

## **West Cork Women Against Violence - Strategic Plan 2017 - 2020**

### **1. PURPOSE OF THE PLAN**

West Cork Women Against Violence Project (WCWAV) has always had as its core function the provision of a high quality, professional crisis support service to women experiencing domestic violence and abuse in West Cork. Strengthening and improving this service continues to be central to our work.

However, we also need to tackle some of the underlying problems which create the demand for our service. Specifically, we need to challenge accepted attitudes and beliefs which continue to allow violence against women to be perpetrated and, by working to build integrated and co-ordinated agency responses to domestic violence, ensure that women receive appropriate, informed and supportive services.

Therefore, the Plan identifies strategies and actions which will progress our work not only as a vital service to women experiencing violence but also provide the tools for change within our community and develop co-ordinated responses and joint working with other professional agencies in combating domestic violence.

### **2. BRIEF HISTORY OF THE PROJECT**

West Cork Women Against Violence Project began as a community response to violence against women and children in West Cork emanating from a joint initiative between West Cork & Beara Women's Forum and the Community Resource Centre in Bantry.

In 1998, funding for a Special Project Worker was obtained from the Department of Social, Community & Family Affairs to work with the Community Resource Centre on the issue of violence against women and domestic violence. The Special Project Worker together with nine local women formed a working group to examine the services needed in West Cork for women and their children living in or having left a violent relationship. This led to the establishment of the West Cork Women Against Violence Project, run by trained volunteers under a community development ethos. The support, listening and information service was formally launched in April 2000, by which time funding was secured from the Southern Regional Committee on Violence Against Women. From that time onwards until 2014 funding has been provided under Section 39 from the HSE. In 2014, Tusla, the Child & family Agency became responsible for all services supporting victims of domestic and sexual violence.

Also in 2000, the Project established a weekly Outreach Service in Skibbereen and launched its quarterly newsletter, The West Cork Whisper. The newsletter provides information on legal and social welfare issues, women's personal stories, educational articles on DV and useful telephone numbers and contacts.

In the years since its formation, the Project has now reached a point where it employs a full-time co-ordinator, two part-time support and development workers and a part-time administrator. It is currently training volunteers to support clients through court and other appointment accompaniments. In 2016, almost 1200 contacts were made to the Helpline and over 200 women were directly supported by the Project.

### 3. OUR PHILOSOPHY

West Cork Women Against Violence Project believes that Domestic Violence is both a serious crime against women and a dangerous expression of gender inequality. We believe all forms of domestic abuse, from the everyday to the most extreme expressions, are unacceptable.

We provide support and information to women affected by all forms of domestic abuse (including financial, emotional and psychological abuse). We support women by working with them respectfully on an individual basis. We do not offer solutions but provide information on options and we will continue to work with women no matter what their choices. West Cork Women Against Violence strives at all times to be an anti-racist, inclusive service for women from all backgrounds, cultures, physical ability and sexual orientation.

### 4. OUR MISSION STATEMENT

West Cork Women Against Violence provide ***a safe, confidential listening, information and support service to women and their children in West Cork experiencing domestic violence, while challenging social, political and judicial tolerance of violence against women.***

### 5. THE CONTEXT

#### **5.1 Domestic Violence in Ireland**

National Research by the National Crime Council in Ireland found that 1 in 7 women have experienced severe abusive behaviour of a physical, sexual or emotional nature from a partner at some times in their lives. The survey estimates that 213,000 women in Ireland have been severely abused by a partner<sup>1</sup> while research commissioned by Women's Aid has shown that 18% (1 in 5) of Irish women surveyed who have been involved in intimate relationships with men, have been abused by a current or former partner<sup>2</sup>.

The estimated economic cost of domestic violence to the Irish economy is €2.2billion a year. This is based on the Council of Europe figure that domestic violence costs each member state €555 per citizen annually in policing, health bills, lost productivity and court procedures<sup>3</sup>.

Ireland's report card on tackling domestic violence could very well read, "must do better". The Mid- Term Review of the National Strategy on Domestic, Sexual and Gender- Based Violence ( 2010-2014) draws attention to the fact that only limited or poor progress has been made in a number of areas in relation to combating violence against women. Despite progress in developing awareness-raising programmes, this has not translated into training for frontline personnel and school personnel. The controversies generated in more recent times by inappropriate sentencing of abusers and perpetrators is symptomatic of the lack of understanding and awareness among the judiciary of the gravity of domestic and sexual violence.

---

<sup>1</sup> Domestic Abuse of Women and Men in Ireland: Report on the National Study of Domestic Abuse, National Crime Council and ERSI, 2005

<sup>2</sup> O'Connor, M, & Kelleher Associates, Making the Links, Women's Aid, 1995

<sup>3</sup> [Dermot Ahern, TD, Minister for Justice, speaking at the International Conference on Domestic Violence, Waterford, May 2008, quoted in 'Domestic Violence costs the country €2.2bn', The Irish Examiner, 30.5.08.

Media bias and public ignorance of domestic violence was tragically illustrated by the response to the murders of Clodagh Hawe and her three children by an abusive, coercive husband (August 2016). Alan Hawe was extolled as a paragon of the community in media coverage of the familicide in the days immediately following the murders. The prevalence of violence against women and children indicates that there is still a considerable way to go in changing the attitudes, behaviours and beliefs which allow it to flourish in our society.

However, with the introduction of the Domestic Violence Bill 2017, Ireland is indicating its commitment to ratifying the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (the Istanbul Convention). This Bill provides a renewed focus on improving and strengthening protections and providing mechanisms to address major gaps in responses to perpetrators and victims of domestic abuse. It introduces a new emergency barring order that will last up to eight days and access to safety protections for non-cohabiting partners and intimates. The Bill will also make it easier for victims of domestic violence during the court process with the right to be accompanied by a support worker/family member/friend and where necessary to give evidence by video link. The anonymity of the victim will be protected in both civil and criminal proceedings. The Bill also incorporates new legislative provisions which will enable Ireland to fully ratify the Istanbul Convention.<sup>4</sup>

Nevertheless, there have been a number of missed opportunities with the Bill; namely to widen the definitions of abuse with regard to stalking and electronic surveillance; to provide out- of -hours barring orders and to link protection of mothers and children within the barring order process as too often, despite the risk posed by a perpetrator and the levels of domestic violence for which they are responsible, the perpetrator will still have unsupervised access to the children. There is still a long way to go in establishing a fully protective legislative base for victims of domestic violence and their children, and even further to travel before Irish institutions recognise the gendered nature of that violence and begin to reflect that analysis in policies, resources, strategies and media coverage.

## **5.2 The role of TUSLA**

Tusla, the Child & Family Support Agency has been responsible for the resourcing of DV services since 2014. The administrative and co-ordinating structure for the DV sector within Tusla is under development.

Understandably, Tusla's emphasis is on the protection and well- being of children and young people, while the role of the DV sector has prioritised the protection of women, highlighting the complex issues involved in the dynamics of domestic violence and the strategies needed to combat it. DV organisations have stressed that strategies to protect children should not relapse into views of 'personal inadequacy' which blame the mother in a domestic violence relationship. Protecting children from violent relationships is a priority for all DV organisations whose cumulative experience indicates that protecting the mother is very often the most effective means of protecting children in circumstances where domestic violence is present.

As Tusla cements new structures in place and rolls out its multi-agency, collaborative approach to protection of children and young people and support for families, it is imperative that the necessary

---

<sup>4</sup> <https://rm.coe.int/CoERMPublicCommonSearchServices/DisplayDCTMContent?documentId=090000168046031c>

resources be made available to the DV sector to participate and contribute on an equal playing field with other agencies, most especially in making our voice heard in the development of policy decisions that impact on the protection of women and children experiencing domestic violence.

WCWAV in its last Strategic Plan (2013-2016) implemented a number of actions aimed at partnership building locally and that remains a firm focus for our organisation over the next three years. Over the span of this new Strategic Plan, we reaffirm our commitment to strengthening and expanding interagency working wherever possible and in particular with the West Cork Child & Family Network (CFSN). The CFSN has provided an important and unique forum within which there has been invaluable mutual learning and a focus on solution-centred responses to service provision for vulnerable families. WCWAV also regard the Network as a useful mechanism through which informed and appropriate multi-agency responses to DV could be identified and developed.

Although there are some welcome attempts being made across sectors to improve services to women experiencing violence, unfortunately, women and NGOs like WCWAV find that the responses are patchy across a range of State services including: Garda, court, mental health, social work and child protection services. Uneven services place women and children at risk of further harm.

In 2015, WCWAV organised training relevant to many of the aforementioned local agencies on the Domestic Violence Risk Assessment Matrix. This risk assessment framework has child protection at its heart and its effectiveness has been proven in contexts in which multiple agencies are committed to the process.\* Frontline professionals with responsibility for child protection throughout West Cork who undertook the training at the invitation of WCWAV, were energised by the framework. There is now a major opportunity for Tusla, as the primary agency in child protection, to champion this framework by adopting it as a matter of policy, adequately resourcing its implementation and working with DV organisations to encourage other frontline agencies, including An Garda Síochána, to get on board.

### **5.3 Policing Violence Against Women**

The policing of domestic violence in Ireland, is undoubtedly lagging behind its peers in many European and Commonwealth countries. Even DV statistics furnished by An Garda Síochána cannot be relied upon for accuracy as these have come under Parliamentary scrutiny for underestimating and improper recording of DV-linked incidents. There is a notable inconsistency of approach to the issue of domestic violence, between divisions, between urban and rural and among individual officers. In instances where successful protection of a woman and her children has occurred, more likely than not, integral to that success has been the presence and support of an individual Gard working with other support services to bring about a speedy resolution. However, the extent of violence against women and the dangers it poses dictates that it should not be a case of luck as to whether an individual Gard is supportive but a matter of policy, training and application for all Gardai at every rank.

Some welcome movement has taken place in the last two years within the Garda Síochána. In 2014, the formation of a Garda Special Protective Services Unit was established within the force. This Unit is responsible for all crime against women and children; domestic, sexual, trafficking, child abuse, child pornography and the monitoring of sex offenders.

A key priority for the Unit is the development of a Garda risk assessment for domestic abuse call-outs which is much needed and would finally bring us into line with many other European forces.

However, this development is still based in Dublin and although there are plans to roll out pilot Units in three areas, it is still a work in progress. At the most senior level of the Garda Síochána there now appears to be a commitment to addressing violence against women and children; to have any real impact it must also translate into leadership on the issue at regional level. Meanwhile WCWAV are very appreciative of the efforts and contributions of individual Garda officers in West Cork who have helped us to keep numbers of our clients safe and supported.

#### **5.4 The West Cork context**

West Cork is a challenging topography, of both coastal and remote inland communities on three peninsulas, a generous scattering of inhabited islands and a wide area of hilly, mountainous terrain. The area is made up of well-known tourist centres, lesser known townlands and small parishes, established farming and fishing communities, and also newer communities of artists and those who settled into the area in search of a simpler way of life or to 'get off the grid' but with little in the way of resources.

WCWAV has supported clients from all of these communities and backgrounds because domestic violence can and does take place in all strata of society.

In the last decade and a half, West Cork also saw a rise in the numbers of new immigrants to the area from Eastern Europe and South East Asia and from within EU member states and this too is reflected in WCWAV clientele.

Rural communities like West Cork have suffered because of lack of job opportunities and the absence of basic infrastructure such as transport and connectivity. This brings challenges not only for the population in general but for services such as the WCWAV project. The closure and understaffing of Garda stations, of banks and post offices, the limited opening hours and distances between community welfare offices, and the distances to be travelled to reach district court sittings for DV victims to obtain protection orders are daily hurdles to be overcome. In addition, the nearest refuge for women and children escaping domestic violence is in Cork City, a two or three hour drive away, and this is already over-extended catering to those in crisis from the city.

### **6. THE PROBLEMS WE AIM TO ADDRESS**

#### **6.1 Priority areas**

This Strategic Plan continues to develop and build upon work identified within the 2013-2016 Strategic Plan whilst including new areas of work that have evolved from changes in the DV sector, in relation to child & family services, and from recommendations arising from our 2016 Evaluation Survey & Report, "Someone to Turn to, Somewhere to Go." (see Appendix 1).

Ongoing actions are needed to tackle the underlying causes of violence in domestic relationships and to improve the services which women and children living in or leaving violent relationships require. These actions aim to educate specific sectors of our community and support services with a view to:

- a. diminishing the frequency of domestic violence in intimate relationships and
- b. establishing a co-ordinated and consistent response to the needs of women and children experiencing domestic violence in West Cork.

In addition, the absence of professional development opportunities or facilities in which DV agencies can exchange and inform our practices, in particular the specific demands on DV services operating in rural areas, necessitate that WCWAV work with sister organisations to provide a forum within which inter-professional learning can take place to enhance existing practice and service delivery.

Arising from WCWAV's 2016 Evaluation, a clear recommendation emanated from clients who had used our service and from the majority of partner organisations with whom we work, for WCWAV to address the need for safe housing for those women and children escaping domestic violence in West Cork. (Appendix 1)

## **6.2 The need for accessible, co-ordinated services**

Any support service in West Cork must take on the difficulties of making itself accessible, providing a range of ways in which those in the most isolated areas get to know of and feel confident in using the service as well as being able to reach service users. Networking among local services providers, co-operating to strengthen service delivery and provision, pooling information and expertise is vital to ensuring better and more informed services to those in need.

WCWAV want to share our expertise and knowledge of how domestic violence operates and our understanding of the needs of its victims with other service deliverers such as health and mental health services, social and community services, Garda Síochána and court services, community and voluntary sector organisations to continue developing linked -up service provision to those experiencing violence in intimate relationships. This would assist other services in: recognising DV clients, increasing referrals to WCWAV, improving the quality of response provided and response times to incidents of domestic violence and the potential for collaborative initiatives on prevention.

## **6.3 Investing in Development**

Aftercare support groups for women who have exited abusive relationships and are still dealing with the traumatic and practical aftermaths are a highly effective means of giving women the opportunity, tools and support to heal and rebuild their lives with their children.

In urban settings, such groups do not require significant resources, but for groups in rural areas there are additional travel and transport requirements. Nevertheless, despite the additional costs, support groups can deliver an enormous qualitative return for women able to participate, as evidenced in WCWAV Evaluation Report 2016.

The struggles to maintain basic DV services to women and children in crisis due to chronic underfunding has resulted in the neglect and undervaluing of those who deliver these services. Despite the range of skills, aptitudes and expertise required to safely guide and support women through life events fraught with physical, emotional, financial, legal and psychological minefields, there is no sectoral professional framework in which qualifications for this work are recognised or accredited, or where further training can be accessed. Any facility for peer learning is usually a by-product of some other meeting within the sector rather than a planned focus.

Rural services like WCWAV have particular challenges in finding and keeping staff with the necessary backgrounds and expertise in the DV field. The cumulative cuts in core funding have also meant that existing staff have not benefited from annual increments to their salaries for the last six years and attracting new staff is also handicapped by the low wage levels for new staff which

mitigates against attracting individuals with the range and depth of experience needed for the posts.

Recruitment often means training on the job which is time-consuming and demanding for already stretched staffing arrangements, while holding on to staff can be difficult because of the absence of any career progression route or accredited qualification system. Yet, DV staff are constantly relied upon by other professionals in state run frontline agencies to provide important and sensitive direction and inputs on shared clients while also taking client referrals from many of those professional agencies.

A training and development framework for the DV sector is a national necessity. However, in the absence of any movement in that direction, WCWAV will prioritise developing reflective practice and peer learning opportunities with its sister organisation, YANA based in North Cork. By pooling resources and sharing the learning, our two organisations can build upon techniques, approaches and expertise accumulated within each organisation to help us identify areas of further training, design in-house staff supports and explore areas of mutually beneficial research for our work. YANA's remit, size and area in which it delivers its services are similar in many respects to that of WCWAV and there is a shared familiarity with the problems posed by weak rural infrastructures and the specific challenges faced by women and children experiencing domestic abuse in rural Cork.

## **7. AIMS OF THE PROJECT**

The West Cork Women Against Violence Project aims to:

- Provide an effective, non-judgemental, supportive and user-friendly service to women in need.
- Provide supports and services which recognise the impact and consequences of violence against women
- Enhance access to our service by providing a Helpline, outreach, drop-in and one-to-one support to clients, including court and other accompaniment.
- Offer clients a subsidised counselling programme on request and within budget limitations.
- Liaise with all relevant agencies, organisations and individuals to raise awareness of domestic abuse and to work in partnership to ensure best practice responses to women and their children, increase perpetrator accountability and the increased safety of women.
- Engage in campaigns and initiatives for the eradication of violence against women.

## **8. OUR WAYS OF WORKING**

The West Cork Women Against Violence Project works in such a way as to:

- Ensure that our services to users are women- centred and empowerment-focused.
- Respect the confidentiality of our service- users within legal and ethical obligations.
- Recognise and cater for the diverse needs of service users and acknowledge that women may face additional barriers when accessing services

- Ensure that service users have all the relevant information and supports they need from either project staff or via referral to specialist agencies.
- Provide skilled, support staff and volunteers to deliver ongoing help, information and direct support to women.
- Provide quality, relevant training and supervision to support staff and volunteers.
- Deliver training, develop partnerships and provide specialised inputs to other services, organisations and institutions to raise awareness of violence against women and promote best practice responses.
- Engage in processes to evaluate and improve our own services, service delivery, knowledge and project effectiveness.
- Comply with best practice in governance and financial management arrangements.

## 9. PLANNED OUTCOMES 2017 - 2020

The overall change we want to bring about over the period of the Strategic Plan is to **ensure greater support for women experiencing domestic violence in West Cork** through informed, collaborative responses and **reduced social acceptability of violence against women in West Cork**.

Specifically our plan is developed around five core outcomes:

1. More women in West Cork are supported and empowered by the Project to stay safe within, and/or exit safely from, violent relationships and women who have experienced violence are actively supporting one another.
2. Public and voluntary sector agencies in West Cork work collaboratively in providing effective responses in support of women and children experiencing violence
3. 'Breaking the Cycle' - promoting healthy relationships is a fixed educational course in an expanding number of schools in West Cork, helping young people to positively value violence-free relationships.
4. WCWAV and other sister DV organisations working in rural areas work successfully to produce evidence-based best practice, improving the quality and value of DV services and the professional standing of their staffs.
5. A practical and achievable solution to safe housing for women and children escaping domestic violence in West Cork will be identified and the means to bring it to fruition put in place.

## 10. ACTIVITIES TO DELIVER ON OUTCOMES

**Outcome 1:** More women in West Cork are supported and empowered to stay safe within and/or exit safely from violent and abusive relationships.

**Activity:** Resource the continuation of peer support groups for women exiting domestic violence in West Cork and replicate the model in other areas of West Cork

**Activity:** Engage in further promotion of WCWAV services using local and social media to reach an increased number of women by recruiting a volunteer to develop and implement a media strategy for the service.

**Activity:** Source effective, relevant training to enhance the quality and impact of support services to women seeking assistance

**Activity:** Increase staffing levels so as to improve the availability of the service to more women

**Activity:** Further explore specific, targeted roles for volunteers in supporting WCWAV, recognising both the challenges of availability and geography within West Cork.

**Outcome 2:** WCWAV provides the impetus for integrated, partnership working on the issue of domestic violence with relevant agencies in the statutory, community and voluntary sectors in West Cork.

**Activity:** Identify relevant, emerging structures and ensure appropriate representation, informing policy and service provision as to the needs of women and children experiencing domestic violence.

**Activity:** Continue with and build on involvement in the West Cork Child & Family Support Network

**Activity:** Identify resources to allow WCWAV to re-establish the provision of DV training to professionals in other agencies

**Activity:** Encourage more specific collaboration with An Garda Síochána, West Cork Regional Division towards the design and adoption of best practice responses to DV and its victims.

**Outcome 3:** Young people in West Cork value violence-free relationships and are supported to 'break the cycle' of domestic violence.

**Activity:** Identify resources that will support a comprehensive and sustained programme to educate and inform young people in West Cork about the dynamics of domestic violence.

**Activity:** Engage a F/T staff member with responsibility for developing specific programmes for young people and to work with schools and youth organisations to get buy-in for 'Break the Cycle' training and awareness-raising.

**Activity:** Work with partner organisations within the West Cork Child & Family Support Network and through the Children & Young People's Services Committee (Tusla) to help us identify, resource and guide awareness-raising with young people in West Cork.

**Outcome 4:** WCWAV promotes evidence-based practice, inter-professional learning and ongoing research & development into the issue of domestic violence.

**Activity:** Continue to strengthen links with sister organisations regionally, in particular YANA, to explore mutually beneficial initiatives which allow us to share learning, review practice and develop new frameworks in which to pursue professional development of staff.

**Activity:** Develop and maintain links with relevant local and international research initiatives and where possible to develop academic partnerships in the region which assist WCWAV in taking forward their work with women.

**Activity:** Ensure that the needs of women and children who experience domestic violence are highlighted in relevant policy and decision-making fora within the region, and with national core funding bodies.

**Activity:** Conduct ongoing reviews and evaluation of the work of WCWAV, with particular focus on developing a practice review framework, allowing support staff to critically evaluate effectiveness in supporting clients towards greater empowerment.

**Outcome 5:** To fully examine a range of possibilities for safe housing in West Cork for women and children escaping domestic violence.

**Activity:** Form a working group comprised of WCWAV board and staff and representatives of: local Homeless Initiative, County Council, relevant Departments and Garda Síochána in West Cork to identify options on safe housing and possible resourcing.

**Activity:** Conduct a feasibility study on options identified by working group

**Activity:** Develop a fund-raising plan for the sourcing and maintaining of best option identified.

## **11. HUMAN RESOURCES**

WCVAW's strength lies in the people who have been associated with the service since its founding 18 years ago through to the present day. Our support service developed through the commitment and determination of local women activists and individuals in West Cork agencies and organisations who took up the issue and supported the initiative. In the almost two decades since, the service has built links with community groups, local media, development agencies, health personnel, Gardaí, court officials and has many ex- clients who hold a deep appreciation and affection for the service.

### **11.1 West Cork Women Against Violence Management Board**

The Voluntary Board of West Cork Women Against Violence is comprised of local professionals in community and mental health services, legal and justice, finance, development agencies, business and arts. The range of their expertise and experience has been central to the project, steering it successfully through organisational and fiscal difficulties and rising to the challenge of new demands on the service due to changing policy and structures nationally.

### **11.2 Volunteers**

At its inception WCWAV relied extensively on voluntary commitment and still requires the support of volunteers for the success of many of its activities. The Board of Management is comprised of nine volunteers whose contribution is both essential and invaluable to the governance of the organisation. Volunteers are also integral to West Cork Whisper's production and distribution. A small number of volunteers are also involved in a mentoring project to support clients going through the courts system.

It can be difficult in a sprawling, isolated rural area like West Cork to maintain volunteer input in a focused way as the travel, transport and costs of voluntary participation are demanding. In addition, many find that the nature of the work and the service is emotionally difficult to sustain. Despite this, there are a number of individuals who can be called upon to support the organisation when specific events or activities demand more assistance than a small team of staff can provide

while still maintaining client services as its priority. WCWAV continues to invest in the recruitment and training of volunteers to supplement core services.

### **11.3 Staff**

The core staff team consists of a full time co-ordinator (39 hrs), two part time support & development workers (with a combined total of 50 hours per week) and a part time administrator (20 hrs).

The demands on staff are familiar to many other DV support services but it is the rural nature of our location that creates both the need for the service and one of our biggest challenges. Distances to be covered to meet with clients, attend district court services, take part in multi- agency meetings, attend trainings and national sectoral meetings consume a significant part of the staffing hours we have available.

The project has a staff team whose combined professional experience provides the organisation with extensive expertise in; the field of support to women experiencing domestic violence, in facilitation work, understanding of the legal, justice, housing, child protection and social protection issues to be negotiated by women in crisis, organisational development and strategic planning, training delivery, financial planning and human resource management. Our small staff team has over 60 years of experience in delivering support to women in crisis and addressing the issues of violence against women and gender equality.

However, with a predominantly part-time staff, increased demands on the service - as borne out by a year on year rise in our client and contact statistics ( Appendix 2) and the working hours spent just getting from A to B, WCWAV in the last year has had to focus almost exclusively on direct work with clients. Training and awareness work has suffered and yet this activity is essential if we are to make any difference in changing the culture around gendered violence, in improving frontline responses to women and children experiencing domestic violence and breaking the cycle of violence in the next generation.

WCWAV has developed tailored programmes for specific organisations and cultural groups on understanding and identifying domestic abuse and it has designed and delivered an age-appropriate programme for Transition Year students on Healthy Relationships.

With increasing numbers of women contacting the service and the complexity of problems with which they present, the educational element of our work has had to be substantially reduced due to a lack of both human and financial resources. Hence, resourcing and renewing WCWAV's commitment to this area of work will require at least one additional member of staff and increased hours for existing workers.

### **11.4 West Cork Whisper**

The *West Cork Whisper*, the project's free quarterly magazine was revamped in 2013 with the help of a talented volunteer and has proven to be a vital, popular and professional source of information for women seeking help and a public awareness-raising tool on violence against women and children. The *Whisper* is a very important element of the project's publicity and promotional role. It is the only publication of its kind in Ireland and as such is extremely popular among DV services, agencies, organisations and interested individuals nationally. We are justly proud of West Cork Whisper and the contributions of volunteers, staff and service users in its production. Current

distribution now stands at 2000 copies and volunteers are active in its distribution and in identifying new distribution outlets and locations.

## **12. FINANCIAL RESOURCES**

WCWAV has been core-funded since 2014 by Tusla, The Child & Family Agency. This funding covers salaries, rent, utilities, IT costs, some volunteer expenses, staff travel expenses, office equipment and some training costs. Tusla also funds the project's subsidised counselling scheme for clients and the production costs of the West Cork Whisper.

Since Tusla assumed responsibility for the domestic violence sector, there have been no reductions in our annual budget. However, neither has there been any increase. From 2009- 2013, WCWAV lost 2.5% annually from its core funding as the cuts following the recession began to take effect. In reality our budget has decreased by 12.5% - a drop of over €25,000 in five years.

The stabilising of our budget by Tusla is extremely welcome but there is absolutely no financial margin for development or expansion of our service with the core resources currently available. Maintaining key client services must always be our first priority, but without adequate core resources, other essential elements such as aftercare, prevention activities, training and awareness-raising will continue to suffer and if these aspects of solution- building work have to be abandoned, then providing crisis services to abused and fearful women becomes a perpetual hamster wheel.

In the past, the service has obtained one – off payments from the National Lottery via the HSE for smaller items such as office furniture and has made use of small grants available in the region for training and to provide for additional client supports; for example, from the Mary Daly Fund in Bantry, the Sisters of Charity Solidarity Trust (Southern Region) and the Community Fund for Ireland.

DV and sexual violence organisations also have the opportunity to apply for COSC funding from the Department of Justice which is available specifically for activities and initiatives to promote awareness. This fund provides up to €2000 annually to successful applicants for awareness-raising projects. However this is a competitive process and a successful application is by no means certain.

WCWAV has also been successful for the first time in obtaining funding from the Commission for the Victims of Crime and these monies will contribute to a little under half of a part-time salary for an additional worker for one year (2017-18) to do essential court support and accompaniment with our clients. The remainder of that salary needs to be identified if the identified work to be done is to be completed within the current fiscal year.

WCWAV plan to establish a fundraising group over 2017 comprised of board members and supporters to prepare and implement a fundraising plan for the Project in light of its ambition with regard to the provision of safe housing in West Cork but also the need to ensure additional staffing hours, support groups and resource new work over the next few years. They will be charged with exploring local fundraising activities in West Cork, the possibility of an annual donation raising event for the West Cork calendar and developing links with the private sector and sponsorship.

## **12.2 Making It Count**

WCWAV's client numbers have increased annually over the last five years as have the number of contacts with clients, other professional agencies and those looking for information about DV services. In that same period, we also increased the availability of our Helpline service from one day a week to 5 days a week in order to respond to demand.

In 2015 WCWAV spent 125 hours in court accompaniment with clients which necessitated hours of travel and related travel costs. In 2016, we delivered four x 2 day programmes to Transition year students in schools and a one day course to information providers in the Citizens Information Service. Preparing and delivery of such courses are time consuming but an important investment in awareness-raising and prevention. In 2016, we had a support group that met every 2 weeks for 6 months, and in the words of one woman who took part, the experience was *'life- saving'*.

The scale of what we deliver has increased but not the resources available, in fact there has been a 12.5% cut in our core funding from 2009-2013. Core funding has remained stable in the last two years but losses have not been reinstated. A full-time crisis and support service has been provided with careful management of hours and rotas as the staff complement for work with clients and agencies consists of 2 part-time support workers and a full time co-ordinator. A part-time administrator provides financial and administrative support to the service and its staff team. However, any sustained absence or leave of even one staff member leaves enormous gaps in our cover with consequent impact on our services to clients. With no increase in resources or in staffing for almost eight years, the priority in the last year for WCWAV has had to be in maintaining direct client services while reluctantly having to suspend preventative and aftercare work due to a shortage of staff and finances.

## Projected Costings

The following are projected cost increases based on the needs of the strategic outcomes laid out in this Plan:

	Salaries and Pensions	Travelling & Subsistence	Client Activities	Other <sup>#</sup>	Total Expenditure
Total 2016	143,723	6,489	8,630	36,746	195,588
Budget 2017	146,214	6,500	10,000	33,176	195,890
Projected 2018*	181,214	8,000	11,000	36,176	236,390
Projected 2019**	185,744	8,000	11,000	33,176	237,920
Projected 2020***	190,388	8,000	11,000	33,176	242,564

**Other<sup>#</sup> includes** *all other core costs  
nb 2018 includes one off feasibility study costs of €3,000*

**\*Includes :** *increase of €1000 for support group costs  
1 additional SDW, plus increase of €1500 to Travel budget to allow for additional SDW  
increase to point 6 on salary scale for both p/t SDWs  
increase to full time from 30hrs for current SDW*

**\*\* includes** *2.5% incremental pay increase for all staff*

**\*\*\* includes** *further 2.5% incremental pay increase for all staff*

In conclusion the funding gap between what we currently receive in funding and what we will require to deliver the outcomes and activities sent out in this plan over the next three years is:

	Cumulative additional resources required	Increase over previous year	% increase over previous year
Projected 2018*	€40,500	€40,500	20.7%
Projected 2019**	€42,030	€1,530	2.5%
Projected 2020***	€46,674	€4,644	2.5%
<b>Total additional resources required</b>	<b>€129,204</b>		



## Appendix 1

Much of this Strategic Plan has been informed by the Evaluation Report of West Cork Women Against Violence researched and written by Dr. Caroline Crowley; “*Someone To Turn To, Somewhere To Go*” ( 2016) Copies of which are available from our office or a PDF version can be accessed on our website: [www.westcorkwomensproject.ie](http://www.westcorkwomensproject.ie)

“*Someone To Turn to, Somewhere To Go*” details the responses, experiences and views of 20 clients of the service and solicits feedback from 37 partner/referral agencies who have worked with the service. The following is a summary of the feedback received and recommendations put forward by both clients and referral agencies:

### CLIENT FEEDBACK

Client reasons as to how they would describe the service were summarised thus:

- Confidence-building and moral support
- Empowerment
- Technical/specialist support
- Peer Support
- Unique service
- Invaluable service

Asked for their suggestions as to how to improve current services the responses prioritised:

- Extend hours of operation and office locations
- Increase staff and add services
- Increase counselling supports
- More advertising
- Adequate funding for the service

Recommendations from clients on new services and activities:

- Safe accommodation and housing in West cork
- More public awareness-raising
- Subsidised recreational/social activities for clients
- Establish more support groups in new locations

## **PARTNER/REFERRAL ORGANISATIONS**

The summary of partner/referral organisations found the following:

- All agencies would encourage their clients to use the service
- WCWAV staff were described almost exclusively as “experienced”, “professional”, “knowledgeable” and “respectful”
- Two thirds of the agency respondents wanted to further strengthen their relationships with the service.
- 90% of respondents found WCWAV staff responsive to their professional needs

Suggestions for improving WCWAV service

- Expanding staff
- Extending hours of operation
- Adding more outreach locations
- Publicity and educational initiatives with other service providers & schools/youth groups
- Counselling and support groups
- Self -development for women using service
- Address the issue of emergency accommodation
- Enhance integration with other services such as law enforcement & justice system
- More collaboration on a strategic level
- Influence policy

## Appendix 2

### Annual Statistics 2012-16

Year	Total contacts	No of Women	New clients	Repeat Clients	Repeat contacts	Unknown	Unanswered calls
2012	1012	199	151	20	831	11	276
2013	889	166	126	40	749		54
2014	1103	170	124	46	959		69
			670 contacts were with 124 new clients	433 contacts by repeat clients		20	
2015	1058	179	157	106	901	0	40
			765 contacts were with 157 new clients	293 contacts by repeat clients			
2016	1195	202	172	32		0	37
			952 contacts in total with 172 these clients	243 contacts by repeat clients			