

# 25TH ANNIVERSARY

Waterford Healing Arts Trust is celebrating its 25th Anniversary this year. The Munster Express is marking this important milestone by publishing a number of columns exploring some of the stories behind this very special organisation. Look out for future instalments featuring experiences of patients, staff and visitors and the impact the work of Waterford Healing Arts Trust has had on their lives. Waterford Healing Arts Trust 051 842664



## Healing Sounds on the Wards

MAEVE BUTLER

*“Music gladdens your heart and makes you feel better”.* These words from a patient sum up a unique music programme managed by Waterford Healing Arts Trust at University Hospital Waterford. Musician Liam Merriman and Clinical Nurse Manager Adrian Crellin explain further.

“We bring live music in the door of a hospital ward”, explains Liam Merriman, one of the musicians on the Healing Sounds on the Wards programme at University Hospital Waterford (UHW). “Professional musicians, who are trained to work in healthcare settings, perform live music for patients, family members and staff, to give people a lift, to help soften the clinical environment and to humanise the space”.

Healing Sounds on the Wards has been running for ten years and is currently delivered by a team of five musicians: Alan Browne, Michelle Haberlin and Liam Kavanagh, who are mentored by their senior colleagues Liam Merriman and Eoin O Meachair and supported by Waterford Healing Arts Trust (WHAT) staff. The programme enhances the quality of life for patients, family members and staff by helping to alleviate anxiety and stress. Feedback is universally positive, with patients and staff stating how uplifting hearing live music can be and how it changes the atmosphere on the ward: “It’s massive, the



Musician Liam Merriman and Clinical Nurse Manager Adrian Crellin getting ready for a Healing Sounds on the Wards session at University Hospital Waterford.

Photos: MAEVE BUTLER

smiles on their faces, patients love every bit of it”, “It really makes an impact for patients” and “It builds rapport, brings patients to a happy place”.

Adrian Crellin, Clinical Nurse Manager, agrees: “It’s almost as if people are moved out of a hospital, into a more familiar setting like the pub or a social setting where they can relax. They join in the music, they sing along, they really enjoy it. It’s a bit of normality for them. The difference in the atmosphere on the ward before the session and after is

incredible.”

Encountering musicians playing musical instruments is not what most people would expect on a hospital ward, but this isn’t just any music. Liam explains that training for the musicians has been essential to the success of the programme: “I trained with Musique et Santé in Paris, who were the pioneers of this approach, and I did further training in Europe, including a Train the Trainers programme. It changed my whole approach. I learned about supporting the hospital staff in their role; about empathy, about moving away totally from being an “entertaining” musician towards being patient-centred and connecting with patients through music. And it’s extraordinary what happens”.

So, how does it work? “When we arrive, we check in with the nursing staff, who guide us on where to play. We begin by playing a “hello” piece of music and seeing if people would like more. Once we get that – a smile, a nod, a little bit of conversation – we move closer and engage with people through the music... Sometimes we have to decide whether or not

it’s appropriate to play. We have to know how to judge this and the staff trust us not to impose. This partnership and trust has built up over many years and is really important.”

Adrian agrees “Initially when the musicians started coming, I was a small bit sceptical as to how it was going to work, but over time, we have really come to trust them. They’re really good at what they do.”

Adrian also emphasises the importance of the live music experience, in terms of the normality it affords the patients. “Ireland, as a country, people are so used to live music, that interaction, it’s such a social thing. With Healing Sounds, they can interact with the musicians, they can request music. I remember one particular evening session, there was so much conversation and craic going on, that the music just kept flowing and people kept joining in. It was fantastic.”

It’s a hospital ward, so how does the normal work of caring for the patients continue with the music going on? “It’s never a problem”, explains Adrian. “If there are things that need to be done within the area where the music is

being played, the lads are very unobtrusive, so we can work around them. And often we just listen to the music, too. It’s a bit of a chill time for ourselves as well”.

What about situations where a person is very ill, and the family is exhausted, worried and stressed? “It depends on the situation, but sometimes a relative will actually request the musicians to come to the bedside, particularly if the patient has always enjoyed music. It can bring a bit of

normality for the person and for the family, and that can make all the difference”.

So, is there anything Adrian would change about Healing Sounds? “We would love to have more sessions. It’s a great initiative. I know there are funding constraints, but it’s so worthwhile. The change that we see, when the musicians come in and play, it lightens the mood. It can help recovery as well, it brings that little bit of normality back to people’s lives that allows them to forget they’re ill, even for a short period of time. It makes such a difference.” Liam adds “We were very fortunate to win a Good Cause Award from the National Lottery last year, which enabled WHAT to train two more musicians and double the number of Healing Sounds sessions this year. Now we’re fundraising, applying for grants and looking for sponsorship to maintain this increase.”

The final word goes to patients who experienced Healing Sounds on the Wards this week: Pat Moore described the session as “fantastic and uplifting”, while Noel Power said “The music made me feel great, super!” His sister, Alice Meaghar, who was visiting, added “It made our day – We feel privileged”, while Kay Harrington said the experience “built my heart up again – I feel ready for anything now”.

**Healing Sounds on the Wards is one of many arts experiences which Waterford Healing Arts Trust (WHAT) brings to the bedside of patients at UHW to alleviate the stress and anxiety which many people feel when in hospital. For more info, see [www.waterfordhealingarts.com](http://www.waterfordhealingarts.com)**



Healing Sounds on the Wards musicians Eoin O Meachair (mentor), Michelle Haberlin, Liam Kavanagh and Alan Browne at Waterford Healing Arts Trust.



Healthcare Assistant Bolanie Adenwi joins patients and visitors for a Healing Sounds on the Wards music session with Waterford Healing Arts Trust musicians Eoin O Meachair and Liam Merriman.