



ANNUAL REPORT 2020





Foreword from the Chairperson

It is with great pride we present the 2020 Annual Report for Ascend Domestic Abuse Service for Women. This is Ascend's 20th year in existence starting as part of Roscrea 2000 and now has grown to support 316 women in 2020.

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. Along with North Tipperary Development Company and other local partner organisations, Ascend is 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 would like to thank the Victims Commission for ongoing funding for Ascend's very important court accompaniment work.

I am delighted to announce that a Safe House is coming to North Tipperary and will commence operation in early 2021. We would like to thank Tipperary County Council, Tusla and Safe Ireland for being partners on this important project.

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 2020. It has been an eventful year for the project. COVID-19 has invaded all our lives and the emergence of the shadow pandemic of Domestic Abuse has shone a spotlight on the harrowing circumstances in which some women and children are living their daily lives. There has been a greater awareness of domestic abuse as a result of COVID-19. 2020 saw the first conviction by a jury of peers of the crime of coercive control. It is hoped that more individuals will come forward with their experience and get justice.

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 on us 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 2021. Through greater awareness of the issue of domestic abuse, women and families can expect this 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



1,956

Contacts with
Professionals

155

Helpline
Calls

4,232

Total Contacts

1,915

Total Telephone
Contacts

186

Total Outreach
Appointments

20

General
Accompaniments

175

New Referrals

150

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 aims to 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 a service of North Tipperary Development Company (NTDC) which 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, 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 Service 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 to have so many resources on hand to assist our service users in matters other than support for Domestic Abuse. We are also a member of Safe Ireland which is a network of thirty eight member services across Ireland providing support to female victims of domestic abuse.

Services offered by Ascend Domestic Abuse Service for Women

Ascend supported three hundred and sixteen women in 2020. Cases are reviewed every quarter and cases closed as deemed appropriate. One hundred and seventy five new clients met with the service in 2020. This represents a 40% increase in referrals in 2020 compared to the previous year. 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 2020, Ascend offered telephone support on 1,915 occasions; a substantial increase on last year (1,576 in 2019) and received 155 calls on our

helpline numbers. There were 186 outreach appointments and 1,956 contacts made with professional regarding clients' issues. We accompanied clients on 20 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 eleven different countries around the world. We provide a translation service for those who's first language is not English.

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 apart from 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 during initial contact which can be made over the phone.

If Ascend staff have 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, family support 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 at their request.
- ◆ Attending domestic abuse hearings with the woman.

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

There were 150 court accompaniments in 2020. There were 57 court sittings (which Ascend attended) from January to December with on average 2-3 women being accompanied on any one occasion. Seventy Seven Clients received court accompaniment in 2020 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 under the Domestic Violence Act 2018, 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.

‘Kathleen was a great help also without her we wouldn’t know what to do’.

“My talks with staff over the last few days before court gave me the strength to attend court to get my order.”

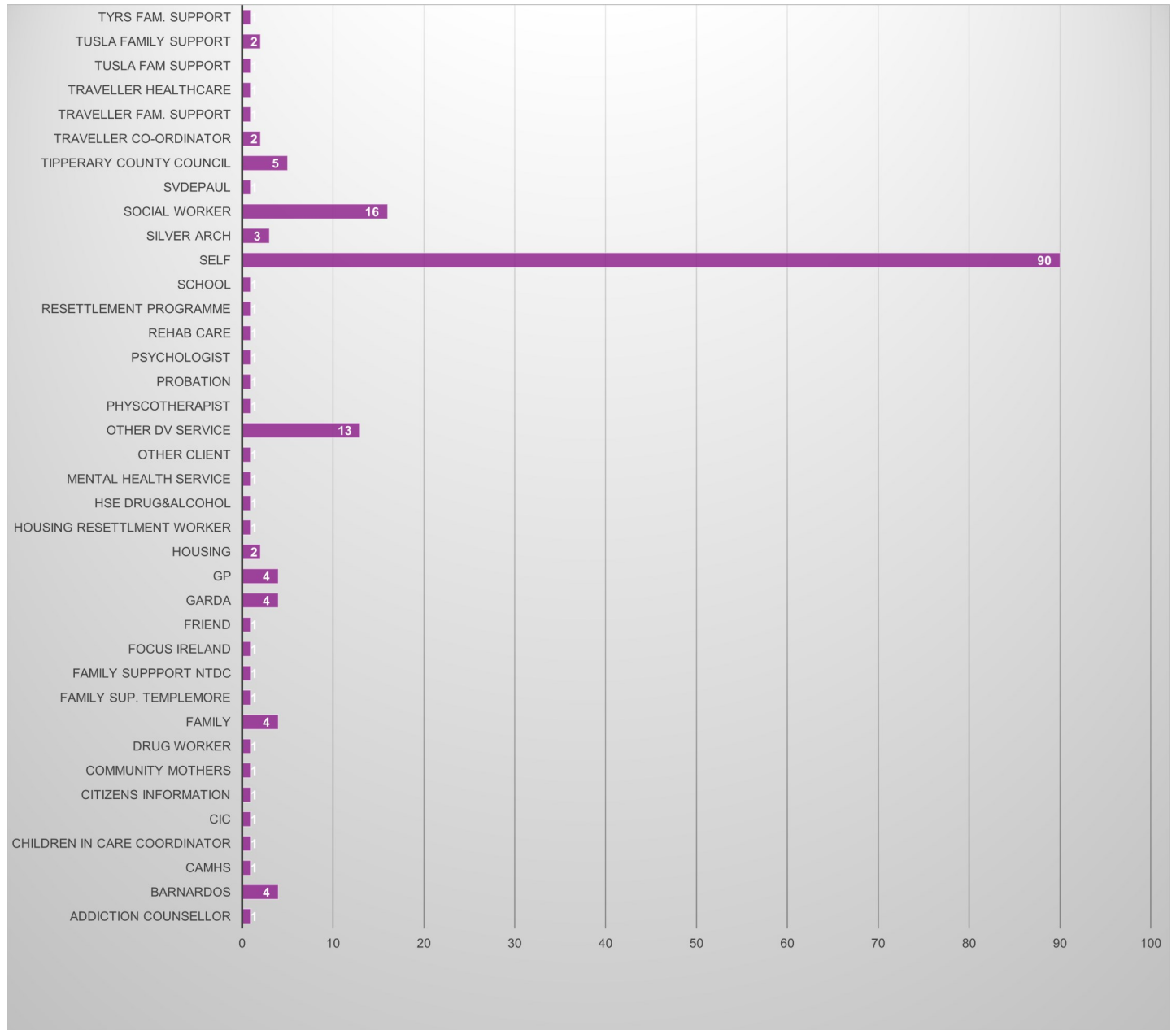
Under the Victim’s Directive clients of Ascend have access to a separate room for District and Circuit Court Hearings in Nenagh and Thurles Courthouses whilst waiting for their hearing/applications. A support person can also go into the courtroom with the service user on foot of a domestic violence application. They will be able to remain at the judge’s discretion. Court accompaniment was paused due to COVID –19 from March to May in 2020.

Data Collection

Ascend has engaged with the eSafe programme which is an integrated information solution led by Safe Ireland and we hope to have the database in place in 2021. It will reflect the diversity and trends of our work and help determine future direction and needs.

Referrals

Ascend received 175 new referrals in 2020—an increase of 40%. We received 16 referrals from Tusla Social Work Department in 2020. Ascend have liaised with various social workers and team leaders throughout 2020 in relation to mutual cases and have found this networking to be of benefit.



Funding

Ascend receives core funding from Tusla, the Child and Family Agency. The service also receives funding from the Victims Commission and Healthy Ireland. We also received donations from the Cloughjordan Buyers Group and from an event held in Roscrea—Christmas Lights in December 2020 and other small donations.

Cross Agency Collaboration

SAFE Ireland

Ascend is a member of SAFE Ireland, the national umbrella body for Domestic Abuse services. Due to COVID-19, Safe Ireland organised weekly zoom manager meetings to help us guide our way through this pandemic and the issues that arose as a result of the pandemic.

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 three times in 2020 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, HSE Mental Health Services, Gardaí, NTDC, HSE Primary Health Care, Mid West Rape Crisis Centre, Citizens Information Centre, Barnardos and Tusla Social Work and the Legal Aid Board. Through the work with the Ascend Advisory Group, it was decided to recommence the North Tipperary Services Providers Forum. This forum advocates on issues affecting female victims of domestic abuse. This forum had its first event in November 2020 which was a collaboration between Tipperary County Council and the forum. Staff presented on the day via zoom on the issue of housing to representatives working in services across North Tipperary. This event was well attended and it is hoped we will have more events in the future.

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 2020.

Ascend participated in the TLC Kidz Steering Group meetings in 2020. 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.

We also sit on two 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

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

Ascend delivered the following information sessions in 2020, they include:

Talks delivered and awareness events attended:

- Meeting with the Drug and Alcohol Service and Community Detox Service – a series of planned Autumn talks with the Drug & Alcohol Services in North Tipperary in conjunction with MWDAF.
- Meeting with the Court Services – presentation of our annual report and discussion around the victim room and ongoing work with the Courts Services.
- Speech given at Women in the War of Independence Event – March 2020.
- Five appearances on Tipp FM – 18/03/20, 14/04/20, 27/04/20, 24/06/20 25/11/20.
- Newspaper Article in Nenagh Guardian – 14/04/20.
- Publicity Leaflet and Letters sent to all GP's in North Tipperary – September 2020.
- Leaflet about how Domestic Violence affects children sent to all schools in November 2020.
- Publicity Leaflet and Letters sent to colleges in North Tipperary – LIT & MIC Thurles .
- Our social media presence is as follows:



106
followers



283
followers

2,704
website visits



3,292
followers

16 Days of Action

Ascend Domestic Abuse Service participates annually in the 16 days' campaign by encouraging local organisations to "Orange Up". "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. It commences annually on the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women (25 November). We held a very successful 16 Days of Action campaign in 2020. "Orange Campaign" We had daily social media posts and there was an announcement of the campaign on Tipp FM Radio and press releases featured on the Nenagh Guardian, Tipperary Star and Midland Tribune. Thurles Garda Station also turned orange for 16 days. Please see photographs below. Thirty services in North Tipperary took part in the campaign and posted pictures of their orange pack (candles and poster and balloons) on social media with the campaign hashtags.



TLC Kidz

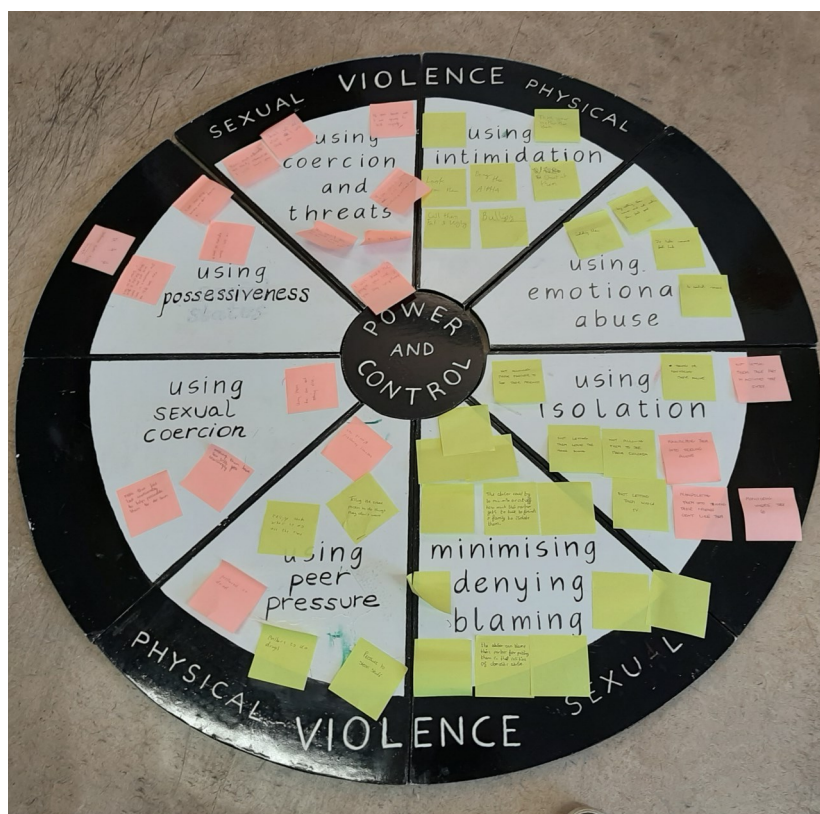
TLC Kidz is a 12-week Group work Programme for Children and their Mothers who have experienced Domestic Abuse. The emphasis is to support women in the knowledge of how to best help their child in healing from the impact of abuse. It is a multi-agency programme with participation from Barnardos, Ascend Domestic Abuse service, Tusla - Child and Family agency, Silver Arch Family Resource Centre, School completion programme and Youth Work Ireland – Tipperary. During the 12-week group work programme, the children's and mother's group run concurrently. 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.

More information is available on 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.

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, consent and communication in relationships, 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 delivered by experienced Outreach Workers from Ascend.

In 2020, this programme was delivered to 152 TY (transition years) students in Colaiste Mhuire, Thurles, Cistercians Roscrea and Our Lady's School Templemore.

Personal Development Group

Ascend Domestic Abuse Service for Women deliver a 12 week personal development programme to clients. This programme commenced in February 2020 but had to come to a halt due to the COVID –19 pandemic.

Some wellness sessions of the programme was delivered online by the SICAP programme tutor and we are grateful for this. We are hoping to re commence the Personal Development Programme in early 2021 online.

Safe House

Since the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic, incidents of domestic violence has increased. This shadow pandemic has put enormous strain under existing refuges and other emergency accommodation. Ascend made a housing proposal to Tipperary County Council in July 2020. The Istanbul Convention which was ratified on the 8th of March 2019 by the Irish Government, recommends that there is 1-unit accommodation per 10,000. Population. The 2016 Census revealed the population of Tipperary was 159,553, women amounting to 79,885. Currently there are only 4 units available in County Tipperary in the Cuan Saor refuge. Ireland is operating at approximately one third of the recommended level of refuge provision which is stated in the Istanbul Convention. We proposed the development of a Safe House for North Tipperary. This is short-term safe accommodation with specialist domestic abuse support. Suitable clients are victims of domestic violence and have been assessed as having a low to medium risk of harm, the capacity to live independently and manage their own safety. We are excited to announce that our proposal has been accepted and we will be commencing operation of a Safe House in early 2021. We have also got funding from Tusla for a part time support worker for the Safe House on a once off basis for 2021. Finally, we also got a grant from Safe Ireland to provide furniture for the house.

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 the non resident parent. It is recognised as a need on the CYPSC (Children and Young People Service Committee) Plan for Young People for North Tipperary. 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. Funding was successfully sought from CYPSC & SICAP for a researcher to complete a feasibility study around a Supervised Access centre. A steering group was also put in place to lead this programme and Ascend is a member of this group. Dana Swanton is in the process of completing the needs analysis and will present her findings in February 2021.

COVID-19—Other Service Developments

COVID-19 has brought about new issues for our clients. There are delays in the court system for hearing of family law cases. Domestic violence remains a priority for the courts but maintenance and access issues face delays. However, many are set for hearing in the coming months. We have availed of the Safe Ireland funding – strand one for assistance of individual women who need immediate practical assistance such as transport, clothes, food which statutory bodies would have already refused. There has been eleven successful applications made on behalf of our clients which has proved invaluable. Safe Ireland coordinated an initiative from Airbnb offering temporary/short-term bed nights to women and children experiencing domestic violence. Airbnb paid a hotel group in Ireland to provide this accommodation. This was only offered to clients who were low risk and attempts had been made to seek refuge. Two of our clients benefitted from this initiative and we are very grateful. Ascend is also now a referral agent for the provision of DV Rent Supplement to victims of domestic violence for a period of three months and possibly an extension to six months. In 2020, we provided a full service to clients in line with COVID-19 regulations. Some adaptations had to take place due to restrictions but we still aim to put our clients to the centre of what we do.

Testimonials

“I would like to thank ascend for all the help and support I have received in the following months of becoming homeless, not only did they get us somewhere to stay but emotionally they were there for us as well, I am eternally grateful that there is people out there that actually help you and go above and beyond for you, I highly recommend ascend to anyone that needs help they are lovely people and everything is private and confidential. Thank you so much Ascend.

“I would like from the bottom of my heart to thank Kathleen and Ascend from the minute I called Kathleen to where I am now I would not have been able to do it on my own, for my own safety. I had to leave my home with just black bags only for Kathleen finding me accommodation I had nowhere to go no money just what I had in my wallet, these past weeks staying in accommodation provided by Ascend saved me without their help and support I don't know what I would have done.”

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 Service for Women Thank you for choosing us to journey with you at this time.



Appendix One—Training Attended 2020

- Group Facilitation- Group Work Theory and Practice – Total Focus QQI 6 with Total Focus.
- In House Webinar cyber security and remote working, Liam Lynch of Cyber Security & Data Protection.
- In house Psychological First Aid, online, from the psychology dept in the HSE,.
- Remove the pain in your SARS (subject Access Requests) by ProPrivacy Compliance Solutions.
- In House Five Ways to Wellbeing during Tough Times, by Mental Health Ireland.
- An introduction to understanding the issues faced by victims of sex trafficking and prostitution and how to respond appropriately, by Ruhama.
- In house training session on HR Policy and Procedure.
- Child Protection on-line training – Tusla
- NTDC Induction Training
- NTDC Covid Training
- Safe Ireland Webinar Training Moving Beyond Blame
- HSE Coercive Control Symposium Training
- First Aid Training STAC Limerick
- Ruhama free introductory training session via Zoom on the subject of sex trafficking and prostitution.
- John O’Gorman—family law training with LAB
- Child Maintenance Legislative Proposal – NWCI (Lynn Ruane) Irish Observatory on Violence Against Women.
- Tipperary County Council/ Ascend Housing Workshop.
- MWDAF Workshops Rionach Power
- Deirdre Midwest HSE Drug and Alcohol Service.
- Community Detox Julie McKenna
- Pat from Anna Liffey.
- Coercive Control Training – Safe Ireland.
- Level 9 Certificate in Non-Profit Leadership & Management.

Appendix 2—Conferences Attended 2020

- Webinar on Human Trafficking organised by Cork against Human Trafficking.
- Adapt Kerry – Don Hennessy - Domestic Abuse
- Webinar with Evan Stark – Don't look Back – Child Coercive Control.
- Family Law Webinar : Building a Family Law System for Families One Family
- NWCI –Webinar Challenging Violence against women
- Women's Mental Health Network Webinar: Unpacking the Impacts - COVID19 and Women's Mental Health
- Tusla evaluation report at a Manuela Project Event.
- Women's Aid Seminar for UN Day for elimination of violence against women

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>