



WOMEN'S AID IMPACT REPORT 2015



One in Five




Women Experience



Domestic Violence



**WOMEN'S AID
IMPACT
REPORT
2015**



*For the first time in my life
I was able to tell someone
what was happening.
Women's Aid didn't judge
or blame me.*

They just listened.

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PART 1:

DIRECTOR'S REPORT



I want to take the opportunity of this **Impact Report** to speak about the challenges still to overcome in 2016 for women and children affected by domestic violence. 2016 is an important year for Ireland. A year in which we are reflecting on the society and nation we have built since the 1916 Easter Rising. It's also a time to look forward and proclaim our vision of Ireland. **Women's Aid wants an Ireland that gives full and equal human rights to women, that values their lives, that provides full protection from violence and abuse and an Ireland which encourages and supports survivors of abuse to move on to safety and freedom.**

The information presented in our Impact Report 2015 gives a powerful and moving illustration of the prevalence of domestic violence, the intensity of the impact on women and children, and the many remaining barriers to safety. The fact that many women still don't know where to turn, or even believe that anyone can help them, is a real cause for concern. This needs to be addressed within the **2nd National Strategy on Domestic Sexual and Gender Based Violence's work programme**¹ to fulfil Ireland's obligations under the EU Victim's Directive².

WE MUST RISE TO STOP THE KILLING OF WOMEN AND CHILDREN.

Domestic violence is dangerous. It kills women. It kills children, too. In 2015, women disclosed on **970 occasions** that their abusive partners threatened to kill them, their children and their families. There were **579 additional disclosures of assaults with weapons, threats with weapons and being strangled and smothered**. The threat of violence against women and children always hangs in the air and women disclosed being **punched, cut with knives, hit with golf clubs, scalded and strangled**. Strangulation or choking is a form of control used to instil fear and terror. Bare hands can be the most dangerous weapon. **20 years of collecting data on female homicide in Ireland** shows that in 46% of homicides no weapons were used with strangulation being the second highest mode of killing at 26%. 31% of women were stabbed, 20% were beaten, 20% were shot and 11% were killed by other means. Over these 20 years, **211 women have been murdered in Ireland with 55% of women being killed by their partners or exes**³. **13 children were murdered alongside their mothers**.

These statistics are **a stark reminder of the dangerous and sometimes fatal nature** of domestic abuse and the tragedy it brings for family, friends and communities. The killing of women, and in some cases, their children, by abusive men is an affront to our society and a problem we must take seriously. These dangers were tragically brought to the fore last October when Siobhan Phillips was shot 4 times by her ex-partner and left fighting for her life and Garda Tony Golden was killed trying to protect her. In 2016, **we must see the ratification and implementation of the Istanbul Convention**⁴ and its four-pillared framework (prevention, protection, prosecution and monitoring) to tackle these serious crimes against women and children. Only then will women begin to feel safe and protected in their homes and in their relationships.

WE MUST RISE IN SUPPORT OF DEFIANT VOICES.

Victim blaming remains deeply embedded in Irish society and leaves women feeling silenced and ashamed.

1 <http://www.cosc.ie/en/COSC/Pages/WP08000096>

2 http://ec.europa.eu/justice/criminal/victims/index_en.htm

3 *Resolved cases, Women's Aid Female Homicide Media Watch, 1996 - March 2016.*

4 <http://www.coe.int/en/web/istanbul-convention/home>

However, in 2015 some welcome signs of change provided a direct challenge to this unfair and harmful culture. **Emma Murphy's viral Facebook video** broke into the Irish psyche last summer and challenged so many stereotypes of women who are abused by a partner. Emma is a smart, articulate and successful young woman who, by speaking out about her experience, empowered many others. Women who realised they were not alone and who were encouraged to reach out for help. Women's Aid website showed an immediate impact when it rose to 1,187 contacts when Emma shared her story, more than doubling the average daily 450 visits. Our National Helpline received **48% more calls** that day compared to the previous day. **Women speaking out directly themselves**, describing the abuse they experience is extremely powerful. It is also a **defiant act** to abusive partners and exes who have tried to exert power and control in order to silence, shame and isolate the women they hurt. Our **Women's Voices Project**⁵ in 2015 gave voice to four women whose testimonies both empowered other women in similar situations and built better awareness and understanding of the complex nature of domestic violence.

WE MUST RISE TO PROTECT YOUNG WOMEN FROM DATING ABUSE

You are never too young to be abused by an intimate partner and this is highlighted by the **17,000 website visits** to **www.2in2u.ie** during our 2015. In a European study on 14-17 year olds experiencing control and surveillance in intimate relationships, one young teenager described being more controlled by her boyfriend than by her parents⁶. This study showed that many of the abusive tactics disclosed to our National Freephone Helpline and One to One support services by women of all ages are evident in young intimate relationships. With the popularity of social media, young women are open to a host of new and insidious forms of abuse facilitated by new technologies and communication channels.

Good progress was made on **strengthening domestic violence legislation** by Minister for Justice Frances Fitzgerald, T.D., in July 2015 with her announcement of further protection for victims from intimidation as they go through the court system. This included the provision of compulsory referral to domestic violence support services and easier access to interim barring orders in the heads of a new bill. It was particularly good to see that the **new bill addressed for the first time the issue of intimidation and abuse by phone and electronic means**. Yet this draft bill **did not extend legal protection to young women in dating relationships** not living with their partners or have a child in common with them. Article 3 of the Istanbul Convention defines domestic violence as 'all acts of physical, sexual, psychological or economic violence that occurs within the family or domestic unit or between former or current spouses or partners, **whether or not the perpetrator shares or has shared the same residence with the victim**'.

This Bill was not brought into law during the lifetime of the last Government and **this legislation remains at draft stage**. With a new Government and a new Dáil, we urge the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice, to grasp this opportunity to extend cover young women in dating relationships in the draft legislation.

WE MUST RISE TO THE CHALLENGE OF 21ST CENTURY DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Our current laws are simply not fit for purpose to meet 21st century challenges of digital abuse within intimate relationships. And the lack of a specific stalking offence is a significant gap in legal protection. EU research showed that 12% of Irish women and girls over the age of 15 experienced stalking with 50% being stalked by a partner or ex-partner.⁷ A snapshot taken between April to December 2015 showed that **online abuse and stalking was disclosed to Women's Aid on 293 occasions**. Under the prosecution pillar of the Istanbul Convention state parties will have to introduce a number of new offences where these do not exist, such as stalking.

Stalking within intimate relationships is a crime. It is when someone will not accept that the relationship has ended and women reported being bombarded with texts and being stalked on social networking sites. Women feel their privacy is invaded; they have no control over their lives and experience anxiety, feel vulnerable and are frightened.

5 www.womensaid.ie/testimonies

6 <http://stiritup.eu/app-and-resources/>

7 *FRA gender-based violence against women survey explorer 2012* available at <http://fra.europa.eu/DVS/DVT/vaw.php>

They may have to change their contact numbers and email addresses, close down social media accounts and in some cases move out of their homes. **Stalking by a partner or ex-partner is one of the most predictive factors for further assault and homicide**, particularly given the information and insight abusive partners have into women's daily lives. In light of the Law Reform Commission's considerations on cybercrime, Women's Aid hosted an international conference in November 2015 to highlight the nature and extent of digital abuse in Ireland; identify the legislative gaps and learn from international contributors to tackle this growing crime.⁸



Margaret Martin and Noirín O'Sullivan, Garda Commissioner at the Women's Aid Digital Abuse conference, 25th November 2015.

WE MUST RISE TO LISTEN, BELIEVE AND SUPPORT WOMEN.

Women's Aid was a victim last year. We suffered a massive budget cut of 20% by Tusla, which threatened the heart of our service. **Yet despite that we managed to transform our National Freephone Helpline from a 12-hour to a 24-hour service.** I would like to commend the Helpline Team for its work on piloting the service from September to December 2015. This work included the recruitment of dedicated volunteers willing to cover the 'out of hours' night shift who help us to run our 24/7 service.

Our 24-hour Helpline launched in January. In the first few months we answered 1,093 extra calls during our extended overnight service. Think of all those voices, desperate for help in the middle of the night and the early morning. Afraid, vulnerable women, who needed someone. Someone to answer the phone to them. Someone to listen, believe and support.

This year, we know there will be many more. Our resources were over-stretched before we suffered funding cuts. But we are determined to keep going, to keep answering the phone day and night.

We know how important and one caller summed it up perfectly saying "for the first time in my life I was able to tell someone what was happening. Women's Aid didn't judge or blame me. They just listened." Words like these inspire us all, Board, staff and volunteers to continue to listen, believe and support women, every single time.

Margaret Martin

June 2016

⁸ Conference materials, presentations and other key information available at <https://goo.gl/iQOZ1B>

PART 2:

CHAIRPERSON'S REPORT



In my capacity as Chair of the Board of Directors of Women's Aid, I welcome the launch and publication of the Women's Aid Impact Report for 2015. The statistics quoted within the report for the National Freephone Helpline and the one to one support services demonstrate the absolute need for the work of Women's Aid. This report shows, as each Impact Report of Women's Aid does, the unfailing efforts of Women's Aid to support and protect women and children, to continue to advocate for women and children affected by domestic violence, to raise public awareness of the issue and the impact of domestic violence on women and children, to lobby for legislative and social change and to provide training to other organisations and bodies where the effects of domestic violence have significant impact on the parties working in those organisations.

The **National Freephone Helpline responded to 9,308 calls** in 2015. The one to one support services provided **870 one to one support sessions**, carried out **239 court accompaniments**, and the drop in service in **Dolphin House met with 289 women during 308 visits**. In the course of all these contacts made with Women's Aid there were over 16,375 disclosures of emotional, physical, sexual and financial abuse and 5,966 disclosures of child abuse. These figures alone indicate the absolute necessity of the work that Women's Aid does and demonstrates the extent and nature of the abuses being suffered by women and children. These statistics are compiled from women who make contact with Women's Aid but we all know, from our different areas of practice that the number of women and children suffering with domestic violence is way in excess of these gathered statistics. It is also with great pride that I welcome the extension of the helpline now to 24 hours per day, 7 days a week.

The Women's Aid Court Accompaniment Service operates mostly in Dolphin House. This is the main Court of application for people seeking protection under the Domestic Violence legislation in the greater Dublin area. Dolphin House dealt with 5,264 applications relating to domestic violence in 2015. This figure includes 2,424 applications for safety orders, 1,605 applications for protection orders, 869 applications for barring orders and 264 applications for interim barring orders. 48% of the total orders were granted (2,513).⁹

Women's Aid has, on a very regular basis, expressed concern at the volume of work that is being processed by Dolphin House in circumstances where the Court is significantly under-resourced. This workload has now increased even further due to the enactment of the Child and Family Relations Bill as it has extended the criteria for applications to be brought before the Court. This volume of work, currently before the Court, has resulted in significant delays between the granting of a protection order and the hearing before the Court of an application for a safety/barring order. **Currently the time between the granting of a protection order and the hearing of an application before the Court is up to 20 weeks**. Protections orders are not granted in all cases where applications are brought under the domestic violence legislation and it is a known fact that it is a very dangerous time for any women caught in a domestic violence situation when she takes a decision to leave. Having to live with these delays we believe endangers women and children further and, in addition to that, it affords a lengthy opportunity for significant pressure to be exerted on women to withdraw their applications before the Court.

These issues are replicated across the 26 counties of Ireland and are evidenced from the contact received to the National Freephone Helpline for women residing outside of the Dublin area.

9 *Figures obtained from from Dublin District Family Law Court, 7th June 2016.*

Women's Aid is also very concerned with regard to the **delays in the legal aid process** for those women who are eligible for legal aid. We accept that a Private Practitioners Scheme is brought into play in relation to applications under the domestic violence legislation but we are well aware, that for many reasons, women are not able to pursue applications under the domestic violence legislation and their only option on occasions is to proceed to separation. **In certain legal aid boards there are delays of 16 months for a first significant legal appointment.** In addition there is a payment which requires to be made on application for legal aid. This amount can be reduced, rarely totally waived, for people in extremely difficult financial circumstances. This is in contrast with the criminal legal aid system where there are no delays, people eligible under the criminal legal aid scheme qualify for immediate appointments and legal representation and no financial contribution to the legal aid scheme is sought.

As an organisation, to the forefront of dealing with domestic violence, its consequences and impact on children, we are at a loss to understand why a **two tier system in respect of legal aid exists** and why it is permitted to continue. Women's Aid has, along with other groups, over the years, lobbied for changes in domestic violence legislation. This has been done with significant success and we do recognise that we have strong domestic violence legislation which offers protection to most women and children who need it. However, as we previously pointed out, **legislation is only as good as the processing of such applications under the legislation and the enforceability of that legislation.** Regrettably, given the huge volume of work that is currently before the District Courts, Judges are still in a position where there are no services available to bring reports to the Court to deal with risk assessment and the issue of the impact of domestic violence on children who are caught up within it. The lack of assistance and back-up to the Court by way of provision of reports from an agency means that Judges are finding themselves in an increasingly difficult situation when considering access and custody applications in domestic violence circumstances. Women's Aid recognises the vital importance of risk assessment and carries out safety planning with women and their children who use our services.

I would like to express my **sincere thanks** to the members of the board of Women's Aid who give up their time and expertise so generously, to our director Margaret Martin, to the staff and volunteers **who work tirelessly to secure the aims and objectives of the organisation** and who are **dedicated to working for the safety of women and children in very difficult and financially challenging times.** Without the contribution of everybody involved, at all levels across the organisation, the organisation would not achieve what it has done and that work has been further enhanced by the extension of the National Freephone Helpline to 24 hours a day.

As Chair of the Board of Directors of Women's Aid, I am immeasurably proud of the work of Women's Aid and all that that work has achieved.

Ursula Regan

Chair

June 2016



*After calling Women's Aid
I went straight upstairs,
packed my things and left.*

I never looked back.

PART 3:

WHAT WE DO



MISSION

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**.

For over 40 years the organisation has built up a huge body of experience and expertise on the issue, enabling us to best support women and children and share this knowledge with other agencies responding to women experiencing domestic violence.

Our Direct Services for women experiencing domestic violence **underpin and inform all of our work** to end domestic violence.

ETHOS AND PRINCIPLES

- Complete confidentiality.¹⁰
- Maximising women's safety at all times.
- Understanding the trauma of violence and supporting women's increasing autonomy while recognising the woman as expert in her own situation.
- Being informed and knowledgeable about the rights, entitlements and options for women and ensuring referral is appropriate and responsible.
- Advocating for women's rights.
- Addressing additional barriers and discriminations that women experience.
- Being committed to ensuring justice for the victim and accountability and sanctions against violent men.
- Recognising the best form of child protection in domestic violence situations is woman protection.
- Supporting women to move from crisis to safety and independence.
- Ongoing commitment to action for political and institutional change.
- Encompassing key feminist principles within the philosophy and ethos of the organisation.

¹⁰ Women's Aid has a policy in line with the Children First 2011 which callers and clients are made aware of when confidentiality or limits of confidentiality are being discussed.

OUR DIRECT SERVICES FOR WOMEN¹¹

Women's Aid services are free, confidential, non-judgemental and non-directive

The Women's Aid National Freephone Helpline 1800 341 900 became a 24 hour, 7 days a week service in January 2016 and provides support and information to callers experiencing abuse from current or former husbands, partners and boyfriends.¹²

The Women's Aid Helpline is the only free, national, domestic violence Helpline with specialised trained staff and volunteers, fully accredited by The Helplines Partnership and with a Telephone Interpretation Service facility covering 170 languages for callers needing interpreting services.

Women's Aid also offers a **One to One Support and Advocacy Service**. Our Support Services Team provides in-depth one-to-one support and information, from Monday to Friday, in six locations throughout the greater Dublin area.

The Support Services Team also offers a **Court Accompaniment Service**, which provides advocacy and support specific to the particular needs of women seeking legal redress regarding violence by a current or former husband, partner or boyfriend.

Women's Aid operates the **Dolphin House Support and Referral Service**, in partnership with the Dublin 12 Domestic Violence Service and Inchicore Outreach Centre in the Dublin District Family Law Court in Dolphin House. This is a drop in service for women using the courts and referrals come in the main via the court.

Women's Aid also **refers women to local domestic violence refuges and support services** around the country.

WORKING FOR JUSTICE AND SOCIAL CHANGE

In addition to our Direct Services, Women's Aid acts for justice and social change by engaging in policy, representation, communications and campaigns activity at a national level. Women's Aid also provides extensive information and statistics on domestic violence in print and online.

We provide training on Best Practice in Woman and Child Protection in the Context of Domestic Violence to social workers and other health and social care professionals. We also provide specialised training and organisational support on responding to domestic violence to organisations in the community and voluntary sector and statutory agencies throughout the country.

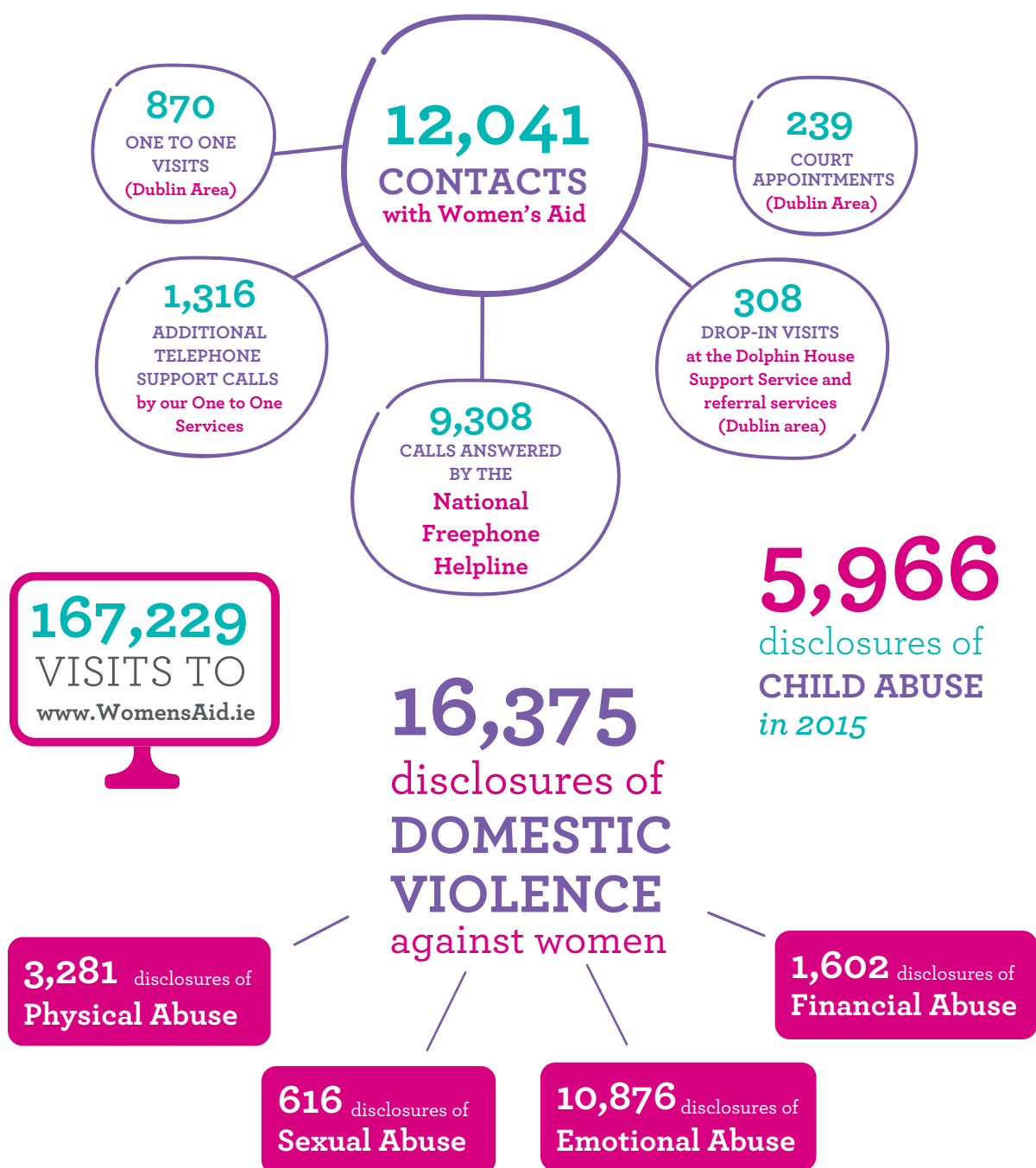
All of our work is made possible by a combination of statutory funding, philanthropic, regular and once-off donations, our charity shops and fundraising activities.

¹¹ Women's Aid Direct Support Services are the National Freephone Helpline, One to One Support, Advocacy and Court Accompaniment Service and the Dolphin House Support and Referral Service. The Dolphin House Support and Referral Service is run in partnership between Women's Aid, Inchicore Outreach Centre and the Dublin 12 Domestic Violence Service.


¹² Previous to this, the National Freephone Helpline was open 10am to 10pm, every day of the year (except Christmas day), including 2015, the year being reported on.

PART 4:

OUR IMPACT IN 2015¹³



¹³ Note on data collected: 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 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.



*I still think of that
day – the day I called
Women's Aid – as the day
my life changed forever.*

PART 5:

LISTENING. BELIEVING. SUPPORTING.

OUR DIRECT SERVICE TEAMS

The Women's Aid National Freephone Helpline

In 2015, the Helpline was staffed by a full time Helpline Manager, a part-time volunteer support worker, 3 part-time Helpline workers, two panel staff and a team of 31 volunteers.

The Women's Aid National Freephone Helpline 1800 341 900 is a **support service for women experiencing emotional, physical, sexual and financial abuse by a current or former husband, partner or boyfriend**. We are also available for family, friends and professionals concerned about women living with domestic violence.

In 2015, the National Freephone Helpline operated from 10am to 10pm, 7 days a week (except Christmas Day). It became a 24/7 service in January 2016.

The Helpline provides vital support and information to individual callers and serves as an access point to other **Women's Aid services** and to **other domestic violence support services and refuges nationwide**.

The National Helpline is **free of charge** to callers in the Republic of Ireland.

This **confidential Helpline** is a valuable and essential service for the many women whose experiences of abuse may have isolated them from their family and social supports, and humiliated them into self-shame, self-blame and secrecy.

All staff and volunteers working on the Helpline are highly trained in working with women experiencing abuse and share their support with gentleness and compassion to all callers to the Helpline. We make space for a woman to speak and be heard and to acknowledge and validate her feelings. At all times, we place the safety of women and children at the centre of our response and acknowledge that the responsibility for the abuse clearly lies with the perpetrator.

The Women's Aid One to One, Court accompaniment and advocacy service

The Support Services staff includes one part-time manager, two full-time and four part-time support workers and one part-time administrator.

Women's Aid provides one-to-one support to women experiencing domestic violence. We provide **in-depth information and support** that includes **face-to-face meetings, safety planning, telephone support** and the **accompaniment of women to court**. We also advocate for women when they wish and refer them to other services. These services are available Monday to Friday.

Appointments for these services are usually made by the woman herself through our National Freephone Helpline (1800 341 900). We can meet women in **six locations in the greater Dublin area**.

These locations are:

- Ballymun
- Coolock
- Dublin City Centre North
- Dublin City Centre South (Women's Aid Offices)
- Dun Laoghaire
- Swords.

If a woman cannot access any of these locations **we will arrange a safe alternative place to meet**.

Referrals for our Support Services come, in the majority of cases, directly from women via the National Freephone Helpline and the Support and Referral service in Dolphin House, as well as from a range of other services such as An Garda Síochána, GPs, Social workers, Family Resource Centres and hospital staff.

The **Women's Aid Court Accompaniment Service** provides advocacy and support specific to the particular needs of women seeking legal redress regarding violence by a current or former husband or partner, or those who have Family Law proceedings such as separation, divorce and child care matters such as custody and access, guardianship and maintenance in the context of domestic violence.

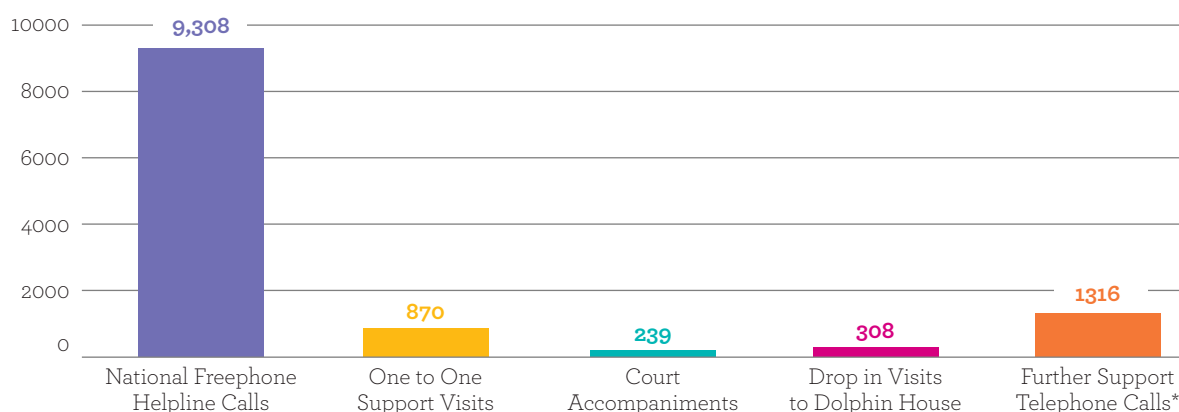
We also operate the **Dolphin House Support and Referral Service**, in partnership with the Dublin 12 Domestic Violence Service and Inchicore Outreach Centre in the Dublin District Family Law Court in Dolphin House.

Women's Aid support workers have an in-depth understanding and expert knowledge of the options available to women. They provide **emotional support** to restore the **women's self-confidence** and to **empower** them to take steps to try to escape the abuse. We provide **practical support** and **explore options** while helping the woman to **maximise her and her children's safety**.

5.1 CONTACTS WITH WOMEN'S AID

In 2015, there were 12,041 contacts made to all Women's Aid Direct services. During these contacts 16,375 disclosures of domestic violence against women and 5,966 disclosures of child abuse were made.

Chart 1: Contacts with Women's Aid Services in 2015



*Combination of support calls by the One to One service and Dolphin House Service.

Of the **9,308 National Freephone Helpline** calls in 2015, **7,725 (83%)** were support calls primarily **from women experiencing emotional, physical, sexual and financial abuse** at the hands of a current or former intimate male partner. **Other support calls** were from **family and friends** concerned about a loved one or from **professionals working with women** affected by domestic violence. Making the first call to our Helpline can be a difficult step for anyone. We hear women struggle to find the words to describe what has been happening to them and to understand the abuse perpetrated against them. Women express hurt, confusion and are horrified about the pain they are experiencing.

153 of these calls were silent support calls. Often women are at first unable to speak about their experiences. Silent calls are valuable support spaces. Sometimes a silent call will progress to where a woman will speak about her experiences. In these calls, Women's Aid Helpline workers offer gentle and encouraging support and an outline of the services available. Being unable to speak about the abuse accounts for many of the hang-up calls that the Helpline experiences.

In 2015, we answered **678 hang up calls (7%)** where the caller immediately ended the call. Many women disclose that they have hung up a number of times before beginning to talk about the abuse. Speaking about the abuse can be a daunting prospect and it can frequently take a number of attempts to begin this process of engagement with support.

Indirect support and administration calls (8%) refers to the many calls that the Helpline receives from voluntary and statutory bodies looking for information or support on issues arising in their work in relation to domestic violence. The individuals using our service include members of An Garda Síochána, Social Workers, Local Support Services, Family Resource Centres, Local Community Development Companies, GPs and hospital staff. Other administration calls include enquiries about volunteering and requests for information about Women's Aid as well as contacts for the Women's Aid One to One Service.

The One to One Service and Dolphin House Support and Referral Service also provided **telephone support to women on 1,316 occasions** in 2015.

The **National Freephone Helpline is a gateway to our Dublin based support services** including our One to One Support and Court Accompaniment Services. The **location of the 870 One to One** visits in 2015 can be broken down to:

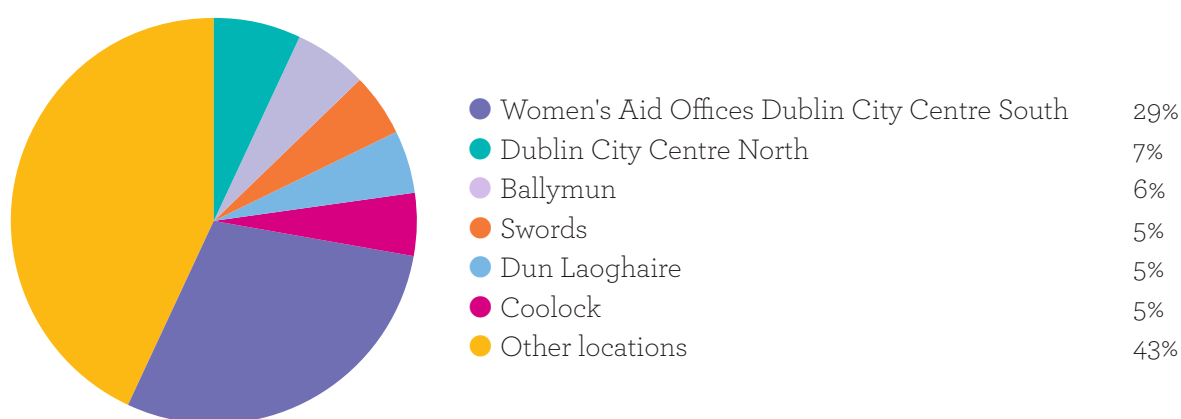


Chart 2: Location of one to one visits in 2015.

Our **Court accompaniment service went to court 239 times with 131 women in 2015.** Court accompaniment takes place at the request of the woman and is a crucial part of our support work with women experiencing domestic violence. Women's Aid support workers will accompany women to court to provide support on the day,

as well as meeting her prior to and after the court hearing to prepare for court and to assist her in managing the outcome of the proceedings.

The **Dolphin House Support and Referral Service supported 289 women in 308 face to face drop-in sessions** throughout the year.

5.2 DISCLOSURES OF ABUSE AGAINST WOMEN

In 2015, the Women's Aid Helpline, One to One Service and Dolphin House Support and Referral Service listened to **16,375 disclosures** of domestic violence against women. This included **10,876 disclosures of emotional abuse**, **3,281 disclosures of physical abuse**, **616 disclosures of sexual abuse** and **1,602 disclosures of financial abuse**.

In addition, the Women's Aid Helpline and One to One service provided support to women via email on 181 occasions in 2015. Some women find that this is their only safe way of communicating or contacting us.

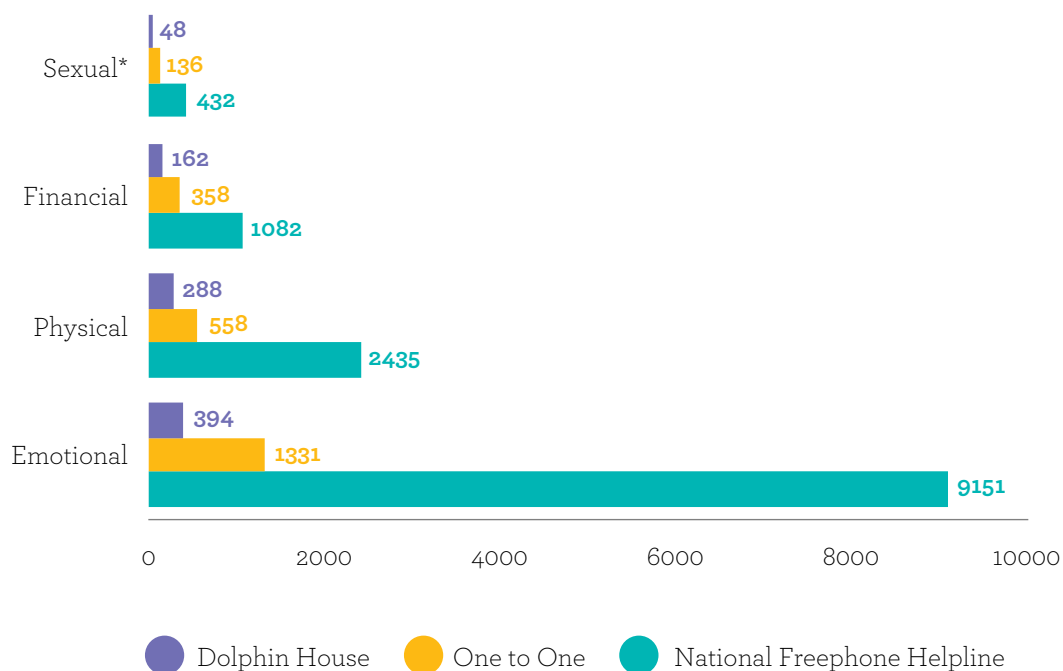
In 2015, 69% of contacts with Women's Aid were first time contacts and 31% were repeat users.

National Freephone Helpline calls can last from 60 seconds to over 60 minutes, with the average call being 14 minutes in duration.

In 2015, 97% of National Freephone Helpline callers were female and 3% were male

35% of callers came from the Dublin area while 31% of callers were outside Dublin. 34% of callers did not disclose a location. In addition to these figures, there were 37 calls from outside the Republic of Ireland.

Chart 3: Disclosures of abuse by type and service



* This figure includes **212 disclosures of rape by an intimate partner**.

5.3 THE TYPES OF ABUSE DISCLOSED

The forms of abuse that women experience within the context of domestic violence include **emotional, physical, sexual and financial abuse**. Most women experience overlapping forms of abuse and where there is physical, sexual and/or financial abuse, there is always emotional abuse. For this reason, the actual number of disclosures surpasses the number of support contacts.

Many women speak of the pain of emotional abuse and how difficult it is for the rest of the world to see or understand its impact. Women have expressed that emotional abuse can be the most damaging and often worse than the physical abuse and where there is no physical and sexual violence there is the threat and fear of it.

Abusive men let women know what they are capable of. These threats are brutal, detailed and very frightening.

Emotional abuse was disclosed to Women's Aid Direct Services on 10,876 occasions in 2015.

This included:

- Being controlled, manipulated and isolated from family and friends.
- Threats to kill the woman, the children, or the woman's family.
- Abuser refusing to call the woman by her name, constant name calling and being shouted at.
- Being accused of being a bad mother and being told that she is going mad.
- Being blamed for the abuse and being told that it's her fault.
- Being shaken, kicked and woken during the night resulting in sleep deprivation.
- Being ignored and given silent treatment for days on end.
- Having belongings destroyed including treasured possessions.
- Being stalked, having to change contact details and being harassed by phone, text and online after the relationship has ended.

Emotional abuse is responsible for high levels of mental and physical health issues. Despite this, legal protection for such abuse in the absence of physical abuse is extremely difficult for women to secure.

A **physical assault** is a serious crime. In 2015, Women's Aid heard of **3,281 disclosures of physical assaults against women by current or ex-boyfriends, husbands and partners**. The many ways that an abuser finds to physically abuse their partner remains shocking to those of us who support women, and most shocking at times is that **bare hands remain the most common, and potentially lethal, weapons**.

Physical violence disclosed in 2015 included:

- Being beaten, bitten and spat at.
- Being punched, thrown, slapped and kicked to the point of bleeding and threatened with a knife or gun.
- Being beaten while pregnant, being beaten when holding an infant.
- Being locked in the house and/or car for hours.
- Attempted arson while she and the children are in the house.
- Being choked, pulled by the hair, being stabbed and cut with knives and blades.
- Being hit with weapons including hammers, axes and everyday household items.

Sexual abuse has always been a part of domestic violence and includes a range of different behaviours. There were **616 disclosures of sexual abuse in 2015. This figure includes 212 reports of rape.**

Many women find speaking about the sexual relationship with their abuser difficult and at times struggle to identify coercion and forced sexual activity as the crime of sexual violence. **But sexual violence, even within a relationship or between ex-partners, is a crime.**

Sexual abuse disclosed in 2015 included:

- Being drugged and raped while unconscious.
- Being sexually assaulted with weapons.
- Being raped by partner who says that sex is his right.
- Feeling that she cannot say no as it will mean a physical attack. Easier to 'give in'.
- Being denied access to family planning.
- Being forced to carry out humiliating and painful sexual acts.

Financial abuse continues to be an issue for many women with 1,602 disclosures in 2015. This included:

- Being denied access to vital medical care and intervention.
- Abuser controlling all family income including woman's salary and/or welfare payments.
- Being left without means as the abuser has gambled or spent the household income.
- Being left to pay all household expenses including bills, food and clothing for the children.
- Abuser withholding maintenance payments.
- Being left with debt in her name and being vulnerable to homelessness as the abuser is not paying mortgages and other bills taken out in her name.

We hear from many women that the recent recession has led to increased frequency and severity of financial abuse. Limited options have trapped them in the relationship. Women, and our support workers, have to work much harder in this climate to identify possible supports and options to leave an abusive relationship.

5.4 IMPACT OF ABUSE

Women and children experiencing domestic violence **should never be portrayed as passive victims.** Women's Aid continues to be inspired by the women who use our services. Women, who are trying to live their lives, raise their children, study, work, and look after others, but who are doing so while suffering the most horrific abuse. Women like us, like our sisters, our mothers, our friends and our workmates, whose strength and resilience in the face of unimaginable abuse and fear ultimate should not be underestimated.

Yet, the **impact of the abuse on women, their children and the community around them cannot be minimised or downplayed.**

Women are controlled and treated as unequal human beings. They are put down to the extent that they don't have any confidence in themselves or in their own abilities. Women are trapped with very few options to leave. They are beaten, hospitalised and can have ongoing and long-term physical health issues. Women can develop mental health issues and in some cases be over-reliant on alcohol and drugs. Women are raped, sexually abused and have no freedom to negotiate a safe and respectful sexual relationships. Women are isolated from supports and from family and friends.

The impacts of abuse as disclosed to Women's Aid in 2015 include:

- Being hospitalised, having broken limbs, jaws, cheekbones, brain and head injuries and internal injuries from sexual assault. Having bruising, black eyes, permanent scars and disfigurement.
- Passing out whilst being choked.
- Sexual health issues including STIs or experiencing an unplanned pregnancy following rape.
- Experiencing miscarriage as a result of assault.
- Poverty and homelessness.
- Alcohol and substance misuse.
- Feeling terrified, confused and misunderstood. Afraid of seeking support from family members for fear of putting them at risk.
- Feeling traumatised, distressed and overwhelmed following assaults and hospitalisation.
- Feeling exhausted, isolated, depressed, put down and having low self-esteem and self-doubt.
- Feeling insecure, alone and powerless.

The mental and physical health effects reported by women experiencing domestic violence are significant, immediate and long term, and wide-ranging. The ultimate cost can, in some extreme cases, be fatal.

5.5 WHO ARE THE ABUSERS?

The majority of women we supported in 2015 were experiencing **abuse from a current or former male intimate partner (81%). 19% of people who contacted our services** disclosed abuse from a non-intimate male family member or another person.

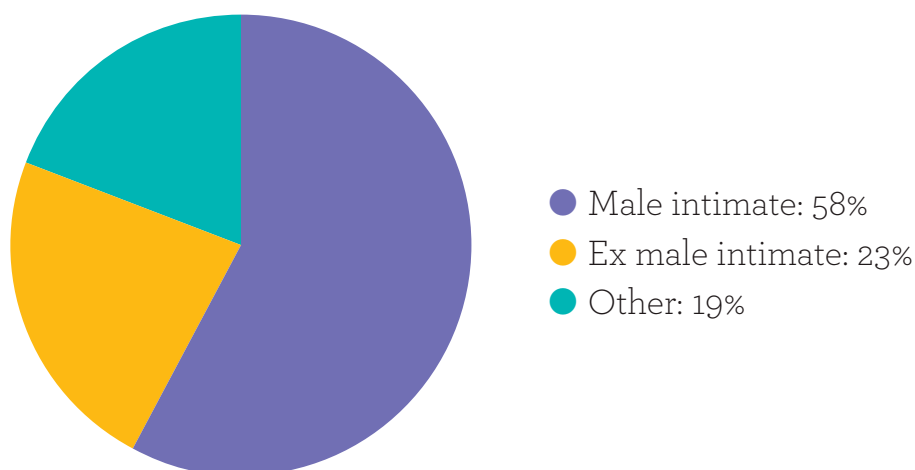


Chart 4: shows the relationship between women and their abusers.

Table 1: Breakdown of male intimate category

The male intimate category breaks down as:

Relationship	%
Husband	42%
Ex-husband	6%
Partner	16%
Ex-partner	17%

Marriage remains the most common context for domestic violence (**42%**). However, almost one quarter (**23%**) of women were being abused by **an ex-husband or ex-partner**, which indicates a significant number of callers who were still experiencing abuse after the relationship had ended.

Leaving an abusive relationship is **fraught with difficulty**. Women stay with abusive men because it is extremely difficult for them to leave. No one enjoys being beaten, threatened and humiliated in their own homes.

There is a growing understanding of the barriers women face when trying to end the abuse. It isn't as simple as telling the woman to leave. Whilst the risks associated with staying in an abusive relationship may be very high, simply leaving the relationship does not guarantee that the violence will stop. In fact, the period during which a woman is planning or making her exit, is often the most dangerous time for her and her children.

Many women are **frightened of the abuser**, and with good reason, fear is their experience. It's common for perpetrators to threaten to harm or even kill their partners or children if she leaves.

Fully resourced and specialist support services are needed to support women as they are preparing to leave and to plan and manage their own and their children's safety until the abuse ends.

The vast majority of perpetrators of domestic violence are men, who deliberately use abusive behaviour to control their partners or former partners. Abusive men come from all walks of life. They can come from any cultural background, religion, class or area. They may be young men or older men.

Domestic violence violates a woman's human rights. It is about gaining control, not a lack of it. If an abuser is careful about when, where and to whom they are abusive to, then they are showing sufficient awareness and knowledge about their actions to indicate they are not 'out of control'. **Abusers use violence and tactics of coercion as a way of exercising control and getting what they want.**

Domestic violence is a learned intentional behaviour rather than the consequence of stress, individual pathology, substance use or a 'dysfunctional' relationship. Perpetrators of domestic violence frequently avoid taking responsibility for their behaviour, by blaming their violence on someone or something else, denying it took place at all or minimising it.

Whilst responsibility for the actual violence is the perpetrators' alone, there is a victim blaming culture in our society that **perpetuates abusive attitudes** and make it difficult for women and children to get help. There is **no excuse** for domestic violence and the abusive man alone is responsible for the violence.

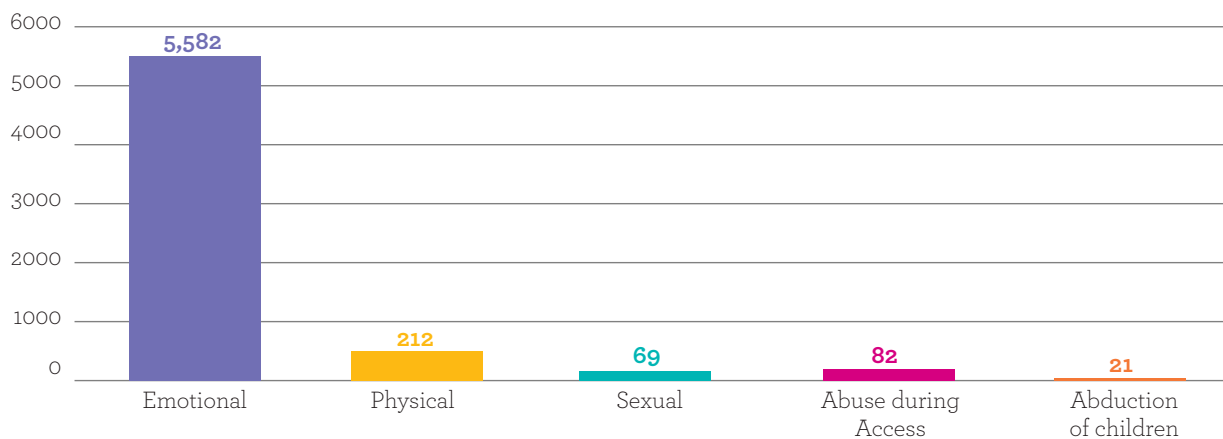
Many women have been told so many times that they are responsible for the abuse and may minimise the abuser's behaviour themselves. As a result, we know that many women are unable to identify what they are experiencing as abuse. It must be remembered that women are **NEVER to blame** for the abuse they experience.

5.6 DISCLOSURES OF ABUSE OF 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. Chart 5 outlines disclosures of child abuse to Women's Aid in 2015.

In 2015, there were **5,966 disclosures of child abuse to the Women's Aid National Freephone Helpline and One to One Support Services**. This figure includes 5,582 disclosures of **emotional abuse**¹⁴ and 281 disclosures where children were **physically or sexually abused** by the perpetrator of their mother's abuse. It also includes 82 disclosures of where children were being **abused during access visits** and 21 disclosures of **child abduction** in the context of domestic violence.

Chart 5: Types of child abuse disclosed to Women's Aid in 2015.



There were an additional **49 disclosures of child abuse** to the Dolphin House Support and Referral Service in 2015.

The abusive tactics used against children living with domestic violence in 2015 included:

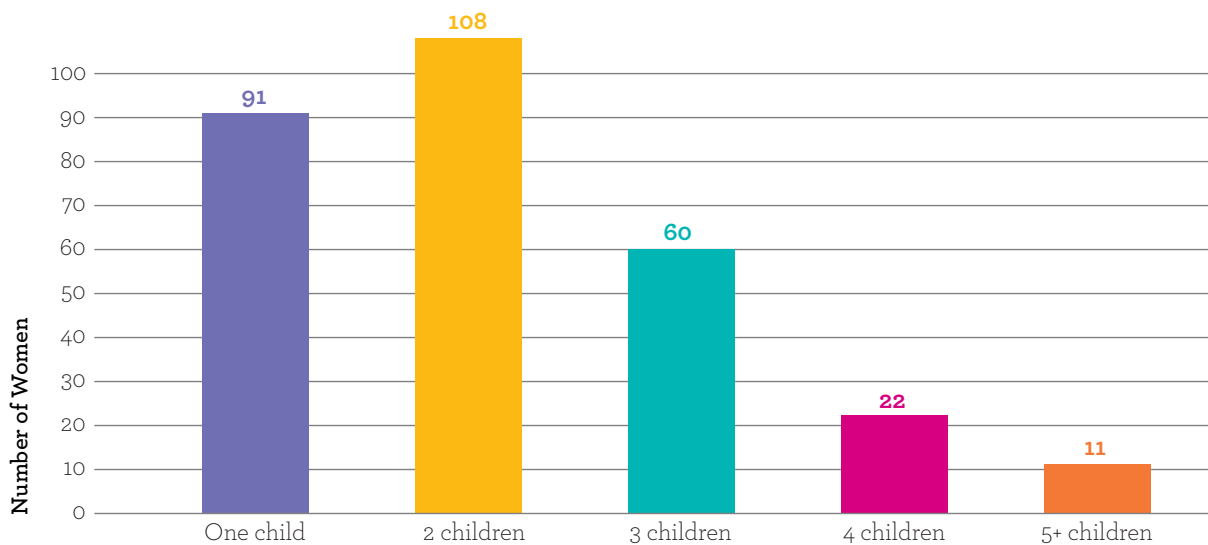
- Children witnessing verbal, physical and sexual abuse against their mother.
- Children being constantly shouted at and being called names.
- Abuser threatening to kill the child/children.
- Children being emotionally manipulated and being told lies about their mother.
- Children being abused during access arrangements.

Where children do not directly see the abuse occurring they may overhear the abusive incidents, or will see the aftermath of it such as bruises, broken bones, damaged furniture and belongings. At times, **the perpetrator will deliberately target children** as a way to hurt both them and their mother.

Women's Aid noted the number of women with children using our One to One Support Service in 2015. Chart 6 illustrates that the majority of women had children with **at least 630 children** living in homes where domestic violence is a feature.

¹⁴ In 2015, Women's Aid merged the direct emotional abuse and witnessing abuse category to fall under the one Emotional Abuse column. This is in line with Children First: National Guidelines on the Protection of Children in Ireland which identifies the exposure to domestic violence as a form of emotional abuse.

Chart 6: Number of first time users of the One to One Service with children.



5.6.1 ABUSE OF MOTHERS AND CHILDREN DURING ACCESS ARRANGEMENTS

Many women will seek to end their abusive relationship when they become aware of risk to their children.

When women do leave the abusive relationship, they face negotiating the legal system for custody, access and maintenance which, in the context of domestic violence, leaves women vulnerable to continued abuse. Many of the women we support are **concerned that access arrangements ordered by the court are placing their children at further risk.**

Women describe finding it more difficult to protect their children after a relationship ends due to ongoing abuse during unsupervised access visits. In **82 contacts with women it was disclosed that children were being abused during access arrangements.** On a further **325 occasions mothers disclosed that they themselves had been directly abused during access visits.**

Abuse in relation to access arrangements in 2015 includes:

- Children being forced to go on access visits with their father despite being terrified of him.
- Constant threats by abuser of being brought back to court for access.
- Being verbally abused and threatened while handing over the children for access.
- Being unable to go to work because children are not collected for access.
- Being threatened that she won't see the children again.
- Children having unsupervised access with sexual predators.

Where a woman has no concerns about the safety of her children she will very often do her utmost to facilitate time with their father. The majority of women using our services tell us of wanting to find ways to support ongoing relationships between children and their fathers. However, **where there has been direct abuse to children and there continues to be the threat of harm to children, it is particularly distressing for women to have to send children to unsupervised access visits.**

Women's Aid works in line with Children First 2011 and international best practise that recognises that **the best form of child protection is to work with the non-abusive parent, usually their mother.** We work to support the mother in her ongoing efforts to protect and care for her children. When we work with women who have children, a lot of our work is focused on the children's needs, in particular their safety and on how to support the mother as she cares for them.

Many abusive men also **withhold maintenance payments as a way of further abusing and controlling women and children**. We support women going through the court system for child custody and access and maintenance matters.

The process can be long and drawn out and in many cases does not result in safe outcomes. In some cases, women ask us for support in setting up safe access and counselling for their children.

However, in our experience, the majority of abusive men will not accept this support nor allow it for their children.

Access visits can be used as an ongoing means to control the women's and children's lives and to continue to hold them in a state of fear and anxiety.

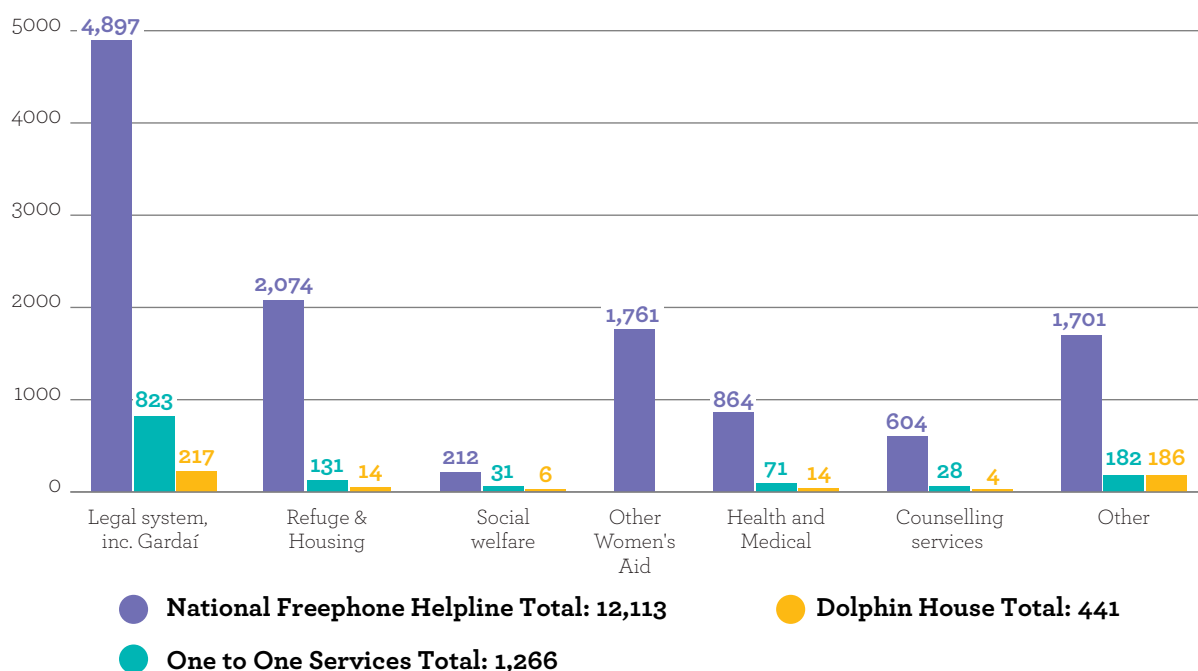
5.7 INFORMATION, REFERRALS AND ADVOCACY

The Women's Aid National Freephone Helpline and One to One Support Services provide a listening and supportive ear. They also provide a valuable source of **information, onward referral and advocacy** for women experiencing domestic violence. In 2015, the Helpline and One to One support workers provided information, referred and/or advocated on **13,820 occasions**.

Chart 7 illustrates the areas covered by these services including:

- Information and support on **legal options** and **how to access expert legal advice and representation**, and **contacting the Gardaí**.
- Information and support as women seek **refuge, alternative housing** and **financial support**.
- **Referral** to other **Women's Aid services** and local **independent domestic violence support services** around the country.
- Information and support on **health, medical, counselling** and **other services** including **social workers, immigration and residency**.

Chart 7: Information, referrals and advocacy by Women's Aid.



5.8 WOMEN WITH DISABILITIES, MIGRANT AND TRAVELLER WOMEN

The women we support come from all walks of life. Domestic violence can affect any woman, at any age and from any background. **390 callers to the National Freephone Helpline in 2015 identified that they were Migrant women, Traveller women and women with disabilities.** The biggest group being migrant women (87%) followed by women with a disability (8%), including deaf and hard of hearing women and Traveller women (5%).

27% of the new women we saw in 2015 in our One to One Service were migrant women. Just over half were from other EU member states while **47% were from non EU countries.** The additional barriers faced by migrant women affected by domestic violence include:

- the impact of the lack of independent residency status.
- ineligibility for social protection.
- limited access to emergency accommodation.

Women may also face pressures and have a reduced number of options because of their cultural or religious backgrounds. For migrant women with particularly complicated cases Women's Aid works alongside migrant rights organisations such as the Immigrant Council of Ireland and the Irish Refugee Council.

In 2015 we continued our **National Freephone Helpline Telephone Interpretation Service** which allows us to support women in **170 languages.** In 2015, **176 calls were facilitated in 23 languages.** Some of these calls were initiated by professionals (Gardaí, Refuge service and GPs) in their quest to support the woman presenting to them.

The **Women's Aid Telephone Interpretation Service** is providing an essential service to women, whose first language is not English and who are experiencing domestic violence. Victims of domestic violence very often experience isolation from family, friends and the community and having limited access/support from services in the local community, because of the language barrier, this can further isolate women. Using the Interpreter service via the Helpline is a very simple process and usually takes no more than a couple of minutes before we engage an interpreter, for the requested language, to facilitate a conversation between the caller and the Helpline support worker. We aim to continue, with the support of our funders and our committed staff and volunteer team, to increase the accessibility of our service.

72% of callers who used the Telephone Interpretation Service spoke a range of EU languages including Hungarian, Polish, Portuguese and Romanian. Polish speakers were the biggest group but are also the largest minority in the country at 2.7% of the population. The non-EU languages included Arabic, Mandarin and Russian.

Women with disabilities

The Women's Aid Telephone Interpretation Service provides support in over 170 languages and can be accessed via the National Freephone Helpline 1800 341 900 and is available from 8am - 8pm, seven days a week. It is a confidential service and is free of charge to the caller.

Some women have physical disabilities and face difficulty securing safe, alternative accommodation because of accessibility issues. Our One to One Service meets women with disabilities in accessible spaces. Women's Aid, in conjunction with the Irish Deaf Women's Group, has a **series of Irish Sign Language (ISL) videos¹⁵** which feature all of the information that is available on our website and link to a text service for deaf or hard of hearing women. In addition, we have produced wallet sized cards promoting our text Service for Deaf or hard of hearing women. These videos were officially launched in January 2015.

15 View the series of Irish Sign Language Videos here <https://www.womensaid.ie/help/information-sign-language.html>

We know that for deaf and hard of hearing women experiencing domestic violence, it can be even more difficult to seek support or to leave an abusive relationship. At Women's Aid, we are committed to seeking solutions to overcome additional barriers to a deaf or hard of hearing woman's escape. The ISL videos continue to be an important step in ensuring that deaf and hard of hearing women have the same access to support as all women in situations of domestic violence.

Women's Aid Helpline Text Service for Deaf and Hard of Hearing Women
087 959 7980 between 8am to 8pm.,

5.9 DOLPHIN HOUSE DOMESTIC VIOLENCE SUPPORT AND REFERRAL SERVICE

In 2015, Women's Aid continued to operate the **Support and Referral Service in Dolphin House**, Dublin's Family Law District court, in partnership with the Dublin 12 Domestic Violence Service and the Inchicore Outreach Centre, and supported by the Courts Service. This is a **free and confidential drop-in service** for women who attend Dolphin House for legal protection under the Domestic Violence Act and for child custody and access orders in the context of domestic violence. The service is staffed by experienced domestic violence workers.

These workers provide women with **information and support** as they make new domestic violence applications. They look at immediate safety planning and they also link women into domestic violence and other support services for longer term support, if they wish.


The service supported 289 women in 308 sessions throughout 2015.

The service also provided **further telephone support** on **96 occasions**. During the 308 sessions women made **892 disclosures of abuse**. This is made up of 394 disclosures of emotional abuse, 288 physical, 48 sexual and 162 financial abuse (included in Chart 3). **In a marked difference from the disclosures of abuse outlined previously 99% of women were experiencing physical abuse** as well as other over-lapping forms of abuse.

This suggests that women may feel that they need evidence of physical abuse when accessing the legal system for protection from domestic violence.

Women are mostly referred to the service by Court Clerks, the Family Mediation Service as well as other domestic violence support services, posters and word-of-mouth. The majority of women come to us at the beginning of their journey through the court system but a significant number come to us after their court appearances.

The Dolphin House Family Law Court Support and Referral Service is available on the 4th Floor, Dolphin House, East Essex Street, Dublin 2 and is available Monday to Friday from 9.30am – 1.30pm. This is a drop-in service for users of Dolphin House and is free and confidential.



*Thank you for your support
and kindness. I have regained
my confidence and feel
stronger every day.*

*I don't know where I would
be without Women's Aid.*

PART 6:

OVERCOMING BARRIERS TO SAFETY IN 2015

For over 40 years, Women's Aid has been there for women and children affected by domestic violence. We continue to work with women so that they and their children can have a different life, one free of abuse and fear. We know countless women are able to rebuild their lives after abuse. It doesn't happen overnight but every day it becomes a little easier.

It is vital that good, effective emotional and practical support from specialist domestic violence services like Women's Aid is available to women as they begin to address their situation. In addition, women need access to good legal protection, safe housing and child care arrangements that place paramount importance on the safety of mothers and their children.

However, there can be significant barriers to safety for women and children and in 2015 we heard about the difficulties facing women. This included **online abuse and stalking in intimate relationships, the impact of the housing crisis, the threat to life and domestic violence homicide and accessing the legal system.**

6.1 NEGOTIATING THE LEGAL SYSTEM, LEGAL AID AND CHILD CONTACT IN THE CONTEXT OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

43% of the information, referral and advocacy work by the Helpline and One to One service in 2015 was in support of women **accessing and negotiating the legal system for protection.** This includes information and support on legal options, how to access expert legal advice and representation and contacting the Gardaí.

Women's Aid **one to one support workers went to court 239 times with 131 women.** The majority of our court accompaniments take place in the Dublin Family District Court and most are in Dolphin House. The current **waiting time from making an application to hearing at Dolphin House is approximately 20 weeks.** These waiting times can leave women and children in vulnerable and dangerous situations.

Confronting a technical court system with unfamiliar language and procedures can be intimidating. This can be compounded by many factors, including the fear of facing the abuser in a court of law and the very real threat and fear of retaliation by him. **Women find being accompanied to court very helpful.**

Women making applications for orders under domestic violence legislation experience great stress. In fact, many women tell us that without support they do not think they would attend hearings. Our support empowers women to face their abuser and follow through on court processes. The support workers stay with the woman for as long as is needed on the actual day. They shield her from her abuser and try to ensure any negotiations are in her best interests and will enhance her and her children's safety.

In 2015, the vast majority of cases where Women's Aid accompanied women to court either dealt with **protection from abuse (civil orders under the Domestic Violence Act, 1996) or child related issues** such as maintenance, access and custody. We also supported women going through **separation and divorce proceedings in the context of domestic violence.**

Table 2 outlines the number of court applications during which Women's Aid provided support.

Woman Applicant		Woman Respondent	
Domestic violence orders	117	Domestic violence orders	14
Child related orders	125	Child related orders	55
Divorce and separation	16	Divorce and separation	1
Breaches	6	Breaches	2
TOTAL:	264	TOTAL:	72

The number of **court applications (336)** exceeds the amount of court accompaniments as a number of applications and issues can be listed for the same hearing. For example, a woman may be in court to apply for a barring order and maintenance order. She will also apply for a safety order in case she does not get the barring order.

Also, **some matters may take more than one court appearance before being resolved**. In our experience child care matters are rarely resolved in one hearing and can go on for months, sometimes years. While the majority of court accompaniments relate to Family Law proceedings, Women's Aid support workers also attended court with **9 women involved in criminal law cases against their abuser on 19 occasions** in 2015.

Despite the reporting of many crimes and breaches of domestic violence orders, this sadly reflects the low attrition rates in domestic violence cases.

Outcomes of Women's Applications for Orders under the Domestic Violence Act

117 domestic violence order applications were made by women we accompanied to court in 2015. Where the outcome is known 37% were granted, 32% were adjourned or continued and 19% were not granted or struck out. 12% of applications were withdrawn or had another outcome.

Engagement with the legal system can place women at heightened risk because:

- Orders, such as safety and protection orders, may mean the woman continues to live with her abuser.
- A woman's safety can further be compromised as the abuser can be angered by what she has done.
- The abuser may hold no regard for the law.
- Should her application for any order be unsuccessful, the woman may be placed at increased risk. It may not be safe for her to return home so she may have to seek emergency accommodation.

Support throughout this process is essential to ensure that women remain safe and proceed with their application. A key element of the Women's Aid Court Accompaniment Service is examining the possible consequences of going to court and **safety planning before, during and after the court hearing**.

49% of women we supported through our Court Accompaniment Service were eligible to apply for legal aid and of these 75% were granted it.

Approximately half of the women we support are eligible for and use civil legal aid but since September 2013, there has been a **160% increase in the application contribution** (from €50 to €130)¹⁶. This is challenging for women as they simply **cannot pay**. We know that it is in a person's best interests to have legal representation in court, especially where there is domestic violence, and this is reflected by the high amount of advocacy and referrals we have with Legal Aid. This involves helping women making applications, and to apply for waivers, some of which are granted and some not, and supporting women in using the private practitioners scheme.

The policy of the Legal Aid Board to **only allow one certificate a year is problematic** for women experiencing domestic violence. It is more likely that their cases and the ensuing child care matters and separations will be before the court because alternative resolutions such as mediation are not appropriate. They are also likely to have more hearings and to take longer to resolve, as is reflected in the multiple hearings there can be for one matter.

There are **long waiting times at the Law Centres** (up to 16 months in some) meaning cases are being adjourned as there is no legal representative available. This has huge impact as it causes delays in resolving issues, for example regarding child care and property matters. In a few cases Judges have ordered the matter be heard with the person not having representation.

Child contact

We continued to be concerned about arrangements being made for children in the family law courts in the **absence of child centred information and risk assessments being available to the court**. The number of cases reports ordered is very low. Of the 180 child related cases supported by our Court Accompaniment Service only 2 cases had case reports ordered. It is known that **where there is domestic violence there is a higher likelihood of child abuse** and in **85 cases last year** we directly referred and advocated with social workers regarding particular families where the children were at risk or not.

Where the court deems there is a risk to children they may grant supervised access, but there are **no supervised access facilities available**. In some instances women place themselves, their families and their friends at risk by the need to have someone supervise the access.

For many years Women's Aid has been raising the need for professional supervised access centres. This remains a priority.

6.2 DIGITAL ABUSE AND STALKING IN INTIMATE RELATIONSHIPS

A snapshot taken between April to December 2015 showed that **online abuse and stalking was disclosed to Women's Aid on 293 occasions**. Women disclosed that their **online use was being tracked and scrutinised** and that their partners **demand access to their private email and social networking accounts**. We also hear from women whose partners and ex-partners had placed **lies, false rumours and bogus escort ads** on internet sites. Women's Aid also hears from women who **had been photographed and filmed without their consent**, sometimes having sex, and having the images uploaded to the internet and/or being used to **blackmail** them.

¹⁶ Minister for Justice, Equality and Defence announces changes to Civil Legal Aid, <http://www.justice.ie/en/JELR/Pages/PR13000338>.

Stalking by a partner or ex-partner is one of the most **predictive** factors of both **further assault and homicide**, including in cases where there is no history of physical violence. Victims need extra support, not only because of the increased risk posed by their partners or ex-partners, but because they have information about them as well as insight into their daily lives.

Our current laws are simply unfit to meet the 21st century challenges of digital abuse and domestic violence. In its experience, the definition of harassment in law is complex and hard to prove, and rarely used to protect women who are stalked by their boyfriends or exes.

All-encompassing legislation is needed to better protect women from digital abuse and stalking and for a better understanding of the harmful and insidious nature of digital abuse. We recommend that a specific stalking offence be introduced in Irish law, with a comprehensive but not exhaustive definition, including new forms of cyber-stalking, and that stalking be recognised as grounds for a safety order.

6.3 LACK OF LEGAL PROTECTION FOR YOUNG WOMEN

In 2015, there were just over **17,000 visits to www.2in2u.ie**, the Women's Aid dating abuse website. Research has shown that while young women can be at even higher risk of abuse in a relationship than their older counterparts, there is low recognition of controlling and coercive relationship behaviour among young women.

We know that 1 in 5 women in Ireland experience abuse in relationships and in a national survey on domestic abuse in Ireland, almost 60% of those who had experienced severe abuse in intimate relationships first experienced it when they were under the age of 25¹⁷. A stark reminder of this risk is that 1 in every 2 women, aged between 18-25, killed in Ireland since 1996 were murdered by their boyfriends or exes¹⁸.

Young women who have never cohabited with their boyfriends fall outside the remit of the Domestic Violence Act. To fully protect young women from dating abuse, we need to safety orders available to women who have never lived with their boyfriends. Until these changes are made, young women in dating relationships remain unprotected and at risk.

6.4 HOUSING, REFUGE AND HOMELESSNESS

Housing and refuge is a significant element of the information, referral and support service provided to women in 2015 (**16% of contacts**). In a study by Women's Aid¹⁹, **having nowhere to go** was the main reason women gave for not leaving an abusive relationship. This remains a huge barrier for women and it is exacerbated by the recent recession and housing crisis. **Restrictions on social housing and rent allowance are problematic**. For the last number of years we have also been noting the **difficulties** where a woman **co-owns a house** with an abusive partner. Often women cannot sell their home due to the recession and as joint owners they have no access to social housing.

The lack of housing stock means that even women who are eligible for social housing have nowhere to move to. The lack of affordable and social housing, coupled with competitive rental market in the greater Dublin area, is a barrier for many women using our services. In 2015 women disclosed that in order to escape the abuse at home:

- They were sleeping in their cars on the coldest nights of the year.
- They and their children were sleeping on floors or sofas of friends and families.
- They had to return to very unsafe environments as there was no refuge space available.

¹⁷ Domestic Abuse of Women and Men in Ireland, National Crime Council, 2005.

¹⁸ Women's Aid Female Homicide Media Watch, 1996 – March 2016.

¹⁹ Making the Links, 1995.

The current housing crisis is very serious for women affected by domestic violence. Women are unable to leave the family home for financial or other reasons. If they cannot move, they and their children face the real threat of being harmed.

The Women's Aid Helpline **made calls on behalf of women to local refuges throughout the country on 701 occasions in 2015**. We phone on women's behalf when they have no phone credit to call a refuge directly. These women are seeking vital emergency accommodation to ensure their safety and the safety of their children. The Women's Aid Helpline is, quite literally, a lifeline for women in these circumstances.

Our support workers often find themselves in a position of not being able to secure a refuge space for women and her children. Women are being forced to stay in dangerous situations because there is simply nowhere for them to go.

Ireland has just over one third of the recommended minimum number of domestic violence emergency accommodation.

6.5 THREAT TO LIFE AND DOMESTIC VIOLENCE HOMICIDE

Domestic violence is a dangerous crime. In 2015 there were **970 of threats to kill women, children and family members** disclosed to Women's Aid. There were **579 additional disclosures of assaults with weapons, threats with weapons and being strangled and smothered**.

The physical violence disclosed in this report **belies the myth that it is 'just a domestic'**. In 2015 women disclosed being stabbed and cut with knives and blades and being strangled. In Women's Aid services we hear about how **strangulation is used as a form of control**; to instil fear and terror. Its quick and he doesn't need any weapons. Ten seconds of pressure can cause loss of consciousness, life threatening symptoms or death. Its seriousness is often unknown or ignored. It may be thought of as nothing more serious than being pushed or slapped. Women may be hoarse, have a sore throat, difficulty swallowing, or a cough; all very vague symptoms not unlike the flu. How can she begin to describe what's happened to her? What does she do? Who can she tell? Who will believe her?

Risk factors for intimate partner homicide include threats to kill, physical abuse, controlling behaviour, stalking and harassment. **We know domestic violence can be fatal**. Each woman murdered is an outrage. An absolute tragic loss of life and potential resulting in utter heartache for her loved ones left behind. The killing of women, and in some cases, their children, by abusive men is an affront to our society and a problem we must face, not dismiss.

Based on 20 years of the Women's Aid Female Homicide Media Watch, we know that **211 women have been murdered in Ireland since 1996. 62% of women were murdered in their own home. 55% of women were killed by a partner or ex-partner. In resolved cases, 99% of perpetrators are men.**²⁰

Women's Aid believes that increased recognition and management of risk factors for intimate partner homicide would lead to an improved response to domestic abuse by the State and its agencies.

20 Women's Aid Female Homicide Media Watch, 1996 to March 2016.

PART 7:

WORKING FOR JUSTICE AND SOCIAL CHANGE



Women's Aid works tirelessly to make women and children safe from domestic violence. In addition to our Direct Services, the Social Change Section of Women's Aid **acts for justice and social change by engaging in policy, representation, communications and campaigns** activity at a national level. **We also provide extensive information and statistics on domestic violence in print and online.**

We provide training on **Best Practice in Woman and Child Protection in the Context of Domestic Violence** to social workers and other health and social care professionals. We also provide **specialised training and organisational support on responding to domestic violence** to organisations in the community and voluntary sector and statutory agencies throughout the country.

7.1 ENCOURAGING POSITIVE GOVERNMENT ACTION

Women's Aid works with the government to provide solution-based recommendations on improving legal responses and protection for women and children experiencing domestic violence.

Submissions

In 2015, our Director, Margaret Martin presented recommendations to the Law Reform Commission (LRC) highlighting the issue of **Cybercrime in the context of domestic violence**. In September, we welcomed the publication of the **General Scheme of the Domestic Violence Bill 2015** and identified the main gap areas. We also made a submission on the **General Scheme of the International Protection Bill 2015**. We also inputted on **plans for the new family law court complex in Dublin**.

All submissions and presentations are available to download at www.womensaid.ie

Election Manifesto

In October, Women's Aid launched our **General Election manifesto on domestic violence** at an open meeting for all TDs, Senators, candidates and political parties and alliances at Buswells Hotel. In our manifesto we outlined what we wanted the next government to do to make sure everyone experiencing domestic violence gets the protection and support they need. These actions were in line with the Istanbul Convention and the EU Victims' Directive

Lobbying

Women's Aid sent a letter to all Domestic Violence services highlighting the three main gaps in the Domestic Violence Bill: the continuing lack of protection for dating relationships, the lack of Emergency Barring Orders and the missed opportunity to finally formally link in safety of children with domestic violence orders, particularly Barring Orders. This was to ensure that we have robust systems for the protection of victims of domestic violence.

We inputted to the Cosc National Strategy to discuss actions for inclusion in the second National Strategy on Domestic, Sexual and Gender-Based Violence. All Lobbying carried out for 2015 can be viewed on www.lobbying.ie

7.2 COLLABORATING FOR JUSTICE

As part of our work to improve responses to women experiencing domestic violence, Women's Aid is a member of several membership organisations and is represented on a number of national and local fora on violence against women including:

- Monitoring Committee of the Second National Strategy on Domestic, Sexual and Gender Based Violence.
- Irish Observatory on Violence against Women
- Safe Ireland
- National Women's Council of Ireland
- Equality Rights Alliance
- Southside Addressing Violence Effectively (SAVE)
- Legal Aid Board External Consultative Panel
- Family Law Court Service Users Panel
- Garda National Crime Victims Forum (GNCVF)
- Women Against Violence Europe (WAVE)
- 'Turn off the Red Light' campaign
- Tusla Reference Group

7.3 RAISING AWARENESS AND PROVIDING HOPE

Women's Aid knows how important it is to raise awareness and provide public information on domestic violence to women experiencing domestic violence and to the wider community. Our annual public awareness campaigns are a key way we highlight the prevalence and nature of domestic violence in Irish society and promote our vital support services including the National Freephone Helpline.

In February 2015 Women's Aid continued our **2in2u campaign on dating abuse** with the support of the **Irish Girl Guides**. The campaign is designed to show the hidden reality for many young women who are experience abuse, control and violence at the hands of their boyfriends. With a combination of radio, poster and online advertising the campaign generated over 17,000 visits to the dedicated campaign site www.2in2u.ie.

In September we teamed up with **Elaine Crowley** from TV3 to promote our National Freephone Helpline as part of our **Don't Be Afraid Campaign**. The campaign encourages women living with domestic abuse to speak up and call the Women's Aid National Freephone Helpline 1800 341 900.

In November we ran the **One in Five Women campaign as part of the International 16 Days of Action opposing Violence against Women**. On 25th November, International Day Opposing Violence against Women, we hosted the international conference 'Digital Abuse in Intimate Relationships' in Wood Quay Venue in Dublin. The event heard from Irish experts on the nature and extent of digital abuse in Ireland and legislative gaps including Margaret Martin from Women's Aid, Pauline Walley SC and also the Garda Commissioner, Noirín O'Sullivan. It also heard from Ann Moulds, a Scottish campaigner who was previously a victim of stalking. The Women's Aid conference was organised to address this growing phenomenon of digital abuse and to learn from best practice approaches in other jurisdictions.

On 10th December, Human Rights Day and the final day of 16 Days, we ran our **Remembering Stolen Lives** campaign by highlighting all of the lives lost to domestic violence homicide since our records began in 1996. We share the women's names on our website and social media pages.

Our proudest achievement in 2015 was the beginning of the **Women's Aid Testimonies project** where we reached out to survivors of domestic violence to gather first hand accounts of domestic violence to use in our campaigning work. In addition to producing our Women's Voices video and sharing written accounts during the 16 Days of Action, we now have a panel of fantastic women who have shared their stories in the hope of helping others.

Overall, Women's Aid generated **189 individual pieces of media** in 2015. June, July, October and November were the most active months. This media attention was generated by Women's Aid public awareness campaigns and the release of our annual statistics, as well as some high-profile stories and policy developments.

7.4 PROVIDING A LIFELINE, ONLINE AT www.womensaid.ie

Traffic to the Women's Aid website www.womensaid.ie continues to grow year-on-year with **167,229 visits in 2015**. With a monthly average of 13,863 visits, we know that the website provides vital information to women experiencing domestic violence as well as to the general public. 80% of visits were new.



Elaine Crowley, TV3, joins Margaret Martin to launch the Don't Be Afraid National Helpline, in September 2015.

Our ability to connect using our **social media** platforms is also growing, allowing us to engage with new audiences and to promote our services widely online. Our Facebook and Twitter presence strengthened in 2015 and we now have **combined community of 21,000** plus followers.

7.5 NATIONAL PROGRAMME OF TRAINING, DEVELOPMENT AND SPECIALIST SUPPORT

Women's Aid aims to be a centre of excellence for the training and development of professional and organisational responses to women and children experiencing domestic violence. **We provide a national programme of specialised training and support to a variety of participants and organisations from the community, voluntary and statutory sectors.**

Just like in 2014 our relationship with Tusla, regarding delivery of training on domestic violence, continued for the first half of 2015. We delivered training to health and social care professionals on **Best Practice in Woman and Child Protection in the context of Domestic Violence** in line with the high level goals of the HSE Policy on Domestic, Sexual and Gender-based Violence. We also continued to deliver training to Family Resource Centre staff & volunteers during this period in our role as Specialist Support Agency on domestic violence to the Family Support Agency (FSA).

Unfortunately this piece of funded work came to an end in June 2015 when Tusla informed us that we would no longer receive direct funding to deliver training to health and social care professionals and that Women's Aid's role of Specialist Support Agency to the FSA was to cease.

Our work under the **Scheme to Support National Organisations (SSNO)**, administered by Pobal on behalf of the Department of Environment, Community and Local Government, is essential in order to allow us to continue our input into the community and voluntary sector and to disadvantaged target groups in particular. Demand for this training across the country remained high in 2015 and we delivered training to staff from organisations in Cavan, Cork, Dublin, Galway, Kildare, Louth, Monaghan, Waterford, Westmeath and Wicklow.

We also delivered **Women's Aid National Freephone Helpline Volunteer Training** to two new groups of volunteers and they have now become part of the Helpline team of volunteers.

In 2015 we were delighted to be successful in our joint training proposal with Dublin Rape Crisis Centre (DRCC) to the Reception and Integration Agency (RIA) for delivering training on the **RIA Policy and Practice Document on safeguarding RIA residents against Domestic, Sexual and Gender-based Violence and Harassment**. We co-delivered 10 days' training with DRCC to RIA and direct provision staff in Mosney, Knockalisheen and Ballyhaunis.

Following a request from Community Health Organisation 9 (CHO9) of the Health Service Executive the Women's Aid training team developed and delivered a two day training programme for all Public Health Nurses (PHNs) in that region. 180 PHNs received the two day training on **Best Practice in Woman and Child Protection in the context of domestic violence** and a third day is planned for 2016 where PHNs can avail of the Women's Aid **Practical Skills Workshop on Managing and Responding to Disclosures of Domestic Violence Where There are Child Protection Concerns**.

As a way of responding to individual training requests from a wide variety of professionals the training team promoted a one day **Basic Awareness Training on Responding to Women experiencing domestic violence** on-site and the response in 2015 was excellent. Participants came from many sectors including; health, social work, domestic violence support services, Courts Service, an Garda Síochána, youth and homeless services.

PART 8:

THANK YOU



Women's Aid National Helpline staff and volunteers at the Volunteer appreciation evening, July 2015

8.1 THANK YOU TO ALL WHO HELP WOMEN'S AID

Women's Aid is indebted to all our volunteers, supporters, funders and donors who make our work possible. In 2015 we continued to face many challenges, particularly financial ones. We remain thankful for the generosity of our supporters. Without financial and fundraising support and the giving of time and expertise, we would not be able to provide the support to women as outlined in this report.

Our Helpline and Charity Shop volunteers

Women's Aid receives huge volunteer support each year. Our National Freephone Helpline 1800 314 900 is supported by 31 committed volunteers who provide the callers to our Helpline with a listening ear and supportive space to talk about the abuse they are suffering. Our trained volunteers are essential to the operation of our National Helpline and enable us stay open 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Our dedicated team of Helpline **Volunteers** gave a total of **2,772 hours** of their time supporting women on the Helpline.

We also have a team of dedicated volunteers in our charity shops which helps raise much needed funds to keep our services operating. To each and every volunteer we THANK YOU for your dedication and belief in the work of Women's Aid.

Regular and once off donations

Our regular donors continue to contribute to the success of our organisation. We also receive once off donations and legacies. This support remains the lifeblood of our organisation. Without it we would not be able to survive.

Our Charity Shops

Our Charity Shops continue to contribute to the work of the organisation. The range and quality of items donated continues to surpass our expectations. Our shops receive great quality vintage and designer items which results in two very well-stocked shops. In 2015, the Dundrum Village Charity Shop held many successful Designer Days, Nights and Weeks, when our most loyal and supportive shoppers have been given the chance to obtain the best goods at the best prices. In 2015 we closed up our shop at Aungier Street and we would like to thank all of the donors, volunteers and shoppers who supported us in our time there. We have moved on to pastures new.

The Terenure Village Charity Shop has recently opened with all the familiar faces from Aungier Street there. We have the continued support from neighbours, family and friends. A big thank you to Facebook, Breda and the Aviva team, Ultrasound in Blackrock, Craft Cleaners on Baggot Street and many others for their donations of clothing and valuable items that stock the Women's Aid charity shops.

Our fundraisers

Our fabulous fundraisers blazed a trail in the Flora Women's Mini Marathon in 2015. We also benefitted from the fundraising activities from the staff of the Drogheda Institute of Further Education, Rational FT Services (Ireland) Ltd., Amnesty International Society in Trinity College, GE Capital for their group wide 'Love not Finance' campaign on Valentine's Day, Tesco, Morning Gloryville, Spirit of Folk festival and more.

Not forgetting all the many people who give regularly and once off donations once off donations and who prefer to remain anonymous.

Our funders

Women's Aid would like to thank our funders who recognise and continue to support the delivery of our services. In 2015, we received funding from Tusla, the Child and Family Agency, the Department of Environment, Community and Local Government, Pobal, the Family Support Agency, the Commission for the Support of the Victims of Crime and Cosc: The National Office for the Prevention of Domestic, Sexual and Gender-based Violence. We also receive funding from The Vodafone Foundation.

And finally...

Women's Aid would like to thank all of our colleagues in other domestic violence services around Ireland to whom we refer women for local face-to-face support and refuge and acknowledge the excellent co-operation that exists to help support women and children experiencing domestic violence. We must also thank individuals and organisations who give freely of their time and expertise to support the work of Women's Aid. The support and generosity we receive each year is overwhelming and so vital to the continuation of our work to make women and children safe.

Thank you all.



Members of the Irish Girl Guides help Women's Aid launch the 2in2u campaign, February 2015

8.2 HOW YOU CAN HELP US MAKE WOMEN AND CHILDREN SAFE

Women's Aid relies on the support of fundraisers, donors and volunteers. Generous and committed people who care deeply about women and children experiencing violence and abuse. You can help us continue to make women and children safe from domestic violence.

How to donate

Online: 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.²¹

By post: Send a cheque or postal order to Women's Aid, 5 Wilton Place, Dublin 2.

Become a monthly donor: Support Women's Aid by setting up a regular direct debit payment. All you have to do is download the Women's Aid Direct Debit form here: www.womensaid.ie/donate complete it and send it back to us. We'll then take it from there and set up the direct debit with your bank.

Your legacy: When the time is right for you to include a gift in your will, please remember us. Once you have looked after your loved ones, any gift however large or small would make a real and lasting difference to the lives of women and children experiencing domestic violence. Please contact us on 01 678 8858 or email info@womensaid.ie to discuss your options for leaving a legacy to Women's Aid.

Fundraise: Organise your own event or take on a sponsored challenge and see how you can individually make a difference for women experiencing domestic violence. If you are planning fundraising activities, Women's Aid will help you along the way. Contact Women's Aid on 01 678 8858 for more information or visit www.womensaid.ie/support.

Visit and Donate to the Women's Aid Charity Shops: Call in and shop at The Dundrum Village Charity Shop or the new Terenure Charity Shop and pick up some high-end bargains. You can also donate good quality second hand and unwanted items including ladies, gents and children's clothing, unwanted gifts, jewellery, CDs, DVDs, books and recent magazines. See www.womensaid.ie/support for more details.

Volunteer: We need volunteers for our National Freephone Helpline and our Charity Shops. Contact Women's Aid on 01 678 8858 for more information or visit www.womensaid.ie/services.

And most importantly, spread the word: If you know someone who is experiencing domestic violence, pass our Helpline number to her if it is safe to do so. Remember – the Women's Aid National Freephone Helpline 1800 341 900 is open from 24 hours a day, 7 days a week and is free and confidential.

Find us at [Facebook.com/womensaid.ie](https://www.facebook.com/womensaid.ie) and [Twitter.com/@womens_aid](https://twitter.com/womens_aid) and sign up for our E-zine at www.womensaid.ie


²¹ 100% 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.

PART 9:

FINANCIAL SUMMARY 2015

In accordance with our normal reporting timetable we would usually include audited financial statements as part of our Impact Report. 2015 is an exceptional year in that there are a significant number of changes to the accounting and reporting framework of the organisation which has meant it is not possible to finalise the audited financial statements before the launch of our Impact Report for 2015.

Once the financial statements are available we will, as always, make them readily available to our sponsors, supporters, colleagues and other interested parties.

A close-up, black and white photograph of a woman's face, slightly out of focus, serving as a background for the text. She has dark hair pulled back and is looking directly at the camera with a gentle expression. The text is overlaid on the left side of her face.

I want to thank the staff and volunteers in Women's Aid who helped and supported my sister and her little son through a horrible time. She is still going through some things but has left her abuser. The support she has received has been of great importance and has helped her keep strong.

Thank you from the bottom of my heart.



WOMEN'S AID

Making Women and Children Safe

WOMEN'S AID

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