CODE OF PRACTICE ON DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

UNITED AGAINST DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Community Development Programme

Family and Community Services Resource Centre Programme
Definition of Domestic Violence

*Domestic Violence refers to the use of physical or emotional force or threat of physical force, including sexual violence, in close adult relationships* (Report of the Task Force on Violence against Women, Office of the Tánaiste, 1997). This includes violence perpetrated by a spouse, partner, son, daughter or any other person who has a close or blood relationship with the victim. The term ‘domestic violence’ goes beyond actual physical violence. It can also involve emotional abuse such as the destruction of property, isolation from friends, family and other potential sources of support, threats to others including children, stalking, and control over access to money, personal items, food, transportation and the telephone.
Introduction

Projects within the Community Development Programme and the Family and Community Services Resource Centre Programme work from community development principles in developing a collective response to tackle social injustice and inequalities in Irish society. A growing recognition of the need for integrated community based approaches to tackle the issue of violence against women was one of the factors that informed the recommendations of the Task Force on Violence against Women. The Report of the Task Force (1997) suggests that ‘local communities can play an important role in dealing with violence against women and should be at the centre of a local response. The aim of community based strategies should be to create a collective response around women’s safety’.

Both men and women are subjected to violence. However, in the vast majority of cases where violence occurs among persons who are known to each other, global research has shown that women are injured and men carry out the assault. In Making the Links (1995), the first national research into the prevalence of domestic violence in Ireland, 18% of Irish women reported that they had been abused at some stage in their lives. The most recent research into the prevalence of domestic violence in Ireland (carried out by TCD and published in the British Medical Journal, February 2002) indicates that 40% of Irish women, who have had a sexual relationship, have experienced abuse. The social stigma and silence that have historically surrounded the physical, sexual and mental abuse of women are effective tools in trapping women in such violent relationships.

Violence against women exists in all communities and is not determined by class or social status. However, the Task Force on Violence against Women (1997) recognised that ‘the effects of violence can be all the more traumatic for women living in poverty, women with physical or mental disabilities, women from different cultures and Traveller women. The cumulative effects of living in poverty, isolation and poor environmental conditions in themselves damage women’s health. When these difficulties are combined with physical, mental and emotional abuse, the effects are enormous’.
This Code of Practice provides a framework for Projects to address the issue of domestic violence. Projects are not funded under the Community Development Programme or the Family and Community Services Resource Centre Programme to provide counselling or front-line services. Their primary role is to support and enable individuals in the community to access relevant services and to promote the development of a community based response. Because worldwide statistics (see note) indicate that victims of domestic violence are overwhelmingly female, the Code of Practice focuses particularly on the issue of violence against women. By implementing the Code, Projects are highlighting their support for those experiencing domestic violence and acknowledging the issue as part of their work.

*The weight of all the evidence in Ireland and globally is that men are the perpetrators of violence in intimate relations over 90% of the time (Byles 1978; Dobash and Dobash 1979, 1992; Martin 1976; Watkins 1982; Kelly 1999; Kelleher and O’Connor 1999). Research commissioned by Women’s Aid to examine the effectiveness of the Irish civil and criminal judicial systems in protecting victims of domestic violence, found that between 92% and 97% of applicants for protective orders were women (Kelleher and O’Connor 1999).

(Name of organisation) is committed to this Code of Practice because:

- Our aim is to address social injustices and work towards equality for all using community development principles.

- Violence against women is a crime and a violation of Human Rights. There is no acceptable level of violence and violence against women should never be tolerated or minimised.

- When violence against women is suspected it should always be taken seriously and responded to appropriately.

- We want to break the silence that has traditionally surrounded the physical, mental and sexual abuse of women and domestic violence in general.
Internal Actions / Response

- Safety of victims and confidentiality will be central to the Project’s response.

- Those experiencing domestic violence will be supported regardless of age, gender, disability, sexual orientation, religion, race, membership of the Traveller community, marital status or family status.

- The Project will provide a safe and supportive environment where the issue of domestic violence can be discussed and where women who are experiencing violence can feel safe, if seeking support.

- The Project will develop and foster an ethos and environment that challenges tolerance of, and collusion with, male violence against women.

- Where violence against women is disclosed or suspected, our response will be supportive, non-judgmental and non-directive.

- Respect for the individual and safeguarding of the woman’s rights, freedom of choice and privacy will be fundamental to our response.

- Our primary concern is for the safety of the woman at risk and her children. Our response will be defined by their needs and wishes and in accordance with Children First, National Guidelines for the Protection and Welfare of Children, Department of Health & Children, 1999 and the Child Care Act, 1991.

- The particular experience of Traveller women and women from other minority ethnic groups will be acknowledged and named. The Project will advocate for the development of responses appropriate to their culture and needs. The Project will also highlight the need for the development of responses that are appropriate to the needs of women with disabilities.
◆ The Project will support the involvement of women who experience violence in the development of a community response to the issue.

◆ The issue of violence against women will become an integral part of the work of the Project and incorporated into the Project's work plan.

◆ Accessible posters and information leaflets on supports and services available to women will be clearly visible in the office, meeting rooms and all other public notice boards within the Project.

◆ The Project will name a key person who will be responsible for compiling and making available the most up to date information on the services that are provided by voluntary and statutory agencies for women who experience violence.

◆ The Project will commit to ongoing training in good practice in relation to domestic violence and developing an appropriate response to it. Training will include the role of individual projects, personal boundaries and safety for members of the Project, relevant legislation and the issue of confidentiality.
External Actions / Response
The Project is committed to:

◆ Developing firm relations with local and regional organisations that provide services and supports for those experiencing domestic violence.

◆ Networking and developing partnerships with the relevant organisations and agencies to develop a community response to violence against women.

◆ Encouraging other agencies / organisations that we work with to support the development of a community response to violence as the most effective way of addressing the issue.

◆ Communicating our condemnation of violence against women with the language and images that we use and the messages that the Project delivers.

◆ Supporting awareness raising campaigns / initiatives about violence against women locally, regionally and nationally.

◆ Raising the issue of violence against women in a variety of appropriate fora that we participate in.

◆ Maintaining strong links with Women’s Aid Specialist Support Agency to address the issue of violence against women in Ireland.

Implementing the Code
The implementation of this Code of Practice will be ratified at management level and monitored by management and staff within the Project. The Project will take full responsibility for providing the most comprehensive and up to date information on the services and supports that are in place for those at risk of domestic violence.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This Code of Practice on Domestic Violence was developed by the Community Response to Domestic Violence Network in the West of Ireland in 2002. The Code was endorsed by Women's Aid.

In 2004 the Code was adopted by the National Advisory Committee of the Community Development Programme for use by Projects in the Programme. In 2005 it was adopted by the Family Support Agency / Family Resource Centre Forum for use by Family Resource Centres funded by the Family Support Agency.

It was printed with the joint support of the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs and the Family Support Agency.

* In 2002, membership of the Community Response to Domestic Violence Network in the West of Ireland was comprised of 6 Community Development Projects; Ballybane Mervue CDP, Galway Travellers Support Group, Kiltimagh and District CDP, Louisburgh Community Project, Pleadá Teo, Tuam Community Development Resource Centre and the Regional Support Agency, West Training and Development.

Membership of the network has since expanded to include additional Community Development Projects and Family Resource Centres.