# How a family's pleas for help saw

Kay Barrett has a history of serious mental illness. As issues spiralled and her family and the health system ran out of options, they were advised to turn to the justice system for a safety order. Now Kay is in prison and her family wants her out, reports **Noel Baker** 



Kay Barrett, right, pictured in 2015, is described by her sister Clair, above, as a popular, 'lovely' person who had worked as a nanny, but Kay is currently in Limerick Prison after making repeated 999 calls and producing a knife when gardaí arrived at her home. Pictures: Eddie O'Hare

S Kay Barrett stood at the rear of the courtroom, agitated and pset, her solicitor spelled out for the judge what had transpired "Kay is hearing voices in her head; she feels threaten ed," Jack Purcell told Judge James McNulty in the courtroom in Clonakilty last February.

"Last week she thought the house was on fire. She says she would prefer to go into prison for a period of time. It seems the lesser of two evils." It turns out it may well be, but mostly through a lack of other options. Kay Barrett, of Donough more in Co Cork, is currently

in Limerick Prison, not due for release until early ovember this year It follows the triggering of suspended sentences for convictions which had accumulated due to repeated breaches of a safety order. initially put in place to act as a deterrent, with her family believing that the other option — a significant

was not open to her. That court appearance in February was unscheduled and came about due to alleged breaches of her bail Kay looked hot and flustered. At one point she stood almost doubled over, her forehead in the palm of her hand The court was told of the suspended sentences hang ing over her. It was admitte she had made a number of 999 emergency calls on one day, and more again that very morning. It was a

condition of her bail that she refrain from making those

calls unless there was an

actual need. A previous court hearing last December neard she had made 200 such calls in the space of a month She had produced a knife when gardaí called to her home. Now, here she was, clearly in the grip of somehing she was trying but ng to control "I am physically sick as well as mentally sick," she

told the court. Mr Purcell said she had been taken to the Mercy Hospital the previous week end and the judge said she could hardly be faulted if she did need assistance and attention. Sgt Paul Kelly said it was alleged that on one of the recent 999 calls, Kay had alleged she had a firearm and threatened self-harm. Gardaí remained at the scene for several hours and an ambulance was called Judge McNulty said: "Kay Barrett is clearly in turmoil and her mental state is clearly deteriorating Bail was revoked. Kay was

remanded in custody for ntencing, which then took current stav in prison. Mr Purcell had consented to a longer remand "to help

her to get settled in" "I think you have called it right." Judge McNulty had said. "It is the lesser of two evils

# 'A lovely person'

It wasn't always like this Kay's sister Clair describes her as "a lovely person" who was popular and was leading her own life She recalls how Kay, now 42. lived in London for a time, working as a nanny;

planning for the future. Clair clearly cares deeply for her sister, as do the other members of the family. including their aunt Carmel, and father, John. They have seen the issues, from 2009, when Kay had a eakdown, to 2017 when, having returned to Ireland she had another setback. Clair explains that their mother had a diagnosis of schizophrenia and spent much of her adult life in residential hospital settings including the Carraig Mór

Centre, a psychiatric intensive care unit in Shanakiel on the outskirts of Cork city Kay was initially diagnosed with schizophrenia but then it changed to emotional deregulation Another expert said she was bipolar. According to Clair. Kay is "somewhere

between the three", and now stuck between the criminal justice and mental health "It's not a sympathy thing mum was in the system and we visited her every week and we thought she had a orrible life and now we see that she had a better life than

Kay," says Clair, "Because Mum had mental health issues, Kay's early months were not very stable "Kay has had attachment issues her whole life. "Mum was diagnosed with schizophrenia and Kay has

the same thing but the diagnosis has changed. It's clear that there is a link. "I've said that to the doctors and they say, 'oh, it's a moveable feast'. She is also

she had a boyfriend and was emotionally deregulated, but she's also been diagnosed with bipolar so how can it be that our mother can be in Carraig Mór for all those years, and Kay is just unfortunately gone down this other way and is locked out of the mental health ystem completely?" Another person familia with the case but who does not wish to be named believe es that a switch in diagnosis away from schizophrenia

worked to Kay's disadvan tage. Her repeated calling of the emergency services was, in their view, driven by a mental health issue. Clair says it is a "coping nechanism". Everyone agrees that it places a huge

strain on overworked gardaí and medical personnel And so, some time ago and, according to Clair, at the well-intentioned" sugges tion of the gardaí, the family sought the court order that would put margins on Kay's pehaviour, so as to protect er loved ones and tempe her behaviour. It didn't

The person familiar with the case said the repeated breaches brought Kay before e courts, but both Judge McNulty and Judge Colm Roberts sought to avoid

sending her to prison. Ultimately, she ran out of chances to avoid incarceration. According to Clair: 'Judge McNulty, I feel for him, because I know that he has compassion and I have seen him communicating with Kay in such a lovely way but his hands are tied and he knows that this is not the solution but there is

ban has been remanded in

psychiatric assessment,

around 5 am on Friday.

and for several years.

nowhere for him to go.

**66**She is one of many in prison because of the mental health service's failure

Regarding the origina order, she says the gardaí were hugely frustrated with the situation, and there was a view that maybe engaging with the court could open up mental health supports. As for the family, "we were desperate", Clair says. "We didn't know what to do, we never thought that it would

lead her to be in prison for 12

### months potentially Failed by services

## In a letter to the court in

the Irish Examiner Kay's aunt Carmel referred to her initial imprisonment and how, in her view, mental health services failed Kav "Kay has a lot of abandon ment/emotional issues as

her mother was institutionalised long term in Our Lady's Psychiatric Hospital and when she becomes emotionally unstable and panicky, she turns to the gardaí as they have to respond," she said. "We have learnt that she is one of many who ends up in prison because of the mental health

service's failure and its

ago. The accused, Daniel

Blanaru, handed himself

Following arrest, he was

overnight for questioning.

Mr Blanaru, aged 34, who

fore Judge Miriam Walsh at

Dressed in a blue T-shirt,

silently throughout the brief

custody, with a recommen- taken to Ashbourne Garda

dation that he undergo a Station, where he was held

after gardaí charged him with murdering the mother He was charged with the murder of Ms Serban on Au-

Ms Serban died at the is also Romanian, but has an

nouse she rented at Rath- address at Rathmore, Ath-

more, near Athboy, at boy, Co Meath, appeared be-

Medics and gardaí rushed a special sitting of Trim Dis-

Ms Serban, aged 26, from navy tracksuit bottoms, and

Romania, had been in Ire- runners, Mr Blanaru stood

She lived in Co Westmeath hearing. He listened to the

perfore moving to Athboy proceedings with the aid of

to the property, but she was trict Court on Saturday

of two at her Co Meath gust 12, at her home.



general lack of coherence and continuum. We are now seeing Kay's personal efforts throughout her life to deal with her issues. Jeven train ing to become a counsellor and working many years as a nanny] being totally undermined by State services. 'This imprisonment comes as a climax to a series of disconcerting decisions made by the health authorities over the years since Kay

had a first nervous break down nine years ago at the age of 31, and was diagnosed as being bipola 'Since 2017 Kay's diagnosis, medication, and therapy have frequently changed or been disrupted. "In the first years after diagnosis, she had the occasional short stay in mental health centres and was mostly able to live a nor mal life, though on constant

medication with little rehahilitation However over time an increasing anxiety and anger appeared. Her b polar diagnosis was replaced by schizoaffective disorder line personality disorder. 'Since May 2019 she has suffered almost bimonthly psychotic angry behavioural episodes, which result in traumatic A&E visits, gardaí and ambulance-service use. and numerous 72-hour admissions to St Michael's psychiatric ward in the Mercy in Cork city. As her

medication was patently not effective, the medical opinion put the responsibil ity on her behaviour, diagnosed her as having solely a borderline personality disorder (BPD) after a previous diagnosis of

Tom

Daniel Blanaru handed himself

Detective Sergeant Colm

Station, told the court that

in to gardaí.

bipolar, which is generally a lifelong illness. "At this point the mental health services made a disruptive decision which came as a total shock to Kay and her family: Kay was lischarged from all menta health services in October 2020 as she was said to be uncooperative and not using the techniques and skills explained to her to deal with crises. Kay was informed that her diagnosis no longer entitled her to the mental

health care and that she had a problem of 'bad behaviour' 'When in panic and distraught, she has been calling ambulances and the gardaí to her home in Donoughmore, The latter, at a loss, suggested that the only way of getting the mental health service to

fulfil its obligations was by etting a safety order agains Kav so that on a subsequent Garda call-out she would be referred to a judge, who would logically refer to mental health care "Kay has been in front of Clonakilty, Bandon, Bantry

and Macroom and all are in agreement that this is clearly a medical matter and Kay is not a criminal; her anger outbursts are due to lack of care "When we [Kay's sister and father] took out a safety order on Kay we thought we

were acting in her best interests, never thinking ou action would result in Kav being in prison. It is morally wrong and we are extremely upset at this outcome. One potential solution is dialectical behaviour therapy (DBT), but

# **Duo's app uses memories** |Larisa Serban's partner held on murder charge to aid those with dementia The partner of Larisa Ser- into gardaí.

# Liz Dunphy

Two young Cork entrepreneurs have developed an app which uses memories to help people with dementia connect with their loved ones.

Amy Boyden, 25, and Niamh Murray, 22, were passionate about helping people with dementia after seeing family members live with the illness.

They have launched their Forget Me Not app (forgetmenotapp.ie), which uses reminiscence therapy to stimulate memory and mental activity, often by using prompts such as images and

The pair, who met while studying law at University College Cork, want to challenge the stigma around dementia and help people con-

nect through memories. They happened to sit next heimer's that first meeting, they

began developing the concept for Forget Me Not. "We were both quite passionate about this issue." to visit my grandmother and nect in the present. she would not know my name. But I used to sing her a

word with me. much sadness around mem- between you and your loved ory loss, there are triggers ones who are living with 55m people are living with like song that can bring back Alzheimer's and dementia dementia



Young entrepreneurs Niamh Murray and Amy Boyden, who created the 'Forget Me Not' app after meeting at UCC.

people connect."

some memories and help through the use of reminiscence therapy.' Research into the benefits Ms Boyden's stepmother, Ellen, suffered from Alzof reminiscence therapy was also central to the project.

to each other at UCC's Entre-preneur Society and from birthday. She remembered "We made sure the app was very user-centred," music and stories," said Ms added Ms Murray.

Boyden. "Talking about the can be very helpful. Forget share with others so every-Me Not encourages people to one — families, loved ones, | take them for 'test drives' said Ms Murray. "I would go talk about the past to concarers — can all log onto the and later selling them to "in-restaurant worker has 'deone account." "We both understand that

The Alzheimer Society of song, 'The Town I Left Be-hind', and she'd sing every decided to create something of dementia. That number is decided to create something of dementia. That number is decided to create something of demential that number is decided to create something of decided to create something of demential that number is decided to create something of dementia. That number is | faces a litany of charges for "Although there can be aims to aid communication people in Ireland by 2050. Worldwide, an estimated bail.

pronounced dead at the evening.

with her family about a year an interpreter.

# Tom Tuite

sale after being allowed to year and on May 31, 2020. nocent" buvers. Stephen Corbally, aged 26.

Cephas Power at Dublin Dis- of gardaí in Finglas on owners handed him the keys Garda patrol "at speed" and

trict Court at the weekend. November 22, 2018 He is accused of stealing

ception' charges for inducing quired property two people to buy stolen cars. it is challenging to talk with Ireland estimates that some with an address at a hostel Two of the cars have been recovered

that would aid this. Our app estimated to grow to 141,200 | offences going back to 2018 Mr Corbally with stealing and has been held on €2,500 €2,300 in cash from a woman take it for a test drive", the angerment charge involved at a party on May 2, 2021, and court heard. He appeared before Judge with endangering the lives

Garda Subomi Etti ob- "failed to return". "When you download it, it A Dublin man is facing trial four cars advertised for sale jected to bail, citing the seripast rather than the present gives you a code that you can accused of stealing cars on online on three dates this ousness of the case and fears hicles was around £8,000. the accused would evade jus-The cleaner and part-time tice, intimidate witnesses, or that CCTV evidence had notify of any address change. dispose of the illegally ac- been obtained; however, stay out of the Coolmine area The garda alleged Mr Corbally contacted car sellers ahan, he agreed there was no

Gardaí have also charged book Marketplace websites. client.

before he drove off and "left the scene", resulting in

The total value of the ve-The garda told the court fence counsel Karl Mon- tact with witnesses.

via the DoneDeal and Face- formal identification of his In each case, "he asked to The court heard the endallegations that Mr Corbally yet indicated how he will It was alleged that the reversed a vehicle into a

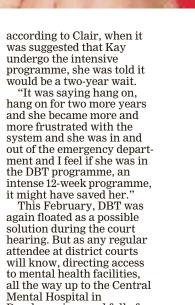
arrested the accused "for the link. Mr Regan told the purpose of charge for the of- court that the translator had fence of murder, contrary to been helpful during the incommon law, as directed by vestigation. the DPP The defendant was perative" that the accused charged at 3.08pm and cau-tioned that if he had any-have the translator's ass ance at the next hearing.

thing to say, it would be taken down and used in evidence. The court heard "he made o reply after caution and

was handed a true copy of the charge sheet". Defence solicitor Maurice quest from the defence to di-Regan said there could be no rect a psychiatric assessail application at this stage. The district court cannot grant bail in murder cases;

only the High Court can. Judge Walsh remanded number of issues in relation

McNally, of Kells Garda Mr Blanaru in custody to ap- to my advice that he is not pear again at Trim District taking in". Man accused of stealing cars after 'test drives' their beloved Kay sent to prison



Dundrum, is a road full of adblocks and potholes. The typical answer is that there are no beds available and the person will have to

# Prisons to fill gaps

wait

A spokesperson for the Irish no up-to-date data on the prevalence of mental illness in the prison population, with information on the level of mental health conditions derived from studies carried out in 2003 and 2005. "For all mental illnesses combined, rates ranged from 16% of male committals to 27% of sentenced men, while in women committed to

prison the rate was 41%, with 60% of sentenced women having a mental illness," the spokesperson said "For the more sever mental illnesses, rates of psychosis were 3.9%

at 2.05pm on Saturday, he Court on Tuesday, via video The judge said it was "imhave the translator's assist-

> Mr Regan said that his client fell into the criteria for legal aid and the judge noted there was no Garda objection Judge Walsh granted it

> and she also acceded to a rement of Mr Blanaru in cus-The solicitor explained that there had been "a

a garda being injured. Judge Power granted bail but Mr Corbally must sign on daily at a garda station. under questioning from de- of Dublin, and have no con-He was remanded with consent to bail to appear at Cloverhill District Court this

Mr Corbally, who has not plead, was also granted legal

amongst men committed to prison, 7.6% amongst men on remand, and 2.7% amongst sentenced men. Women prisoners had psychosis in 5.4% [of cases]. The Irish Penal Reform Trust is familiar with Kay's case and IPRT executive director Saoirse Brady said mental health was a serious

rish Examiner

Monday, 15.08.2022

issue among the prison population. "There is significant unmet mental health need in prison," she said. "People with severe mental health issues who have been assessed as needing hospital treatment, for whom prison

s not appropriate, are often left on waiting lists of over a year to access treatment.

spent time in residential hospital. 'I don't know why Kay can't be a part of that, like Mam' says Clair.

"When we talk about people who are experiencing acute mental health issues, we are talking about the sharp end of mental health need for people in prison, but there is usually between 300 and 400 prisoners engaging vith National Forensic Mental Health Services, and Irish Prison Service data has shown that up to one third of people in prison can be on waiting lists to access inprison psychology services at any given time. The wide ranging level of need is

"What we have now is a damning situation where the State is allowing the prison system to be used to fill gaps in mental health services.

"While we recognise that there is political will for this o change, action to date has been slow. A spokesperson for the Department of Justice said that a high-level task force (HLTF) established in April 2021 by the minister for

ustice in conjunction with the minister for health, to consider the mental health and addiction issues of persons in prison and prinary care support on release has held 10 plenary meetings to date and has established three subgroups on diversion, capacity issues in the Irish Prison Service and

National Forensic Mental Health Services, and community issues, including care after release "Each of the subgroups comprises of relevant xperts, chaired by high ranking officials from the criminal justice sector, with the health leads represented and contributing to all," said

the departmental spokesper-"Each of these groups have met on at least 12 occasions. The HLTF has engaged with a large number of relevant bodies and civil society actors, including neeting with the Mental lealth Commission on December 2 and with the chairperson of the National Prison Visiting Committee irpersons Group and the Inspector of Prisons.

"The work of the taskforce is continuing apace. The aim is to finalise a report, including a high-level implementation plan assigning responsibility and

timelines for its recommendations shortly, after which it will be submitted to vernment for approval. "Minister [Helen] McEntee met with Minister [Stephen] Donnelly as well as other relevant ministers and the chair of the taskforce on July 21 and officials from both departments have been engaging in further discussions in order to progress matters. Publication of the

report is a high priority for the minister and she hopes to be in a position to do so, in

The IPRT's Ms Brady said the work of the HLTF is to be welcomed and that the independent Prison Health Needs Assessment, which aims to determine future health service requireme in prison, should be published as a matter of urgency "Each day that goes by without action means another day where people's

conjunction with her

health, in the autumn

colleague the minister for

mental healthcare needs are not being adequately met," she said. "Any focus on improving mental healthcare in the criminal justice system must begin with keeping people

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# **66**The State is allowing the prison system to be used to fill gaps in mental health services

out of the system in the first place by putting appropriate community resources and systems in place, so that prison is never perceived as he only viable option for a ntencing judge when omeone has a severe mental illness. This can prevent causing further trauma and may even save lives. "However, this will

require a fundamental shift n our approach to mental health at all points of contact with the criminal justice system. Failure to provide appropriate care and ccommodation in the ommunity for people with mental health issues cannot be resolved by the Department of Justice alone.

"We need a strong multiagency focus on keeping eople out of prison and this focus on diversion must be inderscored in the report of the High Level Task Force on lental Health and Addiction. We know there is an appetite for this type of liversion. For example while data we have is quite dated, previous public opinion polling suggests that e vast majority of the Irish ublic believe that mentallyill offenders should be treated in a mental health facility instead of being sent

to prison. "We need a robust do mestic inspection regime that is adequately resourced to routinely inspect prisons at regular intervals and investigate the conditions for everyone in prison including the significant portion of people with severe mental Ith needs. International nan rights bodies, prison chaplains, and prison visitimittees have all outlined the severity of the mental health crisis in Irish

prisons. The forthcoming Înspection of Places of Detention Bill offers an op portunity to strengthen an resource the inspectorate to highlight these serious issues of concern.<sup>3</sup>

The HSE said it could no discuss individual cases. Kay's future

"I feel like her choice is being taken away," Clair says. The family has been "very stressed" by what happened

Kav's behaviour, from saying she would throw nerself into a river or burn the house down, to the production of knives, was "a cry for help", and yet they acknowledge that somethin must be done to ensure Kay does not harm herself or

"We were saying was if better for her to be safe in prison rather than shouting and roaring on the streets 'I don't know if I am doing more harm than good bringing it all up," says

Kay does not have a problem with drink or drugs For Clair and Carmel, she is not a criminal, yet she find herself in Limerick Prison. Despite her difficulties, sh is aware of where she is and what has occurred "When she is lucid, it's

heartbreaking," Clair says But what is the alternative? She believes a resi dential centre that could ad dress Kay's needs, even jus at times of mania, would help. Is it any closer to becoming a reality? What happens when Kay comes out of prison later this year' What happens if she resume making the calls? They would have liked

Kay to contribute directly to this article, but also had to consider how it might impac on her. They want to help her, and for Kay to have her own voice "Carraig Mór is still there

and I don't know why Kay can't be a part of that, like Mam," says Clair. "What is Kav's future? If she continu es ringing the guards for her oping mechanism, is she just going to spend the rest of her life in jail, for a crime that is crying out for help 'I understand she can'i keep wasting police time bu

something has to be put in place for that not to happen



# **% Ulster Bank**

# 'It's hard to see to a loved one in prison, but there's nowhere else for him to go'

Greg is a kind, sensitive man. He has an intellectual disability and pronounced mental health difficulties, and when the services he depended on were removed, everything fell apart, his sister Catriona O'Toole tells Social Affairs Correspondent Noel Baker

#### 6 6 HERE have been a few shocks,' . Catriona O'Toole says. And then

Catriona is an associate professor in Maynooth University's department of education, and is the older sister to Greg — a man who was placed in prison on remand primarily due to a lack of alternatives; someone ofter in distress, a man who has repeatedly rubbed his head so furiously he has created a bald patch, and who during one court appearance was so disorientated by what was going on that he walked over to his family and simply handed them his shoes, asking that they take them

Greg, says Catriona, is a sensitive and kind man with various passions, and longtime difficulties — namely an intellectual disability and pronounced mental health oblems. Then last vear some of his mental health supports were withdrawn. According to Catriona, the HSE decided that his intel lectual disability was the overriding concern; except those in disability services in his native Co Wicklow believed differently - that Greg's mental health concerns were paramount. He 'fell between the two stools"

she savs. "Ultimately, he is a kind. sensitive man who has a lot

to give. "It is very hard to see to loved one, a family member with restraints or cuffs on. I is really tough."

She remembers seeing Greg in a cell, silent, confused. She recalls an appearance in court where his clothes were torn, where he was upset. When he handed them his shoes

"I'm not sure if I have fully processed it," Catriona says. She traces everything back to the removal of the services that Greg had come to depend on for stability and support, the little checks and balances that kept everything tipping along. When they were taken away. her brother lost something tangible but which he could no articulate. and all the atnpts to have the matter addressed seemed to go

"You get to a point where you think 'I am not making any headway here, I have written all the letters I can write, nothing is changing nothing is happening'," says

Catriona. "I know from talking to people that there is this wider issue. Greg's is not an isolated case. It's not him on his own, though it feels like that for families, you feel that isolation. That is the way the services make you feel. Everybody must be ou there thinking they are in a unique situation — the real ity, I know, is far from that

# Game of pass the parcel

Greg is now 42, and according to his father. Peter, up until last year he had his own car and was pursuing his passion for motorbikes He is and has always been his own person, the fifth of seven children who grew up in Co Wicklow near Bray. According to Catriona, Greg had difficulties from a young age and underwent some assessments as a child but he proceeded through mainstream school and did an Applied Leaving Certificate. On nishing second level he worked, consistently - on building sites for contractors, in a factory, at a meat plant. He travelled, includ ing to Australia, where Ca triona says he parachuted out of a plane. He was track side at Grand Prix races. "He has a great sense of fun and adventure," says Ca-

triona. Greg was not assessed as having an intellectual disability until he was an adult and he was hit by the grief of his mother's death when he was 20. It was the first real sign of a wobble, leading to erratic behaviour and ulti mately a court appearance for an incident in which there was considerable dam age caused to the family car and home. It also led to an admission to a psychiatric hospital and subsequent support services.

"Over the years he would have received various diag noses," Catriona says. "Learning difficulties, but also mental health — schizo phrenia, bipolar was there for a particular while. It highlīghts the subjectiv element of mental health

need to move beyond diagnnsis Two assessments of his cognitive function, at differ ent stages over the past 10 years, seemed to steer him towards disability services vet the family believe his mental health needs were ever-present. Unfortunately

diagnoses, that our systems

some 18 months ago, things changed again According to both Peter and Catriona, there was a move by the HSE for Greg to be dealt with by disability services, with the result that mental health supports he had become familiar with such as regular visits by a social worker, psychologist and community nurse, stopped. Peter says those nental health professional would have checked that Greg was taking his medi cation and Catriona says the face-to-face nature of the interactions also benefitted her brother. When they topped, he spiralled

'Medication has a place but thev can't be in lieu of providing social support, a network of support and tacking the root causes of dis-

tress," she says Catriona says Greg did not seem to fit the profile for an integrated service, in which ooth his disability and menal health needs would be ad dressed, but she believes that is exactly what he needed. Instead, she says it became a game of pass the parcel, that because Greg did not tick all he boxes for either service he was stuck between mental health and disability services, with both suggesting he was not their responsibil

'They were passing it from one to the other," she says "All the while we have all these lovely policies, inte grated, trauma-informed reducing harm, peer recovery models — but that is not what is happening. "There is no compassion in the system, no humanity

in the system "Mental health services are saying we think the root of the problem is intellectual disability but intellectual disability [services] sav

meanwhile he doesn't quit fit our profile either /e talk about this 'n wrong door' approach to sation, that provide people with links to appropriate services. I think in Greg's case it was actually there was no right door because he wasn't fitting neatly into these boxes of mental health or intellectual disability. But he clearly has mental health needs and around disability "He did not fit neatly into

is quite similar for other people where there is dual "He wasn't able to articu-

late how he felt but I sense from him and from his disress and demeanour that he felt a sense of abandonment and confusion and he didn't understand necessarily why suddenly people are with-

drawing from his life. "He felt that as an aban donment. For someone who has a history of loss, l think that is going to hit harder." Solicitor Joe Maguire has in and effectively manage represented Greg over many gaps in the mental health vears, and echoes Catriona's

'There was a big support put in place for him before and then he got so well with the supports and all the help, that it all fell apart when they removed it," he says. "This happens regularly with people with mental health issues.

"You would never see Greg at all, then next thing Greg is hanging around Bray. The family became seriously concerned. The family believed the father was going to die from stress or overwork for

And that is when they applied for the protection order. While regularly used in domestic violence cases, they can seem like a last resort for families worried about the behaviour of a loved one — that at least if something goes wrong, the gardaí will quickly respond. However, that does not mean it is an easy decision. "I don't think his behavour was under his own conmight bang doors or break

things and that's just a threatening environment for Dad to be in. "If there was a case where Dad was feeling unsafe in the house the guards could be

called and they would respond quickly. It was Dad's decision and I think it was the right decision. Greg found himself on remand in Cloverhill Prison. "He has been remanded in custody to Cloverhill Prison

because there was nowhere else for him to go." savs Joe "He was remanded initially for a psychiatric assessment ecause the judge was aware that he had been recently discharged from Newcastle Hospital, which is the local psychiatric hospital. Catriona says: "Greg would never be violent, h

has never harmed another person, but he can get so agi tated, so distressed, he's crying, shouting, banging doors. breaking things in the house pacing — that's very hard to live with. "When he is distressed it was kind of a threatening

situation "I would have called guards and they came that ime. Greg was sitting down he had calmed somewhat. they cuffed him and brought him away. That is very trau matic for everyone involved particularly Greg, but it was ery hard for Dad to watch – it's the last thing he wants. I is the last thing

'Some of the huge harm that has been caused by withdrawal of services, 1 don't think they fully com prehend. We would have called the social worker if we had concerns before. if he was starting to escalate. we had that, we could contact the mental health nurse they would see him. With that withdrawal [of services we had nobody 'We are on our own here. 'If you have a concern about him, phone the guards' — it

was really hard to hear, to be

## Prison used to fill gaps in mental health services

honest

Some months ago, the *Irish* Examiner wrote about the story of Kay Barrett, a Cork ous mental illness and who ended up in prison due to the breach of a safety order. Her family had secured the cour order so as to offer some kind of protection to Kav's father. with whom she was living, but repeated breaches meant she ended up in Limerick

Kay's family stressed that, had the mental health supthose categories. I think that ports she needed been avail able, she would never have ended up in the criminal justice system. Due to what unfolded in her case at the start of this year, both Kay's solicitor and the judge described prison at that time as being "the lesser of two evils

> The Irish Penal Reform Trust (IPRT) and the Jesuit Centre for Faith and Justice were among the organisations to criticise what they saw as the criminal justice

system having to intervene system

IPRT executive director Saoirse Brady said at the time: "There is significant unmet mental health need in prison. People with severe mental health issues who have been assessed as needing hospital treatment, for whom prison is not appropriate. are often left on waiting lists of over a year to access

treatment. "What we have now is a lamning situation where the State is allowing the prison system to be used to fill gaps in mental health services. At various parts of the mental health spectrum there have been problems Earlier this month the High Court heard claims that a former prisoner with a serious mental illness has been

left in a "medical no man's land" over the HSE's failure to provide him with necessary mental health services since his release three years ago. And back in September Galway District Court heard that keeping a man in Castletrol," Catriona says. "He was rea Prison was the only way just really, really agitated, he of ensuring he would continue to receive the vital

mental health support and treatment he needed. It rompted Judge Marv Fahr o remark: "That is a serious ndictment on this country that I would have to impose a entence because the ser vices are not there.' Since that case, and Kay's

and Greg's difficulties, a report by the Government appointed "high-level taskrce to consider the mental health and addiction chal lenges of those who come into contact with the crimi nal justice system" has been published. Chaired by former government minister Kathleen Lynch, it delivered a blueprint for how the sys tem could work — a more hu

mane, empathetic approach that, if it is delivered, would see fewer people ending up in arda stations or prisons. Ms Lynch firmly believes that the recommendations contained in the report come with a five-year timeframe or implementation. She sees t as a three-part process

Prevention and diversion detention and how people are dealt with who are al ready committed to the prison system, and then th ourney out of prison. T he former Cork North Central TD says there mus be consequences for people who commit serious crimes. out says there are others who come into contact wit gardaí primarily because

hev are unwell. "Most of the crime, in terms of that low-level stuff, is from people who need atment and who are not setting treatment, and cause isruption to other people's lives, including their own,' she says. The taskforce repor

makes 61 recommendations including for a new approach regarding how gardaí respond to some situations in which the person at the centre of a garda callout is ndamentally, or even tem porarily, mentally unwell. Late last month, and to

ittle fanfare, a separate re port was published outlining exactly how this would work t has another snappy title – 'the Report on a Roundtable Symposium with Interational Collaborators to Explore the Feasibility of Immenting a Communit Safety Co-response Model in \_ hut its findi could potentially impact on scenarios such as those faced

by Greg and Kay Barrett. The report was written y Supt Ândrew Lacey, who is based in Limerick city, and Alan Cusack of the centre for crime, justice, and victim studies (CCJVS) at the school of law at the University of Limerick. Supt Lacey "had unique access to internal Garda research data encompassing two years of incident analy sis", it says, and the con tents of the report are ultimately based on an international roundtable sym posium held at UL last April, and a follow-up interagency practitioner workshop, which involved gardaí and the HSE, held in August.

# Pilot project

The key aspect of the report is a pilot community safety co-response model, known as Community Access Sup port Teams (Cast), which will run in Limerick from next year. Fundamentally, it will mean specialist police officers dealing with incidents involving suspected mental ill-health, either

alone or alongside mental

health and addiction professionals, such as a psychiatric nurse or social worker. According to the report: 'Police officers should not be the de facto responder to mental health crises. However. the multi-agency approach will frequently see inervention at the police custody stage," adding: "There was a consensus that having more clinicians on the co-response team would give rise

to better interventions and Mental health Pulse incidents in the Limerick Division in 2019 and 2020 were analysed, with 1.035 incidents identified as mental health-related that required gardaí to attend. In addition, 136 gardaí responded to a

questionnaire, some of

whom were involved in multiple incidents across those 1,035 incidents. The findings are intriguing and instructive. For example where arrests were made 77% of respondents stated that if there had been an alternative to arrest, they would have used it. In addition, 64% of respondents felt that a co-response model would give rise to better out comes, 79% of respondents felt current legislation relat ing to mental health was in-

adequate, and 31% of respondents stated they would be interested in applying for the pilot co-response team. The report also took data for one month in the Limerick division and found that 221 incidents were directly suited to the Cast model and that 102 incidents were classed as acute mental

health presentations. In the same four-week period, there were 257 contacts made with

and 60, and that alcohol abuse and drug dependency 'featured prominently in the

incidents Currently, under section 12 of the Mental Health Act 2001, a member of An Garda Síochána can make a decision to take a person believed to be suffering from a mental disorder into custody. The report outlines the growing use of Section 12 detentions as "a last resort for An Garda Síochána". Nationally, the number of Section 12 arrests has risen each year from

4.002 in 2018 to 6.315 in 2021. and while the Limerick fig-

up with the individual or their family stands that those figures do not include arrests for the

**Gemost** of the crime, in terms of that low-level stuff, is from people who need treatment and who are not getting treatment, and cause disruption to other people's lives, including their own

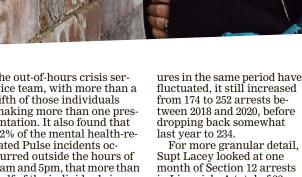
the out-of-hours crisis service team, with more than a fifth of those individuals making more than one pres entation. It also found that 72% of the mental health-related Pulse incidents occurred outside the hours of am and 5pm, that more than half of the individuals inin Limerick. A total of 22 volved were aged between 30 incidents were identified and

in 13 of them, "attending gardaí were aware that there was a mental health concern in respect of the call prior to arrival In 16 of the incidents, attending gardaí made a decision to arrest under the Men tal Health Act in less than 10

minutes, although in others it was over 90 minutes before a garda station assessment was completed. In all bar four incidents attending gardaí stated that the individual arrested was not referred for assessment

to a psychiatric setting, while alcohol or drugs was a factor in just seven of the 22 arrests. Ånd after 15 of the ncidents, attending garda had no interaction or follow-

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ures in the same period have or barring orders — the kind of triggers that were a factor in the detention of Greg in Wicklow and Kay in Cork Ms Lynch says of these orders in the context of men tal health: "Families mostly do something [like that] with the best intentions," but, she adds, "judges have very few options According to Jesuit Centre for Faith and Justice penal policy advocate Keith dams, "I understand that it is a case of last resort for families, due to inadequate State services, but if the 'of fending' is related to just being unwell, the person is just being lined up for

> Breaches of such orders do open up the prospect of prison, but Ms Lynch believ es it should be open to direct people towards treatment, ible. Catriona says her family felt they had to do something to protect their father, Peter, Greg had never been violent towards anyone, but Peter — who has lived with Gregory, as he calls him, in the family hom on and off for years - says he was banging doors, breaking and throwing things. And so the call had to b made. However, someone

familiar with the proposed pilot project in Limerick said that while the new measures would not necessarily see the end of such orders being applied for or granted, it might essen the need for them. "If you are in earlier, inter vention is better, you have better skilled people [in-

volved) then you would like to think every situation that gardaí and the HSE are attending would have a better outcome," they said. The new pilot programme in Limerick — expected to get underway in the latter

half of next year, and to operate for an initial nine-month period — will use a multiagency support hub to link people in mental health crises to the appropriate community services. The individual familiar with the pilot programme also suggested that someone with an acute mental health issue who repeatedly comes to Garda attention would be a candidate for the support hub, meaning that even if the order is in place, a breach would not necessarily mean immediate court appearances, if diversion elsewhere was a possibility

Under the pilot there will be increased training, not just for the officers respond ing to the call-out alongside the HSE professional, but also for the CAD (computer aided dispatch) centres, meaning those people receiving the calls can attempt to triage a case. And the report outlines how pre-hire 'ridealongs' should be organised for healthcare applicants to provide the opportunity to see the realities of the role and decide if it is for them. Ms Lynch is convinced

that the pilot has a role to play, that it can work at a national level, and that the recommendations in the taskforce report can be achieved. She says one area where the taskforce "dug their heels in" was over the issue of dual diagnosis. "That pass the parcel busi-

ness," she says. "What we look at is even triple diag nosis." That is addiction substances, with a mental

Catriona O'Toole stands with her brother Greg and father Peter inside the HSE-provided residential accommodation that Greg has just moved into. The family are optimistic about the change.

illness, and/or an intellectual disability, and also sometimes personality dis order, a condition not currently covered by the Mental Health Act and for which treatment can only be accessed overseas

It sounds like solutions are within touching distance, but there are many challenges to overcome before the pilot programme can be rolled out nationally, not least resources and dealing with ongoing recruitment issues. Yet the person familiar with how the Limerick Cast pilot is likely to work is full of praise of the HSE's efforts so far in terms of engaging with it, and the evidence from other countries indi-

cates it could be a gamechanger. It needs to be. According to the Lacev/Cusack report: "It was clear from cussions with parties that a crisis that requires intervention by the gardaí brings with it extreme fear for the individual. The word 'terror' was used several times. Not only is the person in extreme mental distress, and possibl experiencing severe psycho sis, but the intervention of the gardaí, or those 'in uniform', can add to their feel ings of fear and exacerbate the situation.

After Catriona had made the call to gardaí. officers arrived, just doing their job But everyone's perspective is different. For Peter, watch-

ing his son being taken away was "verv traumatic" "He was actually sitting at the table eating his dinner. he recalls. "They barged in, two of them, put the handcuffs on him. He had no shirt on, he had very little clothes on him, short trousers. They put him in handcuffs and took him away.'

# HSE response

In a statement, HSE Commu nity Healthcare East said it cannot comment on individual cases as to do so would be a breach of patient confidentiality. A HSE spokesperson said: "When service users require support/input from a number of divisions/services within the HSE, we endeavour to adopt an inte grated, patient-centred ap proach involving all relevant services, and the service user, to enable the develop ment of a comprehensive care plan that meets the ser vice user's individual needs. Involvement of the service user in this manner assures his/her will and preference is reflected within a care plan to which he/she con-

"This approach seeks to ensure the provision of integrated and patient-centred nealthcare as articulated in Sláintecare More broadly, the HSE

Picture:Moya Nolan said that adults experiencing a mental illness, like a personality disorder, can be treated by a Communit

Mental Health Team where multidisciplinary teams can provide evidence-based care and treatment. There are currently 112 adult commu nity mental health teams na tionwide. Treatment for borderline personality disorder may involve individual or group psychotherapy According to the HSE spokesperson: "Ninety percent of new/rereferred adults are offered an appointment within 12 weeks for adult community mental health services. Adults who have a

mental illness and require

inpatient care can be re-





system recently, which had a devastating effect on the family as a whole. Picture: Moya Nolan



ferred to any of the HSE's acute inpatient mental health-approved centres around the country. Details on approved centres can be found here. "Personality disorder, as a

stand-alone diagnosis, is not covered under the Irish Men tal Health Act. "The Mental Health Act

2001 outlines three exclusions from the definition of mental disorder. These exclusions are behaviour, conditions, or circumstances that cannot on their own be considered mental disorder. Section 8(2) of the 2001 Act states that it is not lawful to admit a person involuntarily in an approved centre solely because that person is (a) suffering from a personality disorder (b) is socially deviant, or (c) is addicted to drugs or intoxicants.

### Fresh start

In recent times, Kay Bar rett's situation has improved mmeasurably. She is better. and exploring different op-tions. Her family say she has a new lease of life and new possibilities This month there was a

nappy ending for Greg and 1is familv The HSE had come under

scrutiny from the two judges who heard the case in Bray District Court, Judge David Kennedy and Judge John O'Leary

The charge against him was withdrawn after the order was removed. In court Judge Kennedy said it was "most unfortunate" and it was a case that had "fallen between two stools"

The HSE had outlined one potential solution at an earier court hearing, but while it did not come to fruition an alternative that was agreeable to the family was fina lised soon afterwards — Greg would move to a supported residential setting, once it was readv

By the middle of last week it was, and Greg began settling into his new home "That is the place that is available — we thought it

would be a good fit for him, Catriona says, adding that the family is happy with th care package on offer and cautiously optimistic abou the next steps. So is Greg. Peter says of his son: "When he is good he's a lovely lad. I do miss him, bu at the same time I don't miss what he was doing when he

was here. "I hope he gets back [to full health] is all.

According to Catriona: " see it as a fresh start, the possibility for development new relationships, new trus and a sense of community with people, and a sense of iging, and what would be really huge for him would be the stability, the security the safety that a setting lik that would provide. A bit o calm after things have been so turbulent, a return to a state of safety and calm.

In Catriona's own words she has "agency" - she holds a PhD, she knows people, she is aware of th ices of social justice, she has contacts and can call people, ask their advice. Ye last month she found herself tweeting into the void, wondering what she could do for her younger brother, some one she has always believed

"Employment would be great for him, social activ ities, past-times, and hob " she says

"He is a really good climber. There are rocks or in Dalkev Quarrv. he would have been climbing that She remembers an after noon they spent together

around four years ago. "There are climbing wall out in Finglas, where you can practice, and he was teaching me, getting us ha nessed up. He was really pr tective as well as he was in the role of the teacher. He was really protective of me, it was just a lovely kind of switching of roles — that it's not always me looking out

for him. "He was ready to catch me if I was going to fall.

Additional reporting by Joyce Fegan