

Opening Statement by Michael Williams, Sankalpa CLG drug & alcohol recovery service to Oireachtas Sub-committee on Mental Health to consider the issue of Dual Diagnosis.

Tuesday 21st March 2023

Good morning, I would like to begin by thanking the Chair and members of the committee for inviting Sankalpa CLG here today. Sankalpa welcomes the opportunity to address the subcommittee on Mental Health to discuss the issue of Dual Diagnosis.

About Sankalpa

Sankalpa opened in 2008 to provide a community access programme for the Finglas & Cabra area. We are a section 39 funded community-based recovery treatment service from drugs and alcohol. Sankalpa runs four core programmes, which are underpinned by a commitment to evidence-based intervention, professionalism and quality of services adhering to National Protocols for Drug and Alcohol Services.

Stage one “Access” is a low threshold pre-entry,

Stage two “Turning Point” is a full-time non-residential stabilisation day programme

Stage three “Connections” is a full time non- residential substance free programme

Stage four “Connect” is a targeted training and employment community employment programme.

Sankalpa service is unique in the range of service provision and the integrated pathways provided with-in our services. Sankalpa is entrenched in the communities of Finglas & Cabra we created partnership and work closely in partnership with community-based hubs, (including safetynet & HSE case management teams) that refer participants to our services. We work directly with other agencies for efficient case management, so that people don't ‘fall through the cracks’, especially when people complete residential treatment episodes.

The average participant attending Sankalpa day services is an educationally disadvantaged early school leaver, who is unemployed, has experienced homelessness, time in prison and has been in substance use for more than 5 years. Presenting to Sankalpa, they are seeking support to reduce their current substance usage, stabilise on their prescribed medications and move forward in their lives. However, assessment usually highlights a history of mental health difficulties, inadequate social attachments, experiences of trauma and poor coping skills.

In 2022, Sankalpa worked with 162 new people seeking supports, 79 treated episodes were recorded as having Dual Diagnosis 58 of these episodes were male 21 episodes female, over half the episodes (46) were people aged 30-50 years. Sankalpa is an organisation that has re-developed over the years to meet the changing needs we continue to provide accessible and meaningful supports for people in our communities experiencing drug & alcohol issues, and we also provide intervention for their unmet issues of mental health and wellbeing.

On completion, participants reported that these non-medical interventions, specifically our mental health and wellbeing workshops gave them a greater understanding of their diagnosis and practical coping skills.

Sankalpa does not operate from a Deficit model of care and are certainly not restricted or feel ill-equipped in working with people with a Dual Diagnoses.

Sankalpa operates from a model/concept of recovery contagion and growth 'recovery capital'.

The model includes three key components of recovery capital (personal, social and community) and how they influence and shape each other. There has generally been a struggle to support those on a recovery journey, following the completion of their acute, clinical care and initial stages of rehabilitation (i.e., developing insights into thoughts and behaviours to prevent relapse). However, recovery (which has the potential to be transformative at family and community and societal levels) remains fixed in policy realms as a form of clinical care interventions equivalent to opioid substitution therapy or relapse prevention.

Much of the work in Sankalpa is focused on recovery capital that incorporates the resources available to people to support and develop, internal resources (like resilience and coping skills) that are social (such as belonging to recovery groups) and that are societal (like access to recovery communities and pathways to training and jobs).

We are operating in a changing policy context where we frame our drug problem as an individualised issue rather than one that is situated in the context of poverty, inequality, and social exclusion.

Sankalpa seeks to be at the lead in the development of effective drug and alcohol services in meeting the current complexities in providing recovery type services within our communities.

Central to this Sankalpa pledges a commitment to work, together with the Dual Diagnosis teams offering our expertise, excellent and effective treatment support for the growing number of people seeking recovery help.

Thank you for your time. We welcome questions and are happy to share our thoughts and experiences on any of the issues raised.