

The following is a report on activity at the Helpline in 2022

Over the past few years Covid restrictions have prevented us from having our meetings in the usual format and so we had to resort to the use of an online platform. This method proved to be extremely useful and given the wide geographical spread of our members, we decided to continue with the online platform until further notice.

Statistics

The only source of Missing Persons Statistics is the Garda Annual Report. For many years, the figures have been broken down by risk category/Garda Division/ outcome i.e found/untraced at year end. The 2016 Report dispensed with this format. For the past few years, we have been keeping our own statistics in order to arrive at a very basic breakdown of age and outcome.

Based on figures compiled by our co-ordinator we reckon that only 4% of reports result in a Press Release. So what we hear of is only the tip of a very large iceberg.

For the coming year, we have put in place a system of recording more detailed stats from alerts which we receive from Gardai, this will hopefully give us a better insight into the age/gender profile and outcomes.

Garda stats published on 9 Jan 2023, for 2022 showed the following breakdown:

	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Reports made	9,694	9,506	8,496	9,599	10,510
Persons reported	3,909	4,095	3,336	3,506	4,268
Still missing	19	23	24	14	58

The trend for multiple events for the same individuals, continues to grow.

Gardai

It has always been our policy to maintain a sound working relationship with An Garda Siochana and in particular, those working in the area of Missing Persons. Quarterly meetings are held with senior members of the Garda Missing Persons Unit, with new procedures agreed for contact and reporting.

One area which has seen a huge improvement and for which we must praise all involved, is the success of the DNA initiative. Gardai are continuing to take DNA samples from family members of Missing Persons and these have proved successful in identifying a number of previously unsolved cases. Not all have been publicised and indeed, one particular case has been the subject of much criticism and will hopefully serve as a wake up call.

While this will be a continuing and no doubt highly successful process, a limiting factor is the lack of a comprehensive Nationwide Register of unidentified remains or those interred over the years. Gardai have been in contact with Coroners throughout the country in their efforts to compile a National register, but progress on this is extremely slow. On another front, while discussions have taken place on bringing about changes to the Coroners system, current proposals do not look promising. We can only hope that some level of common sense and consideration for families of Missing Persons, takes place.

Family Support Days

In 2022, it was planned that we continue with our Family Support Days, aiming to hold one each quarter. However, for a variety of reasons, only 2 events took place – Dublin in February and Kilkenny in July. Before Covid, our meetings were well attended however, we are finding it difficult to regenerate interest in families. Our next day is planned for February 25th in the Maldron Hotel Dublin.

Links with other Missing Organisations

We have continued search out new contacts and strengthen existing links with International Organisations working in the area of Missing Persons. We are now linked with Poland, UK, Australia and lately Denmark.

Public awareness

We brought our display stand to a number of Shopping Centres during the year. These days provide a unique opportunity for us to interact with members of the public and inform them about our services - feedback has been very positive. While most are aware of Missing Persons in a general way, they have no idea of the scale or affect on families. There is amazement when they look at the sheer number of posters on our board and while they will recognise the few high profile cases, they are largely unaware of others. We will continue this program into the future.

GDPR

GDPR Data Protection Regulations provide protection and privacy for members of the public. Many of the calls/messages to our Helpline request assistance in publishing details of a missing loved one. Under GDPR, we are prohibited from doing so unless/until the details are contained in a Garda Press Release/Missing Person Alert.

It is our experience that in some cases, Gardai may not ask for permission to publicise and therefore those making a report are unaware that it is a requirement. Between one and the other, this results in a report being logged but no publicity – this is the main area of advice which we have to issue to callers...make your report, give full details and request and give approval for a Press Release.

Helpline

Our Helpline Coordinator is a part time position and based in our offices for 4 hours each morning, Monday – Friday. Outside of these hours , we have a rolling rota and calls are diverted and will be answered by one of our call taking volunteers. All of these volunteers give freely of their time in order to ensure that our service continues 365 days a year.

Our website **www.missingpersons.ie** has been updated to ensure that it is easy to navigate and contains relevant advice sheets and reference material.

Over the past few years, Social Media has emerged as our main source of contact with and from the outside world. It has become a vital avenue for us to communicate our message and it is now obvious that much of the traffic we previously expected by personal telephone call has moved on to this medium.

During 2022, our Facebook followers have grown exponentially and at year end numbers more than 44,000 – this is a huge number of people who see our daily posts and Missing alerts. The shares on some of our items have numbered well into the thousands. There have been many occasions on which comments on individual posts, contain details of possible sightings or other useful information – this is passed to Gardai with the permission of the person who posted and has assisted with the missing person being found on a number of occasions. Because of this, it is necessary to continually monitor all of our posts in order to identify and respond to such comments in a timely manner.

National Missing Persons Day

Having been forced online to a virtual event, during Covid restrictions, 2022 saw a welcome return to a physical gathering which took place in Croke Park on 7th December. The National Missing Persons Helpline was instrumental in facilitating a number of speakers on the day, one of which was our Chairperson.,

The organisers provided us with a separate consultation desk in the entrance hall and also a private room where we met with a number of individual family members.

In conclusion

This Organisation has now been in existence since November of 2003 and 2022 marked 14 years operating the National Missing Persons Helpline. This is due in no small way, to the huge amount of work which has been put in by all Board members and Volunteers. This continues to place us front and centre as the “go to” source for all information and support relating to Missing Persons. However we have challenging times ahead. There is a need for new ideas in the Organisation and youth to take over the mantle into the future. Our most pressing need is for individuals to serve as Board members and Officer

Finance Summary

Income 2022	€	Outgoings 2022	€
Donations	2,883.67	Wages	14,603.94
Golf Classic Proceeds	5,415.00	PRSI/Revenue	3,980.58
Membership	65.00	Phone	1,623.33
CSVC Grant	25,000.00	IT	566.51
Mental Health Ireland Grant	7,250.00	Annual Insurances	1,245.00
Prize Bonds	60.07	Bank charges	67.21
Total Income	€40,673.74	Audit Fees	1,280.75
		Office Costs (stationery etc)	76.13
		Volunteer expenses	75.52
		Volunteer training	1,681.51
		IT upgrade	1,937.98
		Replace display stands & wear	1,213.84
		Family Support Meetings	706.50
		Fundraising overheads	2,372
		Total	€31,540.80

Activity at the Helpline

From January to end September, we logged 137 calls to the Helpline during office hours. However, as this did not provide an accurate reflection of the level of contact with and from Public, Gardai etc, from October 2022, we introduced a more comprehensive system of tracking interactions. The following figures cover the period 1 Oct to 31 Dec.

- 108 Calls to the Helpline & out of hours volunteers
- 74 Facebook comments responded to
- 127 Communications via Facebook Messenger
- 237 Emails received and actioned
- 52 Social Media messages

Total interactions for the 3 months were **598**

This new system provides a clearer outline of the level of business conducted at the Helpline.

Facebook @ year end

Total followers 44,164

In the previous 28 days

- New Followers 980
- Our posts reached 555,437
- 215,662 engagements

Garda Alerts

During 2022, we were notified of 348 Missing Persons Alerts

- 280 were located safe & well,
- 39 were sadly located deceased
- 19 still untraced at year end.

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Signed: D. Browne
Chairperson
January 2023