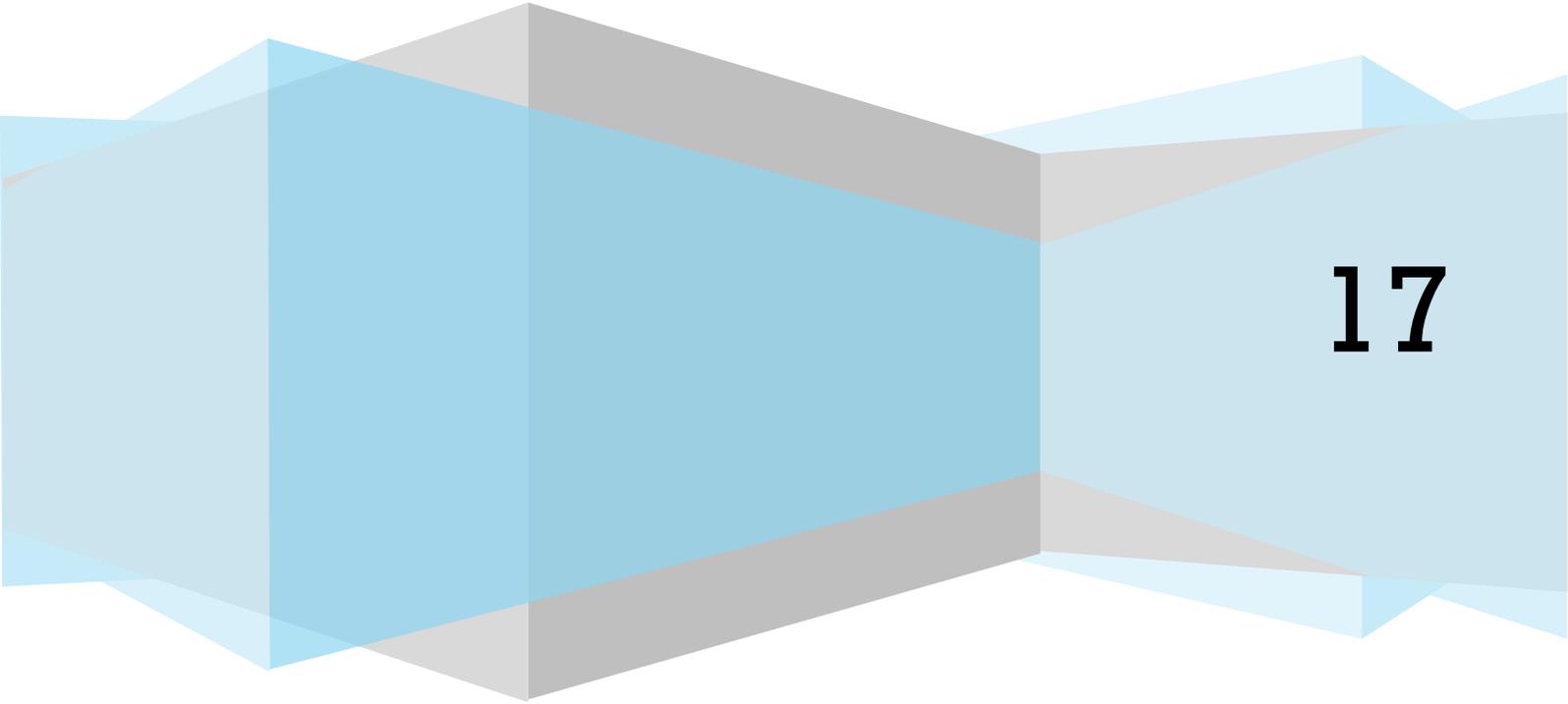


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# Dignity 4 Patients

# Executive Directors Report

**Executive Directors Address**



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*“When I was in the depths of despair, I got enormous support and heartfelt sympathy...really helped me through one of the most difficult times of my life.”*

*“It’s good to know there is someone to talk to who understands what we have gone through.”*

## Mission Statement

Dignity 4 Patients mission is the relief of mental and physical distress of people who have experienced trauma, in particular sexual trauma, whilst a patient in any medical and/or therapeutic setting through the provision of support and advocacy services, information and education and to protect patients from sexual trauma by highlighting this potential risk to patients and using our expertise in the implementation of effective preventative strategies.

## Introduction

At Dignity4Patients we understand how patients are vulnerable to sexual abuse. Our understanding gained through many years working with patient victims is underpinned by nursing and patient advocacy expertise. We also have knowledge of hospitals and health services, medical examinations and patient vulnerability to sexual abuse. We understand the life changing trauma of sexual abuse and the far reaching health consequences for a patient victim. We understand the difficulties for patients in reporting these abusive acts and the added difficulties which arise for patient victims in statutory investigations. We understand there are difficulties particular to a person who suffers sexual abuse as a patient. This knowledge and expertise enables us to provide an understanding, compassionate service to meet the needs of patient victims of sexual abuse. This is what makes Dignity4Patients essential and unique.

In 2017 through dedication and commitment Dignity4Patients overcame many challenges. We increased our work with and on behalf of clients, improved service administration & management systems, further developed service and Board of Management governance and held a number of awareness and fund raising events.

We provided support, advocacy and information when needed. Our advocacy service included a court accompaniment service. One high profile trial involving a former hospital consultant took place in October 2017. This resulted in a conviction and prison sentence. This case highlighted many of the difficulties involved in prosecuting a case of patient sexual abuse against a doctor. Supporting patient victims through this process is vital to minimise the trauma of this process.

Although this trial was a positive development, it placed further demands on our already over stretched service. From our observations each delay of the legal proceeding for our clients has increased their trauma and increased the associated risks. This year we are seeking urgent funding for a Director of Advocacy and an experienced trauma Counsellor due to the high incidence of serious Mental Health issues within our client group.

It is a very positive development that there is now a specialised HSE and Department of Justice funded service for patient victims. However, after ten years, Dignity4Patients remains significantly under resourced. Under current funding levels it is impossible to provide the level of service needed and deserved by patient victims. Dignity4Patients is also prevented from actively contributing to patient protection from sexual abuse due to staff resources. An ever increasing demand for detailed information from some funding authorities, has on occasions prevented us from responding to in the manner in we would like to. This demand from funding authorities at times felt disproportionate considering the known staffing levels within Dignity4Patients and the

level of service our clients required during the difficulties they faced in 2017. It is the same limited core staff who are responding to both needs in many instances.

From 2008 to 2016 Dignity4Patients provided a much needed service to patient victims of sexual abuse under very difficult circumstances. The service struggled from year to year never knowing if it would be forced to close at any time, through lack of funding. Receiving most welcome HSE GAA funding in 2016, committed for a three year period, gave stability to Dignity4Patients for the first time since it was set up in 2008. Service recovery from the many years of insecurity, fragmented funding and staffing resources will take some time. Dignity4Patients continues to be fully committed to administering its service to the highest possible standards in all areas.

In Dignity4Patients we continue to be concerned that the restrictive terms and conditions of Dignity4Patients/HSE Grant Aid Agreement are creating difficulties for patient victims seeking help and may also put patients at risk. We are also concerned that these conditions are having a 'divide and conquer' impact on the issue of addressing sexual abuse of patients. Under current conditions Dignity4Patients is restricted to working with a large number of patient victims affected in one particular case and a small number of additional patient victims in other cases. We are prohibited from providing ongoing services to patients who contact us asking for help, in cases outside the limited number of cases identified under HSE Grant Aid Agreement. In some cases callers to our service have suffered recent acts of sexual violence. We are currently obliged to provide the HSE Advocacy services contact details to these callers and advise them to contact this service. However, the majority of these patients are reluctant to contact the HSE as they have suffered sexual abuse within the HSE. This situation concerns Dignity4Patients as these patients may not receive the ongoing support they need. They may not be 'able' to make that second call to the HSE Advocacy unit. This situation is potentially placing others patients at risk from sexual offenders in the Health Service. We realise it is not possible with current funding levels for Dignity4Patients to provide a service to patient victims outside of the current HSE GAA identified client base we consider it our duty to bring this situation to HSE attention, for their consideration. Dignity4Patients can provide further information to assist HSE consideration of this situation and would welcome an opportunity to address our concerns with HSE Management.

In Dignity4Patients 2016 Report I stated '*Breach of sexual boundaries and sexual abuse of patients is an issue which needs to be addressed in Ireland, at the level such a serious issue warrants*'. I am presently unaware of any steps taken by health authorities to address this issue since 2016.

In 2018 we will continue to provide services that reflect our client's needs. We will continue to seek positive engagement with health authorities in an effort to improve client services and address concerns regarding funding levels, terms and conditions. With each passing year, I have become even more convinced that a national inquiry into sexual abuse of patients in the Health Service is necessary in Ireland. In 2018 Dignity4Patients intend to continue lobby for this long overdue Inquiry.

We again commend the courage shown by many patient victims who have reported incidents of patient sexual abuse and we acknowledge their contribution to public safety.

I would like to thank all who have supported us in our work throughout 2017 and who have enabled us to help our clients. I wish to thank our funders namely the HSE, CSVIC (Department of Justice),

National Lottery Grants & all who have supported us through fund raising events. I would also like to thank our Board of Management, staff & Volunteers.

## Achievements and Highlights of 2017

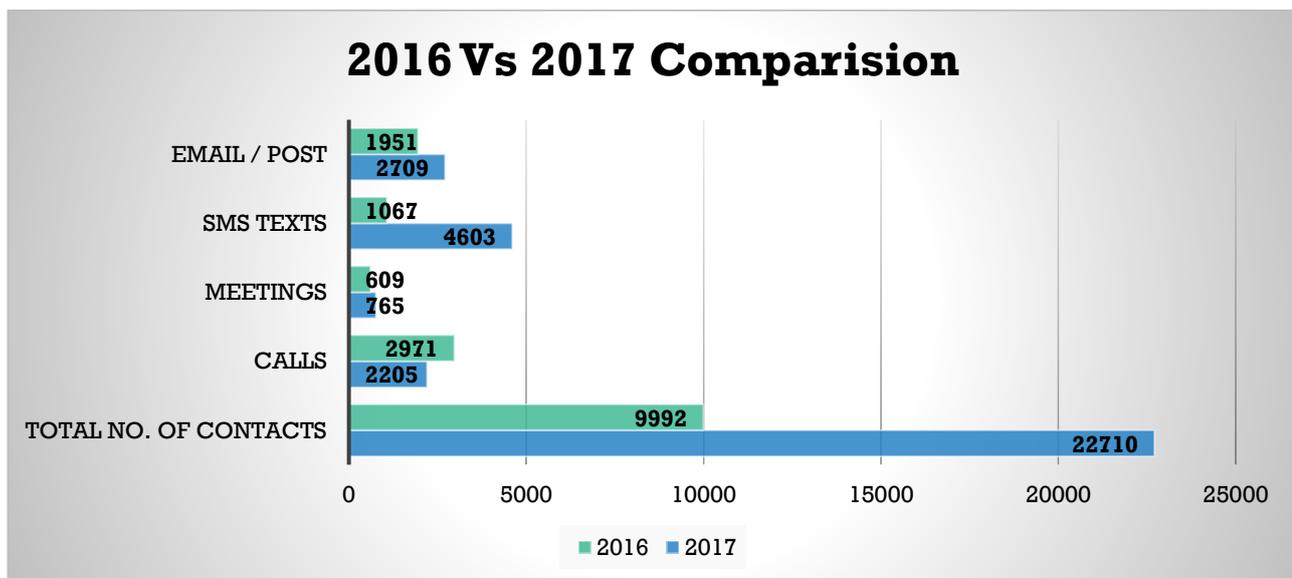
Dignity4Patients provided increased services to clients in all areas of work during 2017. This increased activity is reflected in the comparison graph below showing the 2016 client service compared to that accomplished in 2017.

Supporting clients for many years, throughout a long and difficult criminal prosecution process, which in 2017, finally resulted in a conviction and prison sentence. This now convicted sex offender is a doctor and former hospital consultant.

Providing support to all affected patient victims throughout this trial.

Continued development of our service and supporting administration systems.

Implementation of Improved financial Management systems and Governance.

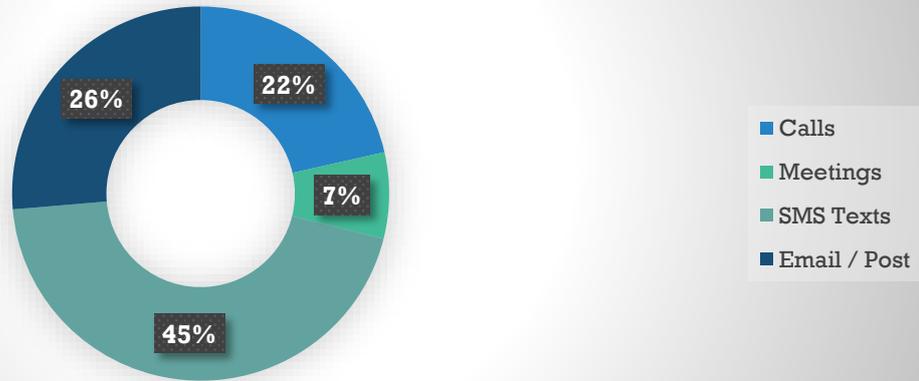


*\*Note: Large increase in **Total No. of Contacts** due to social media interactions in response to a high profile legal case.*

*“(Dignity4Patients) ...have been a great support over the past couple of years and I don’t know how I would have coped without them.”*

**Our core client interactions over 2017 were split in the following areas:-**

### 2017 Activities

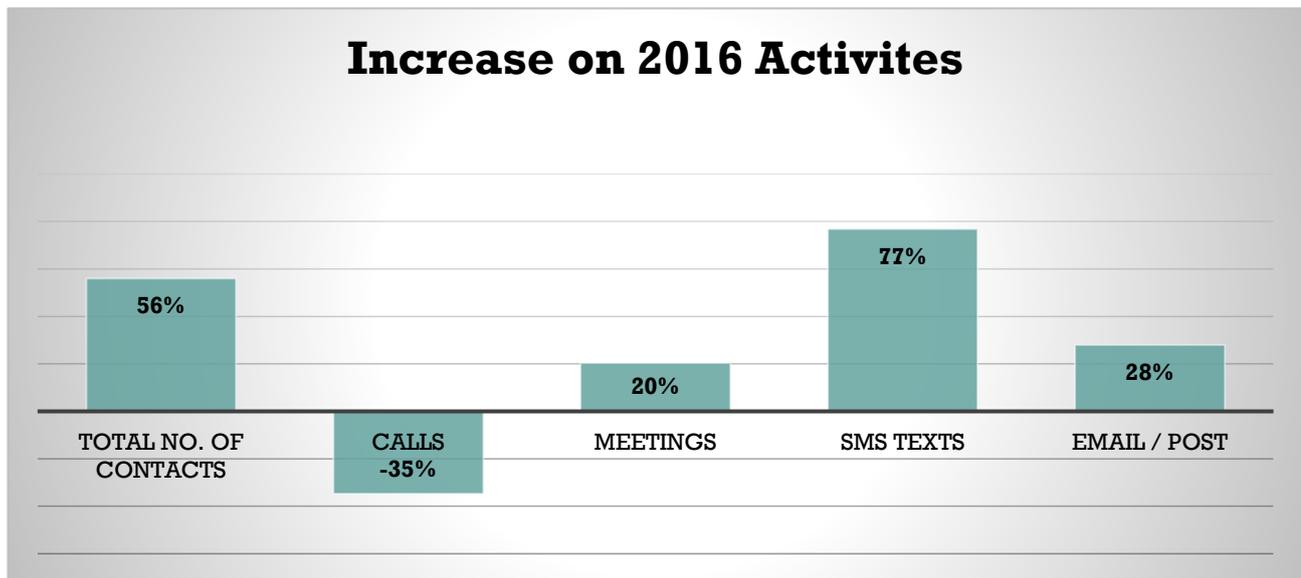


In fulfilling our mission statement Dignity 4 Patients provided support, advocacy and information services to clients throughout 2017. These services were provided as listed in the graph below:-

*“I spent 37 years running and hiding from myself. I now feel that I can live a normal life.”*

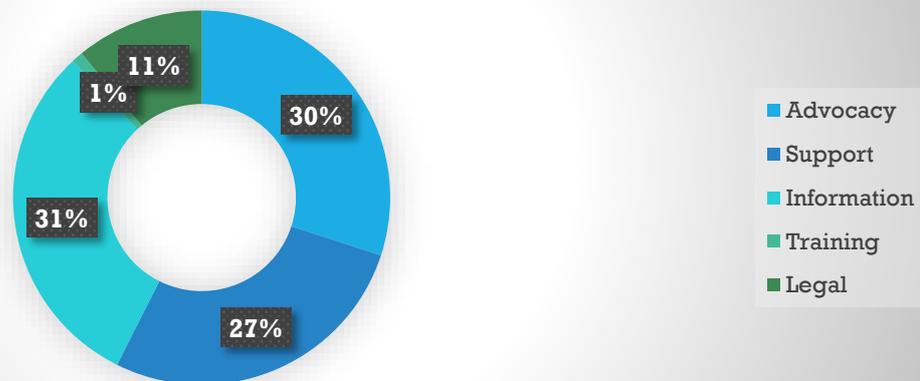
**Continuous funding allowed us to increase the number of one to one client meetings by 20%**

### Increase on 2016 Activites



**Area of activities where most hours were spent supporting Clients:-**

## % Split of Area of Client Activities



*\*Note: Advocacy in chart above includes provision of services in criminal and civil legal processes, medical Council processes and other (Social Welfare etc)*

Dignity4Patients supported the above clients in their many areas of difficulties. We provided information on counselling support and other support services referring to counselling and other services where appropriate. Dignity4Patients also provided information on reporting options to civil and criminal authorities.

## Client Advocacy

*Dignity4Patients has given us a voice, a voice for victims... only for... (Dignity4Patients)... we would all be left on our own to deal with all of this."*

In January 2016 Dignity4Patients Advocacy work began with a delegation from Dignity4Patients meeting officials in the Department of Health to request an Inquiry into the sexual abuse of Patients in the Irish Health Service and to address the needs of patients who have suffered abuse. A time frame of **six weeks** was agreed for officials to revert to Dignity4Patients following this meeting. At the end of 2017 Dignity4Patients has received no follow up contact from Department of Health officials. Under the workload of 2017 it was not possible for Dignity4Patients to pursue this matter. This lack of engagement is keenly felt by patient victims.

General advocacy services were provided to all clients as required during 2017.

### **Legal Advocacy**

Legal advocacy in criminal cases throughout the year of 2017 was continued and clients were kept informed and supported during difficult legal processes. Dignity4Patients attended a number of court hearings with and/or on behalf of clients, as part of our court accompaniment service.

### **Criminal Trials**

A trial scheduled for June 2017 was heard in October 2017. Following a lengthy trial this doctor was found guilty of sexually assaulting two young male patients. He was sentenced to a custodial

sentence of twenty months. This represents the second medical doctor convicted of sexual assault of patients in recent times. The convicted sex offender/doctor in the October case, was released on bail, pending appeal, within a few weeks of imprisonment. This trial process and the ensuing criminal proceedings, was a time of great difficulty for the complainants involved and their families. It was also a difficult time for a large number of Dignity4Patients clients. The trial ran for several weeks and was preceded by weeks of legal argument

Supporting patient victims through this process is vital. Absence of Medical Records appeared to be a factor in some cases in which a conviction was not secured. This highlights the importance of security and maintenance of medical records.

It also highlighted the many challenges to securing and maintaining a conviction. The Criminal Justice Process is a very long and difficult journey for patient victims.

There were notable additional services required in the lead up to this trial, an increase in new patient victims contacting our service and a notable increase in service demand from our existing clients.

We would like to thank One in Four for their assistance throughout this trial.

In the case of a Cork based General Practitioner also convicted of sex abuse of a young (child) female patient, his appeal of his conviction continued in the Supreme Court and his bail continued.

### **Disclosure**

A large volume of work was completed in August /September 2017 to meet further disclosure requests in criminal cases. This was labor intensive and time consuming work.

### **Medical Council**

In 2017 Dignity4Patients supported three (3) clients involved in fitness to practice inquiries and complaints processes. In one case, the complaint was not upheld and the client was supported in the aftermath of this decision. Concerns around doctor suspension in complaints processes and in camera hearings have arisen in a number of these cases.

### **Policy Development**

In 2017 Dignity4Patients continued review and upgrade all current service policies. Policies were updated and where necessary new policies were developed. Policy review is an ongoing process. A new Policy logging and development system and data base was created.

### **Significant Achievements in service administration**

#### Background:

In 2008 when founders of Dignity4Patients spoke for the first time in the public domain, there was an immediate unprecedented demand for the service. Hundreds of former patients who had not been previously facilitated to report incidents of sexually inappropriate behavior and sexual abuse contacted Dignity4Patients looking for help. Many were in a state of crisis and needed intense support. Dignity4Patients was at the very early stages of service and administration set up at that time. Care and support of patient victims and advocating for their needs, was the first priority of Dignity4Patients and was given precedent over background systems development.

**Service Information Management Review & Restructure.**

Since 2008 we have gradually established a service administration system. This task met many challenges as there was either short term or no administration staff over the past nine years. Reviewing and improving administration of our service is an ongoing process. In 2017 Dignity4Patients initiated a large scale Data Management project which encompasses reviewing and further upgrading all current filing and information storage systems. This will improve service development and was achieved despite very difficult staffing conditions. This project will take at least a further twelve months to complete. Together with the client management system this work will greatly improve the efficiency of our service.

**Installation and Development of Computerized Client Management System**

First stages of meaningful development of a Client Relationship Management (CRM) system was initiated in January 2017. This involved an in depth review of Dignity4Patients client recording requirements and customizing Salesforce CRM to allow greater efficiencies in our service.

**Training**

A program of Staff Training on CRM implementation, use and development continued throughout 2017. In service training and supervision was continuously provided by the Executive Director to all staff with most intensity on frontline client services.

*“Before I got in touch with Dignity4Patients I was very withdrawn and was unable to talk about my situation but now I am more at ease with myself.”*

**Intreo**

Engagement with Intreo and Drogheda Resource Centre continued with the aim of extension to the term of our staff placements under the CE scheme. We have long requested that CE placements with Dignity4Patients be extended beyond one year placements.

**Staff Recruitment**

In 2017 Dignity4Patients recruited a part time support and advocacy officer who took up her position in August 2017.

**Board of Management Development & Changes**

One board member resigned in 2017.

## **Financial Information.**

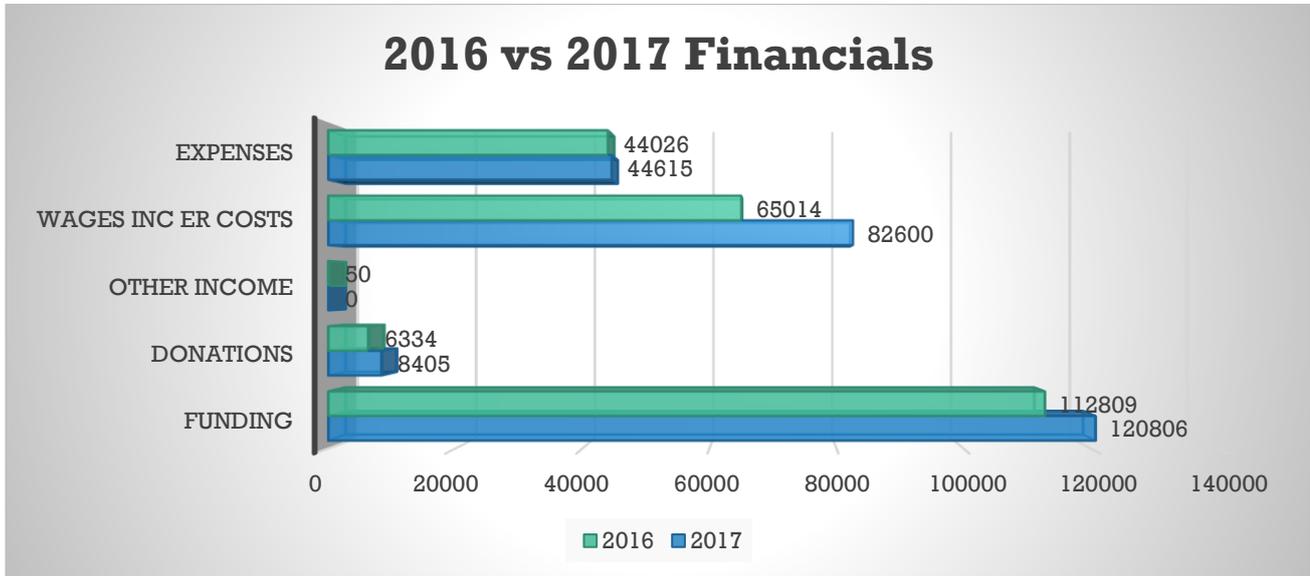
Dignity4Patients will continue to request funding at the level needed for provision of the comprehensive service that patient victims deserve for their wellbeing and recovery.

**HSE Funding under the Grant Aid Agreement**

While the HSE Funding of €100,000 is generous and greatly appreciated it did fall short of the level of funding required to meet the needs of the service required by patient victims. Dignity4Patients is concerned as the funding provided was not sufficient to recruit much needed experienced staff from suitably skilled backgrounds. A review of this funding level, at the end of this term of agreement, would be most welcome.

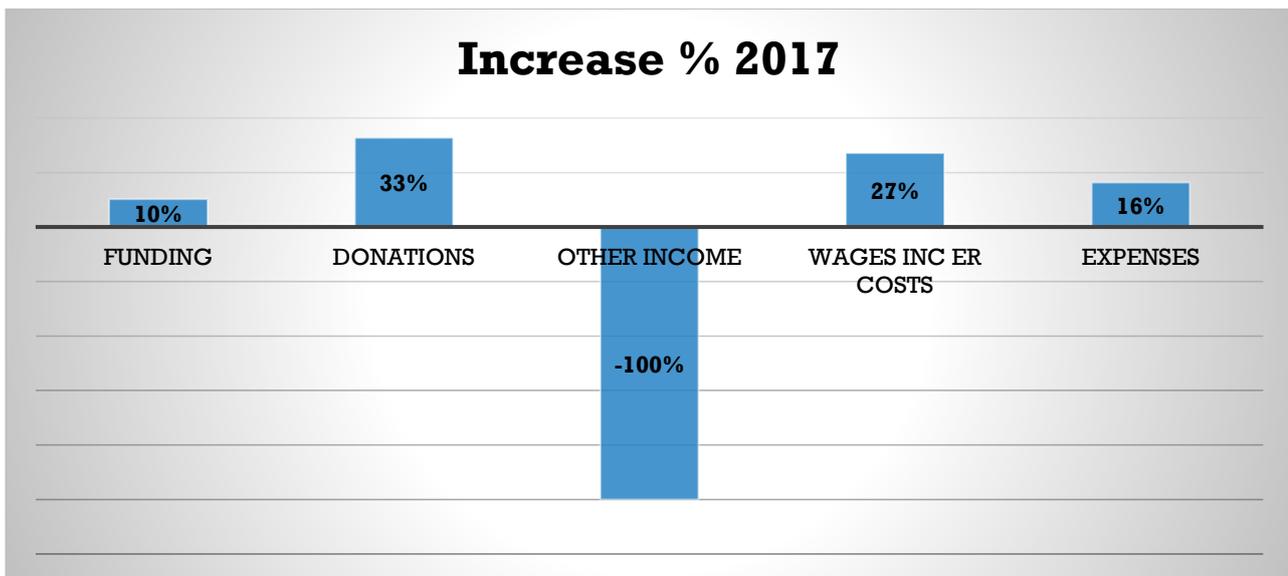
**CSVC Funding**

Dignity4Patients received €11,000 from the Commission for Support of Victims of Crime (Dept. of Justice) this funding was to assist in the provision of our court accompaniment service to an identified group of clients. Again this funding is truly appreciated. In light of the very large volume of Dignity4Patients clients whose cases are in the Criminal Justice System, an increase in funding to increase our client services, would be most welcome.



**Self-Generated Funding**

Donations during 2017 increased slightly thanks to generosity of the community and tireless efforts of the volunteers and staff.



**HSE reporting**

Throughout 2017 Dignity4Patients compiled comprehensive client contact and financial information and provided this information in bi-monthly to HSE management. Dignity4Patients found the level of detail required in these reports very challenging in light of the limited staffing resources available and the workload on Management. The volume of post report submission queries were at times considerable and at times this compromised the time available for services to clients.

**Staffing Issues**

As expected staffing resources posed many difficulties for our service throughout 2017. Dignity4Patients services would be greatly assisted by recruitment of an experienced trauma Counsellor and experienced patient advocate, both preferably from a nursing background. CE Placement staff would then assist these professions in service delivery and no longer be placed in core service roles in Dignity4Patients.

## **Conclusion**

In 2017 Dignity4Patients continued its very valuable work in supporting patients who suffer sexual violence when patients in the Irish Health Service. Prevention is also a key area of our work. Our presence and services, had a very positive impact on many lives and we have witnessed and received verbal testament to this fact from many clients. Dignity4Patients has worked tirelessly for the good of patient victims and for prevention of these acts of sexual violence against patients. Together with Health and Justice Authorities and other support services, we have made a difference in the lives of those affected. We thank all who have supported us in our work.

We thank all our clients who have put their trust in us. We will continue to give you the respect and dignity you deserve and assist you in your recovery.

The level of services required by patient victims/survivors is not yet being met. The level of service required for prevention is not yet being met. With improved staffing resources from increased funding, Dignity4Patients would be best placed to meet both of these needs. We look forward to a time when both these needs are met.

*“(Dignity4Patients is) somewhere to go and know you’re not on your own.”*

*“It has made me feel not alone...part of a*

*group of people who...fight our way toward the light at the end of the tunnel.”*