



ANNUAL REPORT 2019





Foreword from the Chairperson

It is with great pride we present the 2019 Annual Report for Ascend Domestic Abuse. Our report sets out the mission and governance of Ascend, services offered, referrals received, data collected, cross agency collaboration, awareness raising and some new initiatives such as the healthy relationships programme and the supervised access proposal.

Ascend continues in its work to support women affected by domestic abuse. Due to the rural nature of our location, we continue to face challenges in service delivery. We are working with our host company – North Tipperary Development Company and other local partner organisations keeping the issue of Domestic Violence to the forefront of the agenda. This has been greatly helped by the guidance and active participation of the Ascend Advisory Group to whom we are thankful. We appreciate the core funding we receive from Tusla. We also like to thank the Victims Commission for ongoing funding for Ascend's very important court accompaniment work.

Finally, I would like to express our gratitude to the staff of Ascend who work tirelessly to empower women and children to live in safety and free from domestic abuse. Their dedication and commitment is the central to the success of the programme.

Jim Finn

Chairperson NTDC



Welcome

Welcome to our Annual Report for 2019. It has been an eventful year for the project. We bid farewell to our co-Ordinator, Rabiya Ali who left after six years of service to our organisation. We wish thank her for all her work and dedication to Ascend Domestic Abuse Services. I, Kathleen Maher was appointed co-ordinator in October 2019. I have worked as an Outreach Worker with the service for the last six years.

There also has been a few developments in the field of Domestic Abuse this year. On 1st January 2019, the Domestic Violence Act came into force. This includes an extension of eligibility of safety orders to those in dating relationships, recognition of an intimate relationship as an aggravating factor and the recognition of coercive control as a criminal offence.

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 2020. 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.

Kathleen Maher

Co-Ordinator

Ascend Domestic Abuse Services

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Service Overview



1,093

Contacts with
Professionals

93

Helpline
Calls

3,137

Total Contacts

1,576

Total Telephone
Contacts

321

Total Outreach
Appointments

54

General
Accompaniments

125

New Referrals

157

Court Accompaniments

Introduction History/Mission

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 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.

Governance Arrangements

The service is an programme of North Tipperary Development Company (NTDC).

North Tipperary Development Company is a local development company responsible for the delivery of a range of rural enterprise, social inclusion, and community development initiatives in the Tipperary North County 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 opportunities and promote wider participation in voluntary activity for the people of the area". Many of the programmes that form part of NTDC work collaboratively with Ascend Domestic Abuse such as the Traveller programme, SICAP Programme, Family Support Project, Youth Project, community childcare, jobs club with many clients referred from these projects and likewise signposted to these services also by Ascend staff. It is a source of great reassurance having so many resources on hand to assist our service users in matters other than support for Domestic Abuse.

Services offered by Ascend Domestic Abuse

Ascend supported two hundred and seven women in 2019. Cases are reviewed every quarter and cases closed as deemed appropriate. One hundred and twenty five new clients met with the service in 2019. 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 2019, Ascend offered

telephone support on 1,576 occasions; a substantial increase on last year (1,247-2018) and received 93 calls on their helpline number. There were 321 outreach appointments and 1,093 contacts (compared to 409 contacts in 2018) made with professionals regarding clients' issue. We accompanied clients on 54 occasions (excluding court) to meet with professionals and agencies 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 a total of nine different countries around the world.

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. Staff at Ascend 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 four 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 accompany the service user in court. This service can provide the following to women:

- give women a clear understanding of the procedures of court
- accompany women to appointments with solicitors at service users request
- explain the different court orders to women
- explain what is required of women by the Courts when Orders are granted
- 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.

There were 157 court accompaniments in 2019. This could be due to the new Domestic Violence Act coming into force on 1st January 2019. There were 61 court sittings (which Ascend attended) from January to December with on average 2-3 women being accompanied on any one occasion. 72 Clients received court accompaniment in 2019 with some availing of the service once and many being accompanied to court several times over the course of the year.

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.

“You would really want to know what you are at in court, I am so glad ye were there to explain and help.”

Under the Victim’s Directive clients of Ascend have access to a separate room for District and Circuit Court Hearings in Nenagh and Thurles Courthouse whilst waiting for their hearing/applications. A support person can also go into the courtroom with the service user on foot of a domestic violence application. They will be able to remain or not on at the judge’s discretion

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

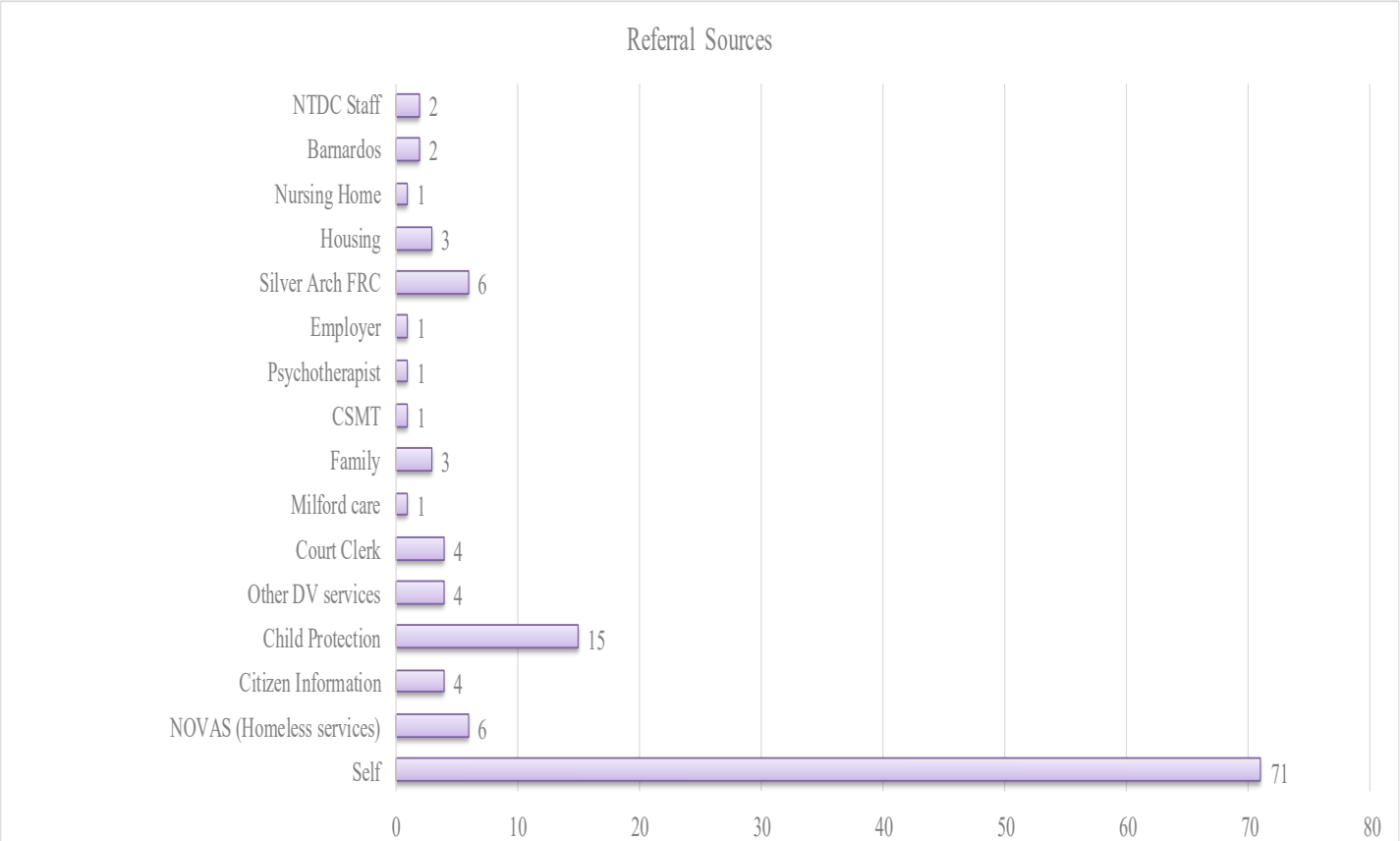
Data Collection

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.

Referrals

Ascend received 15 referrals from HSE Social Work Department in 2019. Ascend have liaised with various social workers and team leaders throughout 2019 in relation to mutual cases and have found this networking to be of benefit.



Funding

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

Cross Agency Collaboration

SAFE Ireland

Ascend is a member of SAFE Ireland, the national umbrella body for Domestic Abuse services. Ascend attended Safe Ireland’s regular AGM’s. Ascend also participated in the Equality, Diversity & Human Rights Workshops.

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 2019 and meetings were well attended. Representatives attended regularly from the MWDAF (Mid West Drug Alcohol Forum), Silver Arch Family Resource Centre, North Tipperary Housing Department, Traveller Primary Health Project, HSE Mental Health Services, Gardaí, NTDC, HSE Primary Health Care, Mid West Rape Crisis Centre, Citizens Information Centre, Barnardos and Tusla Social Work.

Committee Participation

Ascend has worked in partnership with Tusla Social Work, Housing, Court Services, Gardaí, Social Protection and other local services in supporting clients and raising awareness of Ascend's work in 2019.

Ascend participated in the TLC Kidz Steering Group meetings in 2019. Ascend has worked to strengthen and develop their interagency work with other local Domestic Abuse Services – Adapt and Cuan Saor through participation, engagement and training. For example, the Ascend Coordinator sat on the interview panel for Cuan Saor interviews.

We also sit on Outcome 1 and Outcome 3 of CYSPC Sub – Groups. CYSPC is the Young People Services Committee for Tipperary.

We also attend all Homeless Action Team meetings held in the Civic Offices twice a month.

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.

Ascend delivered the following information sessions in 2019, they include:

Talks delivered and awareness events attended:

- Three presentations to Citizen's Information, (Nenagh, Thurles and Roscrea) 0
- Tipperary Infant Mental Health national symposium May 27th 2019.
- Elder Abuse Awareness Day – Hosted by HSE and the National Safeguarding Team - Scout's Hall – Nenagh

We also give regular interviews on Tipp FM. Our facebook page <https://www.facebook.com/AscendDomesticAbuse/>

has 3,116 likes with 3,195 people following the page. Information is posted several times a week to this page. Our website <http://www.ntdc.ie/programmes/ascend/> has had 4,348 visits in 2019.

16 Days of Action

Ascend Domestic Abuse participated in the 16 days' campaign by getting local organisations to 'Orange Up'.

Thirty venues across North Tipperary displayed the campaign material. "Orange Day" is 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).

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 concurrently 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 sits on the TLC Kidz steering group and makes referrals to the programme. Also, one staff member co-facilitates the children's group on a weekly basis.

www.barnardos.ie/our-services/work-with-families/tlc-kidz.

Healthy Relationships Programme

According to Awareness Raising of Domestic and Sexual Violence: A Survey of Post-Primary Schools in Ireland research carried out by COSC¹, 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 generally ask their friends and many boys get their information 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 2019, this programme was delivered to 114 TY (transition years) students in Nenagh College and Borrisokane Community College.

Petition

Ascend started a petition to encourage responsible reporting around domestic abuse. 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. The Ascend Co-ordinator spoke on Tipp FM about the launch of the Women's Aid Femicide Watch report in November 2019.

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 around this issue in 2019.

Voice of the Child

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. This voice 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 (Limerick Institute of Technology) to undertake this research. The Rural Development Programme 2014-2020 funded the research. This research launched in 2018 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 in 2020. Ascend will continue to advocate and lobby on this crucial issue.

Supervised Access

There is a need for a supervised access centre in North Tipperary, a place for families to meet during access times which is safe, can reduce conflict and improve trust and communication. This results in improved bonding and a better relationship between child and parent. It is recognised as a need on the CYPSC (Children and Young People Service Committee) Plan for Young People for North Tipperary. It could also be used as a venue for those children in foster care to provide a place to meet their parents and brothers and sisters.

As a pilot initiative NTDC's Social Inclusion & Community Activation Programme are bringing together relevant agencies who may have a remit or interest in having a dedicated service for Tipperary. There was a facilitated access session on in November 2019. This was well attended by local services and legal professionals. There are local calls for such a service in the area. There are currently efforts to source funding for the project.

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank the following:

The CEO and Staff of North Tipperary Development Company for their ongoing collaboration and support.

The Board of Management of North Tipperary Development Company for their guidance and assistance.

Dairine Cross, Tusla Co-ordinator for her ongoing support and assistance.

The Ascend Advisory Group who give the time and input into our organisation.

The volunteers of Ascend Domestic Abuse whose commitment is much appreciated.

Those who fundraise for Ascend—we are very thankful.

To our partners in the statutory, community and voluntary sector locally in North Tipperary and nationally.

To Safe Ireland with whom we collaborate with so they can advocate for us on a national level.

Finally, to the women who engage with Ascend Domestic Abuse. Thank you for choosing us to journey with you at this time.



Appendix One—Training Attended 2019

- Understanding Self Harm Awareness Training (HSE) – Mulgrave Street Limerick
- Equality, Diversity & Human Rights Workshop, Safe Ireland
- Mindfulness and staying well staff day, NTDC
- Strategic Planning, NTDC
- TLC Kidz Training, 3 days – Thurles
- Tusla- Children First, Foundation Training
- Safe Ireland- Coercive Control Training Advisory Group
- Screening and discussion on ‘Resilience – the Biology of Stress and Science of Hope’
- DSGBV- Awareness and Response
- Court Accompaniment Training
- ASIST Training (HSE) – University of Limerick
- Mid-West Forensic Medical Examination Service/Rape and Sexual Assault Seminar
- SAOR – Training, Naas (HSE)
- Hidden Shame – The Learning Curve Institute, Dublin
- Equality, Diversity & Human Rights Workshop, Safe Ireland
- Mindfulness and staying well staff day, NTDC
- In House Website Training (refresher) Mark O’Leary
- Two-day training in Adapt Domestic Abuse Service.
- Level 2 Child Protection Training in Limerick.
- Assist Tune Up – (HSE)
- Coercive Control workshop
- Safeguarding Vulnerable Persons Awareness course.
- First Aid
- Assist Tune Up

Appendix 2—Conferences Attended 2019

- Launch of Tipperary and Young People’s Service Committee – Plan and LGBT Need’s Analysis Report
- Infant Mental Health Symposium – Clonmel
- The National ‘Community of Practice’ events hosted by Barnardos National Project on Childhood Domestic Abuse.
- 16 Days of Action Event – UHL Hospital
- Safe Ireland Conference “Safe Home, Safe Communities”– Westport
- Sexual Violence of Prostitution and Pornography – Ruhama
- Women and Mental Health- St. Pats Dublin
- Enhancing Practice with Parents and Families (ACES) - Limerick
- National Conference Exploring Domestic and Sexual Violence Issues Impacting Traveller and Roma Communities
- Child Protection: Domestic Homicide Review and Risk Assessment and Management Processes for Police Responses to DV.

Appendix 3—References

- <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>