



*Meath Women's Refuge
& Support Services*



ANNUAL REPORT & FINANCIAL STATEMENTS 2020

Meath Women's Aid Housing Association CLG

IN HER OWN WORDS

A TESTIMONIAL FROM A WOMAN WHO
CAME INTO REFUGE

I felt strong and broken when I got here but the waves of kindness, warmth, mothering, greeted me like a warm blanket being placed on my shoulders. I felt I could drop my shoulders. My legs were tired and shaky. The lovely staff members made my transition from battle ground to shelter so gentle and natural. My mind began to rest for longer moments.....

Feeling lost, broken, discarded and so sad at times I was uplifted knowing I was safe. I could breathe....

I feel I can put myself together piece by broken piece and start again.



Registered Company Name:
Meath Women's Aid Housing
Association CLG
CRA No. 20021634
CRO No. 127494

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Registered Charity Number: CHY 8685

A NOTE FROM OUR

CHAIRPERSON

It is a privilege to present this Annual Report for 2020 as chairperson of Meath Women's Refuge Support Services. As I write this note, reflecting on 2020, a year that brought huge changes and challenges to our work because of Covid 19, The board are very proud of how the organisation adapted and responded. We worked extremely hard with our board of directors, staff team and funders to respond to our 'new reality' and indeed in many areas we thrived and exceeded our own expectations as to what was possible and what we could do.

Organisations such as ours work consistently and with commitment on limited resources and front and centre to our work are women and children. Our mission was very much in action this year and we worked throughout the year 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.

We did this through innovative and creative approaches we adopted, examples of which are illustrated throughout this report. Our central focus for the year was to Keep Our Door Open and this theme was in line with the government's commitment to supporting domestic violence services to meet the needs presenting, demonstrated in its #Stillhere campaign. While government restrictions on space impacted on us as a communal refuge, we adapted quickly to provide community-based refuge. The pandemic has illustrated the historic impact of under resourcing of domestic violence services in Ireland. We are hopeful that the additional supports and responsive manner in which the state stepped up will continue in 2021 and beyond.

The government has publicly stated that domestic violence is an 'epidemic' in Ireland. They have committed to a number of policy developments in the coming year on prevention and an overview of structures that manage domestic violence policy, and services which is very welcome. However, it is vital that there is a whole of government approach to the elimination of violence against women

and children which includes financial investment if we are serious about addressing the shadow pandemic of domestic abuse in Ireland.

As the impact of Covid 19 continued, we realised our fundraising structures would be severely impacted so we redeveloped our website for online donations, resulting in a warm wave of support from the community in Co. Meath. We are very grateful to those who reached out and supported us. Funding to ensure we have stable resources to realise our mission continues to be an issue and the crisis response for service demands has been high. On a positive note, 2020 was the year we submitted our business plan to Tusla to grow the organisation and expand the reach of services we currently provide during the period of 2021-2023.

This will happen in parallel with another momentous development which occurred in 2020, the Department of Housing approved our CAS application (which was supported by Meath County Council) to build eight new refuge units by the end of 2023. To compliment the refuge development, we will also build a cutting-edge ancillary domestic violence service building for women and children in Co. Meath. This ambitious flagship project is the biggest undertaking in the organisation's history.

Finally, I would like to warmly thank and commend our board of directors, including those who joined, stepped down and those who continue with us. We want to acknowledge and note our gratitude to the committed staff team who worked tirelessly 24 hours a day, 7 days a week to ensure women and children are safe throughout the year. The last year has seen huge personal and discretionary effort from the whole staff team. All of those who support our work including our core funders Tusla, Victims of Crime, community groups, grant giving bodies and the many individual funders, we sincerely thank you for walking this journey with us and we hope you continue to do so.

Sinéad Gogan
Chairperson

A NOTE FROM THE MANAGER

2020 was a year like no other for our organisation. As a staff team the challenges we faced were unprecedented, yet we were determined to respond in an agile and creative way to meet the challenges that Covid 19 presented. Several trends and responses occurred in 2020 which shaped our work, and they are outlined in summary below.

Our helpline was the first indicator of the impact of the pandemic in March 2020 and we saw a more than double fold increase in crisis calls from women and children seeking refuge. Due to the contagious nature of Covid 19, overnight we moved from one communal refuge on site to managing two refuge structures, one on site and a community-based refuge which increased our workload significantly and required a new role of housekeeper and buildings supervisor. This shift was supported by our local authority Meath County Council and Tuath Housing AHB.

As a result of managing two refuge facilities, we increased our key worker capacity in refuge from 40% coverage with two workers between Mondays and Fridays, to 100% coverage to manage community-based refuge. This initiative was funded by our core funders Tusla.

A key concern we had as the lockdown continued was the lack of direct face to face contact with women. To respond to this, we moved key services and supports online and increased their availability e.g., counselling and support groups to ensure that this vital lifeline of support was available to women during the lockdowns when women were experiencing high levels of isolation as a result of not being able to access face to face services, see family and friends and in some cases being at home all the time with perpetrators of domestic abuse during this period. In addition, we increased our phone supports to families in the community to ensure women would not feel isolated despite being able to attend community-based services and this is highlighted in our increase in helpline calls in and out.

We continued our presence in the courts across the year except for 6 weeks when the courts were closed. During this time, we continued to do

court preparation and paperwork for women to keep women and children safe and this was core to our work.

Finally, despite or because of these challenges we have gained confidence through our interactions with funders, women and children and the wider community that our positive impact has been felt in our community and that the supports and services we provided were a 'lifeline' for many. Indeed, women spoke often to staff about how much the support meant to them. The expansion of services and diversification of supports has been welcomed by women accessing them.

We believe 2020 was a turning point in Ireland in terms of the increased levels of awareness of domestic violence and the pandemic was a call to action to all of us, at a community level, for funders and commissioners and the state. We need to harness this energy. Three immediate responses are required in our opinion:

- Whole of government approach to the issue of Gender Based Violence in terms of policy drivers
- National Development Plan for investment in domestic violence services including refuge accommodation provision
- Prevention strategy on domestic violence

We believe these actions would demonstrate serious intent by the state to tackle gender based violence in Ireland.

Sinéad Smith
Manager

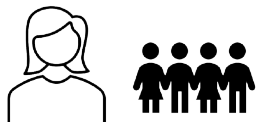


Christmas 2020 donation from fundraiser with St. Joseph's Mercy Convent Navan, students, teacher Ms. Porter and Deirdre Murphy (former manager MWRSS)

OUR IMPACT

A SNAPSHOT

OF 2020



We provided refuge to 42 women and we provided refuge to 58 children. A total of 5,317 services were provided for families in refuge in 2020.



We worked with 100 children in refuge and in the community. We undertook 100 one to one sessions. Our Children's Programme dealt with 352 calls.



We worked with 435 women through our outreach programme in the community including one to one support, court accompaniment and advocacy. This was a 5% increase from 2019.



We dealt with 4,026 calls in 2020 compared to 3,161 calls in 2019 (this represents a 27% increase) for supports 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 988 calls, with a twofold increase in crisis calls. We made 1,305 calls on behalf of women and children which included advocacy (304 more than 2019).

Our outreach programme took 989 calls and made 744 calls to women. This year for the first time we counted our specific calls relating to domestic violence court orders.



Due to Covid 19 we adapted to an online support group, which 36 women took part in between March and December, meeting every two weeks. In total 19 sessions took place.



Recovery - We increased our counselling services providing online and phone counselling women who found this support a lifeline during a particularly difficult time in their lives when access to services were challenging. We provided 181 sessions to 61 women funded in the main through donations. We provided play and music therapy to 14 children.

ORGANISATION VISION, MISSION, PURPOSE, VALUES AND STRATEGIC GOALS

OUR VISION

To have a society where violence against women is no longer tolerated and where women are truly equal. To contribute towards creating communities in which women and children live violence and abuse free lives.

OUR MISSION STATEMENT

Meath Women's Refuge and Support Services works 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.

OUR VALUES

WOMEN & CHILD CENTRED

This means that all of our responses are led by the needs of women and children experiencing domestic violence. Being safety focused is central.

EQUALITY & HUMAN RIGHTS

MWRSS response is rights based. We recognise that everyone has equal rights and aim to ensure that all women have equal access, participation and outcomes from our services regardless of their social status or identity.

EMPOWERMENT

This includes responding with empathy and compassion and demonstrating respect for women's decisions and promoting the agency of women.

TRUST & INTEGRITY

Maintaining confidentiality and being honest and open about our work and how we respond is crucial to maintaining the trust of women, children and all stakeholders and the integrity of Meath Women's Refuge and Support Services.

PURPOSE

TO PROVIDE

a place of safety where women can take time to look at the options available to ensure their future safety.

TO SUPPORT

and assist women in dealing with the impact of the abuse on themselves and their children through the wide range of services and supports provided.

TO RECOGNISE

and care for the physical, emotional, and educational development needs of the children who attend the service.

TO RESPECT

and, where necessary, foster parent/child relationships.

TO OFFER

support, relevant and accurate information to any person in relation to violence against women.

TO RAISE

awareness of violence against women and the impact it has on the wider society.

STRATEGIC GOALS

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

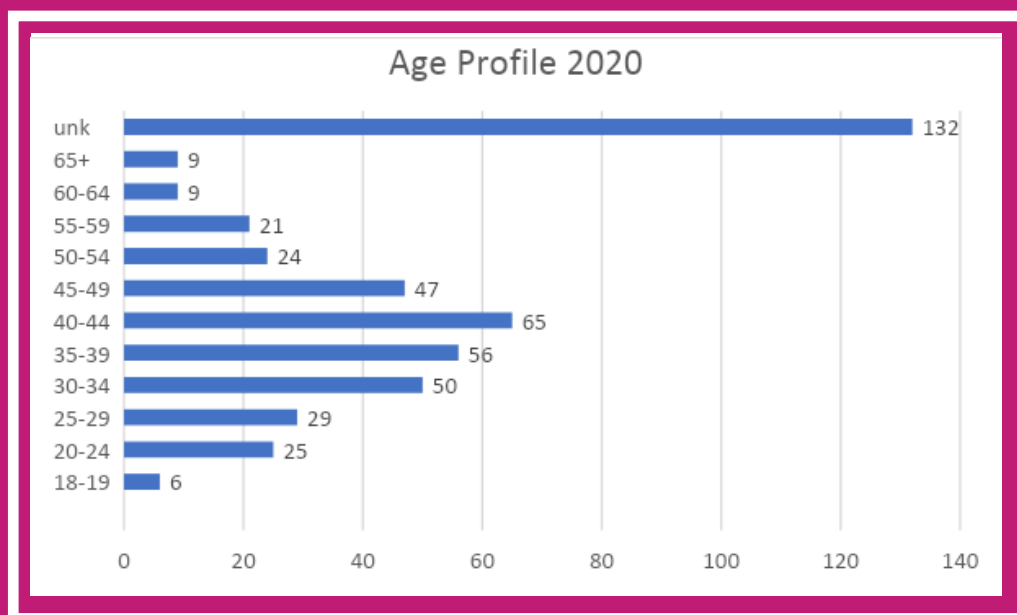
OUR SUPPORT SERVICES

2020 was an extremely busy year for the organisation and the following statistics give an insight into our work. The capacity to quantify our work beyond statistics is challenging in the absence of a Continuous Quality Improvement Framework (CQI) or Quality Standards in the sector we work in.

However, we know that the time invested by our staff and the labour-intensive nature of our work is best illustrated in assessing the outcomes of our work which are often not tangible. The testimonies of women and children and the case studies in this section balance the quantity and qualitative impact of our work and illustrate the positive changes we make in women and children's lives.



DEMOGRAPHICS OF WOMEN WE SUPPORT



28% of women did not state their age e.g., helpline calls for information and support

46% are between 30-49 years of age

13% are between 18-29 years of age

13% are between 50-65 plus

ETHNICITY --- OF WOMEN --- WE SUPPORT

In 2020, 35% of women we worked in refuge with identified as Irish and 16% identified as Irish Traveller. The remaining 49% were ethnic minority women from a range of countries.

In contrast, the outreach programme worked with 78% of women who identified as Irish and 22% who were ethnic minority women, reflecting very different profiles and needs.

A CASE STUDY TO ILLUSTRATE OUR WORK IN REFUGE (REAL NAMES & DETAILS CHANGED)

Liz and her 3 children were admitted to Meath Women's Refuge and Support Services as there is no refuge in her county. Liz had sustained injuries to her arms and face due to a physical assault from her ex-partner. Liz suffered sexual and physical abuse from her ex-partner.

Both Liz and her children endured emotional, verbal, and coercive control from him. This resulted in the four of them to containing themselves in one bedroom within the house in attempts to remain safe. When they came into refuge this continued as they were unable to feel safe without being near each other due to the level of trauma they experienced. Her ex-partner controlled what they wore and who they spoke to and what they were permitted to eat. Liz's ex-partner threatened to take her life on many occasions.

The family were isolated from the community, the children presented with dysregulation due to their experience of domestic abuse. During their stay in refuge Liz attended court to obtain a protection order to provide safety for her and her children. Using our risk assessment tools, Liz and her children were deemed a 'High Risk' and a safety plan was put in place for them. Liz was on the Housing List on her own county but deemed it unsafe to return to that area.

We advocated with the Local Authorities to assist her in obtaining accommodation within the Meath area. Liz's ex-partner was claiming her social welfare payment which caused her to be unable to access financial support. Refuge staff liaised with social welfare to get her a payment in her own name. Liz had pre-existing medical conditions which were becoming more problematic due to the stress from her ex-partner.

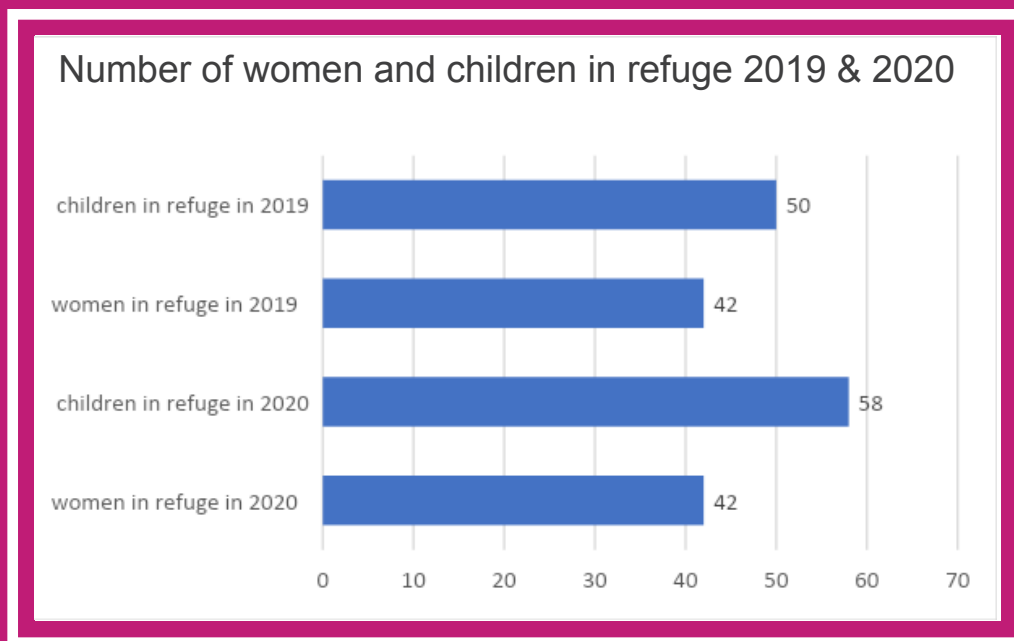
Meath Women's Refuge and Support Service helped her to access medical care and supported her emotionally through our Counselling Service. Our Children's Development Worker sourced summer camps for the children and met them for 1:2:1 therapeutic support. Creative space was provided for the children to explore their emotional literacy and learning how to keep safe.

Following their discharge from refuge, referrals to other agencies were made to assist their transition back into their new community. Issues arose obtaining school placement for the children due to lack of availability. Liz and her three children are settling into their new home and are continuing to link in with supports within the community.

Liz told us that she was totally unaware that supports like us existed and the level of supports available which have had a positive impact on her life.

REFUGE AND HELPLINE SUPPORTS

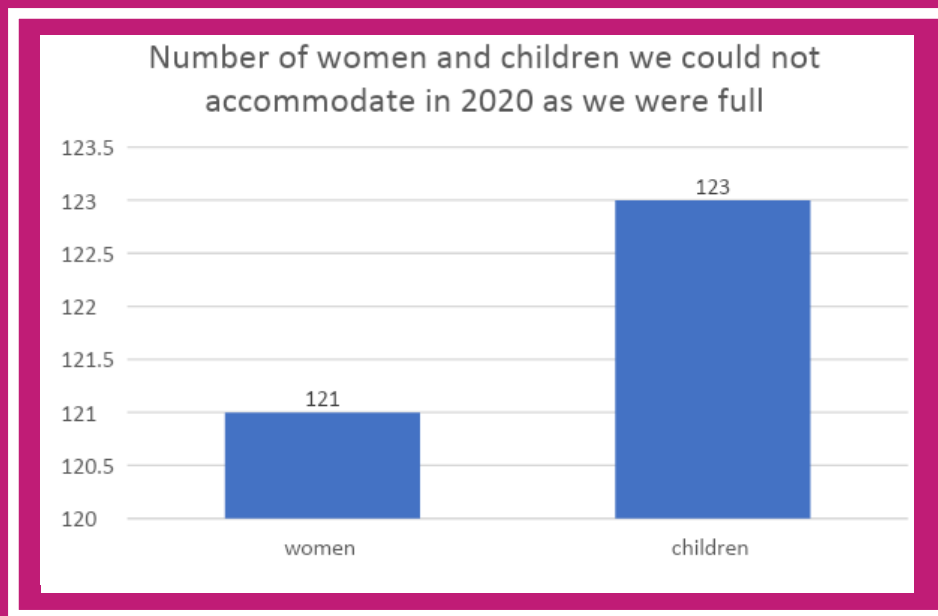
WOMEN AND CHILDREN IN REFUGE



We worked with 42 women and 58 children in refuge in 2020 with an increase of eight children from 2019. One challenge for the organisation is supporting for families to transition from refuge and ensuring that women and children are positioned to move ideally into their own homes or other supported accommodation.

As a crisis accommodation provider, we need to ensure we have space to provide families in crisis with emergency accommodation at the time they need it.

FAMILIES WE WERE UNABLE TO ACCOMMODATE IN 2020



The above figure is very stark and reflects the lack of refuge spaces in Ireland for women and children. In 2020, we had an unprecedented level of demand for refuge accommodation. Every time a lock down occurred; we saw a spike in calls to our helpline. In 2020 we were unable to accommodate 121 women and 123 children. If we compare this figure to 2018 and 2019 respectively; we were unable to accommodate in 2019 14 women and 14 children.

In 2018 we were unable to accommodate 31 women and 47 children. Although the organisation moved from five refuge units to 6 this year, the time it takes to process housing applications means that families are often in refuge for long periods of time. In 2021 we will be working with Meath County Council to reduce these time scales through an interagency structure between the two organisations similar to the Housing Action Teams (HAT).

In 2020 we removed our geographical location criteria for refuge provision which means we can accommodate women from outside the county. This was in response to the limited accommodation provision in Ireland and the need for women to leave their area due to safety concerns, to meet the needs of Traveller women (we never applied a geographical location to Traveller women), undocumented women and women who are trafficked.

LENGTH OF TIME IN REFUGE

Thirty-one percent of families stay 40 days or more in refuge, or just under one third and 11% of this group stayed 90 days or more. In contrast 69% stayed 39 days or less in refuge. Two pictures emerge from these statistics; namely, a split between short term stays e.g., barring orders and longer term stays for families in relation to the application processing timeframe for the Housing Assistance Payment.

Additionally, single women face barriers in terms of affordability for single person private accommodation in Meath and in the cases of two single women they stayed a combined 238 days in refuge. An innovative approach to address the needs of single women is urgently required.

Number of women	Number of children	Number of Days in Refuge
5	6	90 days or more
8	10	40-89 days
6	10	20-39
8	15	10-19 days
15	17	less than 10 days

In 2019, 11 out of 42 women and their children (26%) 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.

SERVICES TO WOMEN & CHILDREN IN REFUGE

MWRSS operate a key working system with a care plan model to ensure that wrap around supports are provided to women and children we work with. This means we advocate with a wide range of agencies on behalf of women and children across a range of areas and needs. We also provide practical supports in terms of form filling and basic care needs e.g., food and clothing. The key working model means a dedicated key worker and care plan for women and children, specific to their needs which covers a wide range of issues which are summarised below.

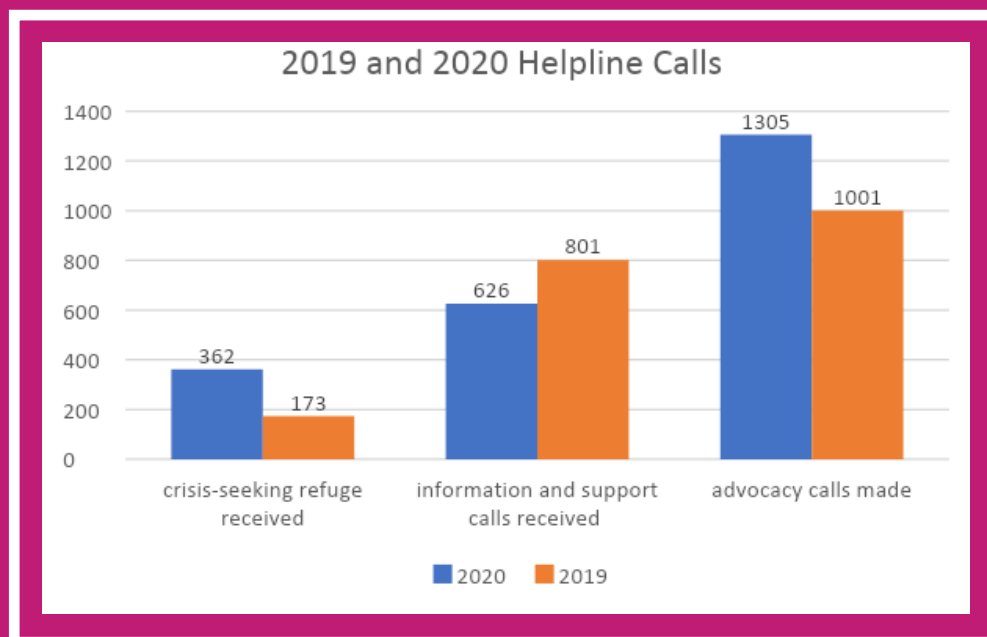
Daily Services in Refuge	
Gardai	160
Medical	178
Solicitor	8
PHN	12
Social Work	146
Psychology	13
CWO	95
Legal Aid	39
Key Working	244
Accompaniment off site	13
Other supports	4409
Total number of services	5317

HELPLINE CALLS

We dealt with 4,026 calls in 2020 to the organisation-an increase of 27% on 2019 figures in calls managed by the organisation. 2020 saw fluctuations and new trends in our phone support with women. We saw a direct switch in information to crisis calls compared to 2019.

In 2020 we saw crisis calls more than double to our helpline-these calls are women looking for emergency refuge accommodation for themselves and their children. In the early days of Covid 19, our calls for refuge shifted from an average of 13-15 a month to 35-40 crisis calls by April and May 2020. We also saw a jump of almost one third in advocacy calls we made to and on behalf of women to external agencies.

Our helpline experienced several surges in demand for services and supports during the various phases of lockdown and has been steadily busy throughout. In total we received 501 referrals for support for women and 581 referrals for children on our helpline.



A CASE STUDY TO ILLUSTRATE OUR WORK IN THE OUTREACH PROGRAMME (REAL NAMES & DETAILS CHANGED)

Joanna first contacted Meath Women's Refuge & Support services in 2020 and continues contact to date. Initially, Joanna requested help in applying for a Protection Order against her husband (John). We assisted with paperwork for this application and provided information and support on the courts process.

Joanna was granted a Protection Order in September 2020. Joanna reported a positive change in John's behaviour once the protection order was granted and believed she did not need to go back to court for the safety order application as her home was now a more peaceful, safer place. Worryingly, Joanna's concept of domestic abuse did not capture all aspects of abusive behaviour perpetrators engage in, therefore we felt it was imperative that we explore this further.

Counselling was offered to Joanna through our service, however, she felt that she did not need this just yet. Following on, we met face to face to explore coercive control and how it impacts on victims in their home. We explored the abuse cycle and in particular, "the honeymoon period" part of this cycle, we discussed how abusers often use this tactic to reel back in their victim only for the cycle to start over again. Joanna was very surprised when she recognised that the behaviour, she had been subjected to in her home was coercive control and abuse. As Joanna became more empowered and stronger in herself, John retaliated by getting a protection order against her, alleging that she was abusive towards him.

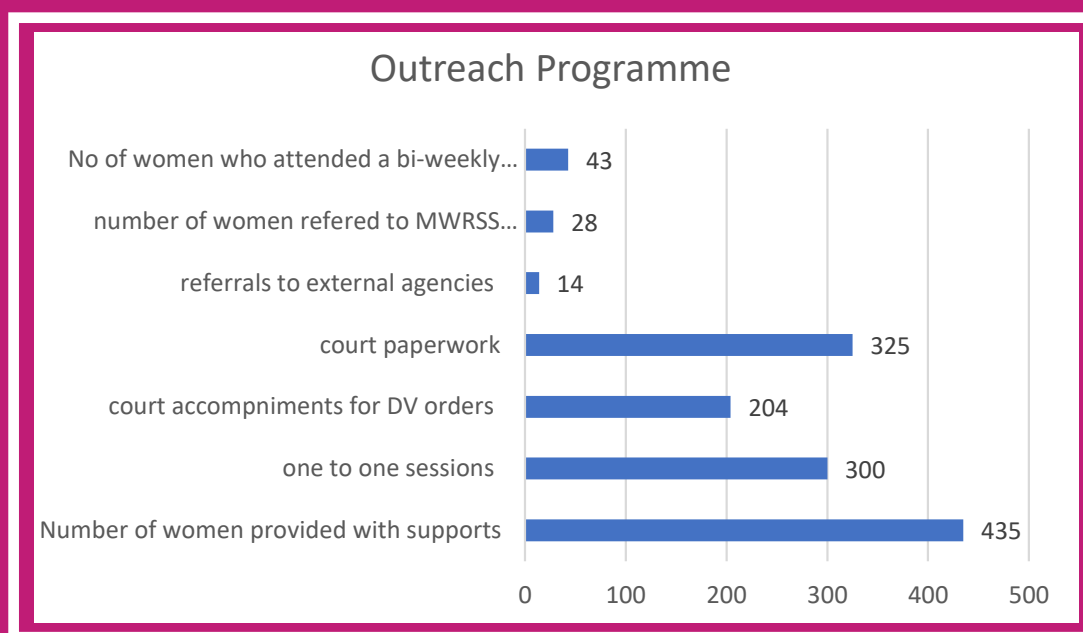
Unfortunately, when both safety order applications came up for hearing in court, neither were granted any further court order which left Joanna feeling very deflated and not believed. Nevertheless, Joanna continued to avail of weekly phone contact from our Outreach team

throughout the remainder of 2020. In March 2021, Joanna disclosed that John had physically assaulted her which left her with bruising. We supported Joanna in securing an Interim Barring Order against John. We also made a referral to Tusla as the children in this home could potentially be exposed to violence.

At the follow up court hearing for safety/barring orders, John gave an undertaking to stay away from the family home for the duration of separation/divorce proceedings. We again discussed support options available through our service with Joanna; one-one support by phone or in person, Zoom Support group, counselling, Power to Change educational programme, and children's supports.

Joanna expressed concerns that her eldest daughter was struggling with her dad being out of the home and welcomed a referral to our Childrens Support Worker who subsequently undertook a piece of work with this child and her sibling. Joanna also availed of counselling for herself, she met with a member of our Outreach team who completed a Risk Assessment and Safety Plan with her to support her safety at home and in the community.

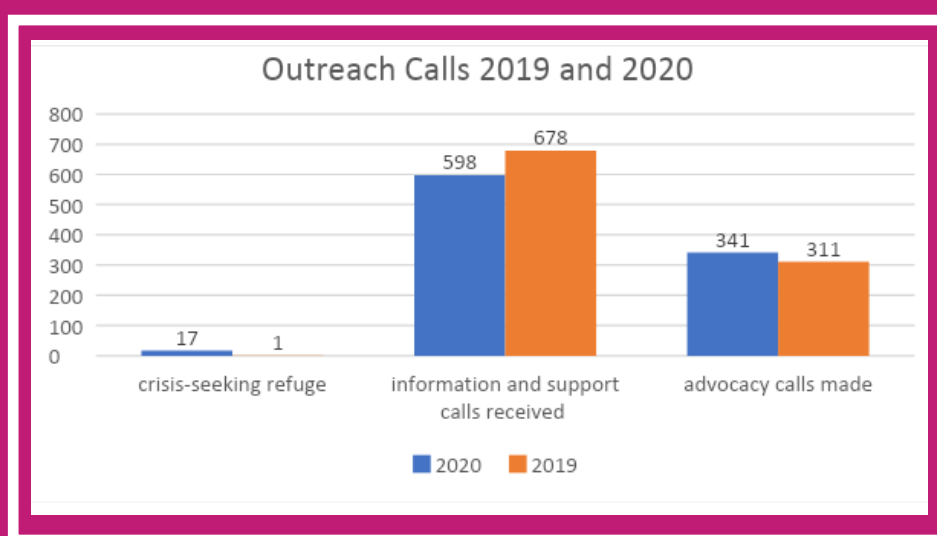
THE OUTREACH PROGRAMME



The Outreach Programme is the largest area of our work as an organisation numerically speaking as it is community facing. As can be seen from the statistics below we worked with 435 women in Co. Meath in 2020, this was an increase of 5% on our 2019 figures.

The programme has grown each year since it was initiated and is managed by three staff who make up two full time equivalent posts. Given the level of demand for services, the outreach programme is significantly under resourced. This impacts on it branching into new areas of work in terms of case management of high risk needs and focusing on other relevant areas of work such as prevention, education, and community development.

CALLS TO THE COMMUNITY OUTREACH PROGRAMME



In addition, our outreach programme dealt with a high number of calls in 2020. In 2020 they also recorded the phone calls they made and took relating to court applications for Domestic Violence orders for the first time.

DIRECT CALLS MANAGED RE DOMESTIC VIOLENCE COURT ORDERS

The number of calls for court orders taken was 374 and calls made to women from outreach regarding applications for Domestic Violence orders was 403 calls.

COURT PREPARATION & COURT ACCOMPANIMENT

In 2020 the Outreach programme provided court accompaniment on 204 occasions, and this resulted in 148 Protection orders and 27 Interim Barring Orders. Throughout the pandemic when court buildings were not open to the public, we continued to do this work and returned to the courts immediately when allowed to do so.

The outreach team worked in partnership with the court's office staff in Navan and Trim Court and agreed referral protocols during Covid 19 given the pressures on the court system and the fact that the court clerks were not available on the public front desk. We attend court three days a week and in between we complete applications for court and our helpline deals with requests for court accompaniment.

This work is funded by the Victims of Crime Office in the Department of Justice and additional resources to extend our work between October and December 2020 was provided by Victims of Crime.

ZOOM SUPPORT GROUP

Our support group moved to an online group and met every two weeks, and the demand was consistently high. Thirty-six women met on 19 occasions during the year. This provided peer to peer support to women and facilitated women who could not travel or attend face to face meetings to access a support service. Women who attended attested to the value of the peer to peer support the group provided to them.

THERAPEUTIC RECOVERY FOR WOMEN & CHILDREN

In 2020 we were able to invest significantly in the provision of counselling services through successfully accessing a range of charitable and grant donations. This meant we could provide 181 sessions of counselling to 61 women who are recovering from the trauma of domestic abuse.

The lack of core funding to do this work and huge need for this support presents challenges to the organisation in terms of planning the levels of provision we can provide on an annual basis. Donations and philanthropic funding resourced this work with women who were isolated and cut off from family, friends and other social networks while living with Domestic Abuse and those who may have separated from their partners but who are in recovery from domestic abuse.

We delivered counselling services via the phone and online. We recruited three additional counsellors to ensure we could meet the needs of women during the year.

COUNSELLING & THERAPEUTIC ART SERVICES

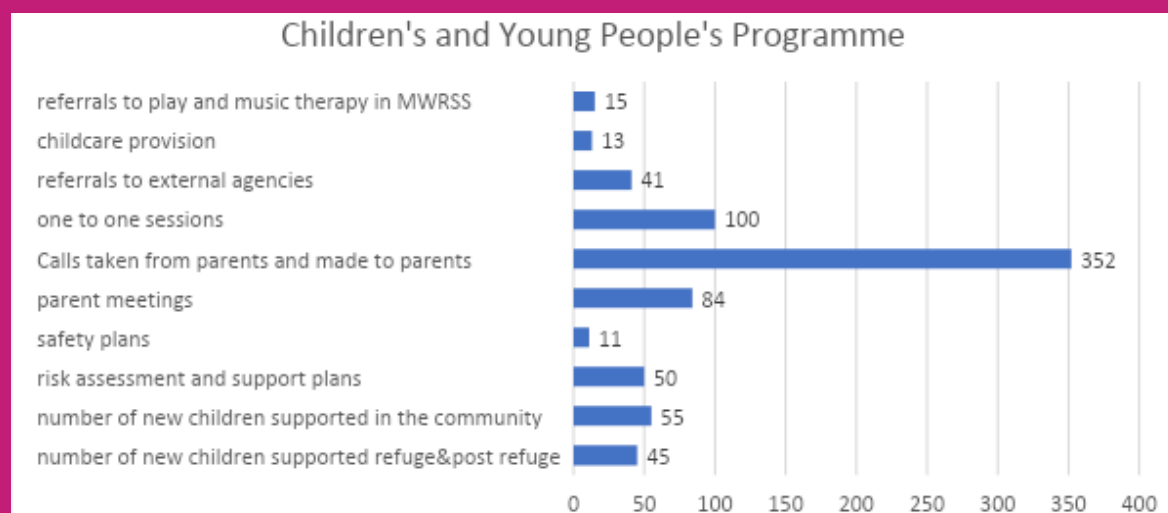
Number of sessions	181
Number of women	61

THE CHILDREN & YOUNG PERSONS PROGRAMME

Our work with children was like many other support services severely impacted on by Covid 19. We refocused our work onto the needs of children in refuge because of this as their access to play, school and friends was severely limited. We provided 100 one to one sessions with children, and we undertook risk and support plans with 50 children.

In terms of the groups, we worked with; 55 children were in the community and 45 in refuge. The programme also managed 352 calls with parents during 2020. We had to curtail the rolling out of additional play therapy and music therapy programmes due to Covid 19 restrictions. We recruited two new therapists during 2020 but were limited in the delivery of a full programme of services.

In 2020 we provided 15 children with 26 sessions of either music or play therapy. The diagram below gives a picture of our work in 2020 with children.



THE NATIONAL CHILDHOOD DOMESTIC VIOLENCE & ABUSE PROJECT

The Children's Programme in Meath Women's Refuge and Support Services is a member of the Barnardos National Childhood Domestic Violence and Abuse project steering committee. One of the elements to this project was to undertake a consultation with children and young people. During this consultation, The Children's Programme supported children and young people to have their voices heard by facilitating discussions on their experiences of domestic violence and abuse.

The children and young people that took part used their powerful words to describe their experiences of domestic violence and abuse. They created art pieces which depicted the darkness that domestic violence and abuse can have over a child or young person and how finding a safe place such as a refuge, made things seem much lighter. The children and young people's words and descriptions were turned into a short video which was shared with professional agencies, across all social media and is located on the Barnardos website. This video captured children and young people's definition of what domestic violence and abuse means to them.

The Children's Programme in MWRSS will continue to actively encourage and support work with children and young people in making sure that they have their voices heard when important decisions are being made about their life. The quotes below are from children who participated in the project from Co. Meath, provided with the permission of their parent.

CHILDREN'S EXPERIENCES OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE & ABUSE

Children experience domestic violence and abuse through their senses- they hear it, they see it and they feel it.

"It sounded like name calling, crying and shattered glass"
Age 14

Children may not be physically present when an incident occurs, but children are very present for the aftermath- they may see bruises on their mother, they may see broken pieces of glass or furniture and they may feel a sense of fear and control in the home.

"I felt they didn't care if I heard them fighting"
Age 9

"... there is other stuff happening underneath the surface"
Age 10

Children feel a huge sense of responsibility in keeping themselves safe, their mum safe and others in their family such as siblings and pets safe from the abuse.

"I felt like I couldn't stop it"
Age 13

STRATEGIC HIGHLIGHTS IN 2020

Some of the key developments we undertook are highlighted below for progress against our strategic plans:

STRATEGIC GOAL ONE

DELIVERY OF
HIGH-QUALITY
EVIDENCE-BASED
SERVICES AND
DEVELOPEMNT
SUPPORTS FOR
WOMEN AND
CHILDREN AT
RISK OF OR
EXPERIENCING
DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

COMMUNITY BASED REFUGE

As a result of the support and partnership with Meath County Council and Tuath Housing we were able to shift our communal refuge accommodation out into the community through four units to accommodate women and children in early May 2020. This required additional staffing and a restructure of our work in refuge to ensure we could maintain supports and contact to women in the community e.g., through home visits. Tusla our funder provided additional resources for us to ensure we could maintain refuge provision in Co. Meath. We increased our capacity by one family from five to six units.

REMOTE WORKING

We shifted our non-frontline staff to remote working in a hybrid model with office-based work and home working. This was a successful endeavour which we will continue in 2021 on a reduced basis in line with the needs of the organisation. It also ensured that contact was maintained with women and children and a seamless shift took place so staff could continue to do their work.

DIGITAL DEVELOPMENTS

We undertook a process of upgrading our IT systems through grants received from Facebook Clonee and Tusla our core funders. We purchased laptops and PCs for staff, and we signed up to a new CRM project called E-safe which will allow us to move to a CRM paperless system in early 2021.

We began to use Zoom and Video What's App calls for contact with service users and for group programmes. We redeveloped our website to support information and supports for women and children and we increased our interaction on social media. We will continue to upgrade our IT systems for communication with women and children in 2021.

FUNDRAISING

Like many charities, we were impacted severely by the pandemic. We were unable to carry out church gate collections or bag packs at Christmas time. Our charity shop, Savvy Chic, closed in March 2020 and remained closed throughout Covid 19 to protect customers and volunteers due to the shop's space and its co-location in a restaurant building.

During 2020, we invested a lot of time connecting with communities about our work and the needs of women and children. We supported groups that undertook fundraising events e.g., providing them with videos on our work, advertising their activities on social media, attending events they were hosting online and most importantly thanking them publicly for their support. We had an amazing response from the local community in Co. Meath. People donated on our new PayPal button, local groups and individuals organised innovative fundraiser events in line with Covid 19 protocols.

Our Christmas Appeal Keeping the Doors Open was hugely supported and our Call to Action for Vouchers in lieu of food donations was very well received. Our Christmas Appeal supported 78 families that we worked with during 2021. In addition, the vouchers we received were also used to provide families in refuge with food and clothing supports in 2021.



An Garda Siochana Navan-Christmas Donation of Toys from the Garda Fund

Over the course of the year, we developed, grew, and deepened our relationships with funders such as Facebook, The Community Foundation of Ireland and Safe Ireland, new donors engaged with us as they felt a strong connection to our work in the context of the pandemic. The emergency direct funds provided by Safe Ireland, our umbrella body, provided direct funding to women linked to our services in Co. Meath. In addition, Safe Ireland provided Covid support funding and resources for counselling services in Meath. Our core funding increased to support additional demands on our services including from Tusla, Victims of Crime and MOVE which facilitated us to respond to these needs. We were delighted to be involved with our colleagues in An Garda Síochána in the inaugural 'Go Purple Day' fundraiser in aid of Domestic Violence Services in Co. Meath which included ourselves and our colleagues in Men's Aid.

Other small grants received during the year are summarised below:

- HSE national lottery funding to resource our music therapy project
- CFI OLC Grant for Counselling services
- Facebook Community Grant Scheme to support IT Development
- Facebook Covid 19 Grant to support counselling services and the Christmas Appeal
- Meath County Council Covid Grant
- Pobal Sustainability Fund Appeal: this government fund was provided to support community and voluntary organisation whose income was reduced because of Covid 19

The impact of this additional funding cannot be underestimated, and it was felt across the organisation in terms of what we could do: increase refuge provision, increase play therapy supports, music therapy, move our work online; adapt our building to meet Covid 19 control measures; increase counselling services; increase supports to women seeking domestic violence court orders. We want to ensure we can continue to maintain these levels of support in 2021 and beyond.



Staff members Sandra Goonan and Margaret Butler participating in fundraiser event for Go Purple Day 2020

POLICY WORK

We worked closely with other Domestic Violence Services including our umbrella body in advocating for the needs of women and children impacted by domestic abuse. Key partnerships included Safe Ireland, An Garda Síochána, the Department of Justice and Equality. We fed into the consultations on the O'Malley Report on the experience of victims of sexual violence; we participated in Tusla consultations on the supports needed by Domestic Violence Services because of the Pandemic, and we attended meetings with Safe Ireland and Minister for Justice Helen McEntee to discuss our work and the policy areas we want to see change on.

Finally, we established a working relationship with the new Divisional Protective Services Unit of An Garda Síochána who have responsibility for criminal investigations into Domestic and Sexual Violence for our area.



Go Purple Day 2020: working with our first responder colleagues in Co. Meath to raise aware of Domestic Violence.

GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT

STRATEGIC GOAL TWO

DEVELOPMENT OF A NEW PURPOSE BUILT REFUGE BUILDING AND ANCILLARY SERVICES

Two key developments occurred in 2020 relevant to strategic goal two. Firstly, in May 2020 the Department of Housing approved our CAS application to build 8 units on a new green field site.

This was a huge achievement for the organisation and to put it into context, we have not expanded our number of family units since 1992. This large investment will require us to build an ancillary service building beside our refuge units to service the units but also to provide space to grow and expand the range of support services in the community. This is the biggest project we have taken on in our history and it will require a huge effort in terms of planning and development.

Coupled with this our core funder Tusla accepted a new two-year business plan to expand and grow our services in November 2020 as the new building and its growth has staffing and resource implications. The organisation will look very different in five years' time and to ensure that the structures are in place to manage this growth, we will be working on the development of a new five-year strategic plan in 2021 and we will be increasing our governance infrastructure to manage this change.

ORGANISATION STRUCTURE, GOVERNANCE & MANAGEMENT

STRATEGIC GOAL THREE

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

Meath Women's Aid Housing Association CLG (known generally as Meath Women's Refuge and Support Services) is constituted as a company limited by guarantee as set out under parts 1-15 of the Companies Act 2014. Its purpose and objectives are set out in its Memorandum of Association and how it conducts its business is set out in its Articles of Association. Both documents (now the Constitution) are publicly available from the Companies Registration Office website (www.cro.ie)

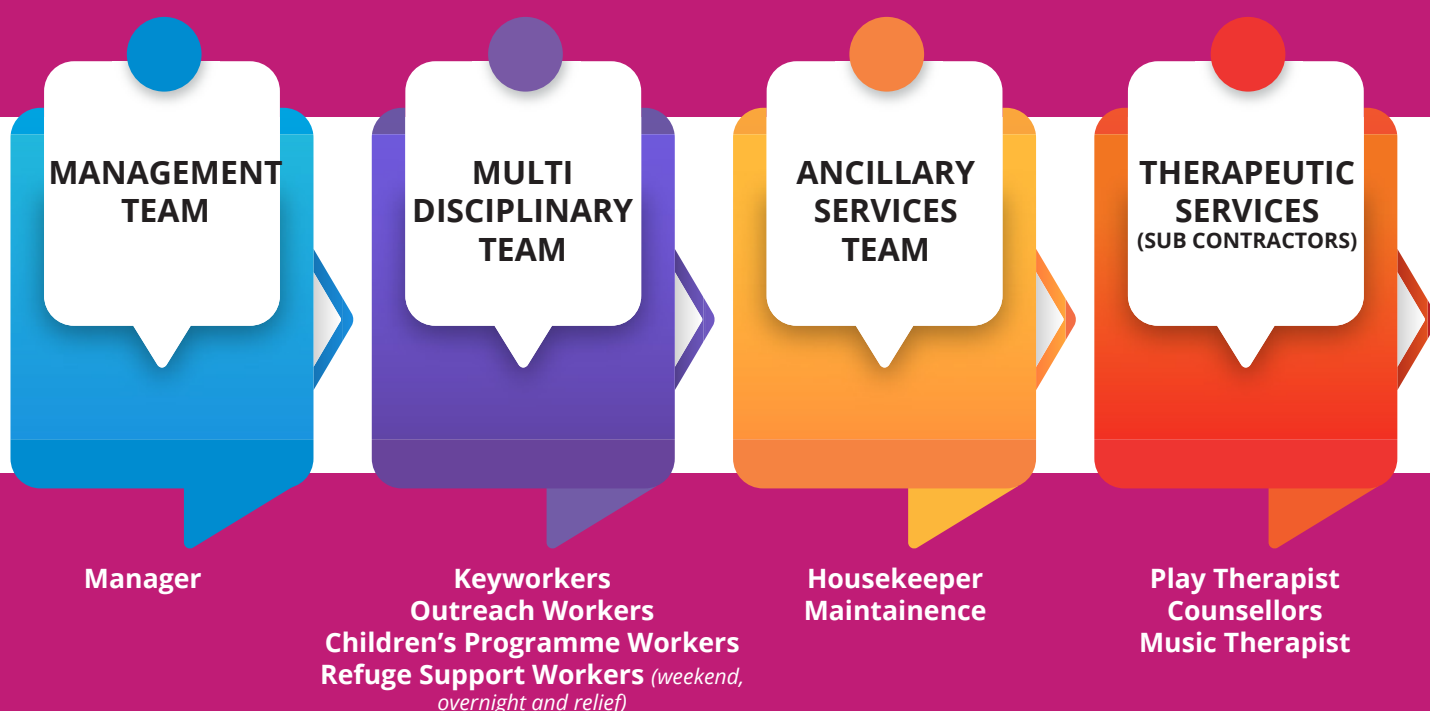
OUR ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE

The management and staff team provide a multi-disciplinary range of supports. In addition, to our core staff, a number of sub-contractors provide therapeutic services on our behalf in terms of counselling, play therapy and music therapy. Our core team includes, a manager, key workers in refuge, overnight and weekend refuge support workers, relief refuge support workers, outreach workers, children's programme workers, housekeeping and maintenance. Our staff team has grown in 2020 to meet the increase in demand for services and it will continue to grow in 2021 and beyond as we begin to implement our business development plan and complete work on our new refuge facility.

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

The directors of our Board offer their services on a voluntary basis. All board directors are independent. They oversee the direction of the work and the affairs of the organisation ensuring the organisation is meeting the needs of women and children and is working to its charitable objects and complying with all necessary legislation and regulation. Board directors do not receive remuneration in respect to their services to the charity. In 2020 there have been no contracts or arrangements entered into during the financial year in which a director was materially interested or which were significant in relation to the charity's activities. The manager of the organisation reports into the Board at Directors' meetings.

BOARD OF DIRECTORS



CHARITIES REGULATOR'S GOVERNANCE CODE AND ANNUAL REPORT

In late 2020 we began to assess our work against the Charities Regulator's Governance Code in terms of compliance and we worked during the year to ensure we could improve and ensure our governance was of a high standard as required by the CRA. We will submit a return to the Charities Regulator in October 2021.

GOVERNANCE DEVELOPMENT

In 2020, we undertook several initiatives to ensure we are compliant with government legislation and regulations, and we will continue this in 2021. All the following policies and procedures were developed with, reviewed by, and signed off by the Board of Directors.

- Annual report for 2019
- Updated admission policy (September)
- Financial procedures & policy reviewed and updated (September/October financial subgroup meeting then board)
- Review of child protection policy and procedure (November)
- Undertook a review of the organisation's compliance with the Charities Regulator Compliance and Governance Code (December)
- Charities Regulator Report (October)
- Board Handbook Review (November 2020)
- Voluntary Housing Regulator Report (November 2020)
- Reserves Policy 2020 (February 2020)
- On Call Policy and Procedures
- Lone Worker Policy (February 2020)
- Lobbying Register-all reports made in line with regulator timelines.
- Health and Safety Statement and Health and Safety Risk Assessment July 2020

BOARD SUBGROUPS: FINANCE & RISK SUBGROUP

The Finance and Risk Subgroup has a term of reference and works to three main internal policies: namely: financial policies and procedures document; health and safety statement and register and the risk management policy and risk register. The committee monitors and reviews the financial performance of the organisation. It also reviews business risk and health and safety risks as part of its 'risk function'. It provides independent oversight and review of annual budgets, returns to funders, projected cash flows, monthly management accounts and the annual financial statements and reports. Recommendations from the committee are brought to the main board for decision making.

HR & STAFFING SUBGROUP

This is an ad hoc group that meets as and when required and is made up of directors with HR expertise and focuses on HR policies and procedures providing advice on the development, review and monitoring of HR policies and procedures. Recommendations from the committee are brought to the main board for decision making. No subgroup meetings took place in 2020.

BOARD MEETINGS

Board Director	Board meeting	Finance and Risk	Retired/Appointed
Frank Long	6/8	3/3	
Raymond Finnegan	7/8	3/3	
Sonya McGrath	6/8	3/3	
Sinead Christian	6/8		
Teresa Macken	1/3		Retired 30 th June 2020
Sinead Gogan	8/8		
Aidan Weldon	2/3		Retired 30 th June 2020
Orla O'Reilly	1/3		Retired 30 th June 2020
Laura O'Donnell	3/4 joined in June		Appointed 30 th June 2020
Charlene Trenier	2/2		Appointed 14 th October 2020

Meath Women's Aid Housing Association CLG

STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL ACTIVITIES

(Incorporating an Income and Expenditure Account)

for the financial year ended 31 December 2020

	Notes	Unrestricted Funds 2020 €	Restricted Funds 2020 €	Total 2020 €	Unrestricted Funds 2019 €	Restricted Funds 2019 €	Total 2019 €
Income							
Charitable activities							
- Grants from governments and other co-funders	3.1	114,630	554,237	668,867	81,978	502,694	584,672
Other income	3.2	2,468	-	2,468	-	-	-
Total income		117,098	554,237	671,335	81,978	502,694	584,672
Expenditure							
Raising funds	4.1	675	-	675	-	-	-
Charitable activities	4.2	167,420	451,713	619,133	97,981	467,431	565,412
Total Expenditure		168,095	451,713	619,808	97,981	467,431	565,412
Net income/(expenditure)		(50,997)	102,524	51,527	(16,003)	35,263	19,260
Transfers between funds		-	-	-	-	-	-
Net movement in funds for the financial year		(50,997)	102,524	51,527	(16,003)	35,263	19,260
Reconciliation of funds							
Balances brought forward at 1 January 2020	14	955,383	35,263	990,646	971,385	-	971,385
Balances carried forward at 31 December 2020		904,386	137,787	1,042,173	955,382	35,263	990,645

The Statement of Financial Activities includes all gains and losses recognised in the financial year.
All income and expenditure relate to continuing activities.

Approved by the Board of Directors on 22nd April 2021 and signed on its behalf by:

Frank Long
Director

Sinead Gogan
Director

Meath Women's Aid Housing Association CLG

BALANCE SHEET

as at 31 December 2020

		2020	2019
	Notes	€	€
Fixed Assets			
Tangible assets	9	758,930	773,654
		<hr/>	<hr/>
Current Assets			
Debtors	10	61,597	2,891
Cash at bank and in hand		267,070	239,445
		<hr/>	<hr/>
		328,667	242,336
		<hr/>	<hr/>
Creditors: Amounts falling due within one year	11	(45,424)	(25,345)
		<hr/>	<hr/>
Net Current Assets		283,243	216,991
		<hr/>	<hr/>
Total Assets less Current Liabilities		1,042,173	990,645
		<hr/>	<hr/>
Funds			
Restricted trust funds		137,787	35,263
General fund (unrestricted)		904,386	955,382
		<hr/>	<hr/>
Total funds	14	1,042,173	990,645
		<hr/>	<hr/>

The total unrestricted funds include a revaluation reserve of €465,981 (2019 - €465,981)

The financial statements have been prepared in accordance with the provisions applicable to companies subject to the small companies' regime and in accordance with FRS 102 "The Financial Reporting Standard applicable in the UK and Republic of Ireland", applying Section 1A of that Standard.

Approved by the Board of Directors on 22nd April 2021 and signed on its behalf by:

Frank Long
Director

Sinead Gogan
Director

Meath Women's Aid Housing Association CLG**STATEMENT OF CASH FLOWS**

for the financial year ended 31 December 2020

Cash flows from operating activities

Net movement in funds	51,528	19,260
Adjustments for:		
Depreciation	14,724	5,869
	<hr/>	<hr/>
	66,252	25,129
Movements in working capital:		
Movement in debtors	(58,706)	(133)
Movement in creditors	20,079	(34,025)
	<hr/>	<hr/>
Cash generated from operations	27,625	(9,029)
	<hr/>	<hr/>
Cash flows from investing activities		
Payments to acquire tangible assets	-	(6,677)
	<hr/>	<hr/>
Net increase in cash and cash equivalents	27,625	(15,706)
Cash and cash equivalents at 1 January 2020	239,445	255,151
	<hr/>	<hr/>
Cash and cash equivalents at 31 December 2020	19 267,070	239,445
	<hr/>	<hr/>

INDEPENDENT AUDITORS REPORT TO THE MEMBERS OF MEATH WOMEN'S AID
HOUSING ASSOCIATION CLG
REPORT ON THE AUDIT OF THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS

OPINION

We have audited the charity financial statements of Meath Women's Aid Housing Association CLG for the financial year ended 31 December 2020 which comprise the Statement of Financial Activities (incorporating an Income and Expenditure Account), the Balance Sheet, the Statement of Cash Flows and the related notes to the financial statements, including a summary of significant accounting policies set out in note 2. The financial reporting framework that has been applied in their preparation is Irish law and FRS 102 "The Financial Reporting Standard applicable in the UK and Republic of Ireland", applying Section 1A of that Standard and Accounting and Reporting by Charities: Statement of Recommended Practice applicable to charities preparing their accounts in accordance with FRS 102.

In our opinion the financial statements:

- give a true and fair view of the assets, liabilities and financial position of the charity as at 31 December 2020 and of its net incoming resources for the financial year then ended;
- have been properly prepared in accordance with FRS 102 "The Financial Reporting Standard applicable in the UK and Republic of Ireland", as applied in accordance with the provisions of the Companies Act 2014 and having regard to the Charities SORP; and
- have been properly prepared in accordance with the requirements of the Companies Act 2014.

BASIS FOR OPINION

We conducted our audit in accordance with International Standards on Auditing (Ireland) (ISAs (Ireland)) and applicable law. Our responsibilities under those standards are further described in the Auditor's responsibilities for the audit of the financial statements section of our report.

We are independent of the charity in accordance with ethical requirements that are relevant to our audit of financial statements in Ireland, including the Ethical Standard for Auditors (Ireland) issued by the Irish Auditing and Accounting Supervisory Authority (IAASA), and we have fulfilled our other ethical responsibilities in accordance with these requirements. We believe that the audit evidence we have obtained is sufficient and appropriate to provide a basis for our opinion.

INDEPENDENT AUDITORS REPORT TO THE MEMBERS OF MEATH WOMEN'S AID
HOUSING ASSOCIATION CLG
REPORT ON THE AUDIT OF THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS

CONCLUSIONS RELATING TO GOING CONCERN

We have nothing to report in respect of the following matters in relation to which ISAs (Ireland) require us to report to you where:

- the directors' use of the going concern basis of accounting in the preparation of the financial statements is not appropriate; or
- the directors have not disclosed in the financial statements any identified material uncertainties that may cast significant doubt about the charity's ability to continue to adopt the going concern basis of accounting for a period of at least twelve months from the date when the financial statements are authorised for issue.

OTHER INFORMATION

The directors are responsible for the other information. The other information comprises the information included in the annual report other than the financial statements and our Auditor's Report thereon. Our opinion on the financial statements does not cover the other information and, except to the extent otherwise explicitly stated in our report, we do not express any form of assurance conclusion thereon.

In connection with our audit of the financial statements, our responsibility is to read the other information and, in doing so, consider whether the other information is materially inconsistent with the financial statements or our knowledge obtained in the audit, or otherwise appears to be materially misstated. If we identify such material inconsistencies or apparent material misstatements, we are required to determine whether there is a material misstatement in the financial statements or a material misstatement of the other information. If, based on the work we have performed, we conclude that there is a material misstatement of this other information, we are required to report that fact. We have nothing to report in this regard.

INDEPENDENT AUDITORS REPORT TO THE MEMBERS OF MEATH WOMEN'S AID HOUSING ASSOCIATION CLG

OPINIONS ON OTHER MATTERS PRESCRIBED BY THE COMPANIES ACT 2014

Based solely on the work undertaken in the course of the audit, we report that:

- in our opinion, the information given in the Directors' Annual Report for the financial year for which the financial statements are prepared is consistent with the financial statements; and
- in our opinion, the Directors' Annual Report has been prepared in accordance with the Companies Act 2014.

We have obtained all the information and explanations which we consider necessary for the purposes of our audit. In our opinion the accounting records of the charity were sufficient to permit the financial statements to be readily and properly audited. The financial statements are in agreement with the accounting records.

MATTERS ON WHICH WE ARE REQUIRED TO REPORT BY EXCEPTION

Based on the knowledge and understanding of the charity and its environment obtained in the course of the audit, we have not identified any material misstatements in the Directors' Annual Report. The Companies Act 2014 requires us to report to you if, in our opinion, the disclosures of directors' remuneration and transactions required by sections 305 to 312 of the Act are not made. We have nothing to report in this regard.

INDEPENDENT AUDITORS REPORT TO THE MEMBERS OF MEATH WOMEN'S AID HOUSING ASSOCIATION CLG

AUDITOR'S RESPONSIBILITIES FOR THE AUDIT OF THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS

Our objectives are to obtain reasonable assurance about whether the financial statements as a whole are free from material misstatement, whether due to fraud or error, and to issue an Auditor's Report that includes our opinion. Reasonable assurance is a high level of assurance but is not a guarantee that an audit conducted in accordance with ISAs (Ireland) will always detect a material misstatement when it exists. Misstatements can arise from fraud or error and are considered material if, individually or in aggregate, they could reasonably be expected to influence the economic decisions of users taken on the basis of these financial statements.

FURTHER INFORMATION REGARDING THE SCOPE OF OUR RESPONSIBILITIES AS AUDITOR

As part of an audit in accordance with ISAs (Ireland), we exercise professional judgement and maintain professional scepticism throughout the audit. We also:

- Identify and assess the risks of material misstatement of the financial statements, whether due to fraud or error, design and perform audit procedures responsive to those risks, and obtain audit evidence that is sufficient and appropriate to provide a basis for our opinion. The risk of not detecting a material misstatement resulting from fraud is higher than for one resulting from error, as fraud may involve collusion, forgery, intentional omissions, misrepresentations, or the override of internal control.
- Obtain an understanding of internal control relevant to the audit in order to design audit procedures that are appropriate in the circumstances, but not for the purpose of expressing an opinion on the effectiveness of the charity's internal control.
- Evaluate the appropriateness of accounting policies used and the reasonableness of accounting estimates and related disclosures made by directors.
- Conclude on the appropriateness of the directors' use of the going concern basis of accounting and, based on the audit evidence obtained, whether a material uncertainty exists related to events or conditions that may cast significant doubt on the charity's ability to continue as a going concern. If we conclude that a material uncertainty exists, we are required to draw attention in our Auditor's Report to the related disclosures in the financial statements or, if such disclosures are inadequate, to modify our opinion. Our conclusions are based on the audit evidence obtained up to the date of our Auditor's Report. However, future events or conditions may cause the charity to cease to continue as a going concern.
- Evaluate the overall presentation, structure and content of the financial statements, including the disclosures, and whether the financial statements represent the underlying transactions and events in a manner that achieves fair presentation.

We communicate with those charged with governance regarding, among other matters, the planned scope and timing of the audit and significant audit findings, including any significant deficiencies in internal control that we identify during our audit.

INDEPENDENT AUDITORS REPORT TO THE MEMBERS OF MEATH WOMEN'S AID HOUSING ASSOCIATION CLG

THE PURPOSE OF OUR AUDIT WORK AND TO WHOM WE OWE OUR RESPONSIBILITIES

Our report is made solely to the charity's members, as a body, in accordance with Section 391 of the Companies Act 2014. Our audit work has been undertaken so that we might state to the charity's members those matters we are required to state to them in an Auditor's Report and for no other purpose. To the fullest extent permitted by law, we do not accept or assume any responsibility to anyone other than the charity and the charity's members, as a body, for our audit work, for this report, or for the opinions we have formed.

Sean Whelan FCA
for and on behalf of
WHELAN DOWLING & ASSOCIATES
Chartered Accountants and Statutory Audit Firm

Block 1, Unit 1 & 4,
Northwood Court
Santry
Dublin 9
Ireland

22nd April 2021

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We want to warmly thank all our donors and funders who supported our work in 2020.

In 2020, we received core funding from Tusla Child and Family Agency, Victims of Crime, MOVE Ireland.

In addition, we received a number of grants from a number of different organisations including the HSE national lottery funding to resource our music therapy project; CFI OLC Grant for Counselling services; Facebook Community Grant Scheme to support IT Development; Facebook Covid 19 Grant to support counselling services and the Christmas Appeal; Meath County Council Covid Grant; Pobal Sustainability Fund Appeal: this government fund was provided to support community and voluntary organisation whose income was reduced as a result of Covid 19 and finally Safe Ireland our umbrella body who funded counselling and play therapy services and provide direct funding to women and children.

Finally, the generosity and energy of GAA clubs, sports groups, community groups, local businesspeople, county councillors, schools, individuals with great fundraising ideas were amazing and your contribution showed how much you value your local domestic violence service. This encouragement and support spurs us on and we know you like us want to see real change for women and children who experience domestic violence in Ireland.

