



# West Cork Whisper

WEST CORK WOMEN AGAINST VIOLENCE PROJECT NEWSLETTER

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## after the holidays

We are all back into our routines now from the Christmas and New Year period. People everywhere are feeling the impacts of the money spent over that period and dreading the bills coming in the door. As support workers, we are often asked whether incidents of domestic violence are worse or more frequent during this period. The extra pressures which are placed on women and their families can exacerbate domestic violence incidents due to the amount of time where everyone is together. The extra stress of the festive period triggers more frequent and at times more severe abuse at home, including emotional abuse of children. Christmas can be a time when fear, intimidation, casual cruelty and sudden flashes of violence are directed towards women and their children. Violent partners can use the holidays to threaten the wellbeing of children, using them as pawns in control and intimidation, during what people hope will be a happy time.

While we know from our contact with women that the focus for those in domestic violence situations is around accessing support to get through the holiday time rather than active ways to escape the violence. Many women work very hard to maintain the home as a festive space for children, despite ongoing and increasing abuse, so that the children can have as positive an experience as possible.

The tactics used in abusive relationships are diverse and vary from physical violence, emotional / psychological torment, financial and sexual abuse. Some women may experience direct violence while others experience differing combinations of abuse. We know that many women find it very difficult to recognise an abusive relationship because denial and minimising are strategies used to enable them to survive difficult situations.

Domestic violence is an ongoing pattern which can increase during the holiday season. It occurs during periods of recession as it also did during the Celtic Tiger. However, the possibility of redundancies, part-time work and long-term retirement, means that abusive men will be at home more and therefore the abuse may be more frequent. Increased financial pressure, due to pay cuts or unemployment, can escalate stress. They may also lead to the greater use of alcohol and other substances. These can act as dis-inhibitors and may lead to an increase in abuse and its severity.

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### CONTACT US

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**1800 203 136**

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TELEPHONE  
027 53847**



## after the holidays continued

**Economic difficulties can be used as an excuse to legitimise his behaviour but it doesn't cause it - men choose to use the violence in their close relationships to ensure control is maintained.**

The difficulties in leaving are exacerbated by the use of financial abuse by a controlling boyfriend, husband or partner. It is especially hard to recognise financial abuse. The perception is that a household involves all income being put into the pot in order to meet payments and ensure a reasonable quality of life. Financial abuse on the other hand, can range from being very subtle to extremely controlling. Some examples of this type of financial abuse include:

- Women forced or coerced to pay abusers' debt. Abuser forges their name to a debt without their knowledge.
- Women having to account for every cent they spend.
- Women forced to give all their wages to partners.
- Women's belongings being sold without their consent.
- Women not being given money to buy essentials for themselves and their children including food and medication.
- Abuser forcing women to put her benefits in his name and not giving her any money.
- Abuser not contributing anything to household expense, when they can afford to do so.
- Abuser withholding maintenance and lying about their income to the Courts.
- Abuser jeopardising women's employment.
- Women being coerced into signing for mortgages / debt.

Women living in abusive situations tell us that their ability to escape domestic violence is being hampered by the recession. They fear making decisions to leave the violence because of the risk of greater poverty, losing their home and the effect all of this will have on their children. Various legislative and policy changes enacted in social welfare eligibility and levels of benefits are making it increasingly difficult to gain access to alternative housing, rent allowance and rent supplement. Hence, it is even more important that women can get the emotional resources to maintain their own and their children's safety during these times and the support and understanding from statutory services and government agencies to provide for their needs. At West Cork Women Against Violence we can give emotional support and practical information to help a woman cope with, or change a domestic violence situation.



## International Women's Day

~ March 8 ~  
*Every Woman  
Makes a Difference*

The origin of International Women's Day (IWD) is drawn from more than one historical event and began as an acknowledgement of women's struggle to make their workplaces better. Created out of protest and political action, it is a symbol for all those who honour women's struggles to improve their lives. Originally the day of remembrance symbolised the efforts to end appalling working conditions endured by women in sweat shops.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, many women in industrially-developing countries entered the labour force taking jobs with low wages, poor working conditions and little or no chance of improvement. Such conditions led to industrial disputes, involving both unionised and non-unionised women workers. It was their struggle that created the global impetus for an International Women's Day.

Today, it is also seen as a day of celebration of women, all that they do, and the accomplishments they have made. Women and men celebrate International Women's Day to honour those who began the struggle and those who continue to work for change and recognition of all efforts to improve the lives of women, both locally and globally.

## Changes to funding for Domestic Violence Services

Major changes are taking place in the funding of domestic violence (DV) services in Ireland, including those provided by West Cork Women Against Violence.

In January 2014, responsibility for funding domestic and sexual violence services such as rape crisis centres, passed from the HSE to the new child and family agency, Tusla.

Tusla is the primary agency for Child Protection and as part of that remit, acknowledges the profound impact on children who are living in families where there is domestic abuse. Children, as we have written about here in Whisper, (most recently in Issue no. 57) do not have to be direct victims of the abuse, but in witnessing and living with it, children are at emotional and psychological risk.

Initially, all DV organisations received their funding as normal this time last year from Tusla because the new agency was still in the process of organising itself. However, in the last few months of 2014, Tusla has made it known that it expects to make changes to domestic violence services and future funding of those services will be conditional on acceptance of their changes. Understandably, there are concerns throughout the DV sector as to the impact of those changes, on service provision and most importantly on those who need the services.

Currently, there are 44 DV organisations providing support and refuge services throughout Ireland, 21 of these provide refuges. All of those services are staffed by highly trained personnel and volunteers with exceptional levels of experience in supporting those who live with domestic abuse. Nevertheless, many of the organisations are staffed by only part-time workers; it is not unusual for a DV organisation covering an entire county to have only 1-2 part-time staff and a few volunteers because funding has been so severely cut back over the years of the recession (although it was never adequate to begin with); some of you may also have read or heard about pending closures of refuges due

to lack of funding or severe restrictions on refuge services for women because there is not enough funds to ensure running costs or maintain safe staffing levels.

Despite the number of DV organisations in the State, there are only 141 family units for short-term emergency accommodation throughout the 21 refuges. This is a third of the recommended minimum number in other EU States. Just over 2,000 women and 2,700 children spent between three days to seven months at the refuge centres in 2013, the last year for which statistics were available.

But there were close to 4,000 requests made by women seeking emergency shelter the same year, meaning that hundreds of women, who were turned away, were potentially placed in danger by being forced to remain in their homes with abusive partners.

Tusla has made it clear that there will be no increase in funding for the sector and that they aim to centralise services which will affect the autonomy and community-owned origins of many services, including our own. The agency wants to make it possible for larger NGOs or even private sector organisations to take over administration for domestic violence services. This would be extremely detrimental to DV services which are client-centred and based on a sound knowledge of the gender power relations which cause domestic violence. In addition, because of Tusla's laudable emphasis on child protection, it is the children of abusive relationships which are their primary focus. However, DV organisations operate on the basis that "if the mother is protected the children are protected." (Also, we regularly work with significant numbers of women who do not have children or whose children are now adult and no longer at home).

Ours is a different approach to that of Tusla's and one which does not further victimise or penalise abused women for the impact on their children of living with an abusive male partner.

DV services throughout the State are currently engaged in negotiations with Tusla to find a way through the present differences in how both sides view the structure, philosophy and principles of how the service should be delivered. West Cork Women Against Violence is part of that effort and we will be working hard in 2015 to ensure that women and children who seek out and use our service are given the highest levels of understanding and support and we will also be working at all levels to ensure the security and continuity of DV services in Ireland and most particularly in West Cork.

*"I was heart broken, scared, I had a lot of anxiety, I was worried, I felt weak and I had no idea how I was ever going to come up with the strength. But I just closed my eyes and took a blind leap. I knew I had to get out of there."* DOMESTIC VIOLENCE SURVIVOR



# MAKING CHANges

If you made resolutions at the beginning of January but have struggled with keeping them you are not alone in that. Or maybe there are changes you've been considering making but you haven't had the confidence to start. Every day, we as support workers hear the levels of resilience in women and their capacity to make positive changes despite huge obstacles. But of course big changes can be hard to make, especially when you are dealing with the unpredictability and trauma of domestic violence.

So, a helpful thing can be to **find one small thing that you can change**, or one small habit you could start which would make your life a small bit easier. When we try to take on big changes it's easy to get overwhelmed and then to feel disheartened if we don't succeed. But if you can make a small change successfully it will increase self-esteem and empower you to make further changes, and can lead to making bigger changes.

**Look for the positives in your day.** We often get caught in a negative thought pattern and that's a hard place to make good habits or changes from. Studies show that consciously focusing on the good things in our lives helps to increase our positive emotions. Good things happen even on the worst days. Sometimes they can be very small like finding enjoyment in seeing a flower bud coming out, or having five minutes to yourself for a cuppa. Take a few minutes at the end of each day to keep a 'gratitude journal', writing down three things from the day that you enjoyed or were grateful for and the reason you thought they were good. This isn't about negating the hard parts of the day but just to find some happier things to think about too.

There's no question that domestic violence has a huge impact on women's self-esteem. But women living with DV also have huge levels of resilience. Resilience according to the dictionary is 'strength', 'adaptability' and 'hardiness'.

Psychologists say that how we think can have a great impact on our ability to cope, on our physical health and on our resilience. Negative thinking, such as thinking everything is our fault and can't be changed, leads to us feeling hopeless and lowers our strengths. The good news is that we can improve the levels of our **'resilient thinking'**. By looking at external factors when things go wrong rather than just blaming ourselves; by knowing that one problem is just one thing and tomorrow can be better; in believing that when one part of life is difficult it doesn't effect your abilities in the rest of your life. So resilience thinking can help you feel more positive and thereby help you make the changes you want to make.

If you are worrying about something it can help to **distract yourself** from those worries, even if it's just for a few minutes. We think that thinking about a problem will lead to a solution but often it's just the opposite, we get stuck in the worrying.

When we take a break from thinking about it a solution may come on its own, and if not at least you've had a short rest from worrying. When we have problems, it is very easy to feel isolated – sometimes the isolation is imposed on us by someone else. Good relationships and friendships are really important for our wellbeing and resilience. **Getting help** with making changes can be very helpful both for the actual support and for the connection that you strengthen with the person you're asking. Asking for help can be as simple as asking them to listen, or asking them to share their experience with you, or perhaps asking them to join you in making a change – maybe someone to do a twenty minute daily walk with or someone to share your gratitude journal with.

Being in a domestic violent relationship means that the period of calm and your opportunity for change is less than it might be for other people. All change is possible but if you are at

all concerned about your safety please do call us to talk to a support worker about ensuring your safety remains a priority. If you are in a place where you feel you need to make changes in your own life then get support for making those changes by calling us on our contact numbers.

**FREEPHONE  
HELPLINE  
1800 203 136**

staffed Tuesdays  
10am to 4pm and other  
weekdays when possible

**OFFICE  
TELEPHONE  
027 53847**

9.00 am to 5.30 pm  
most weekdays



The Sarah Walker Gallery in Castletownbere will host *Naming Baby* a play with domestic violence as its central theme.

The play, written by Jennifer Russell, directed by Julie Aldridge, has a central character reclaiming herself after an abusive relationship.

**DATE:** 6th, 7th & 8th February  
**TIME:** 8pm each evening.







Have you considered becoming a volunteer?

We are looking for a social media savvy someone to join our team!

We need someone to update our facebook page and our website 'News' page.

The volunteer position would only take a few hours a week of your time and is very flexible.

Please contact us at [admin@westcorkwomensproject.ie](mailto:admin@westcorkwomensproject.ie) if you think you can help.

Thank you

*"You don't always need a plan. Sometimes you just need to breathe, trust, let go and see what happens."*

MANDY HALE

# 16 days of action

The 16 days of action to end violence against women is a global campaign which takes place every year between November 26<sup>th</sup> and December 10<sup>th</sup>. For 2014, we at West Cork Women Against Violence focused on raising awareness by giving small gifts and collecting donations. We gave sweets that had a message of 'love should be sweet', apples that said 'stop the bruising' and chocolate coins that said 'respect is free'.

We coordinated with local SuperValu to ensure we reached as many people as possible and Musgraves kindly donated the apples.

**WE WANT TO SAY A BIG THANK YOU ALL THE VOLUNTEERS WHO HELPED OUT AT DUNMANWAY, SKIBBEREEN, CASTLETOWNBERE, BANTRY AND BANDON. WITHOUT YOUR HELP THIS CAMPAIGN WOULD NOT HAVE HAPPENED.**

**WE KNOW IT WILL MAKE A DIFFERENCE.**

My personal experience volunteering at Castletownbere was very rewarding. I was a bit nervous, hoping my local community would welcome my activism for such an important cause. I had the help of a transition year student and a friend. The colour of this years' campaign was orange so we decorated our table, we were well briefed and were ready in the cold to raise awareness. The community was so welcoming and responsive. It was a great opportunity to explain all the supports that West Cork Women Against Violence offer. We were invited to the family support and community wellbeing project where Noel Harrington TD released balloons and spoke about the great work being done by grass roots organization. Catherine and her team at the family support project provided soup and bread and also two lovely volunteers that gave us a lunch break. It was a very rewarding experience and people were so kind and generous, thank you to all who contributed.

Frances



16 Days of Action - Bandon



16 Days of Action - Castletownbere



16 Days of Action - Skibbereen

16 Days of Action - Dunmanway

**Many thanks to all those who donated to our collection. We raised a total of €1,160**

*A House  
where a woman is  
UNSAFE  
is not  
a House*  
IBERIAN WOMAN



## FEMINISM

"Feminism has fought no wars.  
It has killed no opponents.  
It has set up no concentration  
camps, starved no enemies,  
practiced no cruelties.

Its battles have been for education,  
for the vote, for better working  
conditions...for safety on the streets...  
for child care, for social welfare...for  
rape crisis centers, women's refuges,  
reforms in the law.

If someone says, "Oh, I'm not a  
feminist," I ask, "Why, what's your  
problem?" "

*Quote from Dale Spender, Australian  
scholar, teacher, writer and consultant.*

## 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

# 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.

West Cork Women Against Violence Project, Harbour View, Bantry, Co. Cork  
[www.westcorkwomensproject.ie](http://www.westcorkwomensproject.ie) email: [admin@westcorkwomensproject.ie](mailto:admin@westcorkwomensproject.ie)