



My name is Verona Farrell. I am a Child and Adolescent Therapist here in Pieta. And I had to write to you today because I wanted to share something with you.

Every time I get the chance to talk to kind people like you – the people whose generous donations help to keep all of Pieta going – I always struggle to find a way of explaining just how much your support means to the clients we see. Especially at Christmas, which can be such a difficult time for anyone struggling with thoughts of suicide or for families who have been bereaved by suicide.

Then, just the other day, I was given **the most wonderful example of the incredible difference your donations can make in a person's life.**

So, if you can spare me a few minutes, I would love to share that story with you. It's about a man I'll call Alan, because I don't want to use his real name.

A few days ago, I was in town doing some early Christmas shopping, when Alan came over to me, shook my hand and simply said, 'Thank you'.

I know Alan because, last year, I was his Pieta therapist. Now I would never normally acknowledge a client in public, because privacy and confidentiality are essential in Pieta. However, Alan came over to me to tell me that he was doing well and to explain that it was so important to him to be able to say thank you.

He reminded me that, a year ago, he was in the darkest place. He was exhausted and overwhelmed and saw no possibility of hope in his life again. This is how he described it to me.

“I was completely numb. I was so mentally exhausted. When you are in that frame of mind you just need practical help. I wouldn’t have got over that heightened feeling without the help of Pieta. Pieta rebuilt me. It completely rebuilt me.”

And as we stood there on the busy street, he said something else that really struck me.

He said anybody who saw us standing there would think we were just two friends chatting. They would never, ever imagine that we were talking about suicide, or the extraordinary journey that Alan had made since he first contacted Pieta.

It was so true. It made me think about how there is so much about suicide that is still invisible. Because we don’t talk about mental health enough.

It also made me realise that **so much of what Pieta does is invisible too**. Because it happens in private and in complete confidence.

Which means that wonderful Pieta supporters like you may have no real idea of how much of a difference your support makes.

So, I am writing to you today to try and tell you. Because it’s not just Alan. There are so many more people that you are helping.

As I write this, I am in the Pieta centre where I do most of my work. I have just finished my day. Working as a therapist in Pieta is incredibly rewarding. It is such a privilege to hear someone’s story and support them on their journey.

Even though I am a Child and Adolescent specialist, I see people of all ages and at all stages of their journey.

I saw four people today. I obviously can't tell you who they are or repeat anything they said. But I can tell you this:

One session was with a mother whose daughter is struggling with suicidal ideation. Christmas is going to be particularly challenging for her. She came in for what we call a 'Key Person Support Session'. That's where we work with parents and offer support and psycho-education around suicide and self-harm, to help guide them on how best to support and care for both their child and themselves.

Another session was with a young boy who is learning how to cope with the loss of one of his parents to suicide. He can't really express what he is feeling yet, so our session involved a lot of art therapy.

You see, all of our therapy is centred on the individual and their needs. And every person is unique. Sometimes it's cognitive behavioural therapy. Sometimes it's about mindfulness and grounding people. With that young boy it is painting.

He just loves to paint. So, every session we set up our art materials for him. And then, as he paints, words just erupt out of him and he starts to find a way of expressing what he is feeling.

My first session of the day was with a middle-aged man who is currently overwhelmed with thoughts of suicide himself. This is intervention therapy. My focus was on trying to help him stay in the moment and giving him emotional regulation tools that will help him cope with the stress he is under.

And my last session was with a young girl who is struggling with self-harm. A few weeks ago, she wouldn't make eye contact. Today she

was holding her head a little higher. Those are the glimmers of hope that we look for.

They were just the people that I saw today. Tomorrow there will be four more. And I am only one of the hundreds of Pieta therapists working online, or in person in our 22 dedicated Pieta centres all across the country.

The number of people that Pieta helps every day is just incredible. And it's people of every age. **Over half of the clients we see are children and young people under the age of 25.** I have even seen children as young as six.

I have also seen people in their 80s. I remember one beautiful lady who lived alone and had lost contact with her family. She was so lonely she didn't feel she had a reason to live anymore. It was heartbreaking. That kind of loneliness and despair is a much bigger problem than you would think. Especially now, at Christmas time.

The reason I tell you all this, is because all of that therapy, and all of that care and support, was put here by the kindness of people like you.

In fact, nearly every single one of Pieta's life-saving services is fully funded by donations like yours. And it's not just our suicide prevention and bereavement therapy, or Pieta's 24-Hour Crisis Helpline. Your donations help to fund so many critical services.

To give you some idea of the scale of it, I've included with this letter a small factsheet that has been shared recently among staff here in Pieta. I'm passing it on to you so you can see the incredible impact of the services you are helping to fund.

And the most important thing is that your support works. **Oh, I wish I could just show you the difference it makes.**

If you could only see inside one of those therapy sessions or hear one of the calls that come into our 24-Hour Crisis Helpline, you'd see it for yourself. You'd hear people rediscovering a reason to live. You'd see them creating a path forward for themselves.

And you would see something else. Something really simple. But something that I think proves that your support really does help to save lives. And it's this – people come back.

After the first session people return weekly. And they do it because we help them find hope.

Do you remember Alan, the man I told you about at the start of this letter? The first time I met Alan was when he came in for his first therapy session with Pieta. He had called the helpline a few nights before in a state of real distress.

Once Alan was assessed and our team made sure that Pieta was the right service for him, I was appointed to be his therapist and his treatment began within a few short days.

Every time we meet a client, we rate their risk level. That first day, Alan was at the top end of the scale. He barely spoke. He just sobbed. And the difference that one session made was extraordinary.

I know that, because one-week later, Alan came back. And he kept coming back. He chose to come back week after week because, as each week went by, he got even stronger.

Seeing Alan with his family on the street the other day filled my heart with joy. Because we never really see clients once they have moved on from Pieta.

And it is wonderful to know that Christmas will be very different for Alan. This year he is looking forward to enjoying it with his wife and

children. He told me that he has real hope in his life now. Something he had thought he might have lost forever.

But, the therapy sessions that Alan and I had together would simply not have been possible without the donations made by kind people like you every day.

I always think that Pieta is just one big family. It's hundreds of mothers and fathers, sisters and brothers, neighbours and friends, and loving and compassionate people like you coming together to help in any way they can.

It's the kindness and generosity of wonderful people like you that makes everything that Pieta does possible. I think that is just love in its purest form. That's where the hope that people find in Pieta comes from.

That is the real miracle of Pieta.

And that is why I'm asking if you could make a special gift to Pieta this Christmas. Because it could be the most powerful gift of all.

Remember, you can make a donation of any size, it's entirely up to you. I know that, whatever you choose to give – be it €25, €250 or more – it will help to save lives. I see the proof of it every day.

I want to pass on Alan's message of thanks to you and add my own personal thank you for all of the wonderful support you have given to Pieta in the past. And I want to leave you with this one thought.

When you are out Christmas shopping or just standing in a queue at the till in a supermarket, you have no idea who the person beside you

really is. They may be someone who is desperately in need of Pieta's help right now.

Or they might even be someone like Alan, whose life you have already helped to save.

Wishing you and your family a happy and hopeful Christmas.

With my deepest gratitude,

Verona

Verona Farrell
Child and Adolescent Therapist Pieta

P.S. Nearly every one of Pieta's life-saving services is funded by the donations made by kind people like you. That is the real miracle of Pieta. Every gift Pieta receives, no matter how small or large, could make the difference in helping to save someone's life. Thank you. Verona.