

Press Release

## **President Michael D. Higgins acknowledges 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Aware at a special reception at Áras an Uachtaráin**

### **Aware thanks people of Ireland for their support over past three decades**

President Michael D. Higgins has today acknowledged the work of Aware at a special reception at Áras an Uachtaráin to acknowledge the organisation's 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary. The event was attended by a group of 55 volunteers from across the country and special mention was given to the hundreds of thousands of people throughout Ireland who have turned to the organisation for support and information since its foundation.

Alan Morris, voluntary Chairman of Aware has described this anniversary as a very important milestone for mental health in Ireland. "Aware began as a single support group in Dublin with a small number of committed volunteers, led by Dr. Patrick McKeon. Today it is offering an unrivalled level of service across its three key pillars of support, education and information around depression and mental health. As well as proven effective interventions for adults experiencing depression, bipolar and related mood disorders we also offer key services to teenagers from the age of 15-18. The achievements of Aware are testament to the trained volunteers who deliver our services and to the generosity of the Irish public who have supported the charity since its foundation in 1985. A very sincere thanks is due to every single person who has enabled Aware to continue to be a supporting light through depression."

From one support group in 1985, Aware now offers support groups in 45 locations nationwide, attended by 300 people each week. The Support Line and Support Mail services respond to approx. 1,500 requests each month. The organisation also offers free Life Skills programmes based on principles of cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) to approximately 3,500 people each year. These programmes, available nationwide and online, help to overcome some of the barriers to help-seeking such as the prohibitive cost of one-to-one CBT sessions and lengthy waiting times. Aware's programmes for teenagers have also recently been extended: In addition to its 70-minute Beat the Blues schools talk which is delivered to 30,000 15-18 year olds each year, the organisation now also offers volunteer-supported CBT-based programmes to young people on a one-to-one basis, as well as six-session Life Skills programmes for Transition Year students.

Among the volunteers who attended the reception at Áras an Uachtaráin today was Stephen Crowley from Cork who described the event as a real honour for Aware volunteers. "I am delighted to be here today and to represent the 420 trained volunteers who give a weekly commitment to Aware, many of whom have been doing so for several years. One of the things which keeps us all going is the knowledge that even the smallest word of support and understanding can connect with someone on such a profound level and can be the precious gift of hope that they need right at that moment. We know that there are many more people out there who still haven't heard about Aware, or who are trying to take that first brave step to reaching out for help. I sincerely hope that the message goes out strong and clear across the country today that Aware is here and can make a real difference on the journey through depression and that recovery IS possible."

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