



FIRST FORTNIGHT is delighted to announce the launch of its CHILD AND ADOLESCENT CREATIVE THERAPY SERVICE (CACTUS)

***The trauma informed creative therapy service for children and adolescents ages
3 years to 17 years who are experiencing or at risk of becoming homeless***

The Mental Health arts charity, First Fortnight is delighted to announce its Child and Adolescent Creative Therapy Service (CACTUS) is now open for referrals. The pilot will initially focus on the Dublin region, where between its launch and the end of 2022 proof of concept and best practice document will be further enhanced. From this point, and subject to sourcing additional funding the expectation will be to plan the rollout of an expansion of the service to support the target population in Dublin and nationally.

CACTUS is a unique service that will provide a professional trauma informed creative therapy service for children and adolescents between the ages of 3 and 17 years who are experiencing homelessness or at risk of losing their home.

The CACTUS centre will offer children a safe place where they can express themselves, explore ways to improve their coping skills, build self-esteem together with space to play and have fun while also being supported by creative therapists, all of whom are fully accredited through IACAT (Irish Association of Creative Art Therapists). Over the next 6 months we will provide 160 creative therapy sessions to cater for the needs of children and adolescents and a further 370 sessions in 2022. While it is our vision that society will be such that the need for our service is never excessive, we are however, aware that in society our perfect world ideals don't materialise too often. As such, our objective is to be in place and prepared to support as the need requires. This is how we want to measure our success. To be prepared, reflexive and responsive and have robust systems in place.

On behalf of the **children and adolescents** who will benefit from the service and ourselves we would like to extend our sincere gratitude to our funding partners **ReThink Ireland**, the **Government of Ireland (Department of Rural and Community Development from the Dormant Accounts Fund)**, the **National Concert Hall** and **Peter McVerry Trust** whose partnership and support have made it possible for us to expand our services to meet the needs of children and adolescents who are at risk of or who are homeless. For example, having a welcoming, safe, trauma informed space in which we can work from and offer to the children and adolescents up to 17 years, who are referred to **CACTUS**.

The Creative Therapy Service is a wonderful addition to **First Fortnight's** existing **NOSP** (National Office For Suicide Prevention) funded creative therapy service which has supported adults who are at risk of or who are homeless since 2012. We in First Fortnight are acutely aware of the diverse individual challenges that each child and adolescent can face as a result of their homeless experience such as physical and mental health challenges, social stigma and feelings of shame. Research tells us children who experience homelessness are also significantly more likely to experience symptoms of PTSD (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder) and develop behavioural difficulties. Research into potentially traumatic events or *adverse childhood experiences* (*ACEs) that occur in childhood (0-17 years) are linked to chronic health problems, mental ill health, and substance use problems in adulthood. ACEs can also negatively impact education, job opportunities, and earning potential. **First Fortnights' Creative Therapy Service** is founded on the belief that confirms that ACEs can be prevented. The creative therapy service will aim to intervene at the earliest opportunity in a child's life to help prevent such potential outcomes.

Therapeutic Service Manager, Patricia Bourke D'Souza said of the service launch; *"Getting **Child and Adolescent Creative Therapy Service** to this launch point has been a labour of love for the team."* Patricia continued; *"Despite the challenges posed by Covid 19 over the past year, we are particularly excited to be launching our service expansion within its planned time frame. The service will aim to offer children and adolescents a safe place where they can feel welcome, understood, seen and supported as they build resources and address the challenges they face"*.



Pádraig Fitzgerald, Fund Manager - Children & Youth Funds said; *"Rethink Ireland is delighted to support First Fortnight's Child and Adolescent Creative Therapy Service (CACTUS). This innovative project will provide invaluable creative therapies and supports to vulnerable children and adolescents, and will provide them with the opportunity to ensure a safer and healthier future for themselves despite the challenging circumstances that they face."*

Pat Doyle, CEO at Peter McVerry Trust the national housing and homeless charity said; *"We are absolutely delighted to support this service. We know it will be of huge value and benefit for the young people who will be able to access the service, including young people in or at risk of accessing homeless services."*

Nigel Flegg, Head of Learning & Participation, the National Concert Hall said; *"We are delighted to partner with First Fortnight as part of its expanded service to offer children and adolescents an opportunity to actively engage in participative music programmes and initiatives that are fun, creative, trauma informed and that support enhanced mental wellbeing".*

For details regarding the service or to make a referral please refer to our website: www.firstfortnight.ie
First Fortnight is an arts-based mental health charity that organises an annual nationwide mental health arts festival in the first two weeks of January aimed at challenging stigma and opening up the conversation around mental health. **First Fortnight** Mental Health Art & Culture Festival has become a fixture in the cultural calendar and synonymous with mental health awareness, challenging prejudice and ending stigma. January 2021 recorded the 10th year of the festival.

If you would like to make a donation to help support the work of Child and Adolescent Creative Therapy Service (CACTUS) you can do so from the link on our website www.firstfortnight.ie

Socials

Inst. @Firstfortnight

T. @firstfortnight

FB. @firstfortnight

W. www.firstfortnight.ie

Additional information flyer and poster

<https://we.tl/t-fVyK08KTcx>

Pictures

<https://we.tl/t-oYcHDxv5xu>

For more information please contact:

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[Editor's Notes continued overpage...](#)



Additional Notes | Editors Notes

To be Trauma Informed includes

Recognising and understanding the signs, symptoms and impact of trauma and potential paths for recovery. It is all about ensuring the service provided is founded on partnership and collaboration (where the client is recognised as an expert in their own life) and where choice, empowerment and enhanced sense of control are core pillars. Trauma Informed Practice integrates knowledge about trauma into policies, practices and procedures and is proactive in helping minimise the risk of re-traumatisation. Trauma informed practice acknowledges and celebrates the uniqueness of each individual and recognizes the experience and support needs will be different for each person.

Points of note:

- People who have suffered Trauma can be triggered in many different ways.
- An experience of homelessness/ at risk of becoming homeless does not automatically result in the person becoming traumatised.

What is creative therapy?

Creative therapy uses the creative process to help facilitate client connect with self and self-expression. It supports safe containment of the person's experience and helps them to create meaning from their experiences. It offers a bridge when verbal dialogue may be difficult. It also supports clients to explore ways to expand and develop healthy coping strategies and resources while enabling them to explore and develop new ways of relating to themselves and others. The experience of engaging in creative therapy will be different for each person and as such the process is tailored to the needs of the person.

Within Creative Art Therapies there are 4 main modalities - Art, Music, Drama and Dance & Movement therapies. Creative Therapies are evidence-based, person centered and strengths based treatments that involve using arts-based activities in a therapeutic environment. Creative therapy uses a range of techniques to support the creation of a safe environment where clients can work towards expressing and exploring their world at their pace.

In Ireland, creative therapy comes under the umbrella of Irish Association of Creative Arts Therapists (IACAT). First Fortnight's Creative therapists are fully accredited through IACAT, abide by the IACAT code of Ethics and engage in ongoing professional supervision.

Pilot through 2022 (further overview information on considerations needed under the Pilot Scheme)

Before planning a wider expansion of the creative therapy service to support children and adolescents at risk of, or who are homeless, we want to ensure that all systems and key pillars are in place to ensure a smooth and stable roll out. This includes ensuring the creative therapy provided is in line with best practice (councillors are trained in the required approaches), structure and proof of concept. In order to consider a future expansion of the service post pilot we will need to source and phase in additional locations / premises where we can practice, expand our current panel of trained therapists to provide creative therapy for those who may be referred and of course the funding to allow us implements all of this and carry out review and evaluation to verify the efficiency of our service.



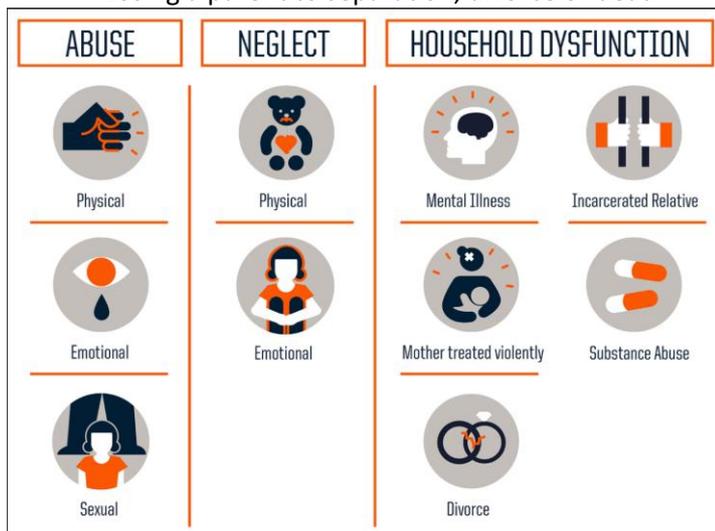
ACEs –Adverse Childhood Experiences

Originated in Italy; 17,000 people involved in initial survey

** a minimum of 10 adverse experiences in childhood are associated with an increased risk of poor health and other problems in later life*

The 10 ACEs are:

- Physical abuse
- Sexual abuse
- Emotional abuse
- Physical neglect
- Emotional neglect
- A family member who is depressed or diagnosed with other mental illness
- A family member who is addicted to alcohol or another substance
- A family member who is in prison
- Witnessing a mother being abused
- Losing a parent to separation, divorce or death



About First Fortnight

First Fortnight is an arts-based mental health charity and organises its festival annually each January aimed at challenging stigma. This year, for its on-going work challenging mental health stigma, First Fortnight was honoured to accept a **Rethink Ireland Award**, recognising our work in Creative Therapies and enabling us to increase the services we offer to children. **The Centre for Creative Therapies** aims to harness the power of creativity and art by providing a professional, regulated art psychotherapy service. In June 2020 First Fortnight was the leading partner which drove the launch of **Minding Creative Minds (MCM)**, Ireland's first free 24/7 well-being programme for the entire Irish Creative Sector. The charity was also instrumental in founding the European Arts Festival model and helped stage Europe's first mental health arts festival in Athens, Greece in 2016 and subsequently hosted European Mental Health Arts Festival in communities across Ireland in 2019. An awareness campaign commencing in the **First Fortnight** of the year works because we are all a little raw this time of year and more likely to be open to an empathic response. **First Fortnight** Mental Health Art & Culture Festival has become a fixture in the cultural calendar and synonymous with mental health awareness, challenging prejudice and ending stigma. January 2021 was the 10th year of the festival. <https://www.firstfortnight.ie>



ReThink Ireland

Rethink Ireland (previously Social Innovation Fund Ireland) provides cash grants and business support to charities and social enterprises working in Irish communities across the country. These are the organisations not just thinking differently, but who are putting their ideas into practice and building a more inclusive Ireland. Rethink Ireland works with companies, families, individuals and foundations who understand new thinking in Ireland is needed. Funds raised by Rethink Ireland are matched by the Irish Government from the Dormant Accounts Fund. Since its first year of operations in 2016, Rethink Ireland has created a €72 million social innovation fund. It has partnered with companies, trusts, foundations, families and individuals to create 30 funds tackling issues such as inequality and educational disadvantage. Rethink Ireland has supported 246 social innovations, which have reached 408,624 people, created over 500 jobs and helped almost 1,000 people experiencing disadvantage into employment.

Rethink Ireland's Children and Youth Funds, which includes the Children and Youth Education Fund and the Children and Youth Mental Health Fund, were designed to support projects addressing the most prevalent issues facing young people and children in Ireland today. Awardees each received a multi-year grant and will also be awarded a place on Rethink Ireland's Game-Changer Programme which includes training, capacity building and participation in a three-year academic evaluation. Proving and improving their impact, these projects have strong potential to be replicated across Ireland with a view to creating real systemic change in the communities they are supporting. <https://rethinkireland.ie>

Peter McVerry Trust

Peter McVerry Trust is a national housing and homeless charity committed to reducing homelessness and the harm caused by substance misuse and social disadvantage. The charity provides low-threshold entry services, primarily to younger people and vulnerable adults with complex needs, and offers pathways out of homelessness based on the principles of the Housing First model. <https://pmvtrust.ie>

National Concert Hall

One of the core goals of the National Concert Hall's Learning & Participation (L&P) programme is to support positive mental health and wellbeing through the medium of music. The L&P programme uses music as a tool for positive change in people's lives, supporting physical and emotional wellbeing through engagement with music in a variety of forms. <https://www.nch.ie>

Ends, Friday June 25th, 2021