

Meath Womens Refuge & Support Services



Impact Report 2019

OUR MISSION

To ensure the safety of women and children who are experiencing all forms of domestic abuse in Co. Meath, through the provision of high quality supports and services that are women centred and evidence based.

Domestic Violence is a Violation of Human Rights

An EU-wide survey' by the European Union Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA), it was reported that 14% of women in Ireland have experienced physical violence by a partner since age 15.

6% of Irish women have experienced sexual violence by a current or former partner and 31% of women have experienced psychological violence by a partner.

12% of Irish respondents in the FRA study had experienced stalking (including cyber stalking).

We have spent 32 years vindicating the rights of women and children affected by domestic violence



Violence against women is perhaps the most shameful human rights violation, and it is perhaps the most pervasive.

It knows no boundaries of geography, culture or wealth.

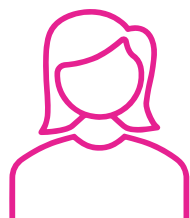
As long as it continues, we cannot claim to be making real progress towards equality, development and peace.



Kofi Annan, former UN Secretary General

Meath Women's Refuge and Support Services

Our Story - 2019 in Numbers



We provided refuge to **42 women** and we provided refuge to **50 children** who stayed in refuge.

A total of **6,487 services** were provided for families in refuge in **2019**.



We worked with **85 children** in the community providing one to one sessions and group programme

It's Good to Be Me and our playroom. In addition, **16 Children** received **61 playroom sessions** to ensure their parents could participate in group programmes.



We worked with **411 women** through our outreach in the community including one to one support, court accompaniment and advocacy.

We dealt with **3,161 calls** in our work relating to crisis, information and support, court accompaniment, follow on supports, advocacy and the needs of children and parents.

Our **Helpline** took a total of **974 calls** and we made **1001 calls** on behalf of women and children. Our **outreach programme** took **678 calls** and made **311 calls** on behalf of women. Our **Children's Programme** dealt with **197 calls**.



69 women in total participated in our group programmes - **25 women** participated in the power to change programme, **27 women** participated in the support group and **17 women** in the arts and crafts programme.

Recovery - **57 women** participated in counselling and **art therapy** sessions and a total **214 sessions** were provided. **34 Play Therapy** sessions were provided to children.



Introduction by the Chairperson Sinéad Gogan

In 2019, we continued to grow and develop the level of services and initiatives we can provide in Meath Women's Refuge and Support Services to women and children living in the county and beyond. We found great enthusiasm, interest and solidarity with our work in the community in Meath. This year we began our new children and young people's programme, we grew our counselling service and began two new therapeutic interventions, namely play therapy for children and art therapy for women funded by the generosity of donors and our own fundraising activities. We sought to raise our profile through the launch of a new website, we brought new directors on board and our staff participated in training to prepare them to develop their skills to meet new demands and respond in a way to ensure we are at the cutting edge of not only responding to issues that present to us but also by being innovative e.g. the Good to Be Programme described later in this report.

A highlight of the year was a summer visit from Minister Katherine Zappone who shared a morning with us local organisations and women affected by domestic abuse to get to know what we do, the challenges we face and our future hopes for the work we do.



We would like to thank each person, donor and agency we have worked with in 2019 and especially want to acknowledge the ongoing commitment and dedication of our staff, board, CE workers, volunteers and all our funders including Tusla, Department of Justice and Equality, Meath County Council, small grant providers, donors, fundraisers in the local community, without whom we could not have supported as many women and children in Co. Meath.

Introduction to our work

Meath Women's Refuge and Support Services is a domestic violence support agency and our work includes the provision of emergency refuge accommodation, outreach services including court accompaniment and one to one support in the community, a helpline, referral supports, a support group, the MOVE programme and education programme. Our work has evolved over the past 32 years and is broad and varied and meets a wide range of needs. Our model is centred on the values of human rights and equality. We focus on ensuring that this approach informs and underpins our work with women and children.

MWRSS are part of a network of organisations that provide domestic violence services in Ireland and we are a member of Safe Ireland, the national membership body. We have a county wide remit and work with a range of stakeholders including Tusla social work services, department of social protection local office, Meath County Council and other statutory, community and voluntary organisations in the county.

Governance

The organisation is governed by a board of independent directors who oversee its governance and strategic direction. The current board is made up of eight directors and includes a chairperson, company secretary, treasurer and ordinary directors. The board meets monthly and is responsible for the governance and strategic and the manager reports into the board and the board works to ensure the best standards of governance are achieved. In 2019, the board oversaw new internal policies developed in areas such as risk management, new terms of reference for the finance and risk sub-group, a board renewal and recruitment policy and a new system of performance management.

Resourcing our work

MWRSS receives its core funding from Tusla, the child and family agency through a service level agreement and we would like to acknowledge their ongoing support for our work and commitment to the issue of domestic violence. Our core funding come through its Domestic, Sexual and Gender based Violence Programme and we work in collaboration with other domestic violence services also, including Safe Ireland, the umbrella body for domestic violence services.

We would also like to acknowledge our gratitude for the ongoing support of the court poor box, local companies and businesses, community organisations and the wider community in Meath which has supported our fundraisers and who have donated generously to our work over the years.

Telling the Story - Measuring the Impact in 2019

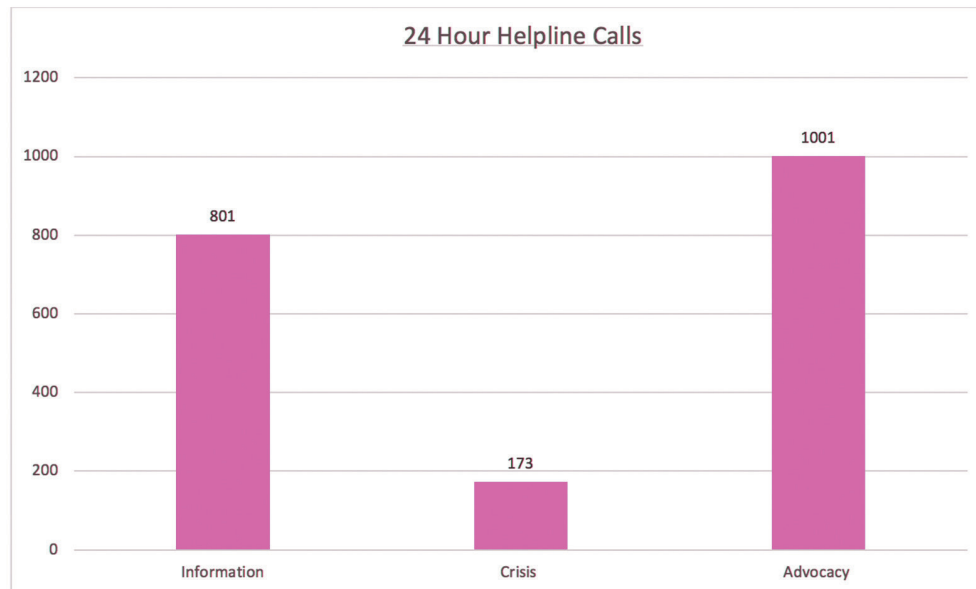
It is difficult to put into words the impact of our work and the story of why women need the support of our organisation paints the story better than statistics and numbers. Anna's story below illustrates the impact domestic abuse social change agencies make every day:

Ana came into refuge with her two young children following severe emotional abuse experienced at home. Her partner criticised her and told her constantly that she was a bad mother. He said if she got a court order against him, he would report her to social work as a parent who neglected her children. She was worried all the time when she came into refuge, was lonely and cried often as her family lived in another country and she worried about where she would live now that she had left her partner.

Ana stayed in refuge for 3 months and was supported through our advocacy to access a new home for herself and her children. We provided childcare, she participated in our arts and crafts programme, we completed forms with Ana, and we linked her to childcare services to enrol her eldest boy in preschool. Ana continues to link in with us through the community.

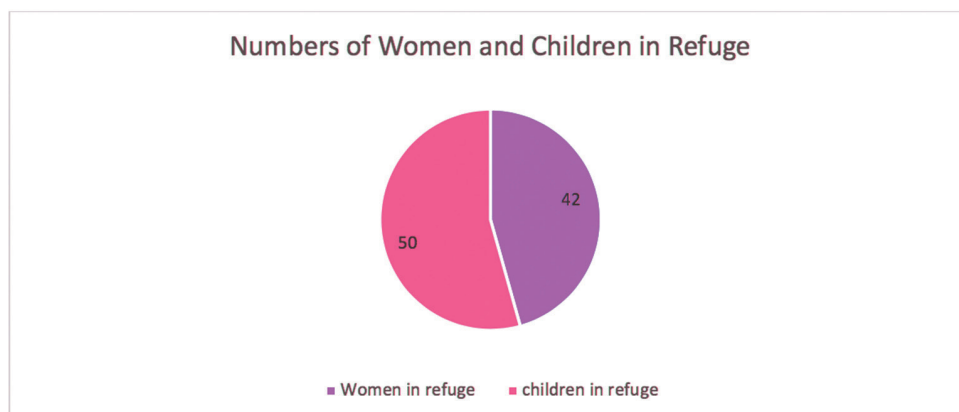
Confidential 24-hour telephone line

Our helpline is managed by professional refuge support workers and in 2019 we received 173 crisis calls for refuge and 801 information/support calls to the organisation. In addition, we made 1,001 advocacy calls on behalf of women in refuge to a wide range of agencies and organisation including the local authority, social welfare, gardai etc. A total number of 1975 of calls were dealt with by the MWRSS helpline, and the figure is reflected in the graph below.



Emergency Accommodation

In 2019, we accommodated 42 women and 50 children. In total, 6210 sessions of support were provided for women and children in refuge in 2019. The supports and services provided included a high level of interagency working and advocacy given the needs of women in refuge settings to access the following; medical supports, solicitor, public health nurse services, social work, psychology services, gardai, community welfare officer, legal aid, housing and other supports.



Length of Time in refuge

Due to the challenges in the current housing market and given the proximity of Meath to Dublin, the length of time women who cannot return home are staying in refuge is longer than it should be. In 2019, 11 out of 42 women and their children stayed 30 days or more in refuge or 9% of women in refuge stayed more than 30 days in refuge accommodation which is almost exactly the same as our 2018 figures and in 2019 the number of short stays was less than 2018 with 27 women and their children staying ten days or less.

Telling the Story-Measuring the Impact

When Maria arrived at the Meath Women's Refuge centre, she had escaped her second abusive relationship. The first one cost her children. The second all but destroyed her mental health. She was degraded and abused so often she felt she was worthless. She had a breakdown and lost her job. After finally alerting Gardai of the abuse she was experiencing, she found out that her partner had installed surveillance equipment to stop her leaving. Meath Women's Refuge and Support Services helped her rebuild her life. From finding her a new home and social welfare assistance, to providing winter clothes and household essentials. She accessed our counselling services and the arts and crafts programme and was introduced to other women in the same situation. Maria has moved into her new home, has reconciled with her children and is starting her life again.

Outreach work in the Community

The Outreach Team forms a large part of the work of MWRSS and this work has grown year on year reflecting the changing needs of women and children affected by domestic violence. Our court work is supported by funding from the Victims of Crime office with our outreach work in the community funded by Tusla.

Our outreach workers work with women attending court in Navan and Trim on three days each week. In addition, the outreach team provided a wide range of supports to women experiencing domestic violence. An area of work identified last year is to grow our one to one face to face work with women in the community and to develop a more in depth case management approach for women who experience ongoing domestic abuse and who are high risk but may not require refuge.

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In terms of phone contact with the outreach team (which is separate to the helpline) we dealt with, a total of 990 calls. The team worked with 411 women during 2019 through one to one support, court accompaniment etc. In addition, they delivered two 12-week group programmes called the Power to Change to 25 women twice that year. Funding to deliver the programme twice came from the Community Foundation of Ireland through their Domestic Violence support programme.

“

I feel freer from letting it all out, and there is a great relief. Everyone is basically in the same boat. This programme is probably the only place where you can get a room full of women talking about their experience. We don't tell it out there, we tell everyone we are fine.

”

Participant on the Power to Change Programme

In addition, the Outreach Team facilitated a peer to peer support group for women affected by domestic abuse. We reviewed the evaluation we undertook from the Pattern Changing Programme and looked at the updated Power to Change Programme, which is a shorter programme, engages the participants more fully and is a more reflective programme. The value of the group process and peer to peer support is very powerful for women who have felt alone and isolated to know they are not alone and that other women share, understand and provide support to each other. This is evident from feedback from our **Power to Change programmes in 2019**.

Telling the Story - Measuring the Impact of the PTC Programme

“More awareness and understanding, gave me support and help.
Didn't feel alone.” (Joan)

“Has shown me that all of the dysfunction in my relationship was very real
and a lot of other people suffer the same.” (Emily)

“I can see that I was abused and couldn't hide it;
I don't let people bully me anymore.” (Tatiana)

“It has helped me name what happened to me as abuse.” (Eva)

OUTREACH STATISTICS

990 
No of Calls

411 
No of Women

25 
Power to Change

27 
Support Group

MOVE programme

The MOVE programme is a programme that the organisation has been involved in since 2009. A member of the outreach team works on the MOVE programme, which is called the CHOICES programme. The partner support work includes meeting each partner completes an assessment of the history of the relationship with the woman with the support worker at an initial meeting/assessment and a weekly meeting/phone call is made to the woman partner of the MOVE programme. The support takes place over all year around during and post programme completion. If court accompaniment is required, the other outreach team worker provides these. In 2019 5 women were supported whose partners were on the MOVE programme.

Arts and Crafts

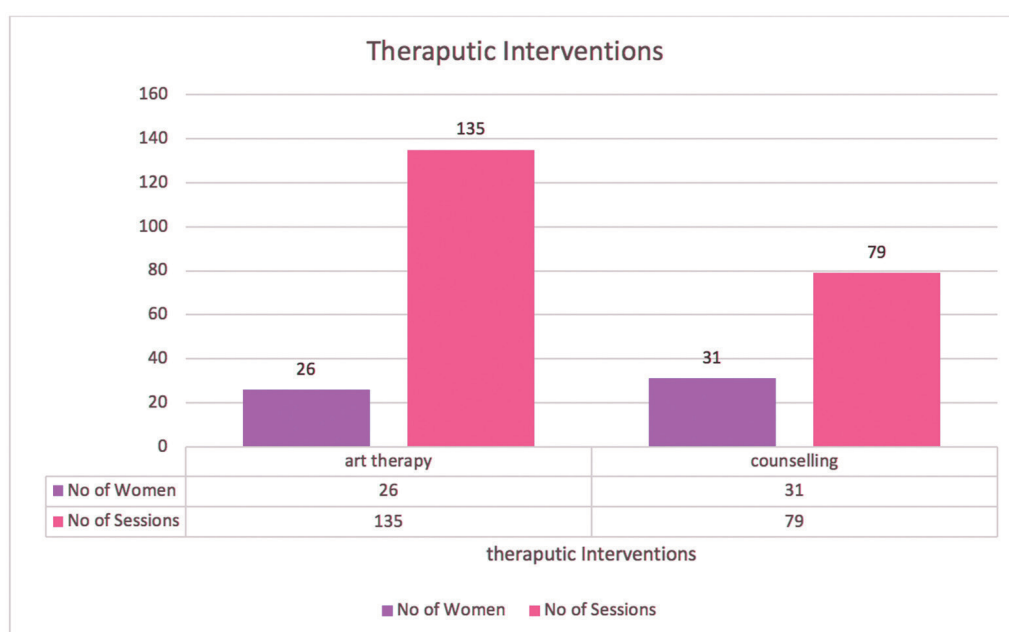
The arts and crafts programme takes place once a week for residents and non-residents and is a non-threatening way to engage women in discussion on the issues affecting them as result of abusive relationships. It is facilitated by an experienced tutor. Childcare supports were provided for 17 women who attended. The aim of the programme is to build self- esteem through the medium of arts and works to promote the participation of women with low levels of literacy and limited English language skills.

Therapeutic Supports - the Road to Recovery

Counselling services and Art Therapy

In 2019 we provided 79 sessions of counselling to 31 women. As planned, we expanded our delivery of counselling services in 2019 significantly through our fundraising efforts. As a core element of recovery for women who have experienced extensive domestic abuse over a long period of time, we believe it is vital that we can provide this support.

In 2019 we provided 135 sessions of art therapy to 26 women, art therapy is a new form of therapy introduced by the organisation and this has been extremely welcome and positive for women who have participated in the programme.



Working with Children

Child and Young People's Worker

In early 2019 the role of children's worker was initiated through funding from Tusla our core funder. This new role has a focus on support and the developmental process of childhood and how this can be impacted upon by domestic abuse. During this year the focus of the work was:

1. Raising awareness of the programme in the community and among agencies working with children and families
 2. Implementing models of practice working with children impacted by domestic abuse using evidence-based approaches
 3. Ensuring a children's focus across all areas of work across the organisation
- The programme co-ordinates a range of other initiatives including the Good to Be Programme and Play Therapy provision.

A range of activities was undertaken by the programme in 2019, including, one to one sessions with children which including risk assessments, safety planning, developmental supports and referral services, access to play therapy, small group programmes like the Good to Be Me programme and the Mammy and Me Programme for parents of small children.

Feedback from children highlight the value of the programme:

"I really need this, so I know how to keep myself safe when Mammy and Daddy fight" *Child 1*

"It's important to not keep in your feelings because they will build up and build up and you might explode" *Child 2*



Statistics from our work with children and young people

Play therapy

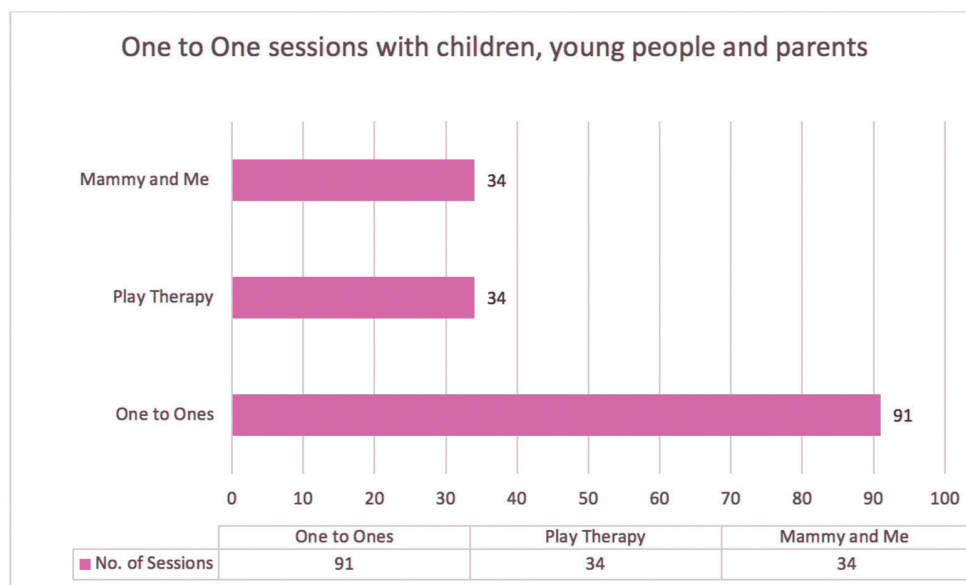
Play therapy uses a variety of play and creative art techniques to alleviate chronic or mild emotional or psychological conditions that prevent children from realising their potential e.g. the impact of the trauma of domestic abuse. In 2019 we provided 34 sessions to four children; we hope to increase this in 2020.

The Good to Be Me Programme

The GTBM programme was funded under the What Works programme in conjunction with the Department of Children and Youth Affairs through the Dormant Accounts Fund. In 2019 the programme was delivered to 23 children during the year between the ages of 7-10 years old. Training on play skills was delivered to four staff members who were trained to facilitate the programme and the programme in the first part of the year was co-ordinated by the children's worker and later in the last quarter by another staff member. An evaluation of the programme was completed in September and the learning from this was built into the programme in the last quarter of the year. It is envisaged that this learning will be shared with other agencies working with children and their families.

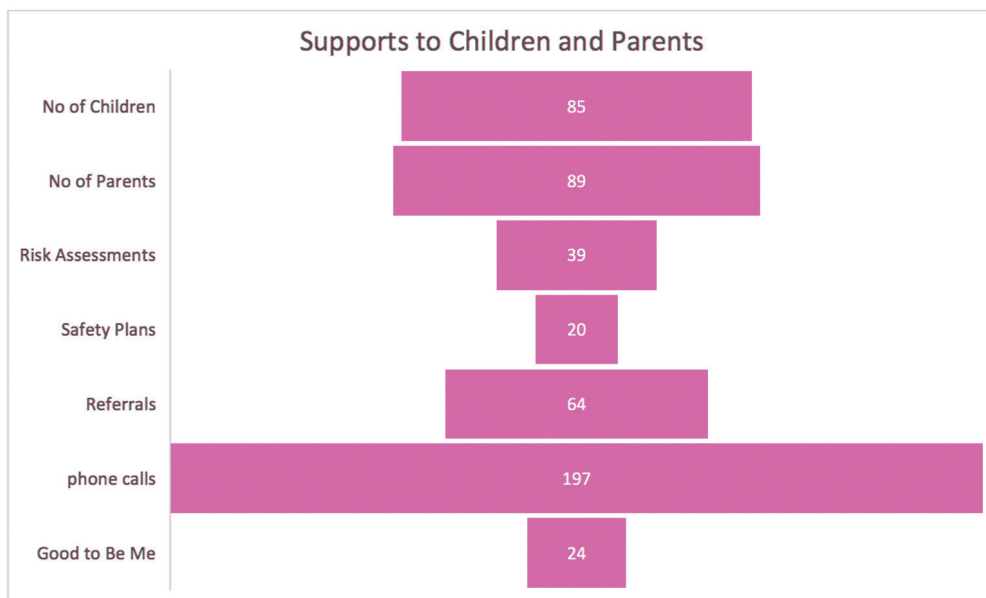
Friday morning playroom

16 children participated in 61 sessions of childcare to enable mothers to attend the arts and crafts programme during the school term.



TLC Kidz

The TLC Kidz programme is a group programme for children and mothers recovering from domestic abuse. It is an evaluated programme developed in the UK. Barnardo's Ireland are co-ordinating TLC Kidz nationally and we co-ordinate the programme in Co. Meath. In 2019 we recruited a part time co-ordinator, established an advisory committee for the programme with a cross cutting representation of organisations working with children and their families. Towards the end of the year we delivered a Training of Trainers Programme facilitated by a UK based trainer with 12 people from a range of agencies including a small number of our own staff. We will recruit an evaluator and will begin to roll out the programme in 2020.



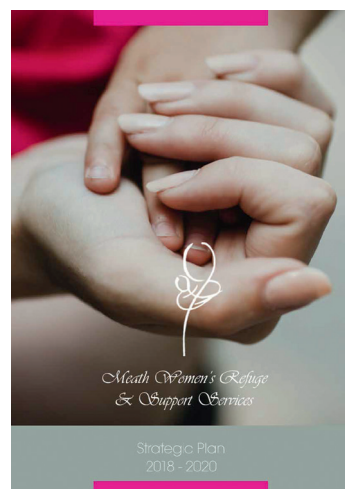
Child Protection

The organisation continues to work to best practice principles following our child protection policy and procedures. We work closely with Tusla and women and children who engage with our services and ensure that women are aware and informed of when we are making a child protection referral. The organisation works to report child protection concerns in a timely and professional manner always and undertakes follow up work when we re engage with women and children post referral where appropriate.

MWRSS Strategic Plan

Our current plan has three high level strategic goals and in 2019 reached its interim stage. An internal review was undertaken to explore progress made and overall progress is in line with expectations. Areas that are not progressed to date are impacted on by external factors .e.g. the development of a new purpose built refuge, for which an application has been made and we are awaiting the outcome of and while we have increased our staff compliment e.g. our children's worker there continues to be gaps. Our three goals have not been changed and are:

1. Delivery of High-Quality evidence-based Services and Development Supports for Women and Children at risk of or experiencing domestic violence
2. Development of a New Purpose-Built Refuge Building and Ancillary services
3. Ensuring the organisation is governed to the highest standards and that we are accountable to our funders, the public and the women and children we work with



We will begin work on a new strategic plan in the third quarter of 2020.

Fundraising

Fundraising while being a core function of our work cuts across the organisation with no dedicated worker and takes a lot of time and commitment not just from our staff and board but also the many volunteers who give their time and energy to support our efforts. Donations come from many different quarters including groups, individuals, businesses etc. This income includes funds we raise through our charity shop and the service charge we receive for the provision of emergency accommodation. We would not be able to carry out the level of work we do without this funding. This funding ensures we can do some of the following critical and core work:

- Provide one to one counselling for women
- Provide play therapy for children
- Resource food for the communal refuge
- To ensure the upkeep and maintenance of the refuge building for women and children e.g. bedding, furniture, equipment, to meet health and safety requirements etc.
- To ensure we can meet our overheads and day to day costs e.g. heating, electricity etc.

In 2019 we undertook a number of fundraising events ourselves including:

- We undertook a raffle with another charity at the Meath Style awards in April
- Churchgate Collection in July, August and September in Navan, Trim and Kells
- Supervalu Johnstown Bag Pack in October
- Marks and Spencer Bag Pack over 5 days on Christmas week
- Olega's Pharmacy

In 2019, we began to develop a fundraising plan for 2019 which will evolve we will be working towards a more strategic approach looking at new actions in relation to fundraising for our work, as the time this work takes is labour intensive and reliant on volunteer participation and co-ordination. In 2019, 14% of our overall income was through donations and fundraising activities, a slight drop of 3% on 2018 figures. Maintaining our donations/fundraising at around 20% of our total income is vital to the viability of the organisation at the current level of costs.

Working with funders and regulators

An increase in the levels of reporting to regulators and funders places additional work on small organisations. In 2019 both the housing regulator and charities regulator announced new plans to put reporting on a statutory footing. While these do not come into play until 2020, the next year will be a learning year for organisations.

Other Developments in our work in 2019

1. Staff Training

In 2019, in line with our strategic plan, we increased training opportunities for all our core staff. Examples of training include Fundraising Workshop, Court Accompaniment Training in house, three days facilitation for staff to improve group work skills, Staff attended Risk Assessment training in Trinity, On Violent Resistance Training, Equality and Human Rights Values Lab with Safe Ireland, Social media training for managers, Mandated reporting Child protection training which board directors also completed, Fire Marshall training for all staff, Performance management training in line with our new performance management policy and four staff members underwent training in play methodologies funded under the What Works Programme.

2. New website completed

In late 2019 we established a new website for the organisation www.dvservicesmeath.ie and we now have a PayPal account and information for women on domestic abuse. The new website is linked to our Facebook and Twitter page. We will continue to develop it over the coming year.

3. New Building CAS 1 Application 2019

The organisation made an application under the Capital Acquisition Scheme in conjunction with Meath County Council in June 2019. In order to complete the application, we undertook additional drawings and budgetary work which was submitted alongside the feasibility study we completed in 2018. Finally, we have identified a potential site for the new refuge building which will be provided by Meath County Council.

4. Networking, Awareness Raising and Policy Work

The organisation continued to work with a wide range of partners during the year in order to further the work we do. We attended a number of Safe Ireland events and hosted an awareness event as part of the 16 days to mark awareness of domestic violence against women. An art installation was hosted in the Solstice Arts Theatre who provided the space for one evening.

Walk in their Shoes event

We also hosted an information event for women in the morning and professionals in the afternoon on domestic violence with Don Hennessy who spoke about his latest book *Steps to Freedom*. Both events had high attendances and were funded through the Community Foundation of Ireland Fund.



Professionals attending the afternoon session of Don Hennessy event

5. Maintenance and Upkeep of the Building

In 2019 the organisation was supported by Meath County Council to upgrade locks on all its internal doors to ensure our building was safe. Day to day maintenance was funded by the organisation itself throughout the year.

Conclusion

The organisation worked to ensure that women and children accessed the supports they needed in 2019. We did this practically through beginning a new children's programme and rolling out a range of supports for children; delivering two power to change programmes instead of one, organising awareness raising events, increasing the levels of therapeutic supports available to women and children and implementing new risk assessment and safety planning procedures. In 2020, we will work towards the full implementation of our strategic plan and the next phase in the development of a new purpose built refuge.