2017 in brief

21,451 contacts with Women’s Aid Direct Services
18,197 calls responded to by the 24hr National Freephone Helpline

1,743 Additional telephone support calls by our One to One Services

528 Drop-In Visits to the Dolphin House Support and Referral Service (Dublin area)

255 Court Accompaniments (Dublin area)

728 one to one support visits (Dublin area)

19,385 disclosures of domestic violence against women and children

15,833 disclosures of domestic violence against women

10,281 emotional abuse

3,502 physical abuse

3,552 disclosures of child abuse

607 sexual abuse

129,535 visits to www.WomensAid.ie

3,552 disclosures of child abuse

1,443 financial abuse
INTRODUCTION

The Women’s Aid Impact Report for 2017 is a powerful and moving illustration of the prevalence of domestic violence and its very real and very harmful impacts on women and children. Last year there were 21,451 contacts made with our direct services during which 15,833 disclosures of domestic violence against women were made. We also heard 3,552 disclosures of abuse against children. Without our annual snapshot, the abuse of women by their current or former boyfriends, partners or husbands would remain largely hidden in Irish society.

Behind these stark statistics there are thousands of women who have shared their story with Women’s Aid. They tell us of horrific sexual, financial, physical and emotional abuse and coercive control. They tell us of their darkest fears and the impact domestic abuse has on them and their children. What we hear are stories of everyday resilience. Everyday in how pervasive domestic abuse is and heroic in how they maintain their sanity and protect themselves and their children from harm. We hear how they struggle against the odds during Ireland’s deepest housing crisis, negotiating an unsupportive and under resourced legal system and how they continue their search for safety and freedom.

A Year Against the Odds

In this Impact Report we shine a light on the many barriers, difficulties and dangers women face when trying to leave an abusive partner. We know that leaving does not always mean the end of the abuse: 28% of women we worked with last year were abused by ex-partners and ex-husbands. Women have told us that going through the process of leaving and seeking support can feel like a game of ‘snakes and ladders’. Barriers include: fear of the perpetrator, lack of protection for them and their children, lack of emotional support, no financial resources and having no place to go. Women are often scared that leaving a violent perpetrator may put them and their children at increased risk of retaliation and violence, and with good reason. Separation has long been identified as a risk factor for repeated and escalated domestic violence and femicide. In Ireland 24% of women killed between 1996 and 2017 where the case has been resolved, were killed by a former intimate partner. We want to change the conversation and ask – “what has to change to support her and her children’s safety?”

A Year of Progress

Many years of campaigning by Women’s Aid and other organisations led to important progress in 2017 with the development of a legislative framework that will provide greater safety for women and children and move Ireland closer to ratifying the Istanbul Convention. The Domestic Violence Bill 2017, which will hopefully be enacted by summer 2018, will see real improvements for victims of domestic violence including the extension of protection and safety orders to couples in intimate relationships without any requirement for cohabitation, the introduction of guidelines for the granting of protective orders, the inclusion of the intimate relationship between perpetrator and victim as an aggravating factor and the new crime of coercive control.

1 Important note on data collection: Quantitative Data for calls to the National Helpline is captured on our telecommunications system, SpliceCom, and all other data is recorded manually on our in house database. The sample available is denoted by n= throughout the report. The information collected relates to details and facts disclosed by women in the process of their contact with Women’s Aid. As the primary aim of our services is to provide confidential support and information to women, Women’s Aid does not solicit information for statistical purposes. For this reason, only partial information is available to us on the majority of women, particularly in relation to the extent of the abuse being experienced and the barriers to seeking help. The value of statistics is that they build a picture of women’s experiences and of their need for protection and support.

2 The Women’s Aid Direct Services include: 24hr National Freephone Helpline and its Dublin based One to One Support Service, Court Accompaniment Service and the Dolphin House Support and Referral Drop In Service (run in partnership with Inchicore Outreach Centre).

3 A ‘disclosure’ of abuse refers to the specific incident spoken about during our contact with women. There may be overlapping types of abuse and incidents referred to by a woman in any one contact. This should not be taken to mean the number of calls or number of women supported by Women’s Aid in 2017.

The publication of our 2017 Femicide Watch increased awareness of the high level of risk women face in their own home from intimate partners. The disparity in sentencing between intimate partners at an average of 7.8 years compared to other males with an average of 10.6 years led to the recognition of the need for intimate relationships to be recognised as an aggravating factor when sentencing for criminal offences. These are significant gains which need to be properly implemented and adequately resourced.

Women’s Aid has worked hard to illustrate the serious nature of domestic violence. Our 2017 Impact Report shines a spotlight on the hidden harm committed every day in homes in Ireland. The 15,833 disclosures of domestic violence against women and 3,552 disclosures of child abuse are a stark reminder of why change is needed.

A Year of Women’s Testimonies

Over the past four years we have been working with women in our Women’s Testimonies project to support them to share their own experience of abuse and survival. By telling their stories, the survivors hope that those in similar situations reach out, ask for help, and seek support. The testimony of three very courageous women on the Ray D’Arcy radio show last November brought this work to the fore. The connection many women had with those stories led to an immediate ten-fold increase in calls to our National Helpline. That broadcast and the testimony bravely shared by businesswoman Norah Casey on the Late Late Show earlier in the year allowed women to identify with the real lived experience of those extraordinary women. Their stories increased the nation’s understanding that domestic violence can happen to any woman, regardless of her age, her profession or her background. And we thank them for their courage and eloquence.

A Year of Believing Women

Our report also brings to the fore the essential and trusted role of Women’s Aid in supporting women who are isolated, alone and at risk of domestic violence and dating abuse. We know how important our presence is for women and the difference our approach of listening, believing and supporting women makes. Women trust Women’s Aid and one woman who contacted us recently summed it up perfectly:

“They helped me when I was at my lowest. Every court case I was at, they stood by my side and gently guided me through the process. Just talking helped me to see that I was in a dangerous situation and I was lucky to escape alive.”

Feedback like this continues to inspire us at Women’s Aid. Our staff, volunteers and the Board of Directors will continue our work to stop domestic violence against women and children in Ireland.

Margaret Martin, Director
April 2018
SECTION 1: LISTENING, BELIEVING, SUPPORTING.

Domestic Violence Disclosures to Women’s Aid in 2017

10,281 Disclosures of Emotional Abuse

Emotional abuse disclosed in 2017 included verbal abuse, being threatened with violence, being stalked both physically and online, women and children being locked out of their homes overnight; being isolated from friends and family, being in fear of their lives because abusers threaten them with guns, knives and with injury due to speeding in cars. Within this figure, we also noted 531 disclosures of digital abuse and stalking and 622 threats to kill the woman, the children, her family or to self-harm.

3,502 Disclosures of Physical Abuse

Physical abuse disclosed in 2017 included women being beaten, having their hair pulled, being smothered, strangled and being hospitalised. Women also reported experiencing physical abuse during pregnancy. Within these figures we noted 756 disclosures of women being choked, beaten and threatened with weapons and smothered. We also had 217 disclosures of abuse while the woman was pregnant, with a number of women experiencing miscarriage because of the abuse.

607 Disclosures of Sexual Abuse

Sexual abuse disclosed in 2017 included women being raped by their partners, women being coerced into sexual activity, women having intimate videos and photos taken and shared without their consent and being raped while pregnant or after childbirth. The sexual abuse figure includes 323 disclosures of rape within intimate relationships.

1,443 Disclosures of Financial Abuse

Women disclosed that they were being denied access to the family income, that their own salaries/social welfare payments were being stolen or controlled by the abuser. Women disclosed that their abuser made them account for every penny spent and often left them with inadequate funds for the family’s needs. Women also disclosed financial abuse continuing after separation including the hiding of family assets and the non-payment of child maintenance.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Abuse</th>
<th>Dolphin House</th>
<th>One to One</th>
<th>24hr Helpline</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Financial Abuse</td>
<td>123</td>
<td>129</td>
<td>1191</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexual Abuse</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>535</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical Abuse</td>
<td>375</td>
<td>322</td>
<td>2805</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional Abuse</td>
<td>589</td>
<td>645</td>
<td>9047</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Chart 1: 15,833 disclosures of abuse against women in contact with Direct Services. (n=15,785)
CHILDREN AND DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

There were 3,552 disclosures of abuse of children in the context of domestic violence made to Women’s Aid in 2017. The abuse of children disclosed included children being physically, sexually and emotionally abused as well as witnessing the abuse against their mothers. We noted 375 occasions where women disclosed that a social worker was involved with families.

In addition, 78% of the women using our one to one services for the first time in 2017 had children.

Domestic violence continues to be a very common context in which children experience abuse, with the abuser of the mother being the abuser of the children.

The abuse disclosed in 2017 includes:

- Children witnessing verbal, physical and sexual abuse against their mother.
- Children being physically hurt, pinched, punched, locked in rooms.
- Children being called names and shouted at.
- Children and their mothers being threatened with murder-suicide.
- Children being sexually abused.
- Children being emotionally manipulated and used against their mother including being told lies.
- The mother-child bond being deliberated targeted and broken by abusive fathers.

ABUSE DURING ACCESS

Women supported by Women’s Aid in 2017 had concerns that the access arrangements ordered by the court were putting them and their children at risk of further abuse. In 2017, we heard 428 disclosures from mothers that their ex-partners were using access visits to abuse them, often in front of their children. It was disclosed on 97 occasions that children were being directly physically, emotionally and/or sexually abused during access visits with their fathers.

This abuse in 2017 included:

- Children being sexually abused by their father during access visits.
- Abuser failing to show up for access, not collecting children on time and not returning the children on time.
- Children being punched and threatened while on access visits.
- Children being afraid to go on access visits.
- Women being verbally abused, spat at and threatened in front of the children during access handover.

Where there has been abuse of children and where there continues to be a threat of harm to children, women tell us of their distress at having to facilitate unsupervised access.

IMPACT OF ABUSE ON WOMEN

The mental and physical impact of domestic violence on a woman’s health and well-being are significant, lasting and wide-ranging. The ultimate cost, in some extreme cases, can be fatal. The impacts of abuse against women as disclosed to Women’s Aid in 2017 included:

- Panic attacks, post-traumatic stress, anxiety, depression, suicidal ideation attempted suicide.
- Feeling exhausted and having low self-esteem and self-doubt as a result of the abuse.
- Being isolated from friends and family members, from their community and in some cases from their children.
- Reproductive health issues including lack of access to family planning, STIs, or experiencing unplanned pregnancy due to rape and sexual coercion.
- Alcohol and substance misuse.
- Loss of consciousness due to strangulation.
- Hospitalisation.
- Scarring and facial disfigurement.
- Broken arms, legs, teeth, broken jaw, bruising to the face and body, head injuries and internal injuries due to physical assault and rape.
- Miscarriage due to physical assault.
- Loss of job, becoming homeless, experiencing poverty and hardship as a lone parent due to the payment of maintenance being used as a controlling tool by ex-partners.

**THE ABUSER**

For women who contacted us in 2017, **83% were being abused by a current or former male intimate partner**. **17% disclosed abuse from a non-intimate male family member or another person.**

**55% of women were being abused by a current boyfriend, partner or husband while 28% were being abused by a former boyfriend, partner or husband.**

**WHO WE SUPPORTED**

96% of callers were women. 4% were men.

30% of callers were in Dublin. 32% of callers said they were **from other locations in the Republic of Ireland**. 38% of callers did not say where they lived.

We responded to **310 Helpline emails** and **71 initial Helpline contacts via social media.**

70% of calls to the National Freephone Helpline were **support calls**. 30% were hang up calls, administration and indirect support calls. We supported **465 women in 728 one to one support visits**. We attended court **255 times with 134 women** and we saw **510 women during 528 drop in visits at our Dolphin House service.**

69% of women were first time users while 31% were repeat users of either the Helpline or our other services.
Responding to Women with Disabilities, Migrant and Traveller Women

In 669 calls to the 24hr National Freephone Helpline women identified that they were Migrant women, Traveller women and/or women with disabilities. The biggest group were migrant women at 87% followed by women with disabilities (7%) and Traveller women (6%).

In 2017, 181 Helpline calls were facilitated in 23 languages. 67% of callers who used the Telephone Interpretation Service spoke a range of EU languages while 33% spoke other non-EU languages.

26% of the women we saw for the first time in 2017 in our One to One Service were Migrant women. Just over half, 54% were from non-EU member states while 46% were from EU member states.

In the Dolphin House service, 36% of women were noted as being from a Migrant background (250 women). 61% of the women were from non EU countries while 39% were from EU countries.

Women’s Aid works with organisations such as the Immigrant Council of Ireland and the Migrant Rights Centre to address any additional barriers migrant women may face.

Support Offered

In addition to being a listening and support service, the Women's Aid 24hr National Freephone Helpline, One to One service and the Dolphin House drop in service provide a valuable source of information, onward referral and advocacy for women experiencing domestic violence. There were 16,799 referrals, provision of information and/or advocacy made during 15,785 contacts with Women’s Aid. The areas covered are outlined in chart 5. We also support women by safety planning and risk assessment to support them in their efforts to keep themselves and their children as safe as possible.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Service</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Legal (inc. Garda)</td>
<td>7617</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Refuge/Housing &amp; local DV services</td>
<td>2082</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social welfare</td>
<td>659</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Women’s Aid Services</td>
<td>1849</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health and Medical</td>
<td>954</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Counselling</td>
<td>760</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>2878</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Chart 5: Support, information and advocacy by Women’s Aid in 2017 (n=15,785).
SECTION 2: SPOTLIGHT 2017
AGAINST THE ODDS

In this piece we focus on the critical role played by the legal system in helping women to leave safely, what the gaps are and what can be done about them. We also look at the important role An Garda Síochána play in protecting women experiencing domestic violence.

Thousands of women share their story with Women’s Aid. They tell us of horrific sexual, physical, financial and emotional abuse and we hear how they struggle against the odds to make themselves and their children safe. Women’s Aid plays a crucial role in supporting women along this path.

Barriers to Leaving

“My friend said ‘I didn’t think you’d put up with that. Why didn’t you just leave?’ It made me so angry.”

There are many reasons why a woman may not be able to leave an abusive partner. Women are often scared that leaving a violent perpetrator may put them and their children at increased risk of retaliation and violence, and with good reason. Women are often living in fear of the perpetrator and have been told they will be killed if they leave. They face an under-resourced and, at times, an unsupportive legal system. They may face stigma, shame or lack emotional support. They may have no financial resources or simply have no safe place to go to.

Separation doesn’t always mean safety. Last year 28% of women we supported were being abused by an ex-boyfriend, partner or husband. Separation has long been identified as a risk factor for repeated and escalated domestic violence and femicide.

The legal system and An Garda Síochána play a critical role in protecting women and helping them to leave safely.

However, we hear from women about gaps and inconsistencies in the responses they receive and how it impacts negatively on their safety and well-being.

Women’s Experiences of the Legal System

“I never thought I’d end up somewhere like here.”

45% of the information, referral and advocacy work by the Helpline and one to one service in 2017 was in support of women accessing and negotiating the legal system for protection. This included information and support on legal options, how to access expert legal advice and representation as well as contacting the Gardaí.

Helpline callers disclosed on 1,194 occasions that they had a protective order (52%), or were in the process of getting an order (29%) or had an order which had been breached (19%).

In 2017 alone Women’s Aid face to face services supported well over 600 women engaging with the legal system. We attended court 255 times with 134 women and we met with 510 women during 528 drop in visits at our Dolphin House service.
In our court accompaniment service, 49% of cases were child related matters within the context of domestic violence. 45% of cases were for domestic violence orders under the Domestic Violence Act with 50% of women having an order granted.

The experience of going to court can be very disempowering. We also find that the granting of orders can be inconsistent and we look forward to the introduction of guidelines for the granting of orders which is included in the new Domestic Violence Legislation.

Proceedings can be drawn out, costly and often do not end up increasing the safety of women and their children.

In 2017, 36% of women using our services in Dolphin House were from a Migrant background (250 women) which may impact on their having access to relevant information and may also mean they have less family support in Ireland.

Most women we work with in Dolphin House are in a very distressed state. They have recently been assaulted by their husband or partner and have no knowledge of the system and procedures.

The current facilities in Dolphin House are very inadequate and unfit for purpose as they do not provide for the safety, privacy and dignity of those attending court in relation to very personal and distressing matters.

The Court is almost always very packed and overcrowded and a very unpleasant place to be. The women have to wait for their turn with the judge in the same room as the abuser so they are exposed to threatening and intimidating behaviour and their safety is thereby jeopardised. There are not enough private and safe consultation / interview rooms to maintain privacy and no facilities to take care of children.

This situation is similar or worse outside Dublin. With eligibility for Safety orders due to be further extended in the Domestic Violence Bill, resources are going to be even more over-stretched.

**Domestic Violence and Access Arrangements**

“There should be no contact until contact is safe.”

Women and children are often put at risk by the perpetrator’s continuing access to children after separation. In 2017 we heard 428 disclosures of women being abused while facilitating access and 97 disclosures of children being abused during access.

The justice system has a pivotal role to play in mitigating these risks through orders under the Domestic Violence Act (particularly Barring orders), making sure that Access and Custody arrangements do not put women and children at risk and ensuring safety through the response of the Garda to domestic violence incidents.

When a woman leaves a violent abuser and wishes to remain safely in the family home, often with the children, she may apply for a Barring Order. She hopes to leave the violence behind and at the same time keep the children in their environment, maintain routine and stability and minimise disruptions in the children’s lives.

If the court grants the Barring Order, it means it has found that the respondent poses a significant risk to
the welfare and safety of the applicant. Both research and our own experience suggest that there is a high probability that the safety and welfare of the children is also jeopardised either by direct targeting of the children or by them being exposed to the abuse of their mother, which is a form of emotional abuse.

In our one to one services, we support women who face situations where Barring Orders are granted to protect a woman from her abusive partner but there is often no assessment looking at the safety and well-being of the children.

While the perpetrator is barred from the house he often still has unsupervised access to the children and uses that access to continue abusing them directly and/or through having the children witness the abuse of their mother.

In cases where abusive ex-partners are granted access including overnight access, this increases the contact women must have with them, her anxiety, and the risk to her and the children.

Women are very upset to find that even in cases where there is physical violence against her and possibly the children in the past, that access is granted.

We have also found, that younger children who communicate their fear of going on access are not listened to by the courts.

In addition, there are no supervised access centres available which would provide a safe place for women to make access handovers. We welcome the introduction of the new Section 31 reports where the voice of the child is taken into consideration. However, we are concerned about the cost involved to pay for Section 31 reports as it may be beyond many women’s means.

It is imperative that the risk posed by a perpetrator of domestic violence to the children of the family and the impact of such abuse on them is assessed and that immediate interim measures are taken to protect the children including the rebuttal presumption of no contact until safe contact can be guaranteed.

**The Role of An Garda Síochána**

“Why did the Garda stand at the garden gate and let him back in to the house, despite the barring order?”

Many of the women we work with tell us they have had to call on the Garda for protection from their abuser. These women have often been subjected to a number of crimes including: attempted murder (often by strangulation or suffocating), assaults of varying degrees with or without weapons, rape, stalking, theft, fraud, arson, threats (to kill, burn down the house, to harm the woman, the children or her family) and breaches of orders under the Domestic Violence Act. At times children are also the target of these crimes. Women tell us that the crimes against them take many forms as well as being repeated many times.

The Gardaí play a unique and vital role in protecting victims of domestic violence both while in the relationship and after they leave, as well as in holding the perpetrators to account. However Garda response to victims of domestic violence can vary from negative to excellent, among and even within Garda stations.

On 654 occasions last year callers to the 24hr National Freephone Helpline disclosed that they had rang the Garda. 82 women were noted as having rang the
Gardaí more than once. 65% of the women who rang the Gardaí found their response was helpful. 35% found them unhelpful. 112 women said that the Gardaí did not enforce an existing protective order while 44 women said that they did. (n=155).

![Chart 6: Callers experience of the Gardaí (n=523)](image)

| 35% Not helpful | 65% Helpful |

The response a woman receives can make a huge difference both in terms of her safety and in terms of her willingness and ability to engage with the justice system.

When women have positive responses from the Gardaí, this can increase their confidence to continue to report what is happening to them and engage with helpful services.

When Gardaí arrest for order breeches, this can have a huge impact on a woman’s safety as in some cases a single arrest can be a deterrent.

Women really appreciate when Gardaí maintain continuous communication on what is happening with criminal cases before the courts and take measures to increase the women’s safety such as referral to services, call backs, even driving them to refuges.

However, we continue to hear reports of Gardaí attending a domestic violence call and not enforcing orders under the Domestic Violence Act, not arresting the perpetrator when an assault or other offence has been committed, not assessing the risk to women and children, giving incorrect information on orders or simply dismissing the woman’s experience and fears.

In circumstances where women have had a negative or unhelpful response from the Gardaí, Women’s Aid provides emotional support around this and inform women about the Garda Domestic Violence Policy and of the proper response they should expect from Gardaí.

We find that women can get a better response when they show that they know what they are entitled to and ask specifically for particular services.

We encourage women to continue to engage with the Gardaí should they need protection or be in danger.

**WHAT WE WANT TO SEE:**

Leaving an abusive relationship is not an easy step. It is vital that when a woman comes to the decision to leave an abusive partner, supports are available and ready for her.

The State has a crucial role to play in ensuring the safety of women and children leaving an abusive partner.

Our focus needs to be on creating a supportive environment for women to leave safely rather than blaming her for not leaving.

Our recommendations include:

1. The establishment of a Joint Oireachtas Committee to examine the barriers faced by victims of domestic violence and identify the gaps in systems and resources that support and assist a safe and quick transition from abuse to freedom.
2. When granting a Barring Order, the Court should always consider the safety and well-being of any children of the relationship and take interim measures, as necessary, for their protection including the rebuttal presumption of no contact for abusive fathers until they prove it is safe for them to have access.
3. Experts should be made available to the Court to assess the risk the perpetrator poses to children and the impact on them of direct and/or indirect abuse.
4. Child Contact Centres should be funded to facilitate safe and supervised access visits between children and domestic violence perpetrators in line with Court orders.
5. The removal of the property test for cohabitants applying for a Barring Order, where the best interest of the child/ren of the family so requires. Failing that, to extend the duration of Emergency Barring Orders to 6 months if the applicant has children in their care and their welfare and safety so require.

6. The Children’s and Family Courts building in Hammond Lane should be financed and progressed as a matter of priority.

7. The roll out of Garda Protective Services Units across the country should be prioritised.

8. Provision for members of An Garda Síochána of initial and ongoing training on domestic violence and the provision of effective support, oversight and monitoring structures to improve police responses to women experiencing domestic violence.

9. Introduction of a risk assessment and management model in relation to victims of domestic violence in collaborations with Domestic Violence specialist support services. This need to include risk assessment and management for children as well.

10. Adequate resources should be provided for the Courts Service and the Garda in relation to supporting victims of domestic violence.

Women’s Aid Help along the Way

“We women’s Aid are absolutely amazing and do wonderful work and super support throughout every step along the way to living again! Make the call and live.”

For over 40 years, Women’s Aid has been there for women and their children affected by domestic violence. We listen, believe and support women on our confidential 24hr National Freephone Helpline. Our Helpline staff and volunteers respond to an average of 50 calls every day and empower women to make their own decisions and choices.

Our staff in our One to One, Court Accompaniment and Dolphin House Support and Referral Service are trusted allies to women who we see face to face five days a week in over 7 locations around the greater Dublin area.

We are with women every step of the long and difficult journey from abuse to freedom and safety.

Our support at key times can make all the difference.
Even though the odds are against them, Women’s Aid will always support women and children who experience domestic violence. Every step of the way.
Even though the odds are against them, Women’s Aid will always support women and children who experience domestic violence. Every step of the way.

The Women’s Aid National Helpline 1800 341 900 is available all day, every day to provide a listening ear and practical information and support.
SECTION 3: WORKING FOR JUSTICE AND SOCIAL CHANGE IN 2017

Women’s Aid Training for Professionals

“A good piece of training. Worth undertaking to become a more rounded, non-judgemental practitioner.”

Women’s Aid training on domestic violence exists so that conditions are created for women to be able to safely disclose their experiences of domestic violence to any worker they may come into contact with and receive a well-informed response, that prioritises their safety and the safety of their children.

A woman who is experiencing domestic violence goes about her daily life as best she can. She may have to visit a Garda station or call the Guards, she may have to go to her GP or bring her baby to the Public Health Nurse, she may get support from a homeless agency or any other community group and when she does these everyday things she may get the chance to tell someone about the abuse she is experiencing. Our desire is that she is met with a worker who has received training on the dynamics of domestic violence and has an understanding of how extremely difficult it can be for a woman to be safe. Domestic violence training aims to equip staff with knowledge and skills to respond to any woman who is being abused by her partner (current or former) in an empathetic manner that does not blame the woman and clearly holds the perpetrator to account for his actions.

Women’s Aid training is continually informed by our direct one to one support and helpline work with women experiencing abuse and their experiences of seeking safety and support. Our training is grounded by the voice of the woman and her experience as the guiding light for meaningful intervention.

In 2017 we continued to deliver specialised training and organisational support on responding to domestic violence to key personnel working in organisations in the community and voluntary sector and statutory agencies throughout the country. Highlights of the year included;

• Training 350 probationer Gardaí in the Garda College, Templemore
• Delivering training to mixed groups of professionals on Women’s Aid calendared training events in our offices in Dublin 2
• Providing training to nursing staff in the southeast region
• Training a wide variety of staff who work in the community and voluntary sector, e.g. drugs and alcohol services, homeless support services, Money Advice and Budgeting Service.

In total Women’s Aid ran 40 training events to a total of 956 participants in various locations around the country, including Dublin, Tipperary, Limerick, Kildare, Waterford, Cork and Kerry. The funding we receive under the Scheme to Support National Organisations (SSNO), administered by Pobal on behalf of the Department of Rural and Community Development, is essential in order to allow us to continue to provide essential training to service providers who work with disadvantaged target groups, in particular.

Evaluations of Women’s Aid training events indicate that there is a high level of satisfaction with the content and training delivery and the vast majority of training participants find the training highly relevant and beneficial to their practice.

“Very useful, encourages people to examine unconscious bias we may have and increases our own confidence in helping victims of domestic violence.”

Ultimately high quality training on domestic violence gives workers the knowledge and skills to respond appropriately to women experiencing domestic violence and contributes to keeping women and children safe.

Women’s Voices - Raising Awareness & Providing Hope

In 2017, Women’s Aid continued to lead the way in raising awareness and providing information on domestic violence to women experiencing abuse, their families and friends, their communities and the wider society.

Our annual public awareness campaigns and communications activity are a vital way to highlight the prevalence, nature and impact of domestic and dating
abuse in Ireland. We also engage with the media to promote our 24hr National Freephone Helpline and other support services.

Highlights in 2017 included:

- Women’s Aid generated over 250 pieces of media coverage on domestic violence in 2017 ranging from local radio interviews, online news stories, opinion pieces in national print media and interviews with TV news and national radio.

- In February, with very little funding, we continued our 2in2u campaign on dating abuse.

- In June we launched our Impact Report with Minister Katherine Zappone, T.D., highlighting the issue of the impact of domestic violence on children and the increased protections needed.

- In November we ran our very successful #ChangetheConversation 16 Days of Action campaign with over 70 groups taking action to highlight domestic violence across Ireland.

- We also launched our Femicide Report for 2017 and purple ribbon campaign which continued to raise the issue of Femicide, the need to implement domestic homicide reviews and better risk assessment to prevent further loss of life due to fatal domestic violence. Our report also highlighted the disparity in sentencing for manslaughter with perpetrators who were in an intimate relationship with the victim receiving lighter sentences.

- The Femicide Report also included Women’s Aid guidelines for the media when reporting Femicide and domestic violence.

- We continued our Women’s Voices Testimony Project which encourages and facilitates survivors of domestic violence to tell their stories in a safe and most importantly, in a way that helps create better awareness and change for women going through similar situations.

Providing a Lifeline, Online

There were 129,535 visits to the Women’s Aid website in 2017. With a monthly average of 10,794 visits, we know that we provide vital information to women experiencing domestic violence as well as to the general public. 79% of visitors were first time users of the website. Our stand alone website on dating abuse www.2in2u.ie received 4,291 visits. The site was refreshed and launched in 2018 as www.toointoyou.ie.
We continue to use social media to highlight the issues of domestic violence and engage with supporters. We have a community of over 12,000 followers on Twitter and over 20,000 followers on Facebook.

Working for Justice and Encouraging Positive Government Action

Women’s Aid works with government to provide solution based recommendations on improving legal responses and protection for women and children experiencing domestic violence. In addition, Women’s Aid brings the concerns and issues of women experiencing domestic violence to a number of national and local fora.

In 2017, this work included:

- Submissions to the UN CEDAW Committee in relation to the Republic of Ireland; on the Domestic Violence Bill 2017 and the Mediation Bill 2017 and collaboration with agencies such as FLAC, Barnardos and One Family on issues relating to legal aid and children’s experiences of and protection from domestic violence respectively.

- Women’s Aid also met with Ministers, special advisors and elected members of the Oireachtas to discuss a range of issues including: our 2016 Impact Report and the Domestic Violence Bill. We also raised key issues such as the need to address the anomalies in sentencing in domestic violence and domestic manslaughter; legal reform to address digital abuse and stalking; the inappropriate use of mediation in domestic violence cases and the issues for women experiencing domestic violence dealing with the Department of Social Protection around maintenance issues.

Continued representation and membership role at: the monitoring committee of the Second National Strategy on Domestic, Sexual and Gender Based Violence; the Irish Observatory on Violence against Women; Safe Ireland; the National Women’s Council of Ireland; Southside Addressing Violence Effectively (SAVE); Legal Aid Board External Consultative Panel; Family Law Court Users Panel; Garda National Crime Victims Forum; Women Against Violence (WAVE) and the Turn Off the Red Light campaign.
ABOUT US

Women’s Aid is the leading national organisation that has been working in Ireland to stop domestic violence against women and children since 1974.

We work to make women and children safe from domestic violence by offering support to women & their families and friends, providing hope to those affected by abuse and working for justice and social change.

Our Direct Services:

- **24hr National Freephone Helpline**
  1800 341 900 including:
  - a text service for deaf and hard of hearing women on 087 9597980 (8am to 8pm, 7 days)
  - interpretation service offering support in over 170 languages (8am to 8pm, 7 days) via the main Helpline number.

- **One to One Service** including safety planning, information, advocacy & referral.

- **Court Accompaniment Service** for women

- **Dolphin House Support and Referral Service**
  - Drop in Monday to Friday, 9.30am to 1.30pm, 4th Floor.

All services are free, confidential and non-judgemental.

We also work for Justice and Social Change by:

- Raising awareness including public information campaigns and communications.

- Working for positive government action and working together for justice.

- Providing specialised training.

See www.WomensAid.ie for more details.

Our 2017 Financial Statements will be available on our website in June 2018.

Thank you

Women’s Aid would like to thank all of our volunteers, supporters, funders, corporate partners and donors who make our work possible. A special thanks to our Charity Shop staff and volunteers in Dundrum and Terenure in Dublin. They raise much needed funds to keep our services operating. We are also grateful for the support and strong working relationships with other domestic violence services and refuges around Ireland and other networks acting to bring about real change and protection for women affected by domestic violence.

“I still think of that day – the day I called Women’s Aid – as the day my life changed forever.”
Support our Work

Visit www.womensaid.ie/donate to make an immediate and secure donation.

Text the word ACTION to 50300 to donate €4 to Women’s Aid.

100% of your donation goes to Women’s Aid across most network operators. Some operators apply VAT which means that a minimum of €3.25 will go to Women’s Aid. Service Provider: LIKECHARITY. Helpline: 0766805278.