

## Remarks by Kathleen Chada, Women's Aid 22<sup>nd</sup> November 2019

I sometimes feel like an impostor at conferences such as today's. I was not a victim of domestic abuse, though perhaps I was of coercive control. I try not to rewrite the narrative that was my life. I have to remember that we were a happy family. That I loved my husband and I have to believe he loved me. To think differently would negate my life with my sons and it is very important for me to remember the many happy memories I have of family life. There can be guilt in saying this out loud. But I have been lucky enough (in the circumstances) to have had the support of the right psychologist to work through this. I know what not all are as lucky.

But then I realize I am a victim of domestic violence. My sons Eoghan and Ruairi were victims of extreme violence the hands of their father and lost their lives. And I'm very aware that victims are not limited to those who lose their life or the immediate family. That it affects the extended family, community, friends, colleges in work and the wider society. Like my friend's partner, a father himself, who even now struggles with how someone he knew to be a good father could do something like Sanj did. Or my 9 year old nephew who turned to his own father and said not all mummies and daddies love their children. Some want their children dead. That wasn't a fairy tale or a Halloween movie and certainly not a line from Home Alone. It is a real thought from a very real child. It is the reality that he and all my nieces and nephews and Eoghan and Ruairi's friends have to live with. Looking around the room today I know that there are many women sitting here who have or are living this reality. They are living with the threat to their lives and the lives of their children. I remember the first time that I spoke the words, my husband wants to kill me! Not the slang "I could kill yea" but real words that he wrote where he intended to kill me along with my boys. It is such a surreal thought even still.

Survival and living a life is important. In fact it is essential. I have spoken before about how I made a choice to live and how important it is to make it a meaningful life. I can acknowledge that losing my boys has shaped the life I have now. And some of that is good. I wish it different all the time. I go to bed at night hoping to wake and all this be a nightmare. I wish I did not know what I know today about violence against women and children. But I cannot change what has happened. I can only move forward and ensure that I bring my boys with me.

I know that when I campaign as part of SAVE, I am looking for changes in the legal system here in Ireland. I am looking for the Department of Justice and Equality to be that.....justice for Eoghan and Ruairi and for their rights to be at the very least equal to their father's. I don't believe that is the case yet.

But first and foremost, my message is one of hope for those who have lost so much....mothers, daughters, son's wives and partners, sisters, loved ones. It is ok for us to live our lives and to make that live meaningful. Our experiences in life shape us, and sometimes we do not have any control over those experiences. But we can control on some level how we choose to move forward.