NEWS

## Winning the mental health battle

Limerick man speaks candidly about how GROW brought him from the verge of taking his own life to finding peace of mind

A COUNTY Limerick man

A COUNTY Limerick man who contemplated taking his own life due to the stress he was under has credited GROW Mental Health Recovery with enabling him to get his life back on track. The man, who will be referred to as James in this article to protect his identity, underwent a serious operation in 1999 which signalled the start of a downward spiral. He was off work for over five months and later that year when he returned he

tive months and later that year when he returned he found that his duties now included a responsibility that was totally new to him. "The guy who had previously done this had left while I was on sick leave. From the beginning I struggled and I did not feel commetent or confident and struggled and I did not feel competent or confident and no matter how I tried I simply could not make sense of it or produce coherent, rational documents, James explained. He was beginning to feel "stupid, lost, tired and confused".

"In the past, when I had a difficulty with any aspect of my job I simply spent more time and effort working on it and usually came up with

time and effort working on it and usually came up with a solution. Not so with this new situation I found myself in, no matter what I did the figures never quite tallied.' James feels it's important to say that he had not been feeling well, mentally, following his operation. 'So it was not just one aspect of my life that felt like it was going out of control. The combination of things became extremely distressing.'

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After some time his doctor prescribed medication.

"I sometimes mentioned the difficulties to my wife but I did not go into detail as I did not want anyone else dragged into, what for me, was becoming an impossible state of affairs."

As the year 2000 dragged



'I felt relieved knowing that here is something that, from the sounds of it, is going to help,' says James of his first GROW Mental Health Recovery meeting

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on James' mental state began to affect all aspects of his life. He moved away from friends, found reasons for not going out to meet other

people, drank more than usual, stopped reading and cycling, and absolutely hated going to work.

"I was not sleeping properly and I was constantly anxious. There were complaints about my performance in the office and this further exacerbated the way I was feeling and thinking."

By 2001 nothing had improved and James decided that it could not continue much longer "so I began planning suicide and where it was going to be done".

On the night in question, as James sat in the car, ready to take his own life a thought

came to his mind, something he hadn't thought about before - "What if something goes wrong and I am not killed but am so badly damaged that I probably won't even know that I am alive, with people looking after me? What absolute misery that would be for those around me and I would not even be aware of what was going on."

The next day he knew he had to do something and so, that evening, he found himself at his first GROW Mental Health Recovery meeting.

"I saw an advertisement on the Limerick Leader. I remember phoning GROW's Limerick office one day and the lady who answered said 'you can expect that there will be anywhere between five and 12 people at a meeting, we keep it to two hours, you don't have to speak for the first three weeks if you don't want to and just listen'. "It all sounded, won't say easy, but it sounded comfortable. I went in then that night. I felt relieved knowing that here is something that, from the sounds of it, is going to

"It was a great sense of re-lief for me to find that there were people there who already knew something of how I felt. They understood anxiety, failure and empti-ness. I could talk about how I felt about life and I had to begin to discuss and devise a plan for what it was I could do. Things such as talking with my boss, asking others for help, new career; all pos-sible solutions. I left that night somehow knowing that things would change." During the following months in GROW, James was given a task to complete

each week.
Following many discussions with his manager
James was given the support of a colleague from the
information technology deinformation technology de-partment who, over two months, taught him how to process the information he required in order to pro-duce confident reports. "Sometime after that I ap-plied to fill a new position in a different section of the plied to fill a new position in a different section of the company. I was successful with this and I left the old department behind with a huge sense of relief. I continued to take medication as I somehow felt that I had not fully gotten past my earlier experiences and there were still regular, unpleasant and unwanted thoughts that would not go away or leave me in peace.

In February 2006 a little dog. Vinnie, arrived at James' house to stay. "As we moved through the summer I noticed that each month, when I went to the chemist for my medication I was needing less and less of it. Finally, in August of that year, six months after Vinnie arrived, I remember no longer having to use any

vinnie arrived, i remember no longer having to use any of the prescribed drugs. I don't yet fully understand the nature of how he helped me become better and to me become better and to achieve reasonable peace of mind, but 1 do know that someday I will find out. During this period (2006 to 2011) I was able to go away on holidays and did not need or want to take medicine with me, I had become to have to any one of those days for granted; ever!"

In 2011 his wife suddenly became quite seriously ill. "I attended GROW on a more regular basis. Again, when there were times that I was faced with problems or worries concerning my spous."

attended GROW on a more regular basis. Again, when there were times that I was faced with problems or worries concerning my spouse it was back to talking them out at meetings and coming up with practical, forward-looking direction and guidance. "There is one section in our book that I usually find helpful. It's short but to

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the point: Crisis Management. 1. Be Definite: What exactly am I troubled about? 2. Be Rational: Is it certain, probable or only possible that this (troubling thought) will materialise? 3. Be Wise: How important is 1? 4. Be Practical: What am Igoing to do about it?"

first wen't to GROW and he still attends regularly. Thankfully, these days my problems are relatively easy, manageable ones. One thing I can say is that after every session I have always left feeling that little bit better, and many times to a greater degree, than when I went in."

"I must give a word of thanks to Mr JP McManus for providing us all with our

for providing us all with our new Limerick premises four years ago." GROW Mental Health Re-

## Arrests in Croom assault

DONAL O'REGAN

TWO arrests have been made after a young man - who refused to buy alcohol for a minor - was viciously assaulted in

The incident, which occurred at around 5pm on Saturday in Croom, has shocked the local community and a garda investigation was launched. The victim, aged 21, was set upon in the park, punched and repeatedly kicked in the head by a group of teenagers. His brother, aged 19, spotted what was happening and ran over to try and help him. He was met with a punch from another male.

and neip nim. He was met with a punch from another male.

The 21-year-old was taken to University Hospital Limerick where he was treated for facial injuries. The reason for the attack was because he refused to buy one of the underage perpetrators alcohol earlier in the day.

Gardai mowed quickly and arrested two male juveniles, aged 16 and 17 years, on Sunday in relation to the incident.

A garda spokesperson said: "Both were detained at Henry Street Garda Station and later released. A file will be prepared under the juvenile diversion programme."

programme."
Deputy Niall Collins, who had contacted Chief Superintendent Gerry Roche on Sunday, praised gardai for their quick actions.
"I was contacted by the family of the young man. He was doing his civic duty in not buying an underage person alcohol. He then finds himself in hospital after an horrific attack. This is discraceful."

"There needs to be more gardai on duty in Croom so people obeying the law can go about their business without fear of reprisals and cowardly attacks," said

Deputy Collins.
Fellow TD, Deputy Richard
O'Donoghue said the "thugs need to be
dealt with severely".

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"There has to be consequences. Parks and playgrounds need to have CCTV to stop gangs of youths terrorising innocent people as they go about their business.

"The town park in Croom has been a businesseed both for Command visions."

huge success both for Croom and visitors. During the Covid pandemic it is the ideal location for people restricted from travelling," said Deputy

## 'Gestures of goodwill are everywhere'

In our latest Diary of a Limerick Priest, Canon Tony Mullins, reveals his life under lockdown

A MONTH into the Covid-19 lockdown, the town of Abbeyfeale became the focus of national attention, when the documentary Abbeyfealegood was broadcast on RTE television.

The title of the documentary was well chosen, as Abbeyfeale is an incredibly good place to live, to work and to raise a family. The experience of living under the shadow of Covidip has brought the best out in people. People have rallied round to the assistance of those who are cocooned or living alone.

sistance of those who are cocooned or living alone.
Gestures of goodwill are everywhere to be seen, like the young shop assistant who delivers a newspaper to an elderly customer every morning and takes time to check in with her about her fears and concerns. Community organisations led by Abbeyfeale Community Council have organised suipport structures. have organised support structures for people who are isolated because of the restrictions. Yes, Abbeyfeale is



Canon Tony Mullins launches a Michael English concert held in Abbeyfeale last year in aid funds for the local hall

evident during this pandemic.

As a priest in the community much of my time and ministry is spent with people. With the arrival of Covid-19 and the subsequent lockdown, all of that personal interaction as I knew it, ended over one weekend. Suddenly, I was looking at empty church pews. Visiting parishioners in their homes was not a wise or a safe thing to do.

instant.

A number of years ago, a webcam was installed in our local church. It has provided a means for parishioners to join in the celebration of Mass and other church ceremonies every day. At first it was a shock to

have no physical congregation present in the church, but we know that hundreds of people link into our celebration of Mass each weekday. At weekends, the numbers of people joining us on the internet link increases significantly. During the month of April, we have had more than 10,000 join us for Mass and the Holy Week ceremonies. Fr Shoji and I

have had to adapt very quickly, but it has taught us much about the importance of digital communications. From the time that Jesus preached his sermon on the mount, the Church has used every means to communicate the 'Good News' of the Gospel. Through this present crisis, I have discovered that digital communication provides opportunities for farreaching pastoral possibilities, that I never imagined were possible to engage in until now. Of course, many parishioners do not have broadband, but West Limerick 102FM, community radio broadcasts Mass live from Abbeyfeale church every Sunday morning at 10am. We have also begun to use other digital platforms like Facebook and WhatsApp to communicate with families and children who are in the first communion and confirmation classes.

The Gospel message of Jesus

children who are in the first commu-nion and confirmation classes.

The Gospel message of Jesus Christ in one of hope. I have been par-ticularly conscious of trying to com-municate that hope to all who join us on our online liturgies. Using new communication technologies, priests can give people an opportunity for an encounter with Jesus Christ.

Aloneside traditional means, di-

encounter with Jesus Christ.
Alongside traditional means, digital communication has opened up broad new vistas for dialogue, evangelization and catechesis. In a way Covid-19 has opened up a whole new world for the seeds of the gospel to be sown, and right now the world is fertile ground for the 'Good News' of the Gospel.

## **FAMILY NOTICES** & IN MEMORIAMS

During this difficult time, we understand that you may not be in a position to leave home and make the trip to our office to place your Family Notices or In Memoriams.

To make it as easy as possible for you to do, and to follow guidelines in place, you can contact as follows.

You can call us in the office on 061 214500 to arrange to have your Family Notice included in the Limerick Leader or you can email us to remember@limerickleader.ie and we will call you back and organise everything for you over the phone.

