

GUEST INTERVIEW

Don Bosco Care is at the front line of many of the social issues facing Ireland today, providing safe, secure and healing homes to young people who come from the most challenging backgrounds. We hear from its Chief Executive Brian Hogan and Head of Fundraising Kevin Delaney about the history and ethos of their organisation, the clear and tangible impact they have on the lives of those they serve, their hopes for the future and the challenges they face on a daily basis.

GUEST INTERVIEW

DON BOSCO CARE

About Don Bosco Care

Don Bosco Care provides safe, secure and healing homes to young people aged 12-22 who can no longer live in their own homes. The young people they work with come from the most challenging backgrounds. They grow up in homes where violence, addiction, physical and emotional abuses and neglect are commonplace. Their families are unable to provide them with the support and care that they need.

Don Bosco Care works with vulnerable young people and often provides support to them and their families long into adulthood.

From the moment a young person arrives in their care until they take their first steps into adulthood, they are at the heart of its community. This empowers them to grow and reach their full potential.



Brian Horgan

CEO
Don Bosco Care



Biography

Brian was appointed CEO of Don Bosco Care in November 2013. He is currently a member of the executive of the Irish Association of Social Care Management (IASCM). For almost 22 years Brian worked at Oberstown Children's Detention School. During his time there he worked his way from residential care worker to unit manager and finally to director of the school, a position he held for almost 12 years.

Brian holds a BA (Theol) from St Patrick's College Maynooth and an MBS in HR Strategies from Dublin City University, Mater Dei Institute of Education. He also holds a PG Dip in Assessment and Treatment of Sex Offenders. Brian believes that motivated empowered professionals can provide quality care for young people experiencing difficulties.

“We measure success in many different ways. The classic form of societal recognised success is high academic and economic achievement, but for some of our young people it is a success simply to be alive.”

Donnchadh Ó Mórdha (DOM): Brian, tell me about Don Bosco Care; its values, its mission and its role in society in Ireland.

Brian Hogan (BH): Don Bosco Care was founded in 1978 in Dublin by Fr. Val Collier to assist the homeless. At that time Fr. Val thought the project would take approximately 10 years. There were significant numbers of homeless people in Dublin and Fr. Val thought that they could solve the problem in a decade. Obviously homelessness is a huge problem today so it has not been solved.

Don Bosco was a Catholic priest who lived in Turin in the 1800s and dedicated his life

to helping homeless children. He developed a teaching method called the Salesian Preventative system which was based on love rather than punishment. At Don Bosco Care we follow this ethos. We have high expectations for all the young people we work with. We aspire for the very best for them while at the same time accepting them for who they are.

We measure success in many different ways. The classic form of societal recognised success is high academic and economic achievement, but for some of our young people it is a success simply to be alive.



▶ One of Don Bosco's young people working in a vegetable garden in Clontarf

Many of the young people we help have experienced significant trauma. I often hear their stories and think I would not have survived the difficulties they have faced.

Last year was the 200th anniversary of Don Bosco's birth. By following his ethos, showing kindness and exhibiting appropriate behaviour throughout our organisation we can make a significant difference.

Speaking of the organisation, can you tell me about the wonderful team you have behind you?

BH: Don Bosco Care provides care 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. It opened in 1978 and has never closed since then. We have a committed team of social care workers, leaders and managers across our houses.

Our staff put a particular emphasis on the therapeutic model of care. They try to understand behaviour in context, so they see behaviour as an expression of the individual's inner hurt. For example, if a young person shouts or breaks something, we ask why are they doing that and don't simply say 'stop that now.' We are very much about reason and we are very clear and honest with young people.

We also have high calibre volunteers on a community employment scheme and on the Tusla – Child and Family agency scheme. We are lucky to have a strong management, social care and support team.

Can you tell me about the continued role of the Salesian Fathers in Don Bosco Care?

BH: Fr. Val is a founding member and has a key role in the organisation. He sets the tone and ethos for staff. He lives the ethos and continues to look after people for years after they have left the organisation. People regularly come to him for practical help or a cup of tea. Some of them may have done well but some may still be homeless.

Fr. Jim O'Halloran has a chaplaincy role. I think one of the particular elements Fr. Jim brings is his grandfather role. He has a great relationship with the staff and young people in all the houses.

I think that we manage to preserve Fr. Val and Fr. Jim's role in conjunction with my position as chief executive while maintaining the Salesian ethos.

That ties in nicely with my next question, which was what path led you to your current position in Don Bosco Care?

BH: The Salesians of Don Bosco ran my secondary school in Ballinakill. I completed my undergraduate degree in Maynooth and had continued involvement with the Salesians during those years. After university I worked in child psychiatry in Warrenstown House for two years.

Following that I worked for over 20 years in Oberstown Boys School as a member of the residential care staff, residential social care worker, unit manager, deputy director and finally as director. About 10 years ago, we were running a course in the Grand Hotel in Malahide. Fr. Val and Martin Burke, Director of Services, were on the course. Subsequently Fr. John Horan asked me to join the board of Don Bosco Care.

I served as a volunteer member of the board for more than 10 years. During that time a strategic review was conducted and the CEO position was advertised. I stepped aside from the board, applied for the position and was successful. I started the job in November 2013.

I also undertook an MBS in Dublin City University (DCU) and a postgraduate qualification in assessment and treatment of sex offenders at the University of Leicester so I have an eclectic mix of skills.

How would you define the role of CEO of a charity and how do you balance that with your urge to be a front line social care worker?

BH: My own management style is a facilitative one. Leadership is my area rather than management. I believe that the vast majority of people are fundamentally good, that if you encourage them, praise them, are straight and honest with them, challenge them respectfully and openly and are genuinely interested in them, they will respond well.

I think that in a charitable organisation, but particularly one like Don Bosco Care, the manner and behaviour of the CEO needs to be congruent with the aims and objectives of the organisation. I have developed skills from dealing with young people, often in extreme crisis, and I bring those skills to the role of CEO. Those specific skills help me determine what is important now and what's not very important at all.

“I believe that the vast majority of people are fundamentally good, that if you encourage them, praise them, are straight and honest with them, challenge them respectfully and openly and are genuinely interested in them, they will respond well.”

GUEST INTERVIEW: DON BOSCO CARE

► Don Bosco's football team of ex residents and care leavers gives a sense of belonging as well as an outlet for pent-up physical energy



“Our frontline staff can provide sticking plaster help and hurdle help to people. That is the strength of our organisation. Our outreach workers and social care staff work directly with those who need it most.”

Is it possible to find a work life balance in this role, especially in Don Bosco Care which, as you say, has been open 24/7, 365 days a year since 1978?

I think I have a good work life balance. In a typical working week I certainly check emails early in the morning and late at night. I keep an eye on media and potential risks and problems that might face the organisation at any stage. I have a reasonably long commute to work but in some ways that's a help because when I leave the office I am gone.

I suppose from my previous career I understand that you have to switch off. Every job I have been involved in since 1989 has been 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. And I am very lucky as I have a great team so it is a shared responsibility.

What is the biggest challenge to Don Bosco Care today? On your website video, an Outreach Aftercare Worker Ciaran Kenny speaks about the challenges of dealing with a caseload of 50 people in outreach aftercare. Does that all come back to funding?

BH: Definitely. The vast majority of our funding is from Tusla for which we are very grateful because we would not survive without it. But we also need private-funding. We need people to contribute.

Often a small amount of help can make a huge difference to young people. For example, recently we helped a young couple that were about to have a baby.

They had very tight financial resources and were looking for a pram and some baby equipment. Small thing like this, which can be donated or purchased for €50 or €100, can transform somebody's life.

That is amazing.

BH: Our frontline staff can provide sticking plaster help and hurdle help to people. That is the strength of our organisation. Our outreach workers and social care staff work directly with those who need it most.

For example, we helped a young non-national whose residency permit was out of date. In order to draw social welfare you must have a residency permit which costs about €150. This young person was coping really well and paying rent but was at imminent risk of losing his accommodation because he did not have the money to get the permit. Our staff are uniquely positioned to help by lending or giving him €150. This is an example of how a small amount can make a huge difference and prevent that young man from becoming homeless.

We can also help with negotiations. For instance, if someone is having difficulties with their landlord we can help resolve the situation. The people we help have often had a traumatic life so they can react defensively which can come across as aggression.

Our staff can show a young person how to behave in difficult situations or even speak to landlords to try and resolve issues. What we do is often a little thing, but those little things are very important.

We need resources to do these little things. My wish list for funding is to get it to the frontline social care workers so that they have small amounts of money to apply practical, first aid remedies to situations that they come across every day.

We also operate an activity centre. Last Thursday, there were 50 young people playing football and then having something to eat at our centre. This provided an opportunity for our social care staff to meet vulnerable people in a social environment and find out if there are any issues affecting them that they can assist with. The activity centre is an opt-in service. So we are preaching to the converted because if they come they know what they are coming to. It provides a conducive atmosphere for us to deliver our service.

Don Bosco's football team of ex residents and care leavers gives a sense of belonging as well as an outlet for pent-up physical energy.

If money was not an issue, what more could Don Bosco Care provide and achieve? Or is it just the ability to do more little things, which can have such an impact?

BH: It is lots of small stuff, and we would also like to do some refurbishment in our properties. We have been around since 1978 and our buildings would benefit from modernisation.

How would you describe the current fundraising environment in Ireland and what is your approach to fundraising? Brian was discussing the fact that it is not a pushy approach....

Kevin Delaney (KD): For many years we did not need to fundraise. We were virtually 100% state-funded and we had a small number of benefactors. Then the recession hit and government funding was cut so there was quite a shortfall.

We did our first ever direct mail campaign last Christmas and 2,600 people responded with donations from €2 up to €1,000, which was amazing. Now it's about leveraging that, explaining what we are doing and the subtleties of our work.

We acknowledge that we are substantially state funded, which puts a roof over a young person's head and pays for the staff but that is not a home. It is similar to your parents providing you with a bed and food, but what about driving you to football and showing interest in your school results.

We recently had some Football Association of Ireland (FAI) coaches explaining to our young people that they are interested in them and that they are worthy of interest. We have also built a recording studio because we realised that some people need a creative outlet.

In general, do you think it's a difficult environment for fundraising?

KD: I think the environment is improving. Unfortunately following the recession more people understand what it is to need. People who may have been very comfortable found money was tight during the recession and if they have emerged on the other side, they have an appreciation of helping others.

I think the days of the significant donation are probably over. It is up to us as an organisation to start discussing impact. It is not just about donating money, there is a person behind all of this.

Homelessness is obviously on the agenda at the moment, the same I think with children at risk. You can see it's something that's very tangible and real for people.

KD: I know that Fr. Val deliberately kept Don Bosco Care beneath the radar to protect the young people. He wanted them to be able to leave any Don Bosco House and go to school and no one would know any different. It is not about the charity, it is about helping the troubled young person. There is no sign on any of our houses. It is their home and we have to protect that at all costs.

“There is no sign on any of our houses. It is their home and we have to protect that at all costs.”

GUEST INTERVIEW: DON BOSCO CARE

“We can provide a roof over their head. But it’s providing that extra cultural activity, sport or training. Those extra bits that make a house a home.”

Do you believe that Don Bosco Care is operating at its optimum size to make the impact it aspires to make with children and teenagers, or is it scalable?

BH: We would like to be somewhat bigger. We have seven houses with six or seven young people in each. We like the size of these units as six or seven is the most you would ever work with in a single house. But we would love more houses.

Our model, our ethos and the Salesian ethos works, so I would like to roll it into more areas. We are lucky as most of our staff have been with us for a long time. We have built up a lot of experience and expertise in how best to help young people. We find most people respond to the reason and kindness we show them.

Another area of interest for us is assisting young people that are falling through the cracks because they are abroad. This is a medium to long-term goal. For now we are focusing on the 31 residential beds we currently operate, refurbishing our buildings and being in a more secure position so we can be certain we are delivering good services to the 100 young people we are working with.

How do you view the support infrastructure for vulnerable children and young people in Ireland and what can the next government do for Don Bosco Care?

BH: I think Tusla has been a very good start. The formation of a separate child and family agency is a very good idea. It is also very important that the next government values the contribution that the voluntary and

community sector makes. It must recognise that in so many ways the voluntary, community and not-for-profit sector can have a big impact and provide high-quality support and service across Ireland.

What’s next for Don Bosco Care and are there any particular initiatives people should be aware of this year?

BH: The Godparents Club is focusing on individuals or organisations that have the means to donate €5,000 or €10,000 which would provide that extra bit for the young people, like Godparents do.

We can provide a roof over their head. But it’s providing that extra cultural activity, sport or training. Those extra bits that make a house a home. They give young people an actual future and allow us to find out what makes them spark. That can make a very quick and real impact in young people’s lives.

So in the next year we are hoping to sign up as many people or organisations to that programme as possible.

Thank you so much for your time today, Brian and Kevin. The work you are doing and the impact you are making on young people’s lives is humbling and I wish you and all at Don Bosco Care every success for the future.