



NORTHSTAR

Family Support Project

Northstar Family Support Project Annual Report 2025



MID WEST REGIONAL
DRUGS & ALCOHOL FORUM
Clare • Limerick • N Tipperary



Feidhmeannacht na Seirbhíse Sláinte
Health Service Executive



Comhairle Cathrach
& Contae **Luimnigh**

Limerick City
& County Council

Charity Number: 19042

Company Registration Number: 484661

Introduction:

The Northstar Family Support Project is a long-established, community-based service which supports individuals and families in the Limerick region affected by the substance misuse of a loved one. The organisation provides a range of targeted supports to meet their specific needs. It was established in 2010 by a local group of concerned individuals with the support of relevant professionals. People who avail of the service are described as 'Participants' as they actively participate in the services offered and, if they wish, in the development of the organisation. The service is universally available to people aged 18 years and over. The organisation's Mission, Vision and Values in 2025 are available in Appendix 1.

Purpose

Northstar supports individuals and families to become more resilient and informed, and have a broader range of coping strategies to address their challenging circumstances and mind their health and wellbeing.

The 5-Step Programme underpins much of the support provided. This is an evidence-based, non-directive model used internationally.

Context

Findings from a 2023 study carried out on behalf of Northstar (Haran et al. 2023) identified the feelings common to individuals impacted by someone else's drug or alcohol use. These include intense worry and anxiety, disrupted sleep, feelings of shame and guilt, disruption to daily routines, financial worries and depression. In some cases, participants were fearful of violence in the home or threats from drug dealers. The impact of substance misuse on children in the home raised additional concerns.

Participants are provided with information on substance misuse and related matters to:

- promote their understanding of the factors that contribute to it
- encourage responses to their loved one that are helpful to all involved
- recognise the importance of boundaries
- know the services available to address other needs such as legal, financial, children's services, health, housing etc

Service Provision

The supports available include:

- One-to-one support
- 5 – Step Group Programme
- Peer support groups
- Educational and social groups
- Access to counselling and external therapeutic programmes e.g. Equine Therapy, Bereavement Support
- Complimentary therapies and holistic activities
- Respite Days in a rural location
- Opportunities for participants to join advisory and other peer-lead groups with a focus on the continuous development of the service and supports

Where necessary and appropriate, Northstar also signposts and refers participants to organisations with a remit to meet other identified needs.

- **One-to one work** is provided by Family Support Workers who conduct an initial assessment to identify needs and the appropriate supports and services to meet those needs.
- **5 – Step Group Programme** is delivered quarterly with each programme delivered over an approximate time frame of 7/8 weeks depending on group numbers.
- **Peers Support Groups** promote personal development and reduce the shame and stigma that can manifest from having a family member involved in drug/alcohol misuse.
- **Complimentary and Holistic Therapies** are offered to help manage and reduce stress and promote the importance of self-care. They are provided in conjunction with the ETB and a commissioned service.
- **Social Groups** promote human connection through engagement in particular activities such as arts and crafts, knitting and singing. This socialisation is not only experienced as enjoyable and fun but also builds confidence and self-esteem.
- **Education/Information Groups** provide information on key topics in response to requests
- **Access to counselling** is facilitated by our service to provide a professional space for participants to deal with their own past experiences and unresolved issues

- **Respite Days** are offered approximately six to eight times a year. They take place in a rural location in a Novas property. The day programme includes a holistic activity such as Sound Therapy.

Supported Community Initiatives

The service has a strong focus on interagency work and collaborates with a wide variety of community and drug services throughout the Limerick region. These include:

- Community Addiction Studies Course (CASC)
- Social Health Education Programme (SHEP)
- Helping Women Recover (HWR)
- Wellness Recovery Action Plan (WRAP)
- HSE sponsored courses
- PALLS specialised CE Scheme
- Local community projects and FRC run initiatives
- Limerick Education and Training Board

In 2025, the Coordinator sat on several Steering Advisory Groups which focus on family support. He was also on the DRIVE Oversight Committee, a group tasked with creating a national response to supporting people experiencing drug debt intimidation.

Interagency Initiatives

The Northstar Family Support Project believes in collaborative, interagency work to provide the best opportunities for its participants. This is dependent on building relationships with other supportive organisations throughout the region. These relationships allow the opportunity to share resources and expertise also creating greater opportunities and shared knowledge of specialized supports when working with people impacted by a loved one's drug or alcohol misuse.

Some of these agencies include

- Novas Respite House
- Garryowen Community Development Company
- Community Substance Misuse Team
- Adapt House
- Novas Intensive Family Support
- Education Training Board
- HSE

- Paul Partnership
- Limerick Sports Partnership
- Social Clubs
- Local schools
- Anna Liffey
- Bedford Row Family Support Project
- Women's Collective Ireland
- PALLS
- Coolmine Limerick

The Northstar team also sat on several local and national advisory and steering committees including Drug Related Intimidation & Violence Engagement (DRIVE), National Voluntary Drug & Alcohol Sector (NVDAS), Midwest Treatment & Rehab Group, Board member for Limerick Island Community Partnerships & the Joint Policing Committee (JPC). The South East Family Support Network and Canal Communities addiction services, Dublin.

Additional Collaboration

Northstar contributed to the HSE/ Maynooth Addiction Studies Course, Crescent College Comprehensive TY students, CWell programme. Talks were delivered in person and online.

The Northstar Coordinator, along with Yvonne Lyons, had the honour of representing the participants of the Northstar by attending the House of the Oireachtas and highlighting the needs of families to the Joint Committee on Drugs. <https://www.oireachtas.ie/.../video-archive/committees/10591>

Our Community Outreach worker continues to build relationships throughout the region with the public, volunteers and other professionals; Looking at collaboration opportunities and ways of engaging with people that might need our supports.

The focus of the outreach worker for 2025 was to continue to create awareness of the project and build positive relationships in the Kings Island and the Weston area.

The Northstar FSP continues to have a strong working relationship with the Limerick ETB who continue to provide education hours to the participants of the Northstar.

The Northstar continued to collaborate with the Mid-West Drug & Alcohol Forum and Novas Addiction Services, Limerick on the development of self-care programmes for our colleagues working in the drugs services across the region. This initiative was established in 2023 and continued throughout 2024 and 2025

The Northstar FSP continues to receive support from Novas Addiction services by allowing the Northstar access to the Novas respite house. This support is always greatly received by participants.

The Northstar Coordinator attended as a guest speaker for the HSE Drug Education Programme & the HSE Addiction Studies Course and attended as a guest speaker in TUS Limerick.

The service continues to offer student placement to students from TUS and UL.

The Service had 3 CE worker active in the services in 2025 from PALLS.

Structure, Governance and Management

The company is a not-for-profit company limited by guarantee. It's governed under its Constitution and managed by a Board of Directors, consisting of a Chairperson, Executive Subcommittee and other Directors.

Board of Directors

The Board meets monthly to review the organisation's finances and the progress report. This information is provided by Northstar's Coordinator in conjunction with the Northstar Administrator, who is responsible with providing transparent and accurate financial documents.

In 2025, the Board held ten meetings with an average attendance of 80%. Board Members are recruited publicly by advertising the positions on Board Match, Volunteers.ie and word of mouth. There were changes to the board in 2025 with three new members joining and two members stepping down. Membership varied between 8-10 members during the year.

After 8 years of service as a Board Director, including time as Chairperson, Sonya Browne resigned from the Northstar Board towards the end of 2025. She generously gave her time and expertise to support the development of the organisation in the interests of all involved. Joy Slattery will Chair the Board and lead it into 2026.

The service is independently audited once a year by an external registered accountant. The 2024 financial audit was carried out by FDC Accountants. The result of this audit is provided to the Board of Directors and produced at each year's AGM. The 2024 AGM took place on April 30th.

Northstar Participant Involvement

The Northstar Board of Management welcomes the involvement of past participants on the Board of Management and will aim to always accommodate at least one past participant on the Board.

To safeguard participants, and to avoid conflict of interest, the Board accepts past participants who have not been in receipt of supports from Northstar or any of its affiliated services for at least 2 years. They are required to complete a relevant course such as a personal development course, CASC, Family Support Training or relevant equivalent course available to community members. Currently, the service has two participants on its board of directors.

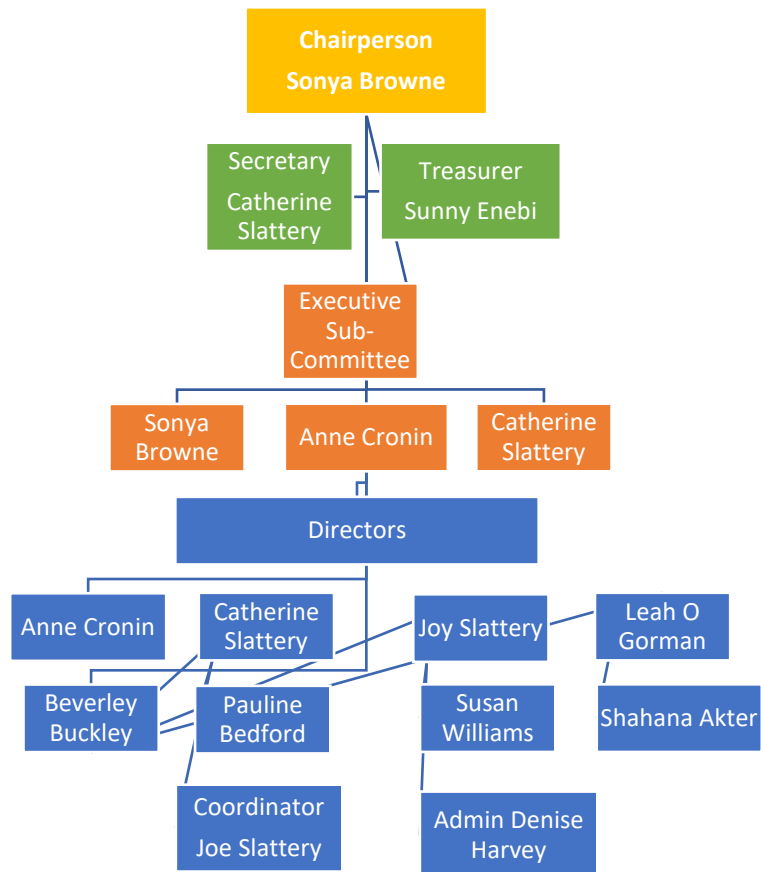
Board Actions

In 2025, the Board of Directors commissioned an external expert to provide a full organisational overview of the service. This included reviewing all supports and programmes provided, a financial health check, and a strengths and weaknesses review of both the team and board of directors.

The outcome of this report will be utilised as a starting point when developing the service and its supports over the coming years. During 2025, the board once again reviewed the services current pay scales and staff salaries to bring them in line with the recommended WRC and Government pay increases. This mandate enabled the Board to increase staff salaries by 9%.

The Board of Directors and Coordinator regularly review the Board's current membership while keeping the recruitment of new members in mind.

Board of Directors Structure 2025



Some Words of Reflection in 2025 from the Northstar Chairperson.

Following on from 2024, we set ourselves some key focus areas for 2025 surrounding our processes and procedures, outlining each person's role and responsibility, this was achieved through an external review of the organisation as a whole from the staff, support, finances and the board whilst completing key targets and a gap analysis throughout the organisation. This completed and is set to be actioned throughout 2026 with a board update each quarter. This highlights key actions to be taken by the whole team from staff members to the board from operational to strategic goals and will continue to drive the project into a very successful 2026. A task of having an updated/reviewed salary and pay scale in line with WRC PayScale adjustments was reviewed.

We've hired some new key members into the board who will help drive policy and the direction we want to take Northstar in.

We again received extra funding throughout the year, which is healthy for us to drive the promotion of Northstar to a wider audience to outside the city limits. The Annual Service of Commemoration & Hope was a resounding success and shows what we really do and will be forever the Northstar's guiding light.

I want to thank all members of staff and the board for their contribution to the Northstar and may we continue as a family to provide support to those who are in need.”

Northstar Chairperson

Sonya Browne

Core Funding

Core funding is provided by the HSE via the Mid-West Regional Drugs and Alcohol Forum (MWRDAF) with a large portion allocated to Staff Payroll and the lease of our premises at 28 John Street, Limerick. The service received €325,116.51 in 2025. The additional funding received in 2025 allowed the service to extend the family support workers hours and continue to fund a part-time Community Outreach Worker to reach people in their own communities throughout the city and continue to provide more specialised interventions like the bereavement support group and family counselling sessions.

In late 2025 based on research developed by the Northstar highlighting the need for outreach supports in the county, additional funding was approved by the HSE to employ a support worker on a fulltime basis. This position will commence in early 2026.

The Northstar Family Support Project submits quarterly financial and progress reports to the HSE & the Mid-West Drug and Alcohol Forum. Northstar Family Support Project is committed to the best practice within our work and governance. The organisation is fully compliant with all relevant Irish charity legislation and regulatory frameworks. We work to a high standard ensuring transparency and accountability in all areas of our work. Audited accounts are prepared annually and approved at the AGM each year.

Secondary, Once-Off Funding & Donations Received in 2025.

Throughout 2025, the service continued to build its reserve fund by renting office and car park space to other community and external services. The service also started the process of developing volunteer-led advisory groups to look at ways of generating funds through fundraising events. Volunteers are recruited through social media, volunteers.ie, Board Match, and internally by inviting past and present participants of the service who are looking to continue their personal and professional development.

Other sources of funding received in 2025 were kindly received from the MWRDAF Small Grants Scheme, Limerick City and County Council Regeneration ESIF Fund, and once-off donations by friends of the service.

Self-generated funds in 2025 = € 24,282

Accounting Records

The measures taken by the directors to secure compliance with the requirements of Sections 281 to 285 of the Companies Act 2014 regarding the keeping of accounting records or the implementation of necessary policies and procedures for recording transactions, the

employment of competent accounting personnel with appropriate expertise and the provision of adequate resources to the financial function. The accounting records of the company are located at 28 John Street, Limerick City

Bank = AIB, O'Connell Street, Limerick

Solicitors = Meehan solicitors, Roche House, 8 Bank Pl, Centre, Limerick, V94 C80H

2025 Northstar Team

The Northstar Family Support Project consists of 6 core staff:

- Family support workers (3) - one full time and 2 part time
- Administrator (1) – 20 hrs a week
- Community Outreach Worker (1) - 20 hrs a week
- Coordinator Full - 37.5 hrs a week

These positions were financed throughout 2025 by the HSE Mid-West Drug and Alcohol Services via Mid-West Regional Drug and Alcohol forum, PALLS & the Regeneration Department of Limerick County Council.

The service also provides two CE placements via PALLS and opportunities for 2nd and 3rd year student (third level) placements.

Throughout 2025 a number of volunteers assisted with the service.

Near the end of 2025 the service was approved funding by the HSE to recruit a fulltime support worker to focus on County Limerick. The recruitment process started in the last quarter of 2025.

Participant engagement is funded mainly through the Regeneration Department of Limerick City and County Council and the Mid-West Regional Drug and Alcohol Forum Small Grants.

The Limerick Education and Training Board support the service with tutor hours that allow the service to provide personalised programmes that are identified via consultation with participants. This secondary funding enables Northstar to provide supports to its participants I.E counselling, holistic therapies, respite, personal development, events, and education opportunities.

Counselling is provided by (CAPS) Counselling and Psychotherapy Services based in Limerick City.

Also supporting the service is one holistic therapist providing a range of holistic interventions to participants.

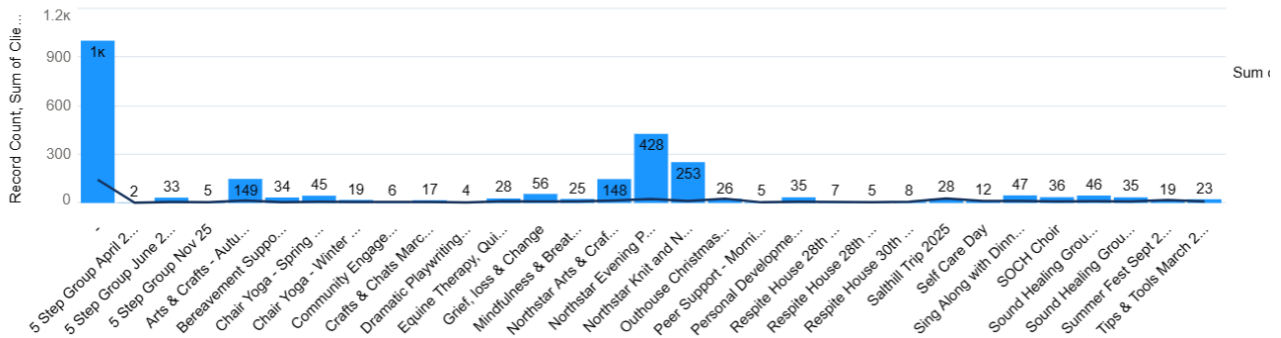
In 2025 the service supported 3 C.E placements in Northstar providing training opportunities for front of desk as well as training in family support interventions.

Participant Events Throughout 2025

71 individuals attended 23 distinct group activities in 2025. Many of the 71 would have attended several of these events, making full use of the available supports.

Total Records
2,589

Total Client: Unique Count
172



Participant Engagement and Activities: 2025

2025 continued to be a very busy year for the service with a wide variety of supports offered to participants.

72 new referrals

326 people received 3,376 interventions throughout 2025

19 participants availed of 222 private counselling sessions

41 people availed of 121 Holistic Therapies

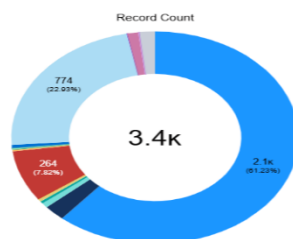
864 key working sessions provided to 132 participants

24 Cases closed

Total Records
3,376

Total Duration (hours)
2,270.167

Total Unique Count
326



Specific Supports and Events in 2025

Participant Fun Day

Table quiz, Music, and Prizes. This event created an opportunity for new and old participants to meet each other in an informal setting.

Participants Summer Outing

A trip to Galway. The participants were treated to lunch and a trip to the beach. These events provide an opportunity to alleviate some of the stress participants live with whilst building peer relationships with other people going through similar situations.

Personal Development through Equine Therapy and Overnight Eden Derry.

8 participants availed of this event which included personal development, an evening meal and an opportunity to enjoy each other's company. This event was very well received by the people who attended.

Explore Grief and Loss via Equine Therapy

A 4-week programme was offered to 10 participants to explore grief and loss via this medium. Dinner was also provided on the last day.

Personal Development Programme

This 10 -week pilot programme was offered in response to an identified need and at the request of some participants. Those who attended reported it to be beneficial.

Christmas In-House Event

A fun-filled event for participants and staff alike, with music, food, and a visit from Santa with small gifts for everyone.

Christmas Dinner for Participants

All participants are invited to attend this event. This year's event was held in the Clarion Hotel with finger food and entertainment provided.

Service of Commemoration and Hope

Our annual flagship event was well-attended.

Northstar's in Your Eyes Fundraiser

This is a fun and collaborative event that invites other services to come along and take part in the night's entertainment of singing and dancing while raising some additional funds.

Future Plan

- Approximately 100 referrals in a 12-month period
- Provide all necessary training to support social activities and excursions.

- Definition of complex needs to be developed by Northstar and supporting services relating to families impacted by a loved one's drug or alcohol misuse. This to be submitted to Drugnet and HRB for approval.
- Continue to promote the Counselling service.
- Continue the process of applying for capital funding to purchase our own building and move out of the rental market.
- Build relationships with the corporate sector via members of the board of directors.
- Continue to promote awareness of Northstar in Limerick City & County.
- Continue to develop working relationships with services in the county.
- Continue to offer supports within the service to a high standard.
- Support staff to continue to upskill and be trained in evidence-based practice models and resources/toolkits
- Develop and facilitate new personal development supports within the service including assertiveness and confidence building, mindfulness, bereavement support.
- Host the Service of Commemoration and Hope
- Host a fundraising event
- Attend external events for organisational learning and development, opportunities for networking and collaborative work, and to promote Northstar
- The Board will review current working policies
- Continue to develop relationships with other services in Ireland that support families

Staff Progression

All Support workers will engage in training relevant to their roles within the service, including advanced Motivational Interviewing, 5 Step Programme, HSE Mandatory Trainings, SMART Recovery – Family and Friends

Strengthen Interagency work with other services within Limerick City, looking at collaboration and training opportunities.

Family Support Staff/Outreach Workers to continue engaging with external and internal supervision.

Continue to develop working relationships with students from TUS & UL to complete their placement hours within Northstar.

All staff received training in the effective use and data inputting of the Health Research Board

The Northstar SFP Team availed of a teambuilding event in 2025.

Acknowledgments

Special thanks and farewell to our outgoing Chairperson Sonya Browne.

Thanks to our volunteer board of directors who generously give their time and expertise.

We acknowledge all those who support the ongoing development and delivery of our services.

To our funders, the services that we collaborated with during 2025 and our volunteers, thank

you. To the Northstar team whose constant dedication and compassion create our supportive culture, thank you. Most importantly, to the people who came through our doors seeking support, your bravery and resilience inspire us to do more and do better.



Appendix 1

Mission statement

Northstar Family Support Project works with families in the Limerick region in a respectful, compassionate and non-judgmental manner to deal with the effects of substance misuse by offering a suite of interventions which empowers the family and provides hope of a brighter future.

Vision

To be recognised across the Mid-West as the first port-of-call for families effected by substance abuse and nationally as a stander-bearer for the provision of such services.

Values

We believe in family support as a catalyst for change; We believe everyone is unique and on a unique journey; We believe that everyone deserves to be treated with dignity and respect; We believe in providing a safe, warm, nurturing space for growth; We work from a strong community development ethos that encourages equality and partnership; We believe in supporting people to reach their full potential at their own pace, through the promotion of trust, honesty and respect.