assessment, close family engagement and supervised visits ensures the wellbeing of all involved.



# Promoting Family and Social Networks:

## Pillar 7 Activity in the Social Work Department



### Coffee Mornings

Our coffee mornings offer a relaxed setting for patients in our R&R cluster to share experience, learn more about community life and to engage with patients who have progressed along the pathway.

### Carers Group

Caring for someone with complex needs within a forensic system can be overwhelming. The Carers Group facilitated by the Social Work team provides emotional support in a space where carers can connect with each other and share their challenges.

### Court Support

We offer emotional and practical support to patients attending court, helping them understand proceedings and feel less alone during difficult times.

### Home Leave & Compassionate Leave

We assist in planning home leave for patients, ensuring it's safe and supportive. Whether it's for family reconnection or compassionate reasons, we provide follow-up emotional support to patients and families.

### Grave Leave

We support individuals visiting the graves of loved ones, offering emotional preparation, accompaniment, and space for reflection.

### Patient Activities

We facilitate groups to help develop patients' social connections with each other and with the wider community network. These include AA, Women's Shed and Disclosure

Every service we offer is rooted in dignity, respect, and compassion. Our department doesn't just respond to needs — we build relationships, foster resilience, and walk alongside people on their journey towards recovery.



# PARTNER SERVICES

## Update from the Evolve Recovery College



We are delighted to celebrate the achievements of over 50 patients who have graduated from Evolve Recovery College, each receiving certificates across a wide range of courses. Their dedication and commitment to learning and personal growth is truly inspiring. Congratulations again to all our graduates – your journey continues to inspire us all!

Looking ahead, we are excited to launch a brand new 7-week course: “Advocacy and Me.” This course will explore what advocacy means and how individuals can use their voice and start positive change. It is not too late to join us!!!

The Wellness Recovery Action Plan (WRAP) program has now begun at Evolve Recovery College and will run for the next 16 weeks.

WRAP is an evidence-based approach to mental health and wellbeing that empowers people to take control of their recovery journey. Developed by individuals with lived experience, it provides a structured framework for recognising personal strengths, managing challenges, and building strategies for maintaining wellness.

Throughout the program, participants will work together in a group environment to explore key elements of WRAP, including identifying personal wellness tools, creating daily maintenance plans, and developing action steps for when things feel difficult. The course also focuses on building crisis and post-crisis plans, ensuring people feel prepared and supported in challenging times.

For more information, reach out to us we would love to hear from you!

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# STAFF NEWS

## Reminder of Staff Supports



### **EAP**and**ME** Employee Assistance Programme

Call the 24/7 EAP national phone line on **0818 327 327** to speak to a trained EAP counsellor or therapist in your area who can help.

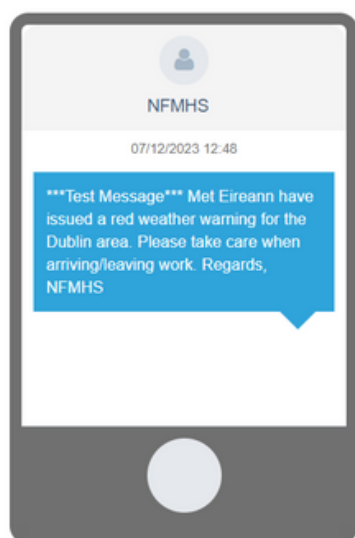
For more information visit [hse.ie/EAP](https://hse.ie/EAP)



## 0818 327 327



# STAFF NEWS



The text messaging service **Sendmode** has been in operation in NFMHS since February 2024.

The service provides short SMS alerts sent directly to a staff member's designated mobile phone and is used exclusively by the Head of Service office to communicate important updates relating to the service, and weather/traffic and/or local news which may impact you.

240 staff members have so far signed up to the service and received alerts regarding **local road closures and delays, Employee Financial Wellness seminars, the Quality Network and NFMHS Town Hall meetings.**

If you wish to avail of the service please email [comms.nfmhs@hse.ie](mailto:comms.nfmhs@hse.ie) and include your mobile number to be included in the database.

Please indicate whether the mobile number is your personal number or work number.

We hope to use the Sendmode system to reach all our staff members!

**SIGN UP TODAY**



# STAFF NEWS

## Central Mental Hospital Golf Society



The Central Mental Hospital Golf Society was founded in 1990 and comprises of members from the old hospital in Dundrum and new service in Portrane.

The CMH Golf society organises 6-7 outings per year, different courses – 1 day per month between April and October.

The two big days are the Captains Day, and the President's Day.

- Winner of this year's Captain's prize was Louis O'Brien
- Winner of this year's President's prize was Cliona Murphy

All current or retired staff are welcome to join the Central Mental Hospital Golf Society

Please contact the Golf Society Secretary Darwin Gleeson at [Darwin.Gleeson@hse.ie](mailto:Darwin.Gleeson@hse.ie) for further information.





# Make Your Own Kind of Music

Dr Natassha Goh

This time last year, on my forensic psychiatry rotation, I was a member of the band in the Central Mental Hospital. The hospital is Ireland's only hospital dedicated to forensic psychiatry, providing treatment for primarily for patients who have been referred by the courts as needing psychiatric care and are unfit to stand for trial or having been found not guilty of an offence by reason of insanity.

Forensic psychiatry is an immensely interesting and rewarding subspeciality. But I found that the most impactful experience that I had while working there, was my time with the band.

Within my first few weeks there, I was recruited by Basil, a senior nurse who had been working in the hospital for over twenty years. One of the nurses on my ward heard that I could play the violin and the mandolin, and immediately called Basil to come over. He did, explaining to me that the band is open to both patients and staff and is run as a therapeutic activity. I was intrigued – I have loved music since I was a child, but never found where it fit into my clinical practice. At the same time, I was new to the hospital and was apprehensive about playing with patients, especially in the forensic setting. All new staff receive extensive training about risk management and as a young doctor, it was on the forefront of my mind.

I went for the first practice without my instruments, just to see what it was all about. The music room was a treasure trove of instruments – among others, there were guitars, drums, ukuleles, a saxophone, and a keyboard. Basil's instrument. Though of course, I came to find out over the course of my six months in the band, there wasn't an instrument Basil couldn't play.

He introduced me to the patients in the band, and over the next few months, I came to know them well. The band was open to those who wanted to play, but there were five regulars. Most of what we played were original songs written by these patients. It's hard to put into words how special I found this to be. Patients became musicians, and through that, each of them had a message. Or many messages, prolific as they were in their songwriting! Unsurprisingly, one can tell a lot about mental state from an original song. There were songs about mysteries, songs about lost loves, songs about things they didn't like.

The patients also had allocated times to visit the hospital's coffee shop, which was often staffed by patients on barista training. When I had the time, I would often join them for a coffee myself. By the end of my rotation, I had asked each one what their inspiration for their music was. Everyone's answer was different. One wrote about his life: "Write what you know" and "start with a poem" was his advice on songwriting. Another said that he wrote a lot of love songs about the women in his life. And another said that he was just making it up as he went along!

# Make Your Own Kind of Music

Dr Natassha Goh

I played the violin for Mass in the hospital, but for band I ended up sticking to the mandolin – and improved more in my time there than I had in the years since I'd first picked it up – and we played for the rest of the hospital on a few occasions. The rest of the time, we were in the music room, practicing maybe twice a week. I found music to be a great equaliser. Aside from the patients, our drummer was one of the hospital cleaners and we had a member of the catering staff on the guitar. The music room was a safe space for all of us. It was a unique opportunity for me to get to know the patients outside of a clinical setting.

During a supervision session with my consultant, I reflected on the concept of boundaries. A topic important in all of medicine but especially so here. I was spending a lot of time in band practice and wondered, as every junior doctor does, if I was doing the right thing. All our interactions were appropriate, there was never a line crossed. The patients referred to me as "Doc" or "Doctor Natassha". We bonded over music; I never spoke about my personal life nor did I contribute a song. And of course, Basil was always present. It also helped that I was not on the treating team for any of the patients in the band.

Being part of the band helped me understand more about myself too. All my preconceived notions of what a 'forensic patient' was undone. A lot of these patients, the band members included, had been in the hospital for many years, some even decades. I wondered what a person who had been living in an environment like that would be like, or how unwell they might have been. And, I realised what I liked most about Psychiatry: the opportunity to connect with people in a way that no other speciality does. With the band, it brought that to a different level, one that all musicians would resonate with.

I hear you, and I understand you. I understand who you are, outside of your diagnosis, your treatment plan. But you, who sings of home, who sings of enemies, who sings of old loves. The person you are, and who you want to be, when you eventually leave this place.

The passion with which Basil led the band was also deeply inspirational for me. He was thoughtful, observant and encouraging. Above all, he was kind. He would come in on his days off to play the piano for Sunday Mass. He wrote me a list of jazz recommendations when I told him I was also interested in jazz. I recall a night shift when I was called away during dinner to an emergency, and when I returned, the canteen was closed for the night. Without me knowing, he had made a few calls to scrounge up some food to make sure I had something to eat.



# Make Your Own Kind of Music

Dr Natassha Goh

Unfortunately, Basil passed away unexpectedly earlier this year, just before he was due to retire. As sad as I was, a small comfort was that I had already finished my posting, so we had said our goodbyes and there was nothing between us left unsaid. I wish he were here to read this essay though. I hoped he knew how profound the impact of the hospital band was on, not just me, but every member of the band.

Within the confines of the hospital and all its necessary restrictions, the band created a pocket of hope and joy for all involved. For patients, it nurtured creativity and provided an outlet for expression. For the wider hospital, it provided good-natured entertainment and a sense of camaraderie in watching fellow patients sing and play instruments. For me, it drew out what I loved best from Psychiatry, melded it with my fondest hobby, and showed me who and what I can become for someone else, if I only put aside my fears. One year on, it remains nothing less than a career-defining experience, having shaped the person I am now, and still becoming.

I'd like to end with the lyrics of a song that I had on repeat during my time with the band.

*Nobody can tell ya*

*There's only one song worth singin'*

*They may try and sell ya*

*'Cause it hangs them up to see someone like you!*

*But you've gotta*

*Make your own kind of music*

*Sing your own special song*

*Make your own kind of music*

*Even if nobody else sings along*

*– Cass Elliot*

In Memory of Zakhele Basil Buthelezi







**CONTACT US**

## **NFMHS Communications**

Thank you to all our contributors to the NFMHS Winter Newsletter 2025.

If anyone would like to pass on a story or highlight the work of one of your colleagues, please send it to [comms.nfmhs@hse.ie](mailto:comms.nfmhs@hse.ie) for consideration in the next newsletter.

Please get in touch if you would like to highlight an initiative taking place in your department.

We also welcome any feedback on the NFMHS newsletter. Please let us know at [comms.nfmhs@hse.ie](mailto:comms.nfmhs@hse.ie)

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