

LawCare News Ireland

Welcome

to the second edition of our new look LawCare News Ireland. We have had a busy first quarter, with plenty going on, and we are proud to announce that the members of our team, across all the jurisdictions, are now fully qualified mental health first aiders. Mary Jackson, Coordinator for Ireland, has completed the course, and you can read about her experience and how it affected her, in the news piece that follows.

I am in Dublin myself on the April 27, speaking to the Irish Women Lawyers Association (IWLA) about mental health and wellbeing in the legal community. The IWLA strives to encourage and support women in the legal profession in Ireland, by facilitating professional, social and educational networking between women lawyers. They also advocate for, and advance, the interests of Irish women lawyers. This is the first time I will have addressed IWLA, and I'm looking forward to meeting the team, networking with the audience, and publicising the work we do in Ireland.

Mary Jackson will be attending the Law Society Professional Training cluster event in Portlaoise on 5 May. We will have a stand there, displaying all our materials, and Mary will be available to discuss anything people may wish to know about LawCare. Law Society Skillnet, in partnership with the Laois Solicitors' Association, Carlow Bar Association, Midland Bar Association and Kildare Bar Association, are running the event. The aim and objectives of the day are to provide an opportunity for practitioners to update their knowledge in areas of law of essential relevance to most in general practice. There will also be an opportunity to network with other practitioners.

We have also been working closely with Emma Cooper of the Law Society's Student Development Services, providing bespoke leaflets, posters and our Top 10 Tips for good mental health and wellbeing. Emma

has been communicating about LawCare, and our services, and we hope we can provide support to those who may need it as they pursue their studies and, ultimately, a rewarding career in the law.

Our blog in this edition of LawCare News Ireland is written by Valerie Peart, a LawCare trustee, solicitor, and Law Society of Ireland Council member. She talks about what being a trustee of LawCare means, and has meant to her, and her aspirations for our charity going forward. It is a frank account, and Valerie is clear about the "only one goal in mind": not ever should any of our legal colleagues or their staff or their family fail to receive the help and support they needed, because the LawCare message had failed to reach them. We are happy to say that the message is reaching them: calls are up to the helpline, as outlined in our news piece below.

We are excited to be in the planning stages for our 20th anniversary, which we will celebrate in style on Tuesday 10 October, which in World Mental Health Day. Watch this space!

Have a good quarter, and please do visit our website www.lawcare.ie to access details of the support we provide, and the information and resources we have available.

Elizabeth Rimmer, CEO



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Rise in Calls to LawCare Helpline

The number of calls about career development have risen from 4 percent in 2015 to 11 percent, while disciplinary issues have fallen from 12 percent to 10 percent. The other main reasons for calls were bullying / harassment at 7 per cent [9 percent]; financial problems at 6 percent [5 percent]; alcohol-related issues, 3 percent [5 percent]; ethical issues, 3 percent [4 percent], and Other issues, including bereavement, drugs, relationship issues and chronic illness were at 10 percent [13 percent].

Women made 62 percent of calls, with men at 38 percent, a change from 65 percent and 35 percent in 2015 respectively.

“What the increase in calls to the helpline shows is that more people are aware of LawCare and the specialist support we offer across the legal profession,” explains Elizabeth Rimmer, CEO. “We are not surprised that stress is still the number one reason for calls: this can be work-related, or due to personal issues.

“We continue to raise awareness about what we provide, and the value of our service, to all sectors of the legal community. We want to encourage people in the legal profession to talk about their mental health and wellbeing, so we can tackle the stigma associated with it, particularly in the workplace.”



Family Law Conference in Belfast

Trish McLellan, LawCare Coordinator for Scotland and Northern Ireland, attended the Four Jurisdictions Family Law Conference in Belfast on Friday 27 and Saturday 28 January. The event was organised by the Law Society of Northern Ireland: there is a Four Jurisdictions organising committee and the conference rotates around the locations.

The majority of the 200 delegates were from Northern Ireland, but practitioners from the other jurisdictions were also well represented. There were a mixture of solicitors, barristers and judges.

The conference started on Friday evening with a welcome reception at Crumlin Road Gaol, and the conference proper took place on Saturday. “During the morning programme one of the organising committee encouraged people to visit our stand, and lots of people stopped to take literature,” says Ms McLellan. “Our leaflets were also included in the delegate packs.”

The conference ended with a dinner on Saturday evening in Belfast City Hall. Next year it is Ireland’s turn to host, and the conference will be held in Dublin 26-28 January 2018.

LawCare Qualifies in MHFA

LawCare Coordinator for Ireland, Mary Jackson, is now a fully qualified mental health first-aider, having trained on a two-day course in London run by Mental Health First Aid England last week, on February 16-17.

Alongside other members of the LawCare team, Communications Advisor Yvette Murphy and Administrator Anna Buttimore, Ms Jackson learned how to identify and assist someone who is developing a mental health issue or is in a mental health crisis. These issues include depression, anxiety disorders, eating disorders, psychosis and substance abuse, while crises covered are suicidal thoughts and behaviours, self-harm, panic attacks and aggressive behaviours, among others.

Ms Jackson, who also works on the LawCare helpline, also learned how to apply the ALGEE Action Plan. The mnemonic stands for Approach, Assess, Assist; Listen and communicate non-judgmentally; Give support and information; Encourage appropriate professional help, and Encourage other supports. The plan is a blueprint for dealing with these issues, both in the workplace, or with friends or family.

“The course was very interactive, with plenty of role-play and team exercises, which really helped with learning,” explains Ms Jackson. “We also had the opportunity to watch



a number of videos of real-life situations, where people who have struggled with a number of mental health issues, from depression to anxiety to psychosis, told us their stories. They were very powerful and moving, and worked well to help understanding.”

The Mental Health First Aid programme was created in Australia in 2000, and was adopted by the Scottish government, and then by England, in 2006. Since then, it gradually spread to many other countries, including Ireland, in 2015.

The MHFA course is open to people from all professions, and more information is available at www.mhfaireland.ie

The Bar of Ireland Wellbeing Initiative

In the first term of the 2016/17 Law Year, to coincide with World Mental Health day, and as a direct response to member feedback, The Bar of Ireland ran a comprehensive programme of Wellness for its members. Their Vice-Chairman Seamus Woulfe SC opened the event with LawCare Coordinator for Ireland Mary Jackson.

The programme comprised a wide range of talks and workshops, including pilates, meditation, health checks and mental well-being, mindful eating, financial planning, exercise, general fitness, raising emotional intelligence and work/life balance. This launched the initiative to place member wellbeing at the forefront of The Bar of Ireland agenda for 2016/17.

A wellness committee has been established, and the hope is to run a wellness event every term and to eventually create a dedicated wellness section on their www.lawlibrary.ie website.

They also hope to integrate health and wellness in all their CPD workshops, in recognition of the close relationship between wellbeing and a more engaged membership, and with the aim to continue to raise awareness and develop support for their members.



Read more of our news at www.lawcare.ie/news

Blog: Being a LawCare Trustee

You could be forgiven for thinking that after 36 years in practice, maybe I might be considering that the time had come to sit back on some of my laurels and relax for a while. Well, not any time soon, for this writer.

Since that nerve wracking time in 2009 when first I put myself forward for election to the Law Society of Ireland Council, I have met and worked with some of the most amazing people. As a Council Member, I have contributed to discussions, chaired working groups, attended awards ceremonies and have represented the Law Society of Ireland at events and functions both at home and abroad. Above all, I have learnt so much.

One day in 2013, I was approached and asked if I would consider accepting a three year appointment as one of the Law Society's two Trustees for LawCare.

I seem to remember that I was recovering from a particularly horrible fall at the time, but not wanting a little thing like crutches and a leg brace to interfere with anything, I accepted the appointment and embarked on a journey into the as yet unfamiliar, world of LawCare.

An avalanche of information was to follow! I made contact with my co-trustee for Ireland, the hard working and unflinching LawCare supporter, Louise Campbell, who was responsible for the avalanche - in the nicest possible way! Through her, I slowly but surely came to learn about this wonderful Charity.

I learnt about the Volunteers who give of their time willingly to manage the Helpline; I learnt about our colleagues who might have no other port of call in a crisis, were it not for those volunteers, and I learnt about the quarterly Board Meetings which usually take place in London, and I prepared to attend my first one which was in the following Spring.

I remember wondering what it would be like, and what would the other Trustees think of me!

They all knew each other and I was the new kid on the block, which was an unusual position in which to find myself.

Well, I needn't have worried, a nicer gathering of people, I could not have met. I was welcomed and felt accepted immediately. At the time of my appointment, the then Chief Executive, Hillary Tilby, was about to retire, and a new Chief Executive, Elizabeth Rimmer, was appointed soon afterwards.



What became immediately clear to me very early on in my term as Trustee, was that caller numbers to the Irish Helpline were remarkably low compared to our counterparts in the UK, Scotland and Northern Ireland.

Good news you might say, confirming the lack of need among Irish practitioners for help in the form of a Helpline. Or was the communication of LawCare's message the issue?

Louise and I, along with the LawCare co-ordinator for Ireland, Mary Jackson, and Elizabeth Rimmer, as well as a whole team of people drawn from the many relevant departments of the Law Society, sat around a table one sunny October day and we brainstormed for a few hours. We looked at all sorts of things, including communication methods, the complimentary services already available and, importantly, LawCare's message.

We had only one goal in mind: not ever should any of our legal colleagues or their staff or their family fail to receive the help and support they needed, because the LawCare message had failed to reach them.

Slowly but surely, we are achieving this goal.

Valerie Peart