



Shadow Pandemic

Back in April, with 90 countries in lockdown, with four billion people sheltering in their homes from the global contagion of COVID-19, the UN referred to the protective measures as bringing another deadly danger. They referred to a **growing shadow pandemic of violence against women.**

Isolation is a key factor in terms of the power and control tactics used by abusers, but what happened during COVID-19 lockdown was that women living in situations of domestic violence were even more isolated than usual, completely separated from the people and resources that can best help them. It was a perfect storm for controlling, violent behaviour behind closed doors. They were trapped within their own homes, no longer able to reach out to their support systems.



The women who are coming forward are more traumatised than before

Many Domestic abuse helplines (WCWAV included) went eerily silent when COVID-19 restrictions were first introduced. It was difficult for women to make a call safely. So, they used their better judgement and they didn't call. Simple as that ...At least initially.

But like pressure building in a pressure cooker-or a weather system gathering momentum over time there came a point when they had no choice but to make a call. And collectively that time seemed to come by about May when Domestic Abuse services became extremely busy.

An increase in the severity of cases reported was noted by Safe Ireland, as well as an increase in serious reports of physical assault and rape. In May, Sharon O Halloran, CEO of Safe Ireland said: "What we are hearing from services is that women who are coming forward are more traumatised than before". She has referred to the pandemic as having 'horrendous outcomes' for women and children and to it causing 'untold trauma'.

West Cork Women Against Violence supported 108 women, with over 820 contacts, from April to July - a 56% increase on the same period last year. We also provided almost 50 hours of accompaniments.

Safe Ireland also noted a change in the demographics of those seeking help. While there has been a decrease in women with children looking for help, there was an increase in cases involving women without children and an increase in abuse of older women by their adult sons.

Women's Aid supported callers on over 6,500 occasions from late March to end of June 2020, which was a 43% increase on the same period last year. The organisation also saw a huge spike (+71%) in traffic to its website during this period and a steady increase in contacts to its new National Helpline Instant Messaging Support Service over the lockdown for April and May.

Sarah Benson of Women's Aid shared that: "Women told us that their partners were using the lockdown restrictions as an excuse not to leave after they had been violent. When abusers couldn't get access to their families, they shifted to digitally abusing women through messages, phone calls and video calls. For women who had previously experienced abuse, the restrictions that the Government placed on movement prompted painful memories of being abused and controlled. Women with underlying health issues reported that their partners were not adhering to Covid-19 restrictions deliberately, and some were effectively weaponizing the virus by coughing or spitting on women."

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There was a 25% increase in calls to Gardai in April and May, when almost 5,600 incidents were disclosed. This was in comparison with April and May 2019. The Gardai established 'Operation Faoiseamh' to support victims of domestic violence. This was a proactive police operation to reach out to individuals who had previously reported domestic violence.

GPs also saw an increase in patients disclosing abuse.

Social distancing regulations meant that refuge capacity was reduced. Although not ideal, hotels and Air BnB's were used in emergency situations.

A national public awareness campaign 'Still here' was launched, additional funding for domestic violence organisations was provided. The Courts Service prioritised domestic violence and childcare cases as did the Legal Aid Board. The Legal Aid Board set up a helpline to assist victims of domestic violence.

Although we are the other side of lockdown, many restrictions remain in place and we are moving between the levels identified by the government roadmap. Dublin is currently at level 3 and the rest of the country at level 2. Women's Aid are now 'calling on the Government to follow through on its commitments to audit and improve existing state responses to domestic and sexual violence infrastructure, including co-ordination; to fully resource specialist services; prioritise Family Law Court reform; to commit to a victim-centred and trauma-informed reform of the Criminal Justice System's response to domestic and sexual violence and to legislate effectively to tackle the growing problem of online abuse'.

We of course echo this request.

Shadow Pandemic



our lockdown stories



I've always been a lover of nature and although very much an amateur my most enjoyable past time is birdwatching. My daily 4k walks in the first weeks of Lockdown (a loop walk of 2k and back again), along meandering stretches of rural lanes and boreens provided a regular dose of feelgood each morning and sometimes twice a day as the beautiful Spring weather began to take hold. I watched the progress of grey and yellow wagtails and dippers build their nests at the edge of the local stream, a family of three buzzards regularly circle over nearby rocky outcrops and come to rest on the telegraph poles along our immediate boreen. Warblers, robins, blackbirds, chiff chaffs and stonechats provided the soundtrack on each walk. The swallows arrived in late April.. and then the phones started ringing.

Marie



When it became apparent how real Covid-19 was I realised how in many ways it would seriously impact our service. One of the key parts of my role as a support worker is assisting women to flee their home due to the abuse they are suffering. This was never an easy process from a practical standpoint given there is one refuge in Cork city for the whole county and the alternative is entering homelessness. With the Covid-19 outbreak options they became nearly non-existent. Refuges were unable to take referrals for health & safety reasons and hotels/B&B's previously used for homelessness were closed due to the pandemic. My biggest concern was that domestic violence survivors would feel they had no options to leave and they would remain in potential life-threatening situations. Also, as a support worker I did not want to take a call and feel I had no choices to explore with the caller. If a woman was not safe in her home, we had to find options. After a few staff brain storming sessions, I decided to approach local AirBnB providers to see if any homes were available and suitable for what we needed. Thankfully, I became inundated with responses from AirBnB providers and locals with holiday homes offering their assistance. Thanks to these individual's generosity a major aspect of our work was sustained.

Lisa



My preference was to work from home. My opinion was that we should stay at home if at all possible. Despite having sons working and studying from home, as well as dogs, a turtle and a husband, I was lucky enough to have been able to carve out a private hotspot within my home. Privacy was paramount given the confidential and sensitive nature of our work. I should perhaps mention that privacy came at a price as it was in a part of the house that is not used so I was surrounded by dead flies which, I might add, I diligently hoovered up regularly. I also found it hard to hear myself think at times due to howling winds and dodgy windows. But on the plus side, I did have an amazing view of the sea and of the countryside, as where I live is up as high as you will get. Instead of my usual commute by car, I climbed about 70 steps up to work every morning, so as you can well imagine it took me a few minutes to recover once I reached the top. Although on the plus side I noticed that I was less breathless over time!! A definite unexpected perk of working from home!

The Helpline and office line were diverted to my mobile. One of the implications of this for me was that I was afraid I would miss a call- so I needed to go downstairs to use the loo or make a coffee I would bring the mobile phone with me. But as the phone was also the WIFI hotspot for my internet access, each time I did that I had to reconnect to the internet on my return. Although I have many talents (!!), tech savviness is not one of them, so this was a challenge. Thank you to Julia our administrator extraordinaire for the back up support provided.

Although we were busy in terms of setting up our own systems in relation to Covid, sourcing accommodation options, liaising with gardai and familiarising ourselves with how other agencies were changing their ways of working in response to Covid, in terms of clients, initially at least, there was an eerie silence. This was very worrying. Professor Stephanie Holt says, separation is not a vaccine for domestic violence and our experience suggested that Covid wasn't going to be either. We also know from experience that women are very resourceful when living in situations of domestic violence, especially where there are children involved, and that they will devise strategies to manage a situation, but often at the cost of their own health or mental health. We notice for example at school holiday time that women will do everything in their power to try to ensure that the holiday period passes by without incident. They dance his dance- for the sake of peace and of the children. They in a sense facilitate him to be the king of his castle, burying their own needs and hopes and dreams in the process. But it wasn't school holiday time really. These were unprecedented times.

I found that I had almost breathed in on their behalf and was holding my breath for them. The silence was not relaxing in any way. I felt a low grade anxiety within me, because of COVID, and because of the silence. And it was uncomfortable. Then the calls began to come. And when they did, I found that they were intense, and that they were urgent. Women were saying that they were finding it hard to ring as he was always around, and they lacked privacy and were fearful of being overheard. They were ringing from the garden or from the loo and often felt they would only have a short time to talk. They had so much to say, so quickly that it was almost overwhelming to listen to. I noticed that there were many new clients. And I noticed that we were hearing from older women, from women who were experiencing abuse from their adult sons, and calls from friends and family worrying about those close to them. Some days there wasn't a pause between calls, one call was followed immediately by another. I found this difficult. I missed having a colleague in the next office to chat to.

When it was decided that I was to return to the office, I was hesitant. Venturing back out into the world felt scary, and one of my best friends had died (not from COVID), and I was afraid her death would become more real once I was back out in the world. And it did, kind of. But we were essential workers and there was more of a sense of normality to being office based and a comfort to having a colleague on site.

It all still feels strange. I miss being able to offer clients a lift to court, to offering a client a coffee on arrival at an appointment at the office. The world is slowly opening back up. The courts are open. We are busy. People can ring more easily and they are ringing. Our stats are up. But all feels changed, changed utterly..... if only a terrible beauty had been born! And yet it was in a way. Kind gestures were evident too, people were very generously offering their holiday houses for use in emergency situations, people sending in donations of money, sending kind messages.

But we are still negotiating the COVID changed reality. We will continue to be there for women in the best way we can, walk with them in the uncertainty and hopefully be a support – behind our masks, using sanitiser and adhering to social distancing of course!

Susan

Now looking back on our time of lockdown it seemed like we were in a movie, waiting on important updates from our Government deciding on what the next stages were. This was very surreal as I was stopped daily by Gardai on my commute to work asking me where I was travelling to, as the restrictions were strict but essential to keep everyone safe.

During the lockdown I was a frontline worker working in Cork city with families experiencing homelessness. This time proved extremely difficult as accommodation options became impossible to source. It was about trying our best to support the families we worked with through this pandemic by adapting to our new "normal" and trying to keep everyone safe. I was very grateful to be able to attend work and be able to chat to my lovely work colleagues as it kept some kind of "normality" in my life as we all supported one another through this period. Even though lockdown was extremely challenging for everyone as we all missed seeing our family and friends, it also brought a wonderful sense of togetherness as I found myself Facetiming and connecting with some of my family and friends probably more than I did before Covid-19.

I also found time to do more hobbies I enjoyed as I wasn't rushing and racing from one day to another. I enjoyed baking during lockdown (yes I made a few banana breads). I also loved being able to take walks every day and felt very grateful for being able to live in West Cork to take in all the beautiful scenery.

Stephanie



Sad, I know, but when it became clear that we would have to stay at home and work, I was delighted. Because I don't do any client work, but I would answer the phones, that was the one part of my job that I couldn't do. I packed up my files and my computer and set up office at home. While my phone wasn't ringing, I got an awful lot of stuff done. Yes, there was work, but the 'long finger' file came out and got ticked off. I organized the new phone system, essential now for working in a virtual office and arranged the replacement of various bits of office hardware. We had to invest in new equipment for Support Workers, and we had to learn to use new methods of communication – Zoom was such fun! Lockdown forced WCWAV to get dragged into the new world.

For the first week or so I found it very hard to switch off – I think this is universal in working from home with a family there. There was an element of conflict when the children were supposed to be getting their schoolwork online and I wasn't available to supervise, but we resolved that eventually, and reached the 'new normal'.

Both youngsters became adept farmers, helping with calving and feeding. My youngest and I dug and planted a veggie patch. Middle child learned to make pancakes and cheese on toast and hot chocolate. Extended family that I hardly ever saw before were now zooming every Sunday evening, alternating quizzers. We got kittens. We have built a den and cleared a large patch of garden too, now thinking about getting chickens..Now, we truly appreciate where we live. Even when we didn't see anyone for a long time, we knew that there were people who live in flats with no outside space, single parents who won't see anyone but the kids, people who live alone, all suffering in ways that didn't bother us, we could carry on almost as normal. We knew all the time that we were reasonably safely tucked away down here in our small corner of the world.

Julia

Of course that's not strictly true, but we are luckier than many others, plus we have great views from our house, it could be worse.



- TOGETHER APART - *Thank You*

Since the beginning of the Covid-19 lockdown uncertainties existed and continue to exist in various forms for our service and our clients. How will our service change? How will Covid-19 further entrap women in the domestic violence they were experiencing? However, there was one certainty throughout Covid-19 and this was the willingness of individuals and organisations to support our work and help in any form they could. As the quote goes "Those who are happiest are those who do the most for others". This quote applies more so for the individuals and organisations below:

It is also important to acknowledge the huge community response to domestic violence that is occurring at a national level. Companies such as AirBnB, Tesco, Boots and Totalhealth Pharmacies have offered their assistance in vital ways (including providing free accommodation, promoting the message support is available, connecting survivors to this support and much more). Various musicians and artists lent their talents to raise funds for domestic violence including the Irish Women in Harmony performance which raised over €215,000.

Domestic violence thrives in silence and breaking this silence is all our responsibility. The continued support by every person, whether by fundraising, working in partnership with DV services, supporting a family/friend experiencing DV or contributing resources to support DV survivors helps break this silence. From the project we would like to thank everyone both at a local and national level for lending their support. In the latter category, Safe Ireland rose to the challenge, providing extensive support, expertise and space to all of the DV services throughout the worst of the pandemic and still are.

Donations

While donations to the project have always been plentiful, we were overwhelmed by the generosity of donors during Covid-19. Through picking the project for their donations the donors (both individuals and organisations) chose to recognise the importance of domestic violence as an issue and its need to be supported during a pandemic. Donations came in many forms including food vouchers, PPE, time, resources, and money. Covid-19 has created its own stressors for nearly every individual, and we appreciate that despite these stressors people were still willing to give what they had.

Housing

We were blown away by all the calls to offer local holiday homes and Air BnBs to women needing to escape domestic violence. These offers provided an invaluable resource to the project of having safe locations throughout West Cork for domestic violence survivors to use should they have to flee their home. Without this resource options to leave the home would have been severely limited for the women we work with and it was so important for our callers to know they had somewhere to go.

Community Partnership

During Covid-19 the local Garda and PSU were vital in working in partnership with the project to ensuring the safety of women living in domestic violence. Operation Faoiseamh, a Garda response operation to domestic violence was a huge success in relation to the response given to women post abuse. An emergency accommodation procedure was set up by our organisation which enabled women to have access to a safe place 24-7 and offering to provide welfare checks to survivors of domestic violence. We would also like to recognise all the kind gestures of support by other organisations who offered their time and expertise.

Sexual Violence Research

Towards the latter half of 2019, WCWAV were invited by Tusla to examine the need for sexual violence support services within West Cork.

WCWAV had drawn Tusla's attention to what we saw as an obvious gap in services and an unnecessary challenge for vulnerable people trying to seek assistance when the nearest specialist service is in Cork City. In partnership with Kerry Rape & Abuse Centre, funded by Tusla, we have developed a research project focusing on West Cork and sexual violence support services.

As a domestic violence support service we are all too familiar with the experiences of some survivors of sexual violence. Sexual violence often occurs within domestic violence. Women coerced into sex they don't want by their abusive partners, but nevertheless feeling that in order to prevent further abuse and harassment they must go along with it, or abusive partners simply taking what they want from women by force. Either way, women have not freely consented, nor been equal participants in the sex act. Coercion, threats and/or violence have been used to subjugate them into acquiescence and silence.

In recent years, our concern for the levels of sexual violence and abuse that we were encountering led us to work in partnership with a counsellor in West Cork who has had specialist training from the Dublin Rape Crisis Centre. But how and where do others who have experienced rape, sexual assault and childhood sexual abuse go for support? Who do they trust to disclose to? What kind of response do they get? What would survivors like to see in terms of a support service? What would work best for them? What would those who have heard the disclosures like to see put in place to support their patients/clients/friends/relatives?

Dr Caroline Crowley, renowned for her research skills, analytical eye and sensitive handling of material has been conducting a survey and interviews with an extensive range of professional, statutory, community and voluntary services in West Cork asking about their experiences of trying to help survivors. What she has found will be eye-opening to many, in that the frequency and extent of sexual abuse disclosures range across every professional agency and every community in West Cork. The need for specialist supports in West Cork is emphasized by health professionals, community workers, social services and voluntary organisations alike. This is Phase 1 of the research and Dr Crowley's report will be available to read when all of those who generously participated have read and signed off on their contributions first.

In the last few weeks, we have begun interviews with survivors and their supporters - those family members or friends who tried to find them help. Miriam Ryan, who has 10 years of working with vulnerable people and amplifying their voices is conducting this next round of interviews. We are hoping to have a range of case studies which will illustrate the needs of survivors in West Cork. All interviewees will be given full anonymity and will remain so in any published report. In both phases of the research, all conversations and discussions will only be used in the final reports with the full written consent of those interviewed. WCWAV have put in place an agreement to provide any survivors or their supporters interviewed with free counselling sessions with the specialist counsellor should they need them.

West Cork author, Louise O'Neill's latest book, *After the Silence* is receiving outstanding reviews. Described as a twisty, page-turner of deadly secrets and unsolved murder, the book also touches on the subjects of domestic violence and coercive control.

After the Silence

We met Louise to ask her about her handling of Domestic Violence in the story.



wcwav: Where did you get the inspiration for the two main characters, Keelin and Henry Kinsella?

L: I wanted to be an actress when I was a teenager, and I often say that I would like to be a therapist for my third act in life. These jobs – acting, writing, therapy – have more in common than you might assume at first glance. They're all about empathy, trying to understand others and figuring out why they behave the way that they do. So, it probably makes sense that for me, the characters always come first. Before I start writing, I want to have a very good idea of what their motivations are, and what external factors and life events have shaped them into the people they are today.

With Keelin and Henry, I wanted to interrogate the stereotypical ideas that we have of both victims and preparators. In Henry, I wanted to show how charming and irresistible these men can be, and how effective they are at manipulating those around them. When it came to Keelin, it was important that the reader sees that she isn't the 'typical' victim. In fact, there is no 'typical victim' and our collective belief in such a concept is actually a barrier for many in recognising that they are experiencing abuse in their own lives. Coercive control is particularly difficult to identify and it can happen to anyone. This idea that abuse doesn't happen to 'women like me' or it only happens to 'other women' is incredibly damaging.

wcwav: I loved the build-up of gaslighting and coercive control incidents and how Henry created and utilised that emotional manipulation to retain power and create fear. Where did your incentive come from?

L: I had the idea for the unsolved murder and True Crime documentary initially but as I did more research into the topic, I noticed something interesting. If the prime suspect in the case was a straight man, there was often a discussion around his wife or partner, with much of it predicated on one question – "why does she stay?" It had an uncanny echoing of the deeply harmful rhetoric we've heard for years regarding victims of domestic abuse – "well, why don't these women just leave?" I couldn't stop thinking about that parallel. Added to that, there has been a great deal of conversation around coercive control over the last number of years as activists in this sector pushed for legislation to make it an offence. Because of that work, it became painfully clear to me how ignorant I was about this form of abuse. I wanted to change that and hopefully, bring the readers of this book along with me.

wcwav: Your domestic violence psychologist was able to identify Henry's tactics. Why did you choose someone in America?

L: This is a great question! It wasn't a reflection on the skills of Irish or British psychologists, it was more to do with our defamation laws in this part of the world. I thought an American psychologist would be sure of their First Amendment rights and therefore more likely to make such a judgment (on camera!) than someone fearful of being sued by the very wealthy, very litigious Henry Kinsella!

wcwav: I loved the sentence "It took a rare kind of resilience to stay silent when you were screaming inside, not everyone could do it". It really reflects the reality of the situation but also your comprehension of that kind of experience for women- was it a difficult understanding to reach?

L: This is the perfect example of why it's so important to do due research when you're writing a book like this. In *Asking For It*, my

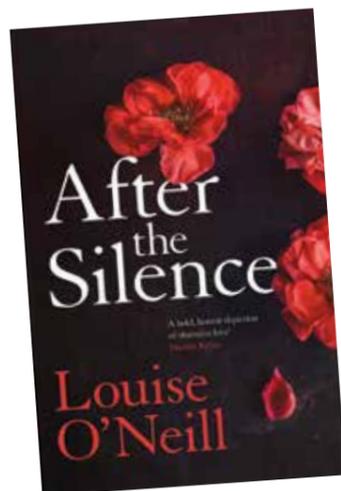
second novel, I was able to use my own experiences of sexual violence to inform the trauma the character experiences. But I didn't grow up with abuse in my immediate family, nor have I experienced it in a relationship. While researching *After the Silence*, I realised that this was only a matter of luck. I didn't escape this type of abuse because I'm smarter or better educated or come from a 'good' family. I was just lucky. The West Cork Women Against Violence Project was so helpful in setting up interviews with survivors of abuse and with each woman, I asked what they thought the greatest misconception about victims was. One replied that she resented the implication that victims were 'weak', when in fact it took an enormous amount of strength to endure something so painful and continue to survive it. When she said that, it resonated so deeply with me. It seemed obvious once she pointed it out but it wasn't something I would have thought before that. Again, I can't reiterate enough how grateful I am to all the women who spoke with me, sharing their experiences with such generosity, dignity, and courage.

wcwav: You identified how people can make assumptions so easily and how social media can be used as a weapon. What has social media been like for you as an author? And as a woman?

L: Oh lord! I think any woman with an opinion is going to find social media difficult and that has certainly been true for me. When *Asking For It* was published, I was very vocal about rape culture in this country, and there were many people who wanted me to shut up. I was subjected to abuse on Twitter, to the point where I decided to take an extended break to protect my mental health. It can feel confronting to be exposed to that level of vitriol and even more so to see how deep the misogyny goes within our society. It can make you feel attacked, unsafe, and fearful. I hate the thought that they might have 'won' or silenced me in any way but staying on Twitter was corrosive to my sense of self. I had to prioritise my own well-being at the end. I still have my Irish Examiner column and I write my books; I'm hoping I can put some good into the world that way instead.

wcwav: Most importantly, this genre has been a different style for you. What kind of challenges did that bring? Can we expect more O'Neill thriller-type novels in the future?

L: It was a challenge; when writing a thriller, you have to pay particular attention to the pacing of the novel, you want to keep the reader guessing and turning those pages until the very end. This is a different novel to Asking For It, and that was deliberate. There were many people who wouldn't have picked up AFI because they thought it might be too difficult or disturbing or that it was simply an 'issues book'. With After the Silence, I wanted to lean into my commercial sensibilities and write a book that was gripping and compelling. I'm hoping that people will read this, perhaps not even realising there is a domestic violence storyline, and that the book might spark a thought, an understanding, or simply a conversation on this issue. All too often, violence against women is marginalised as a women's issue, as if it doesn't involve or affect men and boys. I've seen that myself – it's primarily women who read my books, women who attend my talks. I think that needs to change. I don't want to be preaching to the converted and with After the Silence, I'm hoping I'll reach a new audience. And who knows? Maybe they'll be the people who need this book most of all.



After the Silence is available from all good book shops. See our review of the book here

A powerfully atmospheric, darkly compelling mystery - LUCY FOLEY

A superior psychological thriller - LIZ NUGENT

"After the Silence" is based on an island called Inisrun on which a small community live. This is Louise O'Neill's fifth book but it differs from Louise's others in that this is Louise's first psychological thriller. Louise has always shown a particular strong skill in portraying victims of trauma and she has covered topical issues like sexual assault, body image, consent, and the complicity of society and social media in the suffering of abuse victims. In this book, Louise shows the web of entanglement that deadly secrets create and the devastation thereafter.

Keelin is a native of Inisrun, who fled an abusive husband with her son and remarries the wealthy and charismatic Henry Kinsella on the island. They go on to have their own daughter. Ten years prior, Nessa Crowley, a beautiful young girl died at a party at their house. The murder was never solved and no one was charged for the murder. However, being a close community, the islanders believed they knew who to blame for the crime that changed their community forever. Ten years later, a documentary team arrives to the island and they set about trying to lift this veil of secrecy. They focus on two aspects: to prove Henry Kinsella's guilt and the complicity of his wife Keelin in the murder of beautiful Nessa. As Inisrun is a place where everyone's business is everyone's business, the rumour mill continues to churn. There is a human tendency to make assumptions, to scare monger and make snap judgements about individuals. This jumping to conclusions without merit is hasty and is even more so when one can use the social media platform to troll others. What is interesting in the book is how this platform can turn so easily.

As the book progresses, Louise delves behind Henry's veneer to reveal his controlling behaviour of the family but specifically of Keelin. Louise shows the extensive research she undertook around domestic violence and it was scintillating to see how Louise captured that web of entanglement and enmeshment. She uses some fine examples of gaslighting and coercive control to frame how Henry created and utilised emotional manipulation to retain power and create fear. The more we read, we can see the parallel between the violence Keelin's ex-husband utilised and Henry's use of psychological abuse to continue to entrap Keelin. As is in real life, this began in an insidious way, through the use of small incidents so that Keelin began to question her own decision making. It then escalated as it does. An island location is a harsh environment, one that is cut off from the mainland and its many supports. In this instance, the island can be viewed as a metaphor for those who live in domestic violence, reflecting the secrecy that prevails and the difficulties to be able to speak out and seek support.

As a domestic violence worker, I demolished the book and was eager to read the differing incidents that Louise depicted. From early on, I spotted the early warning signs. I can verify that Louise captured clients voices and their own experiences in how Keelin was manoeuvred. I felt one particular sentence displays Louise's empathy in her writing "It took a rare kind of resilience to stay silent when you were screaming inside, not everyone could do it". Louise keeps the pace of the book tight, with a great build up towards the finale. It was with even greater relish to see the acknowledgement Louise gave to our own service and what excitement to see our names in print at the back of the book. I would heartily recommend to all to get this book and digest it. 'After the Silence' generates an understanding of the complexity of relationships, the enmeshment of psychological violence and does this in a very readable form. Thank you Louise - Colette O'Riordan

Safe House for West Cork Update 2020!

As previously mentioned in the West Cork Whisper in November 2019, WCWAV are delighted to have secured funding to purchase a Safe House for women and children escaping domestic violence here in West Cork. This is the biggest development in the history of the service and we look forward to being able to offer this additional service as part of WCWAV. Unfortunately, with Covid-19 our plans have been delayed, but it is still very much a priority for our service, to get the Safe House up and running as soon as possible. The Safe House is needed in West Cork now more than ever due to Covid-19 which has further entrapped women and children in domestic violence.

Recently, we recruited a safe house support worker, Stephanie, who will be working with the women and children who need access to Safe House Accommodation. Already Stephanie is working with other DV services to learn from their experiences of providing safe houses, making major inroads into developing the policies for the Safe House while also actively searching for properties.

It can be extremely challenging for any family moving from one accommodation to another, but especially in the case of escaping domestic violence. This can be traumatic for the whole family and our goal is to provide holistic support for each step of the process. The safe house support worker role will be to make the family/woman feel comfortable and safe in their new accommodation while also giving them the information and assistance to move onto independent living and housing elsewhere. Stephanie's key areas of work will be to:

- Work collaboratively with other agencies in West Cork to build a wraparound support system for women and children using the safe house, in order to give them the confidence to move onto independent living.
- Linking our clients in with various specialist agencies and services they require.
- To assess the woman (and her children's) needs to create a client centred care plan.
- To help to build up the woman's confidence and self-esteem by linking her in with local services and provide accompaniment where necessary.
- To work with occupants of the safe house on a safety plan and aftercare plan to help their transition to an independent life

There is still some way to go yet, but with a specialist worker now recruited, resourced by Tusla, the Safe House project can start to move forward and make this project a reality for West Cork.

We would like to thank the people in West Cork for their extreme generosity over the last few months. Anyone wishing to help by donating, sponsoring or fundraising for the safe house should contact our office on 027-53847



wonder

women of west cork



Siobhan Cronin,
News Editor,
Southern Star

Where are you from? I was born in Ennis in Co Clare as my Dad was working in Shannon Airport but we moved to Cork city, when he was moved to Cork Airport, when I was about 7. I grew up in Ballintemple in Cork and see myself as a Corkonian now, to be honest.

Job Title: News Editor, Southern Star newspaper

What does your work entail? Organising the news content for the Southern Star each week, editing and commissioning articles, writing some articles myself and also, as a former sub-editor, I take a big hand in the design of the pages.

Why and how did you get involved in West Cork Women Against Violence? I know the team from my work as a news editor as they have a good grasp of how the media works and how important it is to keep up the publicity for a project such as theirs, to keep it in the public eye.

Since your first involvement with WCWAV do you feel things have improved for women experiencing DV? Well I think we are hearing more and more about domestic violence, but hopefully that is because women aren't as worried about the stigma, rather than because the instances are on the increase. But I think the safe house project is wonderful and I have a lot of optimism for the future.

How do you relax? I've recently caught the sea swimming bug, so I swim on Sundays in Lough Hyne and during the week at the Westlodge in Bantry. I also love a good Netflix series or getting fresh air by bringing our cocker spaniel Lucie to the airstrip in Bantry, or the foreshore walk in Schull.

What changes would you most like to see for women? I think childcare is a huge issue because many women start their careers with huge ambition and enthusiasm but when children come along, they often find the guilt complex kicks in, and the career stalls. So if there were good crèche facilities for working mums then I think yes women could do it all! But the facilities need to be on-site or nearby and employers need to be understanding, too, and a bit more flexible where parents of young children are concerned. Ideally, of course, working from home is a great compromise for both, though I can understand that many women embrace the chance to work away from the home, for a change of scene, too.





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

Citizens Information

WE ARE OPEN FOR PHONE & E-MAIL QUERIES

PHONE (West Cork)
0761 07 8390
Email: bantry@citinfo.ie
10am – 5pm. Mon - Fri
National Phone Service:
0761 07 4000
9am – 5pm, Mon - Fri

We are open for a limited number of appointments
BY PRIOR ARRANGEMENT.
Please call 0761 07 8390

for the most up-to-date information log on to:
www.citizensinformation.ie
www.gov.ie | www.hse

Citizens Information

CONFIDENTIALITY West Cork Women's Project assures all women contacting us that four core values underpin our service:

- Confidentiality
- To be listened to
- To be believed
- Respect for her choice

Speaking to someone, perhaps for the first time, about experiencing violence or abuse in the home is never easy. Placing your trust in a stranger on the end of a phone or meeting someone for the first time face to face takes courage. These first stages of seeking support can be a time of stress and fear for women.

It is important that women understand that they have the right to remain anonymous when contacting the service. If a woman is comfortable with giving identifying details, these details are not passed on to any other agency except at her request.

There are two exceptions to confidentiality:

- If a disclosure raises concerns with regard to Child Protection issues
- If a woman discloses that she intends to harm another person.

We're here to support you

FREEPHONE
1800 203 136

Office 027 53847
Mon to Fri: 9 am to 5.30 pm

Bantry Office: 027 53847 Mon to Friday: 9.00 am to 5.30 pm

Helpline: 1800 203 136 during office hours

www.facebook.com/westcorkwomenagainstviolence

Outreach and Drop In services have been temporarily suspended.

Appointments only

Court Accompaniment by prior arrangement

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