

# Matters of Substance: Caring for Clients and Community

Written by Rachel Reisman, LICSW, IIC's Director of Wellness Services

As social workers, my colleague Siobhan Kelly and I know the importance of meeting people where they're at. That includes working with clients toward their own goals, whether that means feeling better, getting sober, or making progress in a specific area of their lives. It also means meeting people in the office, on the phone, by text, or out in the community. Along with empathy, problem-solving, and flexibility, this basic social work practice- to meet people wherever they are- is core to our work with the Irish diaspora in Boston.

Despite the well-established community for Irish immigrants in Boston, many need another place to turn for care related to depression, anxiety, substance use, and everyday life challenges. During this chapter of heightened fear and new anti-immigrant actions, many Irish in New England are bearing the anxiety of possible detention and find themselves retreating further into the shadows.

As a licensed therapist with over 25 years of experience in the healthcare field, I provide direct clinical care and crisis intervention, while my colleague Siobhan Kelly, BSW, helps clients solve challenges related to housing, employment, social security, and finding other resources in Boston, across the U.S., and in some cases, back in Ireland. Every week is different, and we pride ourselves on adapting to the needs of our clients. Even if we can't solve someone's problem completely, we will always provide them with reassurance and direction for their next steps. Those who come through our doors always leave with something!

We are also proud to invest in community education on mental health, substance use, and Know Your Rights, as well as programming that sustains Irish cultural connections for many. In addition to hosting talks, film screenings, and other events, we collaborate with Cumann na Gaeilge i mBoston on an Irish language program that draws 60 students each year and provides a sense of Irish "home" to many in Boston.

With the generous support of the Irish Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade's Emigrant Support Programme, we are able to directly serve more than 300 Irish and Irish-American clients each year. Our Irish clients are often reticent to accept free care, and struggle to feel entitled to it. Being able to remind them that their home country wants to see them safe and well helps remove that sense of burden, and helps us remain in their lives to whatever degree they want or need.

The IIC's Wellness Services provide a place of safety for our clients, as well as a confidential, professional, practical response to their needs. The ability to provide immediate therapy and crisis intervention to our clients, regardless of their insurance or legal status, is an amazing gift.

Social work practice began with immigrant "settlement houses" in Boston, New York, and Chicago, and it has always sought to offer respect, kindness and hope to those acclimating to a new country and culture. Social work values difference and the contributions that immigrants make to our country.

To be a social worker providing Wellness Services at the IIC at this time in our history is to sit with Irish immigrants as they bravely navigate their way through the chapters of life that we all face, amidst new federal actions directed against them. Doing so is to see the strength, courage and dignity inherent in all human beings. To be given the ability to serve and accompany our clients is a privilege every day.



Rachel Reisman, LICSW  
reisman@iicenter.org | 617-542-7654

*The IIC Wellness team is here for you! Contact us for a chat, to problem solve, and to figure out the best next steps for you!*