



West Cork Whisper

WEST CORK WOMEN AGAINST VIOLENCE PROJECT NEWSLETTER

50th EDITION

JAN 2013

Celebrating our 50th edition

WELCOME to our 50th edition of the WEST CORK WHISPER! We could not have gotten here without you. In honour of the occasion, we have a brand new look with more pages and new features. This has been possible because of volunteers taking responsibility for *Whisper* and producing a newsletter worthy of our project and of the women who need us.

This 50th edition of *Whisper* is a major milestone in the history and development of *West Cork Women Against Violence*. The newsletter has been a regular aspect of the work of the service since its earliest days and is a vital means of contact with women in West Cork. Currently, we distribute over 2000 copies and these are spread around family resource centres, community groups, CIS offices, HSE offices, doctors' surgeries, unemployment offices, libraries etc. We want to expand the distribution and depend on you our readers for that. *West Cork Whisper* should be available in every public space in West Cork and we need your help to do that.

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domestic violence sentencing

1 A woman is imprisoned in her own home. She is severely beaten for more than one and a half hours. She is beaten so badly that the perpetrator leaves the footprint of his shoe on her body. Her cries for help go unheard. He puts his hands around her neck, she is in fear for her life, she thinks she is going to die.

The “horrific” pictures of her battered and extensively bruised body are presented to the court. And now, her confidence shattered, she remains a prisoner in her own home, often too afraid to leave for fear that something might happen to her.

Her life is changed forever. His is changed for 240 hours - 240 hours of community service which the judge considers an appropriate substitute for a two year prison sentence. His guilty plea and the “shame” he has caused his family, in addition to the community service, is considered an appropriate punishment.

2 Another woman in her own home is subjected to a barrage of screamed obscenities and verbal abuse. She is put in a headlock and punched repeatedly in the head. She fears she will be killed. She requires four stitches below her eye. She is left with a permanent facial scar.

Her life is changed forever. He is fined €5000 to be paid in two instalments. His sentence of two and a half years is suspended conditional upon that payment - the payment is a “token of remorse” according to the judge.

Women are beaten and scarred for life. And the judicial system heaps insult onto injury. In neither of the above two cases, both of which happened in 2012, was the violent perpetrator imprisoned. So the question is, why not? Why was the viciousness of their crimes not reflected by appropriate prison sentences? Why were neither of these two violent, abusive men imprisoned for their brutality? Does our judiciary, and our society as a whole, take the crime of domestic violence seriously enough? And if not, why not?

The reality is that our judges have no training in, and limited understanding of, the nature of domestic violence. The fact that domestic violence takes place in the home, and is mainly perpetuated by intimate

partners, should make it a worse crime, not a lesser one. And domestic violence is endemic in this country. 1 in 7 women experience severe domestic violence.

For most of us, home is a refuge from the world, it is the place where we feel safest. However, it is not an exaggeration to say that for some women their home is the most dangerous place in the world.

There is a direct link between domestic violence and the murder of women. 62% of the 186 women who were murdered in this country between 1996 and 2012 were killed in their own homes. And two thirds of the women who were murdered by their partners had previously been subjected to domestic violence.

Domestic violence is a serious crime and that should be reflected in how it is dealt with in the judicial system. Serious crime deserves serious punishment. Domestic violence includes, but is not limited to - physical assault, cruelty, verbal abuse, rape, and sexual assault of women. It can lead to physical injury, hospitalisation, and mental health issues. And in some extreme cases it can result in homicide. Children are significantly, negatively, affected by living in a household where domestic abuse is being perpetrated.

Domestic violence is an appalling crime, with appalling repercussions that last long after the bruises and broken bones have healed. Women living in terror need to know that when they do approach the judicial system that they will get the help that they need. Women need to know that when violent abusers are found guilty in our courts they will be appropriately punished - they will get more than a “slap on the wrist” - they will be sent to prison for a lengthy stay.

the facts

- On average one woman a month is killed in Ireland
- One in five Irish women will experience domestic violence
- One in seven Irish women will experience severe domestic violence
- On average a woman will be assaulted by her partner or ex-partner 35 times before reporting it to the police
- Only 29% of women who had experienced severe abuse had reported it to An Garda Síochána.
- Between 1996 and September 2012 there have been 186 women murdered in the Republic of Ireland. 115 women (62%) were killed in their own homes.
- In the resolved cases 71 women (53%) were murdered by a partner or ex-partner.
- National research carried out in 1999 found that between 1% and 6% of domestic violence offenders in Ireland receive a prison sentence.

budget 2013

Budget 2013 included a number of measures which impact on families and which may have a significant impact on women and children.

CHILDREN

Child Benefit rates have been reduced. It will be €130 per month for the 1st, 2nd and 3rd child from January 2013 and €140 per month for the 4th and subsequent children from January 2013 (announced in Budget 2012). It was also announced that by January 2014, the monthly rate for the 4th and subsequent children will be €130.

The Back to School Clothing and Footwear Allowance will reduce by €50 per child. This means that the Back to School Clothing and Footwear Allowance will reduce from €250 to €200 for children aged 12 - 17 or aged 18-22 in full-time education and from €150 to €100 for children aged 4 - 11 years in 2013.

Children Plus Initiative and Education
From 2013 on, €14 million per year will be allocated from the *Department of Social Protection* to the *Department of Children and Youth Affairs* to fund a joint initiative that will provide over 6,000 after-school childcare places for children in primary school. This will be targeted at children from low-income families whose parents are availing of an employment opportunity (who engage with the *Department of Social Protection's* INTREO service). It is envisaged that interested childcare providers, both community and commercial, will be paid a subsidy where a parent is referred by the *Department of Social Protection* under the initiative. The initiative will commence with a pilot scheme in early 2013.

An additional €2 million will be allocated to the **School Meals Programme**.

€2.5 million will be allocated to the *Department of Children and Youth Affairs* for its **Area Based Child Poverty Initiative** to further enhance targeted early-childcare and education supports for children in a number of disadvantaged areas. This initiative will be co-funded by the *Dept of Children and Youth Affairs* and philanthropic partners.

€5 million has been allocated to the *Department of Children and Youth Affairs* in 2013 to provide for a number of initiatives including a **new capital programme for**

Youth Cafes and other youth projects as well as schemes **funding play and recreation** and parent and toddler groups.

The new **Child and Family Support Agency** will be established in 2013. This will involve moving child welfare and protection services out of the HSE and creating a new statutory body which will encompass both the *National Educational Welfare Board* and the *Family Support Agency*.

The Department of Education and Skills will allocate €500,000 to tackle **bullying in schools**. The funding will be spent in line with the *Action Plan on Bullying* to be published shortly.

WOMEN

Taxation - For the first time, Maternity Benefit will be taxable from 1 July 2013 but the Universal Social Charge is not payable on it.

The age reductions in the **One-Parent Family Payment** which were due to apply from the beginning of 2013 and 2014 are being deferred to the beginning of July in each of those years. In addition, the period over which the transitional arrangements applying to existing recipients are to apply, will be extended from the end of 2014 to the beginning of July 2015. This change will provide more time for the creation of additional childcare places (see also *Children Plus Initiative* in the previous column). This provision requires legislation and is not yet in effect. (This measure was not announced in Budget 2013 - it was inserted into the *Social Welfare Bill, 2012*.)

The **earnings disregard for people working and getting One-Parent Family Payment** is being reduced to €110 per week (from €130). This change was announced in Budget 2012 and will apply to all recipients from January 2013.

CARERS

Many women are providing full-time care and while there are no changes to Carers Allowance or Carers Benefit, there was a **reduction in the annual Respite Care Grant** from €1,700 to €375

Further information on the above and how it may impact on you is available from West Cork Citizens Information Service, Wolfe Tone Square, Bantry, Tel: 0761 07 8390

Book Reviews

How he gets into her head, The Mind of the Male Intimate Abuser by Don Hennessy

Meet Don Hennessy and his colleagues as he tackles the serious topic of domestic abuse with humanity and curiosity. This book “How he gets into her head The Mind of the male Intimate Abuser” is an education on the darker sides of the human experience. The stories are based in Cork but the experiences explored with the pages are sadly universal. Don Hennessy works intimately with both the perpetrators and the victims of intimate partner abuse. His perspective and experiences allow him to illustrate vividly the skills used by the male abuser.

This book educates the reader to the sense of entitlement abusers have over their victims, the tactics they use to keep the cycle of violence going and create the climate of fear that allows the abuse to escalate.

This education within these pages creates a sense of social a responsible that will remain long after you finish the book.

The Woman who went to Bed for a Year by Sue Townsend

“The Woman who went to bed for a year” is written by Sue Townsend, Britain’s funniest writer for over thirty years. It is a hilarious novel that deconstructs modern family life and introduces us to a host of relatable characters who will make you feel.

One day Eva, a wife and mother, bolts the front door and goes to bed in the middle of the day. She is not ill. She is not tired. And most definitely she is not having an affair. She’s simply had as much as she can take. Why has Eva gone to bed? What’s keeping her there? How will her family get her out of it? What really happens when the person we love most in the world refuses to be the person we expect them to be? Who decides what happy is?

Sandra, a survivor, tells her story...

At my sixteenth birthday party I met my first ever boyfriend. Months later, completely out of the blue, he became violent. Hearing the scuffle my Dad came to my rescue, throwing him out of the house. It never happened again and eventually this relationship ran its course. Years later I found myself in a similar situation but this time *there was no-one there to protect me, I was all on my own.*

My Dad had been protecting me since the day my Mother had left home when I was eleven. He died of cancer when I was 27 years old and that heart break left me very vulnerable. It was a tough time, I also lost my job and my world seemed to be falling apart. Then a neighbour of my best friend began to pursue me. I was flattered, enjoying the attention and started to feel good about myself. Perhaps things were looking up. But the next three years weren’t the best of times, looking back nearly twenty years later, they were the darkest point of my life.

He was a charmer while he lured me in and suddenly he became my whole world. At first there were incidents; a bit too much drink, a bad temper spilling over and me being insensitive to something he had said. Just small episodes but they were real and they hurt. The apologies and regret became more infrequent. Having been unemployed he got a job which meant moving from London to Manchester and I followed him. He was after all my whole world.

In a new city I was even more alone and even more vulnerable. I lived on my own in quite a rough area while I was toyed with by

my best kept secret

this man who enjoyed my fear. The violence and controlling behaviour became worse. Everything was my fault because that’s what you end up believing. Incredibly during this time I had applied for and got a job. It was a great position involving occasional travel abroad and was my only escape during that dark period. Despite sharing a small office with two others within a much bigger IT department, no-one ever knew my predicament.

Carpet burns were brushed off as a fall and most other bruises were conveniently out of sight. I was never violently raped but refusing sex of any kind was not an option. The worse anybody ever thought was that I was anorexic. *I was constantly told I was fat despite being a normal size so my food intake was always monitored. It was all part of the control, my life wasn’t mine anymore.* Work was relief but when it was time to go home my heart sunk. Fuzzy headaches became normal as the stress of living a double life started taking its toll. All of this became my best kept secret.

Then we got married. This sounds bizarre as I write about it but I really thought things would get better and this man was still my whole world. He insisted on inviting my estranged family. I met my mother and grandparents for the first time in nearly twenty years. His charm offensive slipped a few times and my Nan worked out what was going on. She didn’t say anything but we looked at each other and nothing needed to be said. In hindsight this was the turning point and the beginning of the end.

I gradually started to look for help. Firstly I tried telling a friend but she had her own problems and didn’t want to listen. Then a visit to an Al-Anon meeting, where I just sat quietly and cried, feeling totally helpless. Next a more

determined effort to find a women’s refuge. The uniformed man at the police station, curt but kind, gave me the address of a local shelter. I found it but was turned away, they had no space for desperate women with children so to be fair what chance did I have. Going back home after attempting to get help was always so scary, knowing exactly what to expect. Feeling so alone and helpless, living on the streets or even working on the streets is only a step away when you are so low. Once you’ve been to such depths the judging of others becomes empathy and compassion.

Work finally ended up being my means of escape. While working away with a colleague, I was casually asked about life as a happily married woman and I blurted out the shocking truth. At last my secret was out and the relief was immense. I got the support I needed and within months I had left. The mental scars took a very long time to heal and I still have a fear of driving on motorways due to an angry incident.

I look back and all this feels like a lifetime ago. I have since raised a wonderful family and am a very proud mother. *Life is good and the horror of those nightmare years is firmly fixed in the past.* I came through it, now it’s finally the right time for me to help others to do the same.



support services *for* women

we're here
to help

If you - or someone you know
- think you need our help we're
offering you this card to cut out
and keep in your wallet for when
you get the chance or courage to
ring us. We've purposely made
it secret so you're in no danger if
you have it. Trust us, Trust yourself

Trust your heart

1800 203 136

cork

West Cork Women Against Violence Freephone 1800203 136

Women's Aid Freephone 800341 900

Cuanlee Refuge, Cork 021 427 7698

Legal Aid Board, Cork 021 455 1686 / 021 427 5998

Mná Feasa (Domestic Violence Project) 021 421 1757

OSS, Cork Freephone 1800 497 497
(Domestic Violence Resource Centre for men and women)

S.A.T.U. 021 492 6100

Sexual Violence Centre Freephone 1800 496 496

Domestic Violence Social Work 021 492 1728

Y.A.N.A. North Cork 022 53915

kerry

Kerry's Women's refuge and Support Services (Adapt) 066 712 9100

Open Door Network 066 718 5472

Kerry Rape & Sexual Abuse Centre Freephone 1800 633 333

Legal Aid Board 066 712 6900

Tralee Women's Resource Centre 066 712 0622

west cork citizens' information service

West Cork Citizens' Information Service can provide you with information,
advocacy and advice on all your rights and entitlements. The service is free,
confidential and independent. Open daily, please call for times.

The Square, Bantry, 076 107 8390

South Square, Macroom, 076 107 8430

CIS Outreach, Dunmanway every Wednesday 10am - 1pm

Legal Aid Board - monthly on 3rd Tuesday 10.30am - 4.30am

For an appointment with the Legal Aid Board please phone the Legal Aid Office on
021 455 1685

Free Legal Aid Clinic - monthly on 1st Tuesday 6pm - 7pm

For an appointment please contact West Cork Citizens' Information Service by
either dropping in or phoning 076 107 8390.

MABS outreach Clinic - Each Friday 10am - 11.30am

For an appointment please phone MABS on 023 885 5155.