



Pictured: Michael Quinn.

Pictures by Owen South, Limerick Leader.

Laughing all the Way to the Office

Humour is proving to be a “tonic” at RehabCare’s resource centre in Limerick.

AT REHABCARE’S resource centre in John Street in Limerick, humour and laughter are taken very seriously. So much so, that the centre has recently introduced a ‘humour hour’ as part of the programme activity which people can choose to participate in. It’s all about effecting positive mood change and it’s the brainchild of staff member Michael Quinn.

Michael, who works as a Programme Supervisor with RehabCare in Limerick, and who has been with the organisation for almost 10 years, helps to design and implement programmes that support people to develop their independent living skills, enjoy social and leisure activities,

participate in education and training, and contribute to their personal development.

He recently undertook a degree in Social Care at NUI Galway and, as part of his thesis, he decided to focus on the role of humour in a health and social care setting.

"I initially set out to look at the nature of communication skills in the resource centre and how service users interact with each other and with staff. Quite a number of the people who attend the resource centre here in John Street have a great outlook on life, a fantastic sense of humour and love to have a laugh. It quickly became apparent to me that many aspects of communication at the centre were being delivered through humour.

"When I read up on it and saw the social benefits, I was immediately blown away. What got me excited was how humour could benefit people both physiologically and

mentally. In fact, if you laugh one hundred times, it's the equivalent of ten minutes on the rowing machine but so much more fun!"

He points out that in addition to enhancing mental health and wellbeing, laughter is widely acknowledged to enhance the production of endorphins, the body's own natural opiates, which can diminish pain awareness.

As a result of his findings, Michael decided to introduce a "humour hour" in the centre. During "humour hour" participants sit down to watch funny movies and comedy series, and read jokes and amusing stories. "To see and hear people having a good time and being totally at ease with themselves is such a wonderful experience. We've been looking at the films of Laurel and Hardy and Charlie Chaplin, and sitcoms like *Fawlty Towers* and *Friends*, and we encourage people to keep a humour folder for cut-outs of articles, poems and anything that makes them giggle. The laughs on a Monday

morning are simply infectious, affecting just about everyone as they reverberate throughout the centre."

Already, Michael is seeing the initiative yield some very positive results. "At the moment, we are doing just one session a week, but from my own personal observations, I can already see a real change in people's outlook and perspective in terms of their socialisation and interaction with others. It is helping people to lose their inhibitions; they are becoming more communicative and sharing more, and seem to have a broader perspective on their lives, their background and history."

Michael's insights and findings have received national attention, including an interview on RTÉ Radio One's *John Murray Show* and lots of interest from other groups. "Following the interview on RTÉ, I received a call from a woman working in a day care service for the elderly in Monaghan who wants advice on organising their own laughter group. It's great to be able to spread the word, and the laughter!" ■



Who to contact

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