



# Seeking interest from people to join **REFOCUS**

*Recovery Experience Forum of Carers and Users of Services*

**Do you have lived experience of mental illness and psychiatric services, and feel you could contribute value to a well-established working group of patients, family members/carers and psychiatrists within the College?**

The College is seeking interest from people who currently engage or have previously engaged with psychiatric services for severe enduring mental illness, or are a family member /carer /support for such a person, to join the REFOCUS group. The group has been working as part of the College for 12 years, to help shape the training of specialist doctors in psychiatry, to enhance life-long education of psychiatrists as well as contributing to policy, positions, public education and advocacy activity.

## **Unique and diverse experiences**

It is important that the group includes viewpoints from a range of people from diverse backgrounds, while acknowledging that each member has their own unique experiences and interests. We would particularly encourage people from marginalised or minority communities to get in touch with us – including, but not limited to, those who have a dual diagnosis, those who have been imprisoned, or experienced homelessness, those in the LGBTQ+ community, and individuals of any and all ethnicities and cultural identities.

## **Co-production and individual value at the core**

Key to the success of achieving the objectives of REFOCUS is its co-produced, professional and respectful way of operating where every members' input is valued equally and where ideas are welcomed and listened to.

## **Some current member feedback**

"While I was a psychiatric patient, and particularly when I was in hospital, I did not have the confidence or understanding of what was going on in my mind to communicate with psychiatrists and express my needs adequately. Within REFOCUS, the experience of patients, family members and psychiatrists are equally valued as we work together with the aim of improving the training and delivery of psychiatric care."

**- Mr Brian McNulty, Member and Joint Chair**

"Being part of REFOCUS has been a fun and fascinating insight into the importance of including patients and family members/carers in all aspects of psychiatric practice, from training to service development, and it has been a very rewarding group to be involved with."

**- Dr Mia McLaughlin, Consultant Old Age Psychiatrist and Joint Chair**

"Psychiatrists are interested in people and assisting them when they become ill, not with their physical body per se, but with their mind, the essence of their being. This understanding of our patients is just one small facet of the person. REFOCUS offers us a chance to really appreciate the lived lives of patients and their families, to hear their stories that are not heard in clinics, enabling us to refocus on what is truly important to our patients and their families."

**- Dr Verena Keane, Consultant Psychiatrist and REFOCUS Member**



## Some key points on the work of REFOCUS:

- **Partnership and Recovery Focus:** with a Recovery-focused perspective, and commitment to partnership within mental health services, REFOCUS, now in its 12th year, has a membership made up of patients/service users, family members/carers and psychiatrists, all with knowledge of mental illness, mental health services and an interest in advocacy.
- **Overarching Goal:** The goal of REFOCUS is to provide input into College policy, positions and education, and to ensure the experiences and perspectives of members inform both of these key College activities.
- **Independent Group:** REFOCUS is not embedded in any particular service. Its membership comes from many different services and geographical areas of Ireland, capturing the richness and diversity of individual experiences - all of which enhance its work and furthers the achievement of its objectives as a College group.
- **Productive activity:** The group has participated in many College and external non-College events, produced discussion papers, provided input to trainee development events and more recently, planned and delivered a main session at a College annual conference.
- **Active participation:** REFOCUS meets four times a year and members of the group commit to actively participating at meetings, and to be further involved in particular agreed projects.
- **Member of College Council and joint chairmanship:** The group is joint chaired by a psychiatrist and non-psychiatrist member equally. Both parties now have voting membership on the College governing body (Council), a recent development of which the group is very proud.

**Please note:** Each REFOCUS member represents their own individual experience and views. Persons interested should be in a period of wellness and ready to share openly with the group. While the group works in a very collaborative and supportive way, it is not intended to act as a 'support group'. Membership of the Forum is on a voluntary basis with agreed expenses for participation.

Please express your interest by sending summary details of personal experience and reasons for your interest in REFOCUS and its work to:

**Ms. Karen McCourt**

Communications & Policy Officer  
External Affairs and Policy Department

**By email:** [kmccourt@irishpsychiatry.ie](mailto:kmccourt@irishpsychiatry.ie)

**By phone:** (01) 634 4374

**By post:** College of Psychiatrists of Ireland, 5 Herbert Street, Dublin 2

**Deadline: 5pm, Wednesday, 21st September 2022**

Applicants may be asked to meet with members of REFOCUS to discuss their possible involvement in the group. We will hold informal meetings in September/October 2022, in a Dublin-based location.

**We look forward to hearing from you!**