



# West Cork Whisper

WEST CORK WOMEN AGAINST VIOLENCE PROJECT NEWSLETTER

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## legal access, children & abusive behaviours

Access is a term that is used to describe the level of contact a child is to have with a parent when one parent is no longer living in the family home. Arrangements for that parent to have access to the children of the relationship can be made either informally between the parents/partners, through a formalised agreement drawn up by solicitors, or through the courts where an access order can be made. Irish law rules that it is the right of every child to have a relationship with both parents and generally, access to both parents is beneficial to children. In deciding access, the court must have the child's welfare as its paramount consideration.

While family life is a positive experience for many children, it is also true that some children suffer enduring psychological trauma as a result of rejection, neglect or abuse by parent figures, prolonged separation from a parent in early childhood, parental loss or witnessing inter-parental conflict and violence. It is now recognised in child protection legislation and the policy of Children First that children experience negative effects by witnessing, or overhearing violence in the home. When domestic violence has occurred, the safety of the partner and the children becomes a critical issue. There is a growing debate about the wisdom or correctness of allowing access to children by someone guilty of domestic violence.

It is a child's right to see both parents and access by the non-custodial parent will only be denied if the court believes that it is not in the best interest of the child. The court can set out the time, place and duration of access visits and can order supervised access where another adult is present during visits if it considers it appropriate. However, it must be conceded that in most access applications in Ireland the court does not only 'not hear the child directly', neither does it hear the child 'indirectly' through experts (e.g. social workers or guardian ad litem) in the majority of cases.....

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Eilish O'Carroll (better known as Winnie McGoogan of Mrs Brown's Boys fame), guest speaker at the WCWAV AGM greets Jodie Curtis, a dedicated fan of Winnie and a young volunteer with Dunmanway Family Resource Centre where the AGM was held.

# john's story

I now know that my story is not uncommon; that there are numerous men and women who suffered in childhood as I suffered and who suffered as adults directly because of violence in their childhood homes.

When I was a kid I thought that what happened in my home was normal, later I realised that most of my friends weren't terrified of their fathers and I began to feel shame about who I was and where I came from.

As a family we were geographically isolated from the extended family and my dad ensured that we remained socially isolated by not allowing my mum to have her own friends. My feelings are still very mixed about my dad because whilst he was terrifying and irrational when drinking, he could be great when sober, and was always very contrite after a bad 'episode'; and we loved him too.

Home life was always chaotic and unpredictable; my poor mum tried her best to keep things together but my dad always blamed her, or us, or the dog, when things didn't go the way he wanted them to. There was no such thing as an accident in his world – someone always had to be to blame and if they were to blame they had to be punished. So, we saw and heard our mum being beaten and we were beaten. This was in the sixties and there was nowhere for abused women to go for help then. The authorities didn't get involved in what were viewed as 'domestics'.

The impact on me of witnessing the physical and psychological violence inflicted on my mother and experiencing the same was enormous. I think that I was in a whirlwind of fear and anger most of the time; I had no impulse control and didn't consider the consequences of my actions. I began getting into trouble at primary school, being disruptive and breaking the rules, which culminated in me starting a fire in the school, and the police got involved - I was 7. My friends were the 'outsiders' like me; who were probably also experiencing violence at home. I started truanting from secondary school, wandering the streets, shoplifting and vandalising property. At 13 I was drinking and smoking regularly and then was introduced to drugs and so began a 30 year relationship with cannabis

and alcohol which short-circuited any motivation I might have had to succeed and added paranoia to my problems.

School was a place I went to for escape from the home situation but I was so scattered emotionally that I couldn't learn anything much and left at 15 with no qualifications. I thought I was thick and my dad lost no opportunity to tell me I was too.

I was very fortunate to get a plumbing apprenticeship and through that I discovered I had a real talent for making things and building, but still couldn't really make anything of my life. I suffered crippling depression and would withdraw to bed for weeks at a time and then when I was 'good' I would work all day long 7 days a week. I was constantly anxious and my drug dependency increased this. I continued to drink heavily which resulted in several drink-driving convictions, loss of my licence and then being caught drunk-driving whilst banned. There was no balance or order in my life whatsoever.

In my early 20s I got married and we had 2 sons very quickly. I had promised myself that I would never be like my father but I found myself acting just like him; blaming my wife for anything that went wrong and then hitting her. I was always very contrite after the event, promising it wouldn't happen again, but it always did. So, when my older son was 5 my wife asked me to leave the family home because of my behaviour, which I did as I had become very fearful that I might hurt my children.

That was more than 20 years ago and I have had a lot of therapy since then. It has taken many years and some very deep lows but I understand myself now and know that I am a good person and that the bad things I did were because I was exposed to the trauma of seeing my mother harmed and being harmed myself, by the person who should have protected us from harm - my father.

I am an intelligent and skilled man but due to the impact on my emotional development of violence in my childhood home I haven't and now won't achieve my full potential and I am not alone in this loss.

Mothers and children are experiencing violence in their homes every day in towns and villages throughout Ireland and the emotional cost on a personal level and for our society is huge. The family is the building block of our society and if it can't nurture and protect its most vulnerable members then how can our society be said to function properly?

One man tells his tale of how growing up with an abusive father has affected his whole life.

## The Impact of Domestic Violence on Children

*"Violence in the home is one of the most pervasive human rights challenges of our time."*

Behind Closed Doors - The Impact of Domestic Violence on Children UNICEF

Domestic violence is more prevalent in homes with young children than those with older children.

Children need a home where they feel safe and comfortable, parents who love and look after them (and each other) and a routine which they can depend upon. If these simple requirements are in place children can grow and develop healthily on every level.

Children exposed to violence in the home, being abused themselves, witnessing abuse and/or hearing it, are affected very negatively. The younger a child is when experiencing violence the more profound the impact on their development. A child's very existence is dependent upon its mother's wellbeing and the trauma of seeing her under attack is hugely damaging emotionally and psychologically to the child. The emotional stress caused by such a toxic environment can lead to a stunting of the young child's developing abilities, causing developmental delays in language, toilet training, manual dexterity along with generalised anxiety. This manifests as bed-wetting, anxiety, psychosomatic illnesses, immature behaviour and fearfulness as the child grows. The impact of the early developmental damage shows when the child starts school, where they find the basic building blocks of learning (reading, writing and numeracy) very difficult and fitting in socially much harder than children from non-violent homes. School becomes a problem too and is increasingly difficult for them, they learn to fail which further reduces their sense of self-esteem and become early school leavers. As adolescents, these children are more susceptible to risky and delinquent behaviour, juvenile pregnancy, depression, suicidal tendencies, aggressive behaviour and drug and alcohol abuse.

These early developmental losses don't heal with time. The damage can be so great that as adults these children struggle to survive, can't form good relationships, can't hold down jobs, suffer from mental health problems and are also more aggressive and violent themselves than adults who grew up in non-violent homes. The prison system is full of people who experienced violence in their homes as children and who lost out in the lottery of life due to the damage done to them emotionally. Unfortunately the patterns of behaviour learned in violent childhood homes are sometimes repeated by adult survivors of domestic violence. Children living with domestic violence are subject to emotional and psychological effects and damage which can be life-changing and life-long.

It is now becoming evident in the brain scans of children who are exposed to early childhood emotional / physical neglect and violence in the home, that there are physical brain changes which are not present in the brains of children who have not experienced abuse

Information for this article is taken from: Behind Closed Doors - The Impact of Domestic Violence on Children, Unicef and The Body Shop, 2006; Brown, Brett V., and Sharon Bzostek, 'Violence in the Lives of Children', Cross Currents, Issue 1, Child Trends DataBank, August 2003; Frontiers in Human Neuroscience, 2012:6:52.

Mental Health is more than an absence of mental illness, mental health influences how we think and feel about ourselves and others and how we interpret events.

## THE WELLNESS YOUTH PROJECT

### The Wellness Youth Project has two main aims:

- To raise awareness of what constitutes mental wellbeing and how to maintain it.
- To reduce the stigma surrounding mental distress through positive promotion of mental health

West Cork Women Against Violence Project is delighted to have been asked to be part of this innovative new project. A pilot programme for Transition Year students in two local secondary schools in West Cork, Coláiste Na Toirbhirte, Bandon and Sacred Heart Secondary, Clonakilty will take place during the first term of the academic year 2014/2015.

As part of the school programme, West Cork Women Against Violence will deliver two sessions to students on domestic violence and abusive relationships.

Living with Domestic Violence can have devastating impact on mental health. It is now well accepted that abuse (both in childhood and in adult life) is often the main factor in the development of depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorders.

### The aim of the WCWAV sessions is:

- To help students develop their understanding of what makes a safe, non-abusive relationship
- Help identify controlling and abusive behaviours.
- Learn about the supports available to individuals living with domestic abuse and especially services for young people.

For more information on the Wellness Youth Project please contact one of the following people:

Caroline Hurley  
cazy23@eircom.net tel: (087) 9280485

Adrienne Adams  
adrienneadams@hse.ie tel: ((087) 6599526

Sandra Goldhawk  
sandra.goldhawk@hse.ie tel: ((086) 7916300

## legal access, children & abusive behaviours

We know from the experiences of many of our clients that access is a system where the abuser can transfer the dynamic of power and control into his right to have access to the children. We see a lot of instances where the court system accommodates that continued abuse because of its failure to understand the nature of abusive relationships. In some cases access is only sought as an opportunity to 'get at' the other parent or to use access to the child to glean information about the other parent. The handover at access of the child from one parent to another can also be a flashpoint where physical or verbal abuse can occur in front of the children. Women recount numerous difficulties where the abuser uses the phone to harass, criticise and intimidate her using the excuse that he is only trying to organise access times. He can systematically use differing statements (e.g.: regarding the clothes children are wearing, activities children are attending, homework issues) to continually criticise the woman's parenting. He can dictate or demand alterations to access times with very short notice or may not show up at the allocated time, thus creating upset for the children, and stress on the mother as she is the one who is left trying to explain to them why access did not occur.

Some access regimes put the child in a very difficult 'middle' position. Some children deal with this by choosing sides. The child can become totally alienated from the non-custodial parent or angry at the parent at home blaming them for the absence of the other parent. Sometimes, children refuse to go on an access visit or become sick with non-specific stomach or headaches. This can be their way to manage the tension surrounding access visits by trying to avoid them. It has also been suggested in court that the custodial parent has 'poisoned' the child against the absent parent. Some children react to the difficulties in access by re-starting old behaviour patterns that may have been resolved at the time of separation (like bed-wetting, sleeping problems, aggression) and are a good indicator of a child's distress. However, difficulties can arise for the custodial parent as failure to comply with an access order is an offence. This is an issue that we hear of on a daily basis and we work to support clients who are experiencing these difficulties.

Where access becomes abusive rather than child centred, further applications can be made to court at any stage to address the issue or to change the order.

# supports for children and young people

If you are ever in danger

immediately contact an adult whom you trust

or call the Guards on 999

## childline

**FREEPHONE**

**1800 66 66 66**

(24 hours a day, 7 days a week)

**TEXT SUPPORT** Teentext is a national one to one real time text service for young people in Ireland. To register text the word "Talk" to 50101.

**AUTOMATED TEXT** A 24 hour automated service that supports children by providing a free text support service.

A young person can get support on a variety of issues including pregnancy, suicide facts of life etc. Text "List" to 50101.

**WEB BASED SUPPORT** The childline website offers support and information to young people. On the website young people can access information on a variety of support topics as well as posting messages-like an email. Log on to

[www.childline.ie](http://www.childline.ie)

**ONE TO ONE LIVE CHAT** There online service also offers one to one live chat from 2pm-10pm every day. Log on to

[www.childline.ie](http://www.childline.ie)

## teen-line ireland

Teen-Line Ireland is a free-phone service that provides listening support to teenagers aged 13-19. Teen-Line Ireland is open every day of the week from 8pm to 11pm and Wednesdays from 4pm to 11pm.

Phone: 1 800 833 634  
Email: [info@teenline.ie](mailto:info@teenline.ie)  
[www.teenline.ie/](http://www.teenline.ie/)

## let someone know

Let Someone Know is an interactive and fun website developed by the HSE in conjunction with the National Office of Suicide Prevention (NOSP) to help you understand more about what's getting you down and find various ways to help.

[www.letsomeoneknow.ie](http://www.letsomeoneknow.ie)

## LGBT national helpline

The LGBT Helpline is a non-judgmental and confidential service providing listening, support and information to lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people, their family and friends, and to those who are questioning if they might be LGBT. The National LGBT Helpline service is provided by a network of trained volunteers from a number of local LGBT helplines.

LGBT Helpline: 1890 929 539  
[www.lgbt.ie](http://www.lgbt.ie)

## spunout.ie

SpunOut.ie is an independent, youth powered national charity working to empower young people to create personal and social change. The website carries a range of health information for young people, including mental health, sexual health, exam stress and general lifestyle information. SpunOut.ie offers a unique platform for youth empowerment.

[www.spunout.ie](http://www.spunout.ie)

## EPIC Empowering People in Care

(formerly IAYPIC) is an independent association that works throughout the Republic of Ireland, with and for children and young people who are currently living in care or have had an experience of living in care.

[www.epiconline.ie](http://www.epiconline.ie)

## social work department west cork

Child and Family Agency,  
Duty Social Work Department,  
Coolnagarrane, Skibbereen,  
Co. Cork.  
tel: 028 40447,  
Monday-Friday





dirty ticket

Slapped square in the jaw with his reason,  
He's cat-claw mean to fight  
You strap on silk armour for battle  
He shreds it each creeping night

The children are too dirty  
Or too noisy  
Or not his  
You flip your mind and turn the stones  
To see some sense in this.

Meanwhile take care  
Don't slam a door  
Or close it just too slow  
You'll face fresh day  
With one or more  
Brain stain that just won't go

Your bed too tiresome early?  
When he's still unspoken needs?  
Tomorrow with new strength to rise  
He'll plant new festering seeds

His tumour deep inside you  
Grows twisted, gnarled, unstable  
The shoots eat all good flesh from bones  
Your head drops to the table

Back he'll march to tell you hard  
That table now needs cleaning  
Your tears have made a mess of all  
Self-pity leaves him steaming

This scrapes your neck of frightened hair  
Puts hot fingers down your throat  
As you wonder why you ever bought  
A dirty ticket for this boat

But you can turn the table  
You can mend the kids  
You can slam the door on him  
Leave his life on the skids

You'll have a bed somewhere someday  
Where you sleep with both eyes shut  
Build the roots inside yourself again  
When his cancer has been cut

But take your time  
Take friends  
Take wine  
Take any help that fits  
And work your way to freedom  
Tear that ticket into bits.

Jean Hatcher

## How we can support **you** when there is a child protection issue

West Cork Women Against Violence Project is a locally-based, independent confidential listening and information service for women seeking help and information about how to manage living in or wanting to leave domestic violence situations. Our trained staff are here to listen and support you non-judgementally. Practical help and information on legal, financial and housing issues will be provided and your options explored in order to empower you to make the decision that feels right for you. Callers receive confidential support from our staff who have an in-depth knowledge of the complexity of abusive relationships.

### New Communities Partnership migrant family support service

We are a new communities support group who assist families experiencing childcare protection interventions. This is through a one to one support, listening and information service. We are a non judgemental, confidential and free service. Families can visit our office in Cork city or we can offer outreach and attend external meetings where appropriate.

NEW COMMUNITIES PARTNERSHIP 107 Shandon Street, Cork  
TELEPHONE: 021 23 99 910 MOBILE: 087 9605589  
E MAIL: ncpcork@gmail.com WWW.newcommunities.ie

"An overview of research studies found that in 30-66% of cases, the same perpetrator is abusing both the mother and the children".

[Edleson, J., *Children's witnessing of adult domestic violence*, *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, vol. 14. 839-870, 1999].

As part of the ongoing campaign of emotional abuse and eroding of a woman's self-worth, a woman may experience continuing criticisms about her parenting abilities from her abusive partner. A tactic sometimes employed by an abuser is the threat to involve social services in their lives, instilling in her a belief that the children will be placed in care as she is such an unfit mother. Women sometimes find it difficult to be believed by people or agencies that are in a position to help them, specifically when trying to explain the impact of emotional abuse and the implication behind a particular threat. This can make it harder to reach out and can prevent a woman from accessing her rights, including legal protection, housing and financial support. Continued intimidation results in a woman's reluctance to disclose what is happening in her life due to possible repercussions – a heightened violence to herself or the children or where she feels judged or blamed.

Frequently, children living in such a relationship observe or may become embroiled in the dynamics of the violent relationship. As a domestic violence service we are legally bound to follow Children First guidelines around the welfare of children. When we receive a disclosure of a child being exposed to or at risk from an abusive parent then we can only offer limited confidentiality as it becomes clear that this is a child protection issue. Callers are informed of this limitation when they first call and then often make a decision as to how much they tell us. Many women



go on to disclose to us minor or serious incidents of harm to children. In this instance, we provide a high level of emotional support and focus on safety planning. From a domestic violence perspective, we believe that Woman Protection Equals Child Protection and that if support for the woman is provided effectively, then children will be supported and kept safe.

We can assist you to make a supported referral or we can make a referral on your behalf to the Child and Family agency and we can support you throughout this process

The climate of fear that is created around social workers is incorrect as these professionals are best placed to name and support you in violent situations. A child protection referral does NOT mean that your children will be taken off you, rather that the domestic violence will be taken seriously as it can put children at risk of harm. The assessments that are carried out are prioritised to keep children safe. They are designed to explore the key strengths and identify the weaknesses of the whole family unit but the key aim is to work with you to improve the situation for your children and you.

At any stage where someone has knowledge of a child being at risk whilst in a domestic violence situation, you can phone our local Child and Family Agency on 028 – 40447 and ask to speak with the duty social worker. We can also offer support to that person in how best to manage the situation.

"Listening to Children- children's stories of domestic violence" (National Children's Strategy Research Series, 2007) highlights the harm to children when children witness and are exposed to violence in the home. Ongoing research is being done in this area.

Do what  
you can,  
with what  
you have,  
where  
you are.

THEODORE ROOSEVELT

# support services for women

## cork

West Cork Women Against Violence ..... Freephone 1800 203 136

Cuanlee Refuge, Cork.....021 427 7698

Free Legal Aid Clinic ..... Locall 1890 350 259  
Information and referral

IRD Duhallow Domestic Violence Support.....Helpline 087 7733 337  
from Monday to Saturday 10am - 10 pm or office at 029 60633

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

Kerry Rape & Sexual Abuse Centre..... Freephone 1800 633 333

Legal Aid Board .....066 712 6900

Tralee Women's Resource Centre.....066 712 0622

## national

Women's Aid ..... Freephone 1800 341 900

## 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.

Dear West Cork Women Against Violence,  
Today we were discussing what great work you do in sharing information about your service, however it came to our attention that the title "Whisper" of your newsletter seems to be outdated and sends a mixed message. Do you think this is something you could consider addressing?

Thank you,  
Skibbereen Community & Family Resource  
Centre Women's Group

Thank you Skibbereen Women's Group for that feedback and for starting off a discussion here among our staff and Board members too. We would really like to hear what others think about the name of our newsletter and invite you to comment and offer suggestions for an alternative title. Perhaps you might also like to think of a new name for West Cork Women Against Violence which is quite a mouthful to say when answering the phones. So let's hear more of your ideas and views on this and any other related subject.-

**Marie Mulholland, Co-ordinator,**  
West Cork Women Against Violence

## we're here to help

If you - or someone you know - think we could 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 discreet so only you will know what it is about. Trust us, Trust yourself

**We are here to  
support you.**

**1800 203 136**

West Cork Women Against Violence Project, Harbour View, Bantry, Co. Cork  
www.westcorkwomensproject.ie email: admin@westcorkwomensproject.ie