



Ascend Domestic Abuse Service
Annual Report 2018

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History/Mission Objectives of the Service

Ascend Domestic Abuse Service offers confidential support services and information to women who have or are experiencing domestic abuse in their intimate relationships. Services include one to one support, a helpline, court accompaniment, information and outreach support. The service is based available throughout North Tipperary including Roscrea, Nenagh and Thurles.

Ascend's primary purpose is to ensure that women have support and information about the dynamics of domestic abuse and of relevant services available so that they can make informed choices. The Service is committed to ensuring that every woman will live a life without coercive control and reclaim the power to fulfil her potential. Ascend Services work collectively and collaboratively with women, families, communities and agencies to promote a clearer societal acknowledgement of the unacceptability of domestic abuse. Ascend aims to put the safety of women and children at the centre of our work, to empower women in their lives, and to advocate on their behalf where appropriate.

Ascend provides a high quality service. We work closely with other agencies in order to avoid duplication, manage our resources judiciously and do our utmost to provide a cost-effective high value service.

Governance arrangements

The service is managed by North Tipperary Development Company (NTDC) in collaboration with the Child and Family Agency. The company is core funded by the Department of Environment, Community and Local Government and operates within the former North Tipperary Local Authority Area. The purpose of NTDC is "to act as a voluntary, non-profit making, private limited company with a mission to promote social inclusion, to promote economic development, increase employment and enterprise and promote wider participation in voluntary activity for the people of the area".

Services Offered by Ascend

Ascend supported two hundred and forty four women in 2018. Cases are reviewed every quarter and cases closed as deemed appropriate. One hundred and nine new clients met with the service in 2018. Most new clients seek information on their options, about court, housing and children's supports. Many women require more understanding in relation to the issue and wish to develop their coping strategies.

Ascend offers a confidential listening and information telephone service where women have the opportunity to discuss their circumstances. The ADAPT Services Helpline number is available on the Ascend answering machine for clients who need support outside of our working hours. All calls are responded to in a timely fashion. In 2018, Ascend offered telephone support on 1,247 occasions and received 80 calls on their helpline number. There were 419 outreach appointments and 409 contacts made with professional regarding clients' issue. We accompanied clients on 54 occasions (excluding court) to meet with professionals such as Barnardos, Child Protection, Court Clerk, Estate Agents, Family Support, Gardaí, GP's, Housing, Legal Aid, Solicitors, and Social Work. Women who accessed

Ascend were born in countries as diverse as Belarus, England, Germany, India, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland and Romania.

If women wish to discuss their situation in person they can make an appointment with Ascend to meet anywhere in North Tipperary. Ascend staff meet service users at an appropriate safe location outside the service users' home.

Ascend provides emotional support to women with a support service that listens to them and believes them. The Service helps women get clarity on their situation. Service users are given information about their options. Every service user receives a safety and risk assessment with specific questions. A safety plan is created in consultation with them. This is done either in person or initial contact can be made over the phone.

If Ascend staff has concerns about a woman's safety or that of their children they make a referral to specialised services within the Tusla. They do not provide legal advice or counselling services. Ascend also accompany women and participate in child welfare conferences and other relevant meetings as requested by service users and agencies.

Ascend makes referrals to TLC Kidz, Barnardos, counselling services, Pieta House and any other relevant agencies according to the service users' needs. They also provide support with regard to the following agencies: referral to a refuge, or alternative temporary housing through Social Work, Social Welfare, Housing and homeless services, Child Protection, Gardaí, Legal Aid, St. Vincent de Paul and many others. Ascend staff liaise with an average of three professionals per case whilst also providing clients with many other interagency contacts to explore their options.

Ascend offers service users the opportunity to participate in a Personal Development course where they can meet other women in a similar situation.

Court Accompaniment

Ascend offer a Court accompaniment service through which the staff and volunteers:

- i. accompany the service user in court
- ii. can give Women a clear understanding of the procedures of court
- iii. accompany Women to appointments with solicitors at service users request
- iv. explain the different court orders to women
- v. explain what is required of women by the Courts when Orders are granted
- vi. provide on-going service to women throughout their court history and follow-up

Ascend supports women in court on matters relating to domestic violence, maintenance, child access, separation and divorce.

One hundred clients were in receipt of court accompaniment services in 2018. This is 38 more than 2017, possibly due to the availability of free legal aid representation in domestic abuse cases from January 1st 2018. There were 133 court appointments from January to December. Women attended court for a range of needs including applying for protection, safety and barring orders, and maintenance and child access. The Service continues to engage with solicitors and court staff to get better outcomes for clients.

Court work continues to be a vital and critical support to women accessing the Ascend service. Service Users have given personal testimonies of the value they put on this service. Many service

users spoke to the value they placed on Ascends Court accompaniment support at the Speak Up Café, 2013.

Data collection

Ascend has a data collection mechanism in place but is looking forward to a more streamlined data collection system to reflect the diversity and trends of their work and help determine future direction. Databases are being developed nationally and regionally and Ascend is awaiting feedback from them to determine which is most suitable for their needs. A record is kept of every client engaged with by the Service.

Funding

Ascend receives core funding from the Child and Family Agency. The service also receives funding from the Victims Commission.

Staff Development

Ascend is committed to providing the best service to women accessing the service and all staff are offered opportunities to participate in training and development to meet that objective.

In 2018 the following training and development was undertaken by Ascend staff:

- Meitheal Training-Limerick
- Tusla Signs of Safety briefing- Nenagh
- ASIST 2 day training
- Adapt Services- Level 1 day and 2 day Level 2 training
- In-house workshop to identify tools to increase awareness of Ascend in North Tipperary
- Don Hennessy- Steps to Freedom
- Community Addiction Studies (20 week course)
- GDPR training
- Domestic Violence Act 2018- Safe Ireland (North Tipperary LAN also attended)

Ascend has attended the following conferences this year:

- Safe Ireland Summit
- Breaking the Pattern of Male Violence, Dublin
- CARMHA Workshop(Community Network) – Nenagh
- Sexual Health Seminar – Waterford
- TLC Kidz research launch, Thurles
- Connecting for Life, Limerick
- NTDC rebranding launch
- Learning Event for Safe Ireland Members - Exploring Implications of Coercive Control Criminal Offence in Practice
- Safe Ireland Seminar - Marking the Domestic Violence Act 2018 and exploring its key legal advances
- International seminar on domestic violence, children and child protection, Trinity College Dublin – Safe Ireland
- Seminar on Gaslighting, ODVSS

- ‘100 whispers’ workshop DV effect on children, Limerick
- Safety Net Learning Event, Dublin Venue. Full Day Event – Safe Ireland
- ‘See, hear, act’ Women’s aid conference in Belfast

Complaints

One complaint was received in 2018.

Referrals

Ascend have liaised with various social workers and team leaders throughout 2018 in relation to mutual cases and have found this networking to be of benefit.

Referral Sources	
Adapt Services	1
Barnardos	1
Citizen Information Centre	6
Counsellor	3
Family	5
Friend	7
Gardaí	6
GP	2
Housing Department	1
HSE Nursing Staff	1
Judge	1
Kickback Café	1
Longford Women's Link	1
Maternity Hospital	1
Neighbour	1
NTCS Family Support	2
Restorative Justice	1
School	1
Self	51
Social Work	2
Social Work Mental Health	1
Tenant Liaison Tipp Co Council	1
Traveller Family Support Worker	2
Traveller Primary Care	1
Tyone Health Centre	1
Youth Family Support Worker	1
NA	7
Total	109

Cross Agency Collaboration

North Tipperary Local Area Network

The LAN met once in 2018 and attended a presentation by guest speaker Caroline Counihan from Safe Ireland who spoke about the new Domestic Violence Act 2018 and Sexual Offences Act 2017.

The LAN participated in the 16 days campaign by getting their organisations to 'Orange Up'. Twenty venues across North Tipperary displayed the campaign material.

"Orange Day" by the United Nations Secretary-General's Campaign UNiTE to End Violence Against Women is a day to raise awareness and take action to end violence against women and girls. As a bright and optimistic colour, orange represents a future free from violence against women and girls. Orange Day calls upon civil society, governments, and UN partners to mobilize people and highlight issues relevant to preventing and ending violence against women and girls, not only once a year on the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women (25 November).

SAFE Ireland

Ascend is a member of SAFE Ireland, the national umbrella body for Domestic Abuse services and has participated in all their initiatives and meetings in 2019.

Ascend Advisory Group

This group was created as a response to Ascend's Strategic Plan to inform the work of Ascend through interagency collaboration. This group has met four times in 2018 and meetings were well attended. Representatives include the MWRDTF, NTCS, North Tipperary Housing Department, Traveller Primary Health Project, HSE Mental Health Services, HSE Community Development, Gardaí, NTLP, HSE Primary Health Care, Citizens Information Centre, Education and Training Board North Tipperary.

Committee participation

Ascend has worked in partnership with Tusla Social Work, Court Services, Gardaí, Social Protection, and other local services in supporting clients and raising awareness of Ascend's work in 2018. Ascend also attended Homeless Action Team, and CYPSC subgroup 1 and 3 meetings. Ascend participated in the TLC Kidz all meetings in 2018 as well as sitting on the interview panel for Barnardos. Ascend has worked to strengthen and develop their interagency work through participation, engagement and training.

TLC Kidz

TLC Kidz is a 12-week Group work Programme for Children and their Mothers who have experienced Domestic Abuse. The emphasis throughout is to support women in the knowledge of how to best help their child in healing from the impact of abuse.

It is a multi-agency programme with participation from Barnardos, Ascend Domestic Abuse service, Tusla - Child and Family agency, North Tipperary community services, School completion programme and Youth Work Ireland – Tipperary.

During the 12 week group work programme, the children's and mother's group run concurrent on the same week. It is open to children between the ages of 5-16 (in appropriate age groups) depending on availability, children who live in North Tipperary and those for whom Separation has occurred and the perpetrator no longer resides at the family home.

Ascend chairs the TLC Kidz steering group, makes referrals to the programme and co-facilitates the children's group. Ascend attended the launch of the Evaluation of the TLC Kidz programme in Thurles in October. www.barnardos.ie/our-services/work-with-families/tlc-kidz

Personal Development group

The personal development group took place from September-December 2018 with thirteen participants. This programme proved to be very successful with positive outcomes for all participants. The programme was designed by Ascend and focused on supporting women in regaining their confidence and self-esteem and other skills needed to support their recovery. The course was delivered by Ascend.

This years guest speakers were Stephanie O' Donnell, Stella O' Malley, St Sheelans College Templemore and three past graduates of the group.

One participant stated her experience 'I didn't know that I could gain so much from a group. I am so grateful that I met you all. I am going to miss everything about it; you are like a second family.'

'Initially, I wasn't comfortable about going to the first session, but each week the course touched on an issue that I had either experienced or was currently going through. This course has given me coping mechanisms to assist me in this journey and provided me with the tools to help me'

Healthy Relationships Programme

According to *Awareness Raising of Domestic and Sexual Violence: A Survey of Post-Primary Schools in Ireland* research¹ carried out by COSC, The National Office for the Prevention of Domestic, Sexual and Gender-based Violence in 2012, the second level curriculum in Ireland does not cover the issue of relationships and safe dating. Teenagers in schools have told us that nobody talks to them about relationships, either at home or at school. Girls ask their friends and many boys get their information

¹ <http://www.cosc.ie/en/COSC/Cosc%20Report%20-20Awareness%20Raising%20of%20Domestic%20and%20Sexual%20Violence%20-%20A%20Survey%20of%20Post-primary%20Schools%20in%20Ireland.pdf/Files/Cosc%20Report%20-%20Awareness%20Raising%20of%20Domestic%20and%20Sexual%20Violence%20-%20A%20Survey%20of%20Post-primary%20Schools%20in%20Ireland.pdf>

from pornography. We have no contextually relevant research on this issue in Ireland but surveys in the US and the UK reveal that girls between the ages of 16 and 24 are most at risk of dating abuse.

Education is critical in preventing abusive relationships among teenagers, particularly as abusers tend to fly under the radar and may appear harmless and polite to relatives and friends.

Ascend delivers a *Healthy Relationships* programme for Transition Year students, girls and boys to promote self-esteem, help them identify abusive behaviour and signpost services. The sessions are interactive and engaging for the young people, promoting discussion and reflective learning.

The topics covered include: recognising the difference between a healthy and unhealthy relationship, how to be a good partner, examining the role of media and pornography in shaping their perception of relationships, how to keep safe on social media, and how to help a friend.

The programme runs for a six week programme which runs over a double session once a week. The programme is delivered by experienced Outreach Workers from Ascend who are Garda vetted and trained in Child Protection.

In 2018 this programme was delivered to over 200 students in Newport Community College, St Marys Secondary School Newport, Nenagh Training Centre, Colaiste Pobal Roscrea and St. Joseph's school, Borrisoleigh.

Voice of the Child

Children First: National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children 2017 states that there are a number of key principles of child protection and welfare that inform both Government policy and best practice for those dealing with children. These are:

- *The best interests of the child should be paramount*
- *Children have a right to be heard, listened to and taken seriously. Taking account of their age and understanding, they should be consulted and involved in all matters and decisions that may affect their lives*
- *A proper balance must be struck between protecting children and respecting the rights and needs of parents/guardians and families. Where there is conflict, the child's welfare must come first*
- *Child protection is a multiagency, multidisciplinary activity. Agencies and professionals must work together in the interests of children*

The Voice of the Child research project was born of all the times Ascend went to court with women in North Tipperary trying to establish safe and fulfilling access and custody arrangements for their children. They saw the challenges families were facing in the judicial process and wanted to find out what could be done to make it easier.

Rather than them compiling lists of their own experiences in court, they felt that it was important to have an impartial voice. One that could channel the women's authentic experiences and present them in a language that could be understood by decision makers and independently reflects the reality of being in court. To this end, Ascend commissioned LIT to undertake this research.

The Rural Development Programme 2014-2020 funded the research. This research is a small step in Ascend's role of supporting families experiencing domestic abuse. They intend to commission further

research to engage with the children themselves. Ascend will continue to advocate and lobby on this crucial issue.

Awareness Raising

Information Sessions

Every opportunity was taken to provide various professionals with information on the nature and complexity of domestic abuse and also responding appropriately to clients concerns and situations. Ascend literature was distributed at each event.

In 2016 the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality, Ms. Frances Fitzgerald T.D., launched the national awareness campaign 'What would you do?' which is a key action under the Second National Strategy on Domestic, Sexual and Gender-based Violence 2016-2021. The COSC national campaign was supported by Ascend through Facebook and radio interviews with Spin SW in 2017.

The Ascend coordinator did monthly radio interviews on Tipp FM to support the COSC 'What would you do' campaign as well as additional interviews on issues that were in the press.

Awareness raising sessions were delivered to Farming Families (Nenagh), HSE Mental Health team, Duty and Intake- Child Protection, Money Advice and Budgeting Service (Nenagh), Cuan Saor (South Tipperary), St. Vincent de Paul (Roscrea) and Tusla Safeguarding and protection team. A short presentation about Ascend was delivered as part of the Tusla one day DSGBV training for North Tipperary.

Social Marketing campaign

The social marketing campaign was based on a specific behaviour change. The behaviour that Ascend wanted to change was people's willingness to take action in situations of domestic abuse in their community. The primary message was that 'Domestic Abuse is not a private matter'. The secondary message was to identify ways and means that people can recognise, respond and refer to the needs of women in their community in a safe and responsible way.

Ascend arrived at these two areas of work through extensive consultation with their own team and through a literature review. Research had shown that one in four women have or will experience domestic abuse in her life in Ireland. This increases the odds that members of the general public would know someone who is in an abusive relationship.

Ascend's message was targeted at the adult population of North Tipperary. They conducted a series of focus groups with groups of adults in the area and gauged their understanding of Domestic Abuse, and more specifically their willingness, knowledge and ability to respond if they were aware of an abusive relationship. Focus group findings suggested that the general public may not always be able to identify non-physical Domestic Abuse. The findings also showed that people were scared to get

involved if the male perpetrator is a stranger. This was positive, and meant that Ascend could reinforce a message that people are already subscribing to.

The other major finding was that both men and women felt more comfortable intervening if the abuser or victim was known to them. 'I would stop them on the street, in a pub, in my neighbourhood- no problem. I would call the Gardaí if I was scared for my own safety. I would assist the woman. In the case of a neighbour I would knock on the door, and say that they are making too much noise etc., use an excuse. But I wouldn't do so if it was the first time the incident happened.'

When broached of the barriers to intervening most people felt that the gardaí would not take them seriously or that the victim would not make a statement to the gardaí. They also felt that they would be told that everything is fine by the victim, and that she might face recriminations if she spoke up.

The last major finding was the various ways that the general public felt that they could help the victim. These were very closely aligned with our own recommendations of 'We can talk to the person, give them information. Support them. Ask them to speak to their GP. We can confront the abuser. Report it to the Gardaí if the children are abused. Set up a meeting with a DA services. If it's a neighbour, then knock on the door.' The overall feeling at all the focus groups was that:

If the abuser had a fear of intervention there would be less Domestic Abuse.

The second element of the campaign is to raise the level of acceptance of intervention in North Tipperary. Ascend had support from several public and community groups such as Tipperary GAA, Roscrea library, North Tipperary Community Services, Tipp FM radio station, NTLP Board and staff, Youthreach Roscrea. They agreed for Ascend to visit their group, deliver a short presentation about their work and campaign and photograph the group with visual materials such as banners and posters supporting this campaign. These photographs were used in the campaign. This was to help the general public to identify with this cause and emulate local leaders in their behaviour.

Benefits of this campaign were twofold: increased awareness of the types of domestic abuse and provision of tools of safe intervention to the public. The campaign was supported through our website, Facebook page, radio advertisement, radio interviews and a poster roll-out across the county to reinforce the message.

'It was so nice to hear you on the radio! You were very good! It's great that you are being heard'.

'Well done. Thank you for speaking out.'

Petition

Every bad article on domestic violence is a missed opportunity to help prevent further deaths. Responsible reporting can improve public understanding of domestic violence, help victims and their families seek justice and help women at risk access support.

Over 200 women in Ireland have been killed by their partners in the past 10 years. Some of these deaths attract media attention, yet due to a lack of guidance, domestic violence deaths are often reported in a way that compromises the dignity of the deceased woman and her surviving family. It's time to put an end to bad reporting, which has lasting traumatic impacts on surviving family members.

Ascend started a petition to encourage the Press Ombudsman to introduce guidelines on the reporting of domestic abuse.

1. **Accountability:** Place responsibility solely on the killer, which means avoiding speculative “reasons” or “triggers”, or describing the murder as an uncharacteristic event. Homicides are usually underpinned by a longstanding sense of ownership, coercive control and possessive behaviours: they are not a random event.
2. **Accuracy:** Name the crime as domestic violence, instead of “tragedy” or “horror”,
3. **Dignity:** Avoid sensationalising language, invasive or graphic details that compromise the dignity of the dead woman or her surviving family members.
4. **Equality:** Avoid insensitive or trivialising language or images.
5. **Images:** Avoid using stock images that reinforce the myth that it’s only a physical crime.

The Ascend Coordinator met with the Press Ombudsman and there will meetings arranged between the DSGBV sector and press unions in 2019.

Education Needs of Domestic Violence workers

Ascend participated in research to identify what kind of education programme would be most suited to the women’s domestic violence sector in Ireland. The overarching research goal was to explore how the dual role of the domestic violence sector as both a social service provider and a social change agent can be supported and strengthened through education. A key feature of this research is a collaborative inquiry with members from within the domestic violence sector.

The research is part of PhD study in Adult and Community Education in Maynooth University. Ten people engaged in this process over 12 months, and have drafted a framework to bring this project forward. The next steps are to identify an institution to develop the program and to get support from others in the DSGBV sector.

New literature

Ascend developed and distributed a leaflet for young people to identify the signs of an unhealthy relationship.

Conclusion

Ascend looks forward to continuing to provide a welcoming professional service to women in North Tipperary affected by domestic abuse. It is our belief that the provision of such a vital service to the community of North Tipperary enhances the safety and well-being of those who engage in the service. It is incumbent that we continue to be able to support all women when they access our service and meet them at whichever stage of life they are at.

Ascend will continue to create more awareness of the issue and service in 2019. Through greater awareness of the issue women and families can expect their issue to be recognised, responded to and referred on, appropriately to and by the relevant services.