



# Annual Report

2017

*Helplink Support Services CLG*

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## MESSAGE FROM BOARD CHAIR

Dear Friends,

Levels of self-harm, anxiety and trauma have all increased in recent years, and according to Professor Jim Lucey, every Irish family is impacted. In a recently published book, Harvard professor Susan David states that applying words to emotions is tremendously helpful in dealing with stress, anxiety and loss: our staff and volunteers can be your companions on those journeys.

In the year I joined the board, Helplink, reached a critical milestone:

we celebrated our organisation's fifth anniversary of providing services to the public (September 10<sup>th</sup> 2017).

In 2017 Lochlann (Helplink CEO) and I developed and presented to the board, staff and volunteers a new and sustainable strategy for growth: since then, we have consolidated Helplink's strengths, addressed its weaknesses, improved the office facilities to support the work of our staff and volunteers and most of all provided a better environment for the people we serve. To ensure transparency and accountability in respect of all stakeholders, in particular the general public, we have reviewed our governance practices (GDPR, Child Safeguarding Policy among others). All this would not have been possible without the invaluable input of our staff, volunteers, CEO and board members.

I would like to thank our outgoing Chair Lorraine Lally and board member Pdraig MacNeela for their valuable contributions over the last few years, and welcome, Georgina Kearney, Michelle Corcoran and Jennifer Conroy, all bringing essential sets of skills and experience to the board, in areas such as Finance, Human Resources and Law.

We are in a good position to achieve our growth targets, measuring regularly both quantitative and qualitative aspects: but let's keep in mind that this is still a long and arduous journey in particularly for those we serve, along with their families and friends.

Thank you



**Gilles Varette Chairperson  
Helplink Support Services**

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Gilles Varette', written over a light blue horizontal line.

## MESSAGE FROM CEO

Dear all,

First of all, I would like to say a big thank you to all our Board members, contractors, employees, volunteers and supporters for 2017. Without your time and support Helplink would not be the organisation it is today. I would also like to thank all of our clients for choosing Helplink and all the schools, community organisations and businesses that we have worked with over 2017. What a year! We revamped our website, consolidated and streamlined the services we offer and began offering new services to the public. As you may know, Helplink has a mission to provide accessible, low cost or free mental health and conflict resolution services. We achieved this mission in 2017 through the provision of over 1,300 counselling and mediation appointments face-to-face in Galway City and County, online nationwide and also internationally to Irish citizens abroad in Australia and Canada. Furthermore, we have provided multiple evidenced-based mental health and conflict resolution workshops to schools/colleges, community organisations and businesses across Galway City and County. As our Chairperson Gilles related in his message, we are very proud to have reached the major milestone of celebrating five years of service provision to the public and we look forward to providing many more years of service.

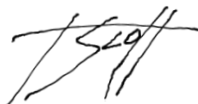


**Lochlann Scott, CEO**  
**Helplink Support Services**

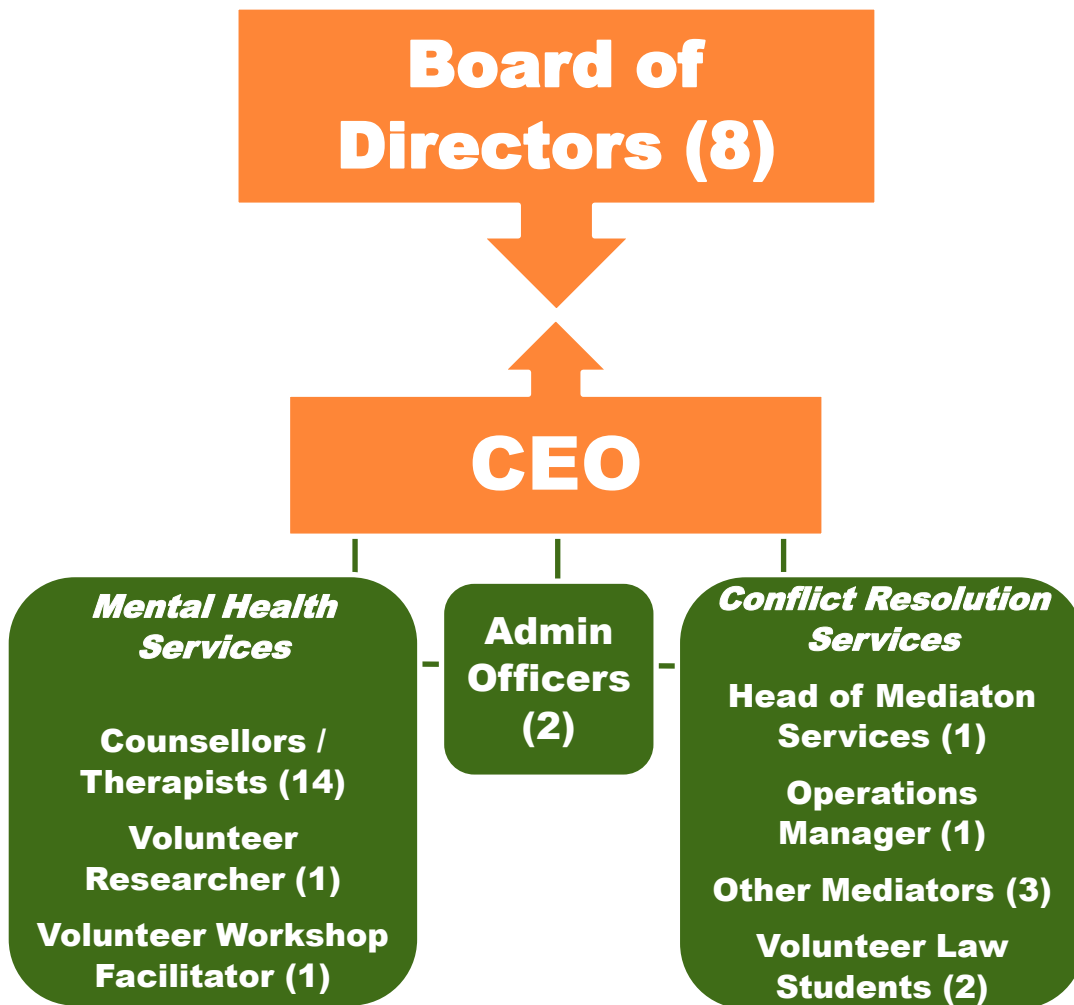
Some other interesting developments during 2017 include our provision of a new, free alcohol dependency counselling service to clients referred from TUSLA, which is available across Galway City and County. We also began providing private low cost addiction counselling services in Galway City and online nationwide. Helplink further expanded its therapeutic offerings by providing a low cost play therapy service. In 2017 we expanded our free Irish abroad online counselling service - Cabhrú is now available to Irish citizens in Canada and Australia and we plan to expand this service to even more countries in 2018. Finally we developed and piloted our mental health and conflict resolution workshops for students called 'Mind Hacks'. To date we have provided these workshops to over 350 students across Galway.

We have gone from strength to strength with your help, a strong team and a diligent Board of Directors. Our aim in Helplink is to keep this positive momentum going into 2018 and beyond.

Mise le meas,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'L Scott', written over a light blue horizontal line.

# Organisation Chart



## Helplink Directors

**Gilles Varette:** Product Support Manager Americas – EMEA CSG International (Chairperson)

**Nial O'Reilly:** Executive Consultant & Business Coach

**Georgina Kearney:** Qualified Accountant and Business Consultant ([Sustained Growth Consulting](#))

**Sam O'Neill:** Marketing Executive and former President of GMIT Student's Union

**Tamar Scott:** Counselling Psychologist, Supervisor and Dir. of NUIG's Dip. in Psych. of Counselling

**Debbie McDonagh:** Family Support Training & Development Coordinator at WRDATF

**Jennifer Conroy:** MA in International Human Rights Law and Founder of 'Failte Refugees'

**Michelle Corcoran:** Responsible for HR in EMEA at 'The MathWorks'

## MISSION

*The mission of Helplink Support Services, as a charitable organisation, is to provide accessible, low-cost or free mental health and conflict resolution services.*

## Service Provision

*Helplink's headquarters are based in Galway City, where we provide our services face-to-face to clients, including outreach services across the West of Ireland. Furthermore, we provide our accessible support services to our clients nationally and internationally online.*

## SERVICES

### Counselling/Therapy Services

Helplink's qualified, insured and Garda vetted counsellors are available for appointments **7 days a week**, from 9 am to 9 pm, Monday to Friday and 12 to 6 pm Saturday and Sunday. To date our Helplink's Counsellors have provided over 4,000 appointments to clients **online** nationally and also **face-to-face** in Galway.



### Therapeutic Services Available:

- General Counselling
- Play Therapy (currently Galway only)
- Art Therapy (currently Galway only)
- Couples Counselling
- Addiction Counselling
- Bereavement Therapy



**Employee/Corporate Services:** we provide a **staff (EAP) counselling service** that is available 7 days a week by phone and online nationwide (nationally/internationally). This is a novel pay-as-you-go service for companies and organisations of any scale. Helplink staff also provides **workshops for leaders and employees** on topics such as: safe communication, building resilience, stress and anxiety management and mindfulness at work.

**Irish Abroad Service (Cabhrú):** with the support of the *Minister for Diaspora*, the *Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade*, the GAA, An Post and other agencies we provide a **free online counselling service** for Irish people who have emigrated. In 2017 this service was available to current Irish passport holders in Australia and Canada.

### Non Public Mental Health Services

In 2017 Helplink became a service provider for TUSLA - Child and Family Agency in Galway County and City. Our addiction counsellors provide a free alcohol addiction counselling service in Galway City, Gort, Tuam, Ballinasloe and Loughrea. TUSLA refers adult clients, who are in need of solution focused, evidence based support with regard to alcohol addiction issues, to us.



### Mediation/Conflict Resolution Services

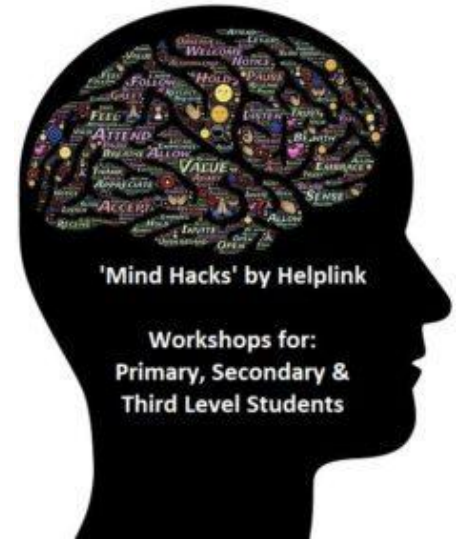
**Face-to-Face Mediation Service:** our Conflict Resolution Centre (CRC) provides a face-to-face, donation-based **Mediation Service** for people experiencing **family, housing or community** disputes/conflicts (West of Ireland only).

**Online Mediation Service:** we also provide Ireland's first **Online Mediation Service** – the rationale behind establishing this service was our desire to support people who are in conflict and either cannot, or should not, be in the same room with each other; but they still need to resolve disputes such as child access and financial matters.



## **‘Mind Hacks’: workshops for schools, colleges & community organisations**

‘Mind Hacks’ is a suite of workshops that have been developed by Helplink’s Garda vetted, insured and qualified Counsellors and Mediators. We currently provide these workshops to primary, post-primary, third-level students and community organisations across Galway City and County. All ‘Mind Hacks’ workshops are evidence based. Over 350 students and 100+ staff members of local community organisations have participated in our workshops to date.



### **Primary School Workshops:**

‘Mind How You Go’ is a one hour workshop aimed at primary level students from **1st class to 6th class**. The workshop is focused on **mindfulness and positive mental health**, and students gain relevant skills and insights into their thoughts and feelings.

‘The Voyage’ is an all day **6th Class Workshop**, focusing on the **transition from primary to post-primary level**. The workshops utilise a combination of Art Therapy and Play Therapy therapeutic approaches; utilising directive methodologies. ‘The Voyage’ provides an opportunity for each student to creatively explore their individual feelings relating to the transition from primary to post-primary schools.

### **Post-Primary and Third Level Student Workshops:**

#### **Mental Health**

‘Mind How You Go’ is a workshop for post-primary students, which is 2 hours in duration. The workshop has been developed and is facilitated by qualified, insured and Garda vetted mental health professionals. ‘Mind How You Go’ is aimed at **3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> year** students and can be adapted for 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> year students on request. These workshops are **focused** on participants developing knowledge and skills with regard to **mindfulness** and their own **positive mental health**.



## **Conflict Resolution**

'**Changing Conflict**' is a 3 hour workshop that has been developed by Helplink's qualified, insured and Garda vetted Mediators for students in post-primary school and staff of Community Organisations. The pilot was originally developed and provided to students and members of the public across Galway City in partnership with the NUIG EXPLORE programme in 2016. The **aim** of the workshop is to provide **conflict resolution training** to young people and community groups and to prepare participants for informal **advocacy roles**, in the area of conflict resolution, within their own communities.

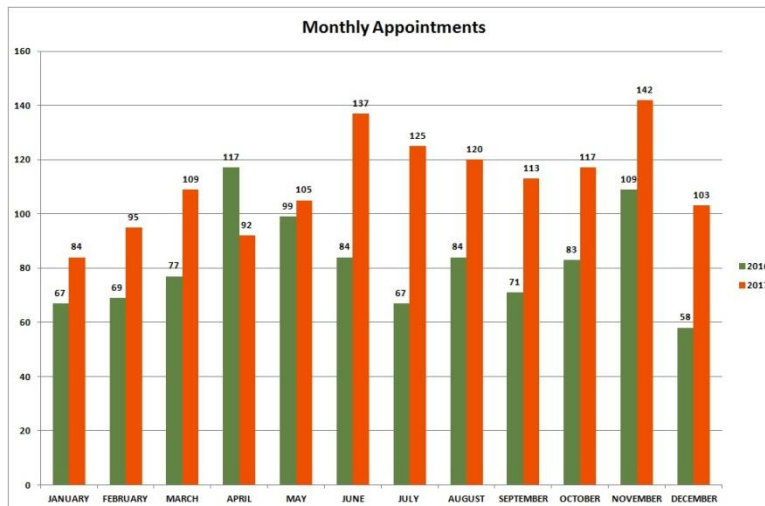
### **Upon completion of this workshop each participant would be expected to:**

- understand similarities and differences (exclusion and inclusion)
- understand that perceptions vary and how to avoid bias
- understand the nature of communication and the requirement to communicate effectively to resolve conflict.
- realise that conflict is present and the need to deal effectively with conflict to ensure that all persons and interests are respected
- learn that there is a requirement to engage in mechanisms and methods to resolve conflict
- learn to undertake practice negotiation and a trial mediation
- gain skills and training in active listening, communication (two-way), cooperation with others as part of a team, appropriate assertiveness in resolving conflict etc.
- become an advocate for mediation/conflict resolution within their own communities

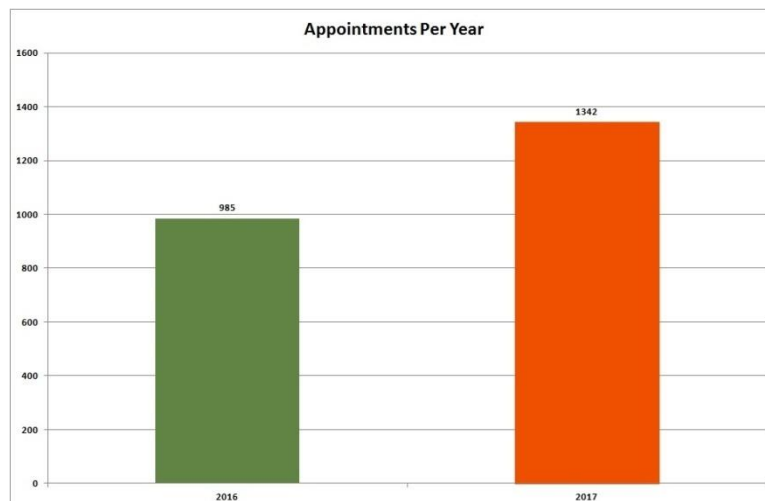
# IMPACT AND OUTCOMES FOR 2017

One annual **measure of success/impact** for any charitable organisation which provides services to the general public is whether there is an increase or decrease in appointments attended by clients in comparison with the previous year. As illustrated below Helplink has recorded a 31% increase in appointments attended between 2016 and 2017. A total of 1,342 appointments were attended in 2017.

## MONTHLY



## ANNUALLY



A **second measure** of impact within a service like Helplink is client satisfaction. Over the past 6 years Helplink has received many testimonials from clients and from organisations/schools etc that have availed of our workshops and other services. The testimonial below is just one example, provided by a client who utilised Cabhrú – our free counselling service for the Irish abroad during 2017 (Cabhrú is part funded by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade Emigrant Support Programme):

*“I was going through a very difficult time in my life. Things were falling apart for me and I needed help. Through the hard work and dedication of this team I managed to get myself back together again. I met an amazing person who didn’t judge me but instead offered a listen ear and very good advice. I felt these people genuinely wanted to help me and cared a great deal about my life. I will be forever in their debt as they were that helping hand which I so badly needed. Things don’t always work out as planned but for now the future seems that bit brighter”*

*Anonymous*

A **third measurement** of impact utilised is our mixed methods evaluation forms that are given to each participant in our ‘Mind Hacks’ workshops. On the next page you will see a sample of results we gained from providing Mind Hacks mental health workshops to post-primary and third level student participants during 2017. A high level finding from the evaluations was that 82% of participants felt the workshop benefited them.

## Participant Responses to ‘Mind Hacks’ Mental Health Workshops

Below is an analysis of 276 student participants’ responses from post-primary and third level institutes from September 2017 up to March of 2018.

The participants responded anonymously to the below questions after they had participated in a Helplink’s Mind Hacks mental health workshop.

### Participants were asked 3 questions:

**Question 1:** A likert scale was used to observe how much participants ‘agreed’ or ‘disagreed’ with the statement *“The ‘Mind Hacks for Exams’ workshop has benefited me and my school”*.

**There were 218 forms where this section was completed, results found:**

	Number of Ticks	Percentage
Disagree	<b>9</b>	<b>4%</b>
Somewhat Disagree	<b>31</b>	<b>14%</b>
Somewhat Agree	<b>118</b>	<b>54%</b>
Agree	<b>60</b>	<b>28%</b>

**Question 2:** A rating scale was used to observe which section of the 4 part workshop participants enjoyed/found most useful. The results of the 194 completed forms found:

	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>
	<b>(Most Useful)</b>			<b>(Least Useful)</b>
<b>Part I (Stress)</b>	87	46	29	32
<b>Part II (DNA-V)</b>	30	37	48	79
<b>Part III (S.O.S Skills)</b>	27	59	68	40
<b>Part IV (Building Resilience)</b>	50	51	49	46

**Question 3:** A qualitative analysis was used. Participants were asked to answer the question *“What have you learned about yourself as a result of taking part?”*

**The study received many comments. There are 2 striking examples of comments received below:**

*“That I need to get help”*

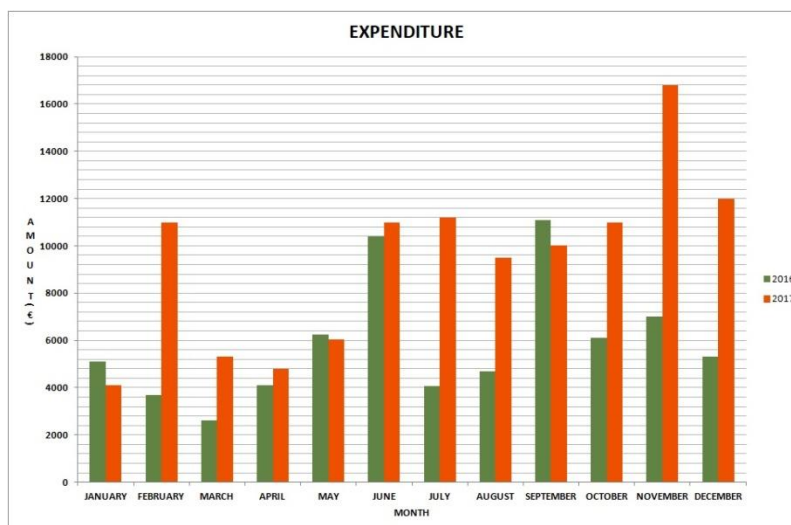
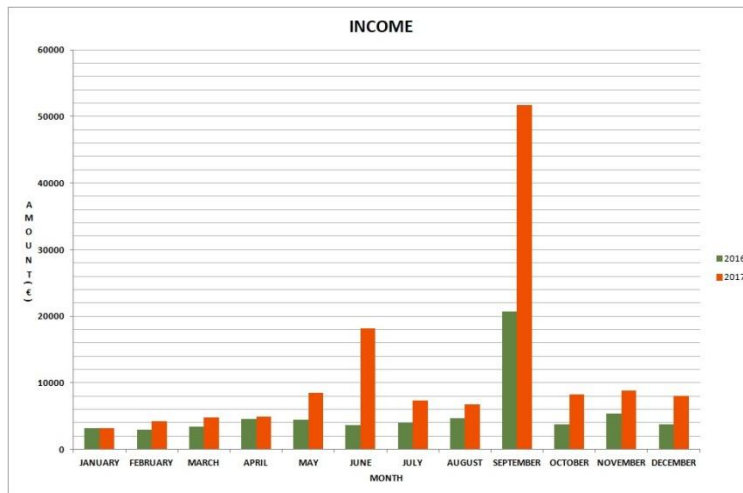
*“That I shouldn’t give up on school”*

# Financial Outcomes

Between 2016 and 2017 Helplink saw an increase of 70% in income into the organisation and a corresponding increase of 46% in expenditure.

**2016 Income = €64,550 Expenditure = €70,400**

**2017 Income = €134,575 Expenditure = €112,750**



# Supporters / Partners / Memberships 2017



Johnstown Village • Navan • Co.Meath • C15 Y20W  
Company registered in Ireland 335880  
VAT Registered Number IE63558805  
T: +353 46 9050800 E: info@collsoft.ie

## Looking to 2018!

As indicated in the outlined financial figures and outcomes, we have been increasing the quantity and enhancing the quality of services we provide to the Irish public at home and abroad; establishing our organisation as a leading provider of accessible mental health and conflict resolution services. We have set ourselves a number of task/aims/goals for 2018. Some examples are outlined below.

A key aim for 2018 is to expand and increase the provision of our free counselling service to the Irish abroad (Cabhrú) from our current presence in Australia and Canada, to a global service (time-zone dependant) for Irish emigrants abroad. In addition, we aim to offer this unique service to returning Irish emigrants in order to assist them with the transition back home.

A further core aim for 2018 is to increase our outreach/face-to-face services to schools, colleges, community organisations and individuals across the West of Ireland. The plan to achieve this goal is twofold:

- 1) by providing our 'Mind Hacks' workshops face-to-face to even more schools, colleges and community organisations in Counties Galway, Mayo and Roscommon. We also are going to assess the feasibility of making these workshops available nationwide via an online platform.
- 2) by opening two new offices in Counties Mayo and Roscommon in 2018

## Helplink in the Media 2017

<http://www.thejournal.ie/free-counselling-service-irish-living-in-canada-3504190-Jul2017/>

<https://www.irishtimes.com/life-and-style/abroad/free-skype-counselling-for-lonely-irish-offered-in-australia-and-canada-1.3162628>

<http://su.nuigalway.ie/mind-hacks-free-workshop-handling-stress-building-resilience/>

<https://www.rte.ie/lifestyle/living/2017/1018/913188-11-things-to-do-in-ireland-this-weekend-oct-20-22/>