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# SOUTH CONNACHT MONEY ADVICE AND BUDGETING SERVICE














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Annual Report 2019

DECEMBER 31, 2019

South Connacht MABS, Cualgara, Teeling St., Ballina, Co. Mayo

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## FOREWORD

I am delighted to endorse the Annual Report reflecting our progress and activity during 2019 which has been produced by our Regional Manager.

I would like to express my appreciation and that of the Board to Rosaleen Maher, Regional Manager, not just for this but for her stewardship of the service through a transition period. With the support of the staff she has achieved an integrated service that seamlessly delivers services across the Region. I would like to thank the Coordinators and the staff for helping to develop a high quality service of which we are all proud.

The Board itself was in a period of transition during its first full year with some additions and departures to a newly formed Regional Board. The full list of Board Members is in the body of the report.

I would like to thank all of them for their voluntary commitment to supporting the core principles of MABS.

In particular I would like to pay tribute to two Board members, Michael Howley and Caroline Barry who left during 2019.

Both were members of the South Mayo MABS Board with Michael there from its inception. On the development of the Regional Structures both offered themselves as members of the new Board. Caroline was the original interim Chair of this new Board, and Michael was a member of national committees.

I wish both of them the best for the future with our thanks."

**Martin Greaney,**

**Chairman, South Connacht MABS**

## INTRODUCTION TO SOUTH CONNACHT MONEY ADVICE & BUDGETING SERVICE

The South Connacht Money Advice and Budgeting Service (MABS) is an organisation, funded by the Department of Social Protection, through the Citizen's Information Board (CIB), which provides advice and assistance to households in financial difficulties in the catchment area of Roscommon, Mayo and Galway counties. South Connacht MABS is a registered charity. CIB are closely involved with the monitoring and control procedures of South Connacht MABS, pursuant to the Service Level Agreement in place.

South Connacht MABS was incorporated on July 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2018, and the five then existing MABS companies of North Mayo MABS, South Mayo MABS, North Galway MABS, South Galway MABS and Roscommon MABS were amalgamated into South Connacht MABS on October 1<sup>st</sup>, 2018, as part of Phase Two of the Nationwide MABS restructure, whereby 51 MABS companies were restructured into 8 new Regional models.

This Company is based throughout the Western Counties of Roscommon, Mayo and Galway, and has 5 main offices in Roscommon, Ballina, Castlebar, Tuam and Galway city, with two sub offices in Loughrea and Carraroe. The catchment covers both rural and urban areas, and several outreaches are provided by South Connacht MABS to facilitate access by all potential clients of the Service.

### **Accommodation**

Currently the MAB Service owns its own premises in Teeling St. Ballina, with all premises in Roscommon, Tuam, Loughrea, Galway city, Castlebar and Carraroe being leased by the company.

All premises are Wheelchair accessible.

All premises are in discreet and accessible locations to accommodate the confidential needs of the client base of our Money Advice Service.

## **CURRENT WORK OVERVIEW**

In the twelve month period of 2019 South Connacht MABS dealt with **1444 new clients** (which represents a slight increase on the same period in 2018)

At close of business on December 31<sup>st</sup>, 2019 the services in South Connacht MABS had a total of **1510 active clients**.

Within our staff complement, our Service is working at its maximum to meet the needs of clients throughout the Region.

In 2019 the South Connacht MAB service has **29** staff – comprising of One full time Regional Manager, 5 full time Money Advice Co-ordinators, 7 full time Money Advisers, 4 full time Dedicated Mortgage Arrears Money Advisers, 5 part time Money Advisers, 4 full time Administrators and 3 part time Administrators.

## **Regional and National Activities**

**2019** was a very busy year, with the Regional Manager (RM) engaging with meetings with Citizens Information Board on a quarterly basis.

She also participated in monthly meetings with the 7 other Regional Managers in order to further standardise procedures and protocols throughout MABS on a national basis.

The RM also engaged in ad hoc meetings with the external stakeholders of MABS which include the Insolvency Service of Ireland, St Vincent de Paul, iCare (Approved Housing Association and Mortgage

to Rent Provider), Competition and Consumer Protection Commission and the Banking Payments Federation of Ireland, amongst others.

The RM and Money Advice Co-ordinators (managers of the local services) also met on a monthly, team management meeting, basis.

The RM also chaired the National Service Delivery Working Group, which comprised representation from staff from all regions and all grades. This participation also included representation from MABSnd and the Abhaile project. The objective of the group is to examine all Service Delivery processes, procedures and existing documentation. Thereafter, the group endeavoured to identify any gaps and update processes and protocols to standardise all service delivery nationally.

The RM also chaired regional Staff meetings on a bi-monthly basis, in order to maintain transparency and keep all staff grades informed with regards any new processes or procedures, and acted as a conduit of information from the Board to staff, and collated information and staff experiences from the 'ground up' in order to feed into the national picture of MABS.

There were two specified purpose meetings between the RM and the Administrators of South Connacht MABS, in order to agree regional processes of financial and/or other reporting.

There was also one Regional staff conference which took place on October 11<sup>th</sup>, 2019, which incorporated a team building day and was attended by all staff bar one, of South Connacht MABS. This was a very informative and productive day, with staff feedback being that it was very enjoyable too.

In November 2019, our funders CIB hosted a MABS National Conference in Croke Park for staff participation. 18 members of the South Connacht MABS attended and again the staff feedback was of a most enjoyable and informative event.

## **Board Activities in 2019**

In 2019 **10 Directors** governed South Connacht MABS.

South Connacht MABS Board met on 7 occasions during 2019 –

**January 21<sup>st</sup>, February 25<sup>th</sup>, April 16<sup>th</sup>, May 24<sup>th</sup>, July 10<sup>th</sup>, September 18<sup>th</sup> and December 16<sup>th</sup>.**

**The AGM of the South Connacht MABS was held on September 18<sup>th</sup>, 2019**

## **Community Education**

Community Education is described in our mission statement as a core element of the work of MABS. Unfortunately due to the volume of work involved in the restructure of the company in 2018, South Connacht MABS were only in a position to begin to evaluate our community education provision in

2019. We intend to incorporate and implement strategic community education responses as part of overall strategic plan in the future.

However, local services were able to provide some community education initiatives in 2019.

In particular participation in the Global Money Week (which is a global initiative involved with the rolling out of money management education in post primary schools). In 2019 5 schools within the region participated in this Global Money Week initiative, under the direction and advice of local Money Advice staff.

## CASEWORK

### NEW CLIENT CATEGORIES - 2019

**MABS Clients are divided into 4 Categories:**

**Special Account** - a bill paying and debt repayment facility operated through MABS in partnership with Credit Unions.

**Budget Negotiable** - MABS cases that require negotiation, but not the use of Special Account.

**Information Only** - MABS cases that do not require negotiation or the use of Special Account.

**DMA Clients** – MABS clients who are in late stage mortgage arrears

NEW CLIENTS	2019
Special Account	0
Budget Negotiable	1198
Information Only	71
DMA clients	241

**Total = 1510**

### New Client Gender Analysis

New Clients Gender Analysis	2019
Female	794
Male	716

### Client Age Profile

**The age profile of our clients is comparable with the national figures:**

- Age 19-25 - South Connacht MABS 3 % compared with national figure of 3%
- Age 26-40 - South Connacht MABS 27% compared with national figure of 33%
- Age 41-65 - South Connacht MABS 66% compared with national figure of 58%
- Age Over 65 - South Connacht MABS 4% compared to national figure of 5%

In an effort to increase our interaction with a nationally under served client demographic (the under 30's), the Board and Staff of North Mayo MABS had developed a Money Management Tool in the form of a Budgeting Application for mobile devices in mid-2018 prior to Re-structure.

Post the Restructure in 2019, the Regional Manager was involved with further development, and the Budgeting app was rolled out in the App store (for iPhone users) and the Google Play store for android phone users. The objective of this Budgeting App was that this free application might assist clients and non clients to become more financially aware in the tracking of their spending, which could result in a greater understanding of their financial situation, and thus contribute to financial empowerment.

Following on from consumer engagement and feedback in 2019, we have collated this feedback and there are further amendments on the application proposed for 2020 to increase and facilitate it's 'user friendly' nature.

### **New Client Source of Income:**

In 2019,

- 49% of South Connacht MABS Clients were in receipt of social welfare payments as their main source of income, this is very much higher than the national average of 32%.
- The percentage of Clients on a wage in 2019 was 31% in comparison to the national figure of 34%.
- 58% of clients who contacted the service have mortgages compared to national average of 49%.

## OUTREACH CLINICS

Due to the large geographic area of the South Connacht MABS hinterland, it has always proved effective to provide outreach clinics to clients as per demand.

Typically these outreaches can be provided on a once a week, once a fortnight, once a month or an 'ad hoc' basis as per client requirement.

These Outreach clinics are now embedded in the various locations, and clients have become familiar with and are happy to attend these locations. These clinics allow for networking and engagement with other groups (e.g. Citizen's Information, Family Resource centres, Medial Centres etc.) and allow the MABS message penetrate into local communities.

### Outreach Clinics

Local Service Venue
<b>South Mayo</b>
Achill
Ballinrobe
Claremorris
Kiltimagh
Louisburgh
Ballyhaunis
Westport
<b>North Mayo</b>
Belmullet
Charlestown
Swinford
Bangor Erris
<b>North Galway</b>
Mountbellew
Headford
Athenry
Williamstown
<b>Roscommon</b>
Boyle
Ballaghaderreen
<b>South Galway</b>
<i>No outreaches in 2019</i>



## **SPECIAL ACCOUNT REPORT**

In 2019, **66** clients paid creditors via this system.

Historically the Special account was a means for a client (who did not have access to a Bank Account) organise repayments from a 'Special Budget account' facilitated by MABS.

Given the current availability of a universal bank account, it was agreed that during 2019 Money Advice staff would begin a review of the efficacy of our current Special account process.

Following review it was agreed that assisting clients to move away from the Special Account system is now timely.

However, it is acknowledged that clients on existing Special Account facilities need to be supported in any future move to other financial arrangements. It is envisioned that going forward there will be a reduction in Special accounts in South Connacht MABS.

## **LOAN GUARANTEE FUND REPORT**

During the restructure, all of the existing Loan Guarantee Funds in each of the five services were centralised into one account.

This fund has proved very beneficial to the services in the past, as a means of dealing with emergency clients' financial situations. However, the nature of our evolving business model means that the operation of this fund is currently under evaluation, to explore whether these funds could be used in a more appropriate fashion which could benefit all clients in an equitable way.

There are currently no loans outstanding on the account and the balance in this account is **€46,255.76**.

## **EMERGING ISSUES**

During Quarter 1 of 2019 the restructure occurred of North Mayo MABS into South Connacht MABS with the voluntary liquidation of the 'old' North Mayo Company. (All other 4 'old' companies had been successfully liquidated in 2018)

At no point during this restructure was successful service delivery impeded in any way to clients.

## **Mortgage Crisis**

In 2019, clients in mortgage arrears remain a high proportion of the South Connacht MABS caseload (58%). The sale of mortgage loan books by mainstream lenders (most notably Ulster Bank and PTSB) to so called 'vulture funds' in 2019 created uncertainty and fear in many of our clients.

The four Dedicated Mortgage Arrears Money Advisers worked closely with their Money advice colleagues to collaborate and deliver the most appropriate service to these vulnerable clients.

There were two collaborative mortgage information sharing days between DMA's and MA's in 2019. These days allowed for the dissemination of specific mortgage related information, in a formalised process, between DMA staff and MA staff.

The DMA Money advisers are currently located in Tuam (servicing the north Galway and Roscommon region), Castlebar (servicing the Mayo region) and Galway City (servicing the South Galway region). We were also happy to welcome an additional post of Regional DMA to the team in 2019, and this member of staff is based in Galway city (but can travel region wide to assist any service with any mortgage case 'overload')

Both DMA and Money advisers regularly attend court as Court Mentors, in Castlebar, Roscommon and Galway city, in order to liaise with both Personal Insolvency Practitioners and Duty Solicitors on behalf of clients. MA staff also provide a point of contact for any member of the public who might be in court, and require assistance to deal with their mortgage arrears.

## **Debt Relief Notices (DRN)**

South Connacht MABS has been designated as an Approved Intermediary for the processing of Debt Relief Notice (DRN) and staff members within the region can act as "Responsible Persons" within the company for this purpose.

In 2019 **18** DRN's were processed in South Connacht MABS.

All new and existing clients are advised of their options available under the Personal Insolvency Act 2012, which include DRN's, Personal Insolvency Arrangements (PIA), Debt Settlement Arrangement (DSA) and Bankruptcy.

## **BPFI (Banking Protocol Federation of Ireland) Process:**

The BPFI is a process specifically negotiated with all mainstream lenders and MABS nationally. It is a voluntary process which seeks to 'reward' some MABS clients who have a good history of repaying their debts at a sustainable level. Should the client's meet certain criteria, lenders may choose to write off some, or all of their debts after a prescribed period.

All potential clients' eligibility is assessed for the potential application of the BPFI process.

Subsequently the BPFI Protocol was applied by Money advice staff in 2019.

## PROJECT STRUCTURE

### South Connacht MABS Company Details:

The company registration number is **629659**.

CRA No. is: **20202232**

CHY No. is: **22231**

### Board of Directors

<i><b>Name</b></i>	<i><b>Organisation</b></i>
Martin Greaney	HSE
Caroline Barry	Solicitor
Padhraic Barrett	Western Alzheimer's Association
Ann Fergus	Udaras na Gaeltachta
Michael Howley	Dept. of Employment Affairs and Social Protection
Brendan Nestor	Farmer
Michael Carey	Accountant
Elaine Harvey	Local Employment Service
Nora Fahy	Roscommon Women Resource Centre
Louisa McKeon	Solicitor

### ***Company Office***

Martin Greaney	Chairperson
Padhraic Barrett	Secretary

### ***Staff***

Rosaleen Maher	Regional Manager (F/T)
Michael Donnelly	Money Advice Co-Ordinator (Roscommon) (F/T)
Monica Joyce	Money Advice Co-Ordinator (Castlebar) (F/T)
Belinda McGreal	Money Advice Co-Ordinator (Tuam) (F/T)
Marie McLernon	Money Advice Co-Ordinator (Galway City) (F/T)
Anne Dennehy	Money Advice Co-Ordinator (Ballina) (Temp F/T)
Sheila Gately	Money Adviser (F/T)
Jackie Sullivan O'Neill	Money Adviser (F/T)
Rachel McNulty	Money Adviser (Temp F/T)
Lorraine Kavanagh	Money Adviser (Temp F/T)
Sean Perill	Money Adviser (F/T)
Martin O'Brien	Money Adviser (F/T)
Ann Keenaghan	Money Adviser (P/T)
Anna Wall	Money Adviser (P/T)
Anne McNulty	Money Adviser (P/T)

Roisin Byrne	Money Adviser (Temp P/T)
Majella Lyons	Money Adviser (P/T)
Clodagh Naughton	DMA Money Adviser (F/T)
Vivienne Molloy	DMA Money Adviser (F/T)
Brian MacGabhann	DMA Money Adviser (F/T)
Martin McNicholas	RDMA Money Adviser (Temp. F/T)
Satpal Panesar	Administrator (Temp. F/T)
Ann Marie Ward	Administrator (F/T)
Brian McNamara	Administrator (F/T)
Rosaleen Shaw	Administrator (F/T)
Anna Marie Hume	Administrator (P/T)
Amanda Brennan	Administrator (P/T)
Caroline Gill	Administrator (P/T)
Catherine Collins	Administrator (Temp. P/T)

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

South Connacht Money Advice and Budgeting Service would like to thank the following for their continued co-operation and assistance throughout the year:

- South Connacht MABS Staff - whose commitment to and enthusiasm for their job makes the ongoing service delivery of money advice so efficient, empathetic and successful
- Chairperson, Martin Greaney
- Secretary – Padhraic Barrett
- All the South Connacht Board of Directors who gave so freely of their time
- CIB – Management & Staff
- MABSnd – Staff & Management
- Ballina, Swinford, Erris, Ballaghaderreen, Tubbercurry, Castlebar, Galway, Tuam, Kiltimagh, Loughrea & Westport Credit Unions
- Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection
- St. Vincent de Paul Society
- Creditors
- Citizens Information Services throughout the Region
- Mayo, Galway and Roscommon County Councils
- Office of the Director of Consumer Affairs
- Personal Insolvency Practitioners liaising with staff in the Region
- Insolvency Service of Ireland
- Duty Solicitors liaising with staff in the Region
- Courts Service in Mayo, Roscommon and Galway

*As it would be impossible to thank all organisations individually, we take this opportunity to extend our gratitude to all that lent their support to the Service throughout the year.*