

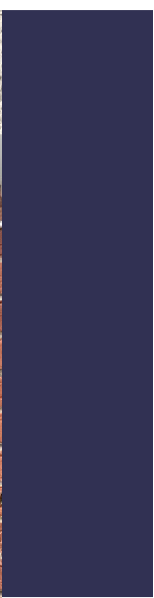
saoirse

SAOIRSE HOUSING ASSOCIATION CLG
(Saoirse Women's Refuge)

ANNUAL REPORT 2020



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SOME COMMENTS FROM SAOIRSE CLIENTS



“Everyone working here is so lovely and caring.”

“I have received more than expected, I felt like the universe and Angels are just at my doorstep.”

“I am less stressed now that it is easier to get help.”

“I never knew there were refuges or that you could get support and help when things got really bad. Thank you for being there and keeping us safe.”

“Your respect for all the women and children like myself who come here in crisis, is inspirational. Everyone is so positive and that lifts me up too.”



Garret Byrne
Chairman of the Board



CHAIRPERSON'S REPORT 2020

At the beginning of 2020, Saoirse was already facing some serious challenges for the year ahead. We had just opened our second refuge in Rathcoole, which meant a significant increase in staff numbers and a new organisational structure to bed in. We had also received the wonderful news that our CEO, Allison Graham, would be taking maternity leave at the end of March. Thankfully, we had agreed with Ellen O'Malley Dunlop that she would step in and take the reins as acting CEO for the remainder of the year, so we felt that matters were well in hand.

Then, on the eve of Ellen taking over, the metaphorical roof fell in as the first Covid lockdown was announced. The role that Ellen had agreed to take on had suddenly become fundamentally different, in that it was not possible for her to set foot in the refuges or meet the staff, management and board in person. Indeed, her handover with Allison had to be conducted entirely online. However, despite these enormous difficulties, Ellen ensured that the organisation didn't just survive – it thrived. Among all the achievements during the year, I would tentatively suggest that the fact that Covid was kept out of the refuges is the most important, as it meant that we were able to offer our services almost uninterrupted.

Of course, the challenges faced by Saoirse in dealing with the pandemic paled into insignificance when compared with awful reality faced by thousands of women and children in Ireland, for whom each lockdown meant incarceration with their abuser.

The statistics recorded in this Annual Report paint a dark picture, as the demand for Saoirse's services increased substantially throughout the year. A very worrying element of this was that, in the first weeks of lockdown, we found that the calls to the helpline and the Outreach service actually decreased, no doubt because women simply could not find the space and time to make the calls safely.

The one silver lining of this very dark cloud was the public response to this crisis. Saoirse received substantial additional donations from members of the public and local businesses, demonstrating the widespread sensitivity of the community to the effects of the pandemic on the women and children we help. We also received donations, through Safe Ireland, arising from the stellar work of the Irish Women in Harmony group. These donations helped to fund a new childcare facility in the Rathcoole refuge, which will support children suffering the effects of domestic abuse for years to come.

Also, we received many offers from businesses who were able to provide additional accommodation to women and children escaping domestic violence. There is no doubt that, as a result, we were able to prevent significant harm to these women and children, who we would not otherwise have been able to take in.

Saoirse was able to count on the continued and unwavering support of Tusla, who ensured that additional costs incurred due to the pandemic were met without delay. The ongoing funding we receive from Tusla is absolutely essential to what we do – without it, Saoirse would be able to provide only a small fraction of its vital services. I would like to take this opportunity to extend my thanks to my fellow board members, who continued almost seamlessly in their work for Saoirse as our regular board meetings necessarily moved online. We also gained the benefit of the insight and wisdom of Rebecca Molloy of Workhuman, Gerard Bradley of Amazon, and fellow barrister Aidan Lawler. Sadly, Maureen Carroll left the board during the year, as her work took her away from Ireland to a much sunnier climate.

Lastly, I am delighted every year to express my gratitude, on behalf of the board, to the staff and management of Saoirse. For this exceptional and unprecedented year, it is a genuine privilege to pay tribute to their dedication and bravery in maintaining the excellent standard of the services, in such difficult circumstances, provided to the women and children who come into the refuge and who are supported through the Outreach service.



Allison Graham

CEO



CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER'S REPORT 2020

It is difficult to think or talk about 2020 without covid 19 being at the forefront of everyone's experience of the year. 2020 was to be a year of great hope, growth, and new horizons for Saoirse Women's Refuge as we finally achieved the much anticipated and hard-fought opening of our second refuge service in Rathcoole, Co Dublin. We proudly opened the Rathcoole refuge to women and children needing support, safety, and freedom from domestic violence in early January with the addition of five refuge spaces to our existing six in Tallaght.

Little did we know, that within 2 months we would be heading into a national lock down with the rest of Irish society due to the covid pandemic. Quite quickly it became apparent that we were not only fighting the spread of covid 19 in our services, but we were also struggling to support an ever increasing number of families suffering escalating abuse in lock down situations.

The 'shadow pandemic' of domestic abuse as it became known, brought one positive development, in that it got people talking to a greater extent about domestic abuse, including the media, and it pulled it out of the shadows into the public arena, breaking down myths, barriers and shame.

Our priority focus shifted to protecting staff and clients as much as possible from covid, by keeping all services covid free throughout 2020, which was no mean feat.

We became creative in ensuring service provision continued, including some remotely, as we supported as many of the increasing numbers of women and children contacting us for help as possible in desperate times.

I want to acknowledge and thank the resilience and unstinting commitment of our management team, Trish, Nadine, Ade, Paula, Orla and Lesley and the dedicated staff who faced all challenges put in front of them and kept clients' needs centre stage at all times.

Our organisation was going through a change process in 2020 pre-covid, as it moved into new territory with multi-sites, new departments and modes of service delivery, and expanded management and staff teams.

Some of the change processes were stalled once lock down hit in March 2020. One change that did proceed was my handing over of the CEO reins to Ellen O'Malley Dunlop, when I went on maternity leave in the midst of the first lockdown. I appreciate the mammoth challenge and responsibility that Ellen faced, but she stepped up to that challenge with much energy, experience and expertise to keep a steady steer.

Thank you, Ellen. I also want to thank and acknowledge our Chairperson, Garret Byrne and our Board of Directors for their guidance and support both to me and the organisation on this unprecedented journey during 2020.



**Ellen O'Malley
Dunlop**

Acting CEO



ACTING CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER'S REPORT 2020

2020 has been a year in the world like no other. Every person has been touched by the Covid-19 pandemic and none more so than survivors of domestic sexual and gender-based violence.

2020 was to have been a year for Saoirse when, after the very hard work, commitment, and planning, the much-needed extended services were to be realised. The second refuge in Rathcoole opened its services for women and children in January 2020. There were plans afoot to move to new offices to accommodate the administration team and the newly expanded Outreach programmes. New management and staff were recruited and then in March we experienced the first lockdown because of Covid. Allison Graham, Saoirse's CEO went on maternity leave, and I took over as Acting CEO working from my office at home and only meeting management and staff virtually.

It is a great tribute to the CEO and her management team and staff and to the Chairman and the Board of Saoirse and to the solid foundations on which Saoirse is built, that I was able to step in as Acting CEO in such unprecedented times and continue to provide and develop the much-needed services for the women and children survivors of Domestic Violence as well as move to the much-needed new offices.

Alongside the regular provision of services, we were immediately hit with having to train and provide Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) for all management, staff, and

service users because of Covid-19. New policies were developed and implemented to ensure that everyone was as safe as possible. Like everyone else we were dealing with so many unknowns and we were doing the very best that we could do and changing and building on what we were learning as we went along.

This was the backdrop to what the United Nations deemed to be the Shadow Pandemic. The Shadow Pandemic referred to the escalation of Domestic Violence across all sectors of society as a consequence of the lockdown. At Saoirse we saw an exponential increase in calls to the 24-hour Helpline and a similar increase in the number of women and children in need of refuge space. Unfortunately, we were not able to cater for everyone who needed our professional support but in those instances we were able to make referrals to our colleagues in other parts of the county and country.

articles highlighting the increase in violence against women and children and the services being provided by Saoirse. We also received extra much needed financial support from members of the public which enabled us to further develop the Saoirse website and build on Saoirse's social media presence which is an added support for survivors. It is really important to have data to support the experiences of services like Saoirse. In this context Saoirse, in conjunction with Ámarach Research conducted a survey in 2020, the results of which confirmed the escalation in Domestic Violence and the need for more services during this time.

It has been my privilege to work with such a dedicated team of women as is the management team and staff of Saoirse. I want to thank in particular senior managers Trish Cole and Nadine O'Brien for their expertise and cool heads and Saoirse's Financial Controller Ade Ogundipe who continued to make the relevant changes to our financial plans which



As a member of Safe Ireland and because of the opportunities that remote meetings opened for us, we developed much closer relations with our colleagues at Safe Ireland and the support we got from each other was invaluable. We also linked in with Tusla and an Garda Síochána and extra funding was made available so that we could deal with the increases in the demands on the services. We took part in the Department of Justice's Awareness Raising Programme 'Still Here'.

We were very grateful for the support we received from the local newspaper the Tallaght Echo, which published several

were continually changing due to the extra demands on the services. I want to pay a special tribute to Garret Byrne Chairman of the Board and to all the Board members who give of their expertise voluntarily and whose support is invaluable to the work of Saoirse.

It is a very sad reflection on any society that women and children must leave their homes because of very abusive partners. I do hope that the day will come, and I hope it comes sooner rather than later, when we have legislation in place that will give an Garda Síochána the power to remove the abuser and allow the families to stay in their homes.

Our Services

Saoirse Women's Refuge officially opened its Tallaght refuge in December 2006 providing short term crisis refuge accommodation and 24-hour support for up to six families, operating a 24-hour helpline (01-4630000) offering support and a listening ear to women who may need someone to talk to about the abuse they have suffered in both past and current relationships.

After 3 years of endurance, toil, and many struggles, we achieved the goal of opening our five-unit refuge in Rathcoole, Co Dublin, in January 2020 with funding from South Dublin County Council, Dept. of Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Capital Assistance Scheme) and Tusla, Domestic Sexual and Gender Based Violence Dept.

Our helpline covers both refuges and referrals across both sites, as well as direct admissions, to each refuge, thereby ensuring maximum use of our 11-unit capacity. Our Refuge Manager, Trish Cole, with the support of an Assistant Manager in each refuge, Orla Greaney and Lesley Hill, manage the refuge and support services we provide with care, compassion, and commitment to an ever-increasing number of families in crisis and danger, with no other option but to flee their home and seek refuge.

Our Tallaght refuge provides a purpose-built playroom and qualified Childcare workers to support the resident children and their mothers, and our Rathcoole refuge has a playpod and childcare staff on site to also offer a dedicated space and service for children in refuge. In 2020, the Childcare service was afforded its own Assistant Manager, Paula Garry, to lead and develop the services that Saoirse provide to our most special clients, the children of all ages living with domestic violence in all its forms.

Our Outreach & Prevention service went from strength to strength, now with its own dedicated and passionate Manager, Nadine O'Brien at the helm delivering a respectful, client focused service. The service now has six staff supporting families from West Wicklow to South / South West / South Inner-City Dublin in the community as well as providing court accompaniment, while also raising awareness and providing training on domestic violence.

Our Vision

Our vision is to reach and support an ever-increasing number of families in Irish society, who deserve respect, dignity, safety, and freedom from domestic abuse. Through our team of professional, caring and committed people our primary focus remains our commitment to continuous improvement in all aspects of our operations and the services we offer to our clients and the community.



Our Mission

To provide safe, supportive, and confidential services for women and children experiencing domestic abuse. We are open to referrals from all of Ireland and all sectors of Irish society. Our focus is on empowering the women who contact us by facilitating the space to explore their options and we work from the ethos that they know best for themselves and their children.

Our Values & Principles



We believe that ...

- Nobody deserves to be abused.
- No person should ever have to experience the torture of being abused by a 'loved one'.
- No one should be alone in carrying the burden of blame, shame and judgment perpetrated upon them.
- Early educational interventions with young people entering intimate relationships are key to combating domestic abuse in future generations and breaking the cycle of abuse.

We acknowledge that ...

- Domestic abuse is a serious and life destroying crime for which the client is never responsible.
- Domestic abuse is a cycle of abuse that only escalates with time.
- Domestic abuse occurs in all walks of life – all classes, creeds, ages, and races.
- Domestic abuse is an unequal balance of power and control that an individual holds over another in any intimate relationship – husband and wife, same sex partners, or adult children and an elder parent.
- Domestic abuse takes many forms including physical, sexual, emotional, psychological, and financial abuse.

We commit to ...

- Empowering our clients and facilitating them in having a voice.
- Listening, hearing, believing, and respecting those who contact us for help whether they plan to leave an abusive relationship or seek support in staying safe in the relationship.
- Working in a non-judgmental environment supporting clients – only they know the reality of their abuse.
- Maintaining a confidential service for all our clients and ensuring that we always work according to 'Children First', to protect children, first and foremost.

Trish Cole

Refuge Manager



REFUGE MANAGER'S REPORT 2020

None of us could have predicted the rollercoaster ride that was 2020. We took our first families into our new refuge in Rathcoole in January 2020. We also engaged our new Assistant Manager Lesley Hill to assist in the running of the service. All was running well and then March and the Covid pandemic hit.

There were so many challenges and issues that came with the pandemic, not only were women having to deal with Domestic Abuse but now they were at home constantly with their abusers. Despite this both refuges remained open and were full to capacity.

The helpline was in huge demand and yet we had to explore ways of taking families in but not getting Covid. This meant that we had to use Tallaght refuge as a quarantine site for two weeks for every family that came to refuge. As Rathcoole is communal living, we could not use it for emergency accommodation. We had to get creative.

As a direct result of the pandemic and self-isolation measures, unfortunately we accommodated less women and children in refuge than in other years, even though the demand was higher. Many women did not want / were unable to isolate for the mandatory 2 weeks in their apartments and in the beginning of the first lockdown, we operated reduced capacity as a public health measure. There were less move-on options for families also as the country was at a standstill, therefore their stays in refuge

were on average longer. Rathcoole refuge was used as a filter refuge from Tallaght for the majority of 2020, so turnover of families was slower and the full potential of 11 refuge units across two refuges we planned for 2020, was not realised in Rathcoole's first year.

Allison Graham, our CEO went on maternity leave in April, which meant we had a new temporary CEO, Ellen O'Malley Dunlop in situ. Ellen got a real induction by fire to our service. Between the management team we had to create Covid policies and procedures and figure out how to keep families and the staff team safe from the virus. Huge commendations must be given to all the team at Saoirse as neither refuge ever had a positive case of Covid. It was a tough time for all though, with self-isolation, some of our team working from home and needing to have a 24-hour service throughout. We had to find ways to work with women and children, without doing face-to-face most of the time.

We had several new staff throughout 2020, all of whom encountered an exceptionally challenging situation due to the special circumstances caused by the pandemic, and thankfully everyone adjusted to each situation, and were completely flexible with all the changes required, and continued to support families to the best of their abilities. The whole team were amazing and remained strong through all the tough times. Tusla, our core funders, were a great support to us at this time, providing additional funds for

wifi and providing laptops and other items for our clients, which helped to alleviate the additional isolation that Covid brought to refuge life.

The HSE DRHE Homeless Covid Response Forum and Safetynet, were an invaluable service to Saoirse throughout the pandemic, not only providing us with information and support but also providing PPE and access to accommodation units for families needing isolation. Without all their hard work, I don't think Saoirse would have remained Covid free.

As always Saoirse is here to provide support for all the families living through domestic abuse. The numbers of families contacting and accessing our services in 2020 increased substantially. Thankfully additional supports were extended to victims via an Garda Síochána, courts and social protection. Additional accommodation was offered to services through different avenues, which enabled more women at risk to escape.

The planned refurbishment works for our Tallaght refuge could not happen but are now scheduled for 2021. Rathmines refuge remained closed throughout 2020. We look forward to services returning to some normality in 2021 and to being able to engage on a one-to-one basis with families and our colleagues.



Nadine O'Brien

**Outreach and
Prevention Manager**

OUTREACH AND



and Celtic Contractors we were able to customise the space and develop unique therapeutic safe spaces for victims of domestic abuse to meet their Outreach worker in a setting that values and honours the victim /survivors' experiences.

The Outreach and prevention team provide a community-based day service that enables those experiencing domestic violence to access the necessary supports required. We offer risk assessments, safety planning, psycho-education work, one-to-one support, and domestic abuse group work programmes. We operate the Safe house project which encompasses two Safe homes as a step-down option for clients of Saoirse in the South Dublin area.

We know that perpetrators of domestic violence use many abusive and controlling tactics designed to assert power and control over women. This is intentional and as a result women feel trapped and undermined, and their confidence is eroded. Many women have been told and believe that they are responsible for the abuse and may understate the abuser's behaviour.

We respond to the Domestic Violence needs of the client, the community, and other professionals. We raise awareness and lobby for change at a political and social level. Saoirse recognises the need to work towards social and community change. Saoirse provides specialist training to statutory groups, non-statutory groups, family resource centres, women's groups and specialist domestic violence services responding to domestic violence.

The pandemic within the pandemic

The pandemic saw a dramatic increase in domestic abuse, and we worked very hard to raise awareness about the signs of domestic violence and abuse and to promote and share information on supports available to victims and survivors.

The Outreach service started remote working during the first covid lockdown in March 2020 with Outreach clinics in the community having to cease for a time. We provided phone, facetime and Zoom support to clients.



The silence from victims of Domestic violence throughout periods of 2020 was ominous as clients found it tough to reach out due to isolating with perpetrators. We tried to encourage women to access support in any way necessary even using social media sites such as WhatsApp, Facebook, email, or DM on Instagram. The need to further adapt our community Outreach ways of working to support women saw the team offering not only the instant messaging and virtual support but also delivering a respite accommodation service in the Maldron Hotel which was funded through Airbnb and Safe Ireland.

With the need to adapt to new ways of working we also began to deliver training and workshops via Zoom and other virtual methods. All training and workshops provided by Saoirse were tailored to meet the unique identified needs of those requesting the training or workshops.

Finally, during lockdown our supporters got creative with their fundraising ideas, and we had numerous events and challenges to raise awareness of Saoirse. The commitment and generosity of donors and grants by individual groups and companies made a huge difference to the work we do, and I would like to extend a mammoth thank you.

Paula Garry

**Childcare Assistant
Manager**



CHILDCARE SERVICE REPORT 2020

During 2020, 115 children were supported in Refuge. Many families were also supported through our Outreach and safe houses. The role of the childcare team changed considerably over the year due to the impact of covid. As children were out of school, the childcare team needed to adapt and develop the service to meet the very different needs of the children. We were supported by some very generous community services and personal donations that ensured that all children had access to laptops or tablets.

As the childcare team couldn't work with the children in groups they communicated with the children through their tablets and also did more phone support for parents. Many arts and crafts activities and packs were delivered to the children in their rooms to make sure the children were given fun learning opportunities throughout this time. The childcare team worked much more directly with schools to ensure that the children were well supported, advocating for children and to be a voice for them in the wider community about the impact of living in refuge during the covid pandemic. It was extremely difficult for families who came with more than one child when children needed space for schoolwork and Zoom calls. However, the refuge was still filled with fun and laughter and our outdoor spaces were utilised much more.

Although this year brought challenges, there was also great expansion to the Saoirse childcare services. Rathcoole refuge opened in January 2020 and the Senior Childcare Worker moved into the post to support children in the Rathcoole service. As the refuge was communal, this staff member had greater opportunity to offer support to Mams in shared spaces and create fun areas for the children. However, as the service developed it became clear that the children needed their own space. During 2020, some very generous donations allowed for our Playpod to be built just before Christmas, with some lovely outdoor play areas. A resource that was greatly needed and appreciated for the families.

A highlight from the childcare team this year was our involvement in the 16 days of Action Against Violence campaign. 'Our Community, Our problem' highlighted the prevalence of domestic violence in all communities and the responsibility of all community groups to keep women and children safe. We ran a visual campaign with Rua Red Tallaght, where baby grows were hung as an installation at Civic buildings in Tallaght to represent the number of children in refuge. We also designed an ad campaign for our social media sites and ran a campaign with a secondary school where the girls designed baby grows and laid them in their school hall, again a really impactful installation representing children in our community affected by domestic violence.

School talks continued in a very different way through Zoom meetings. Although this was a very different way of working, it still reached a large group of students and raised awareness of our services. We continued to work with many other community groups as well as schools, social workers, and public health nurses to name but a few.

Staff upskilled and took part in many different training courses over the year regarding children and minding their mental health during these very difficult times. We were very aware of the impacts of digital media and lockdown on children. We tried to encourage more meditation, yoga, deep breathing, and fresh air for children. Although a difficult year, the childcare team worked tirelessly to ensure the children had positive experiences and were linked to appropriate services.

Although 2020 brought challenges it reminded us as a staff group of the challenges that children who have experienced domestic abuse encounter, and the importance of encouraging, listening, hearing, and believing in our children. In the words of one of our favourite philosophers in the playroom and playpod: "It makes such a difference said pooh, to have someone who believes in you."- Winnie the Pooh.



Our Board

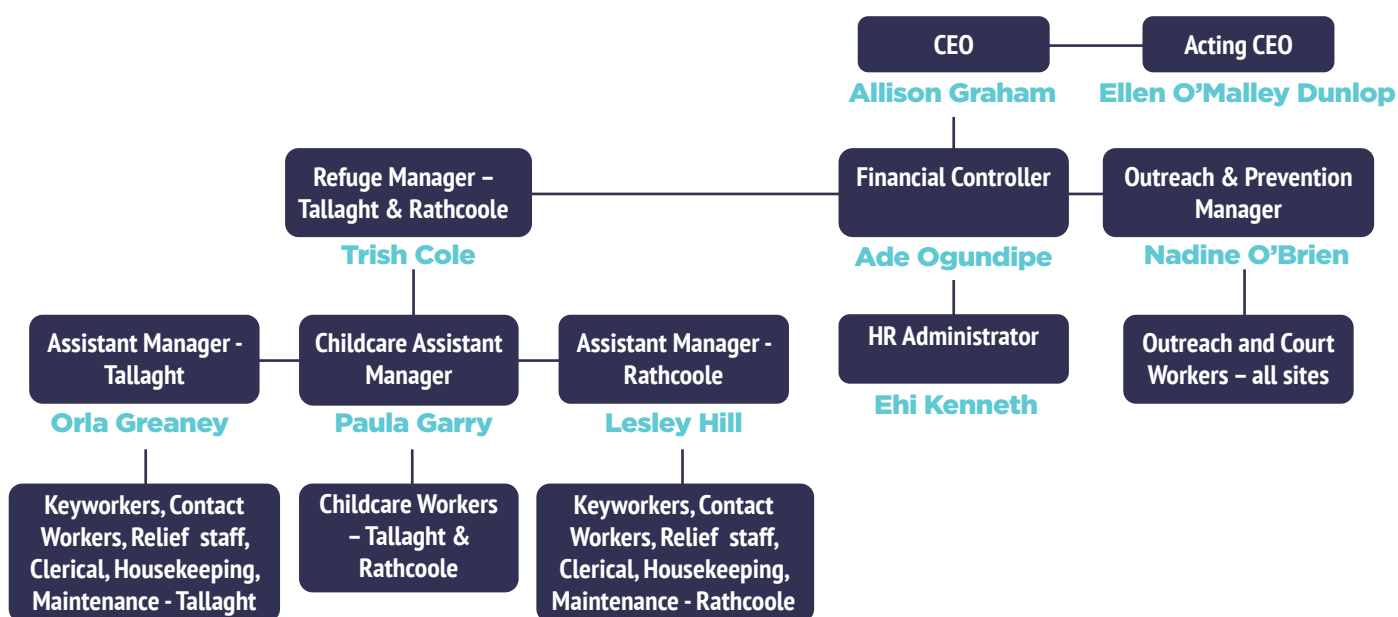
Our voluntary Board of Management of Saoirse Housing Association CLG is made up of a mixture of statutory, local community group representatives and professionals from the private sector, representing a wide array of backgrounds, experience and expertise, and bringing a rich mix of skills, resources, and leadership to their governance role.

The Board meets every 6 weeks and in 2020 the Board comprised of:

Garret Byrne	..... (Barrister – Chairperson)
David Laird	..... (Management Consultant - Director)
Mark Brennan	..... (Barnardos - Director)
Vikki Hughes	..... (Tallaght CIC - Director)
Daren O'Neill	..... (Tallaght West Credit Union - Director)
Sandra Byrne	..... (Kildare Wicklow Youth Services – Director)
Rebecca Molloy	..... (WorkHuman - Director)
Gerard Bradley	..... (Amazon - Director)
Aidan Lawler	..... (Barrister / Accountant - Director)
Kirsten Byrne	..... (Senior Social Worker Tusla - Board Member)

Our Staff

Following a period of expansion and change in 2019 as the organisation grew and developed a number of new services, the organisational structure in 2020 became:



Our management team grew over the development period in response to the changing needs of the growing organisation, to become the new expanded structure of:

CEO	Allison Graham
Refuge Manager	Trish Cole
Outreach & Prevention Manager	Nadine O'Brien
Financial Controller	Ade Ogundipe
Refuge Assistant Manager Tallaght	Orla Greaney
Refuge Assistant Manager Rathcoole	Lesley Hill
Childcare Assistant Manager	Paula Garry



Our staff team, across three sites now, also grew considerably in preparation for the Rathcoole refuge opening, the expansion of the Outreach and childcare teams and the addition of some new posts including the HR Administrator.

The core frontline staff roles remain predominantly the same but on a larger scale. Keyworkers are assigned to each new resident family on admission, and they work Monday - Friday providing advocacy, accompaniment and referral supports to clients. Their case management with clients offers a range of supports in line with the needs of the clients and we aim to meet these ever-changing needs. Our Contact Workers provide invaluable support alongside Keyworkers to resident clients, helpline callers and day callers across a 24/7 rota, allowing us to maintain 24 hour refuge support and admissions for families who need us whenever they need us.

Our Childcare Workers support the families through case management of the children's needs during their time in refuge in consultation with their mothers, thus enabling the children to have a voice around their experiences. They provide group play and one-to-one sessions in the playroom, Monday to Friday, for the children ranging in ages from infancy to late teens. They also support child clients of Outreach families in our Safe Houses and are working

towards the development of service provision to the child clients of community Outreach families.

Our Outreach and Court accompaniment staff team moved into a new office space in Tallaght, during 2020, and although the covid pandemic reduced their face-to-face support sessions with clients in the community and at our clinics, they have appropriate space available for support sessions once life gets back to some normality. The Outreach team provide supports and case management with the residents of our Safe Houses also. They have an important role in networking, advocating, making links and also awareness raising as part of their prevention work. Our relief teams provide emergency and staff leave cover for full time staff on our 24-hour and childcare services. They are often called on at short notice and are long term contributors to running our services. The support we provide every day to families in crisis is only possible with such commitment and passion.

We also have an HR Administrator and a Receptionist providing essential administrative support to our management team and services in general, to keep all the wheels moving. Our Housekeeping and Maintenance staff are also a core part of our service provision team, and work across both refuges and Safe houses.

What 2020 Brought

The following data collection provides some insight into service provision by Saoirse in 2020 and highlights some changing patterns in our service use that helps us to meet demand and also adapt and improve the services we provide on an ongoing basis in line with our clients' needs and our strategic goals.

No. of women in refuge	80
No. of children in refuge	115
No. of women in Safe Houses	9
No. of children in Safe Houses	12
Total residents	195
No. of Outreach clients	314
No. of helpline calls answered	4629
No. could not accommodate as refuge full	369 families
Average length of stay	33 days
(from 1 day to several months)	

The numbers of families in refuge (80), was down slightly from (89) in 2019. While we had more capacity at the start of the year with the opening of Rathcoole Refuge, this reduced for 10 months of the year due to covid precautions / families isolating, the communal setting in Rathcoole, etc. The number of refuge admissions was adversely affected, therefore. The number of children (115) was also down as a result. The average length of stay in refuge was 33 days, which is considerably longer than 21 days in 2019. This was due mainly to covid measures, self-isolating, lockdowns

restrictions, no move-on options, etc, which directly impacted on the number of families we accommodated in 2020. The ever-high number of requests for refuge continued with 369 requests for refuge not accommodated because we were full to available capacity.

This equates to us not being able to accommodate 78% of requests for refuge as the refuge was full / had no available capacity due to covid.



24 Hour Helpline

Helpline Calls Breakdown

4629 answered

Accommodation	16%
Client Care	28%
Information	10%
Support	7%
Outreach	5%
Administration	15%
Other	19%
(incl. Silent calls, hang ups, not appropriate service, hoax calls, unknown).	

78% of requests for refuge accommodation could not be accommodated, as the refuge was full / had no available capacity due to covid

Of the 4629 calls made to our 24-hour helpline, accommodation and existing client care are among the most frequent requests, while the calls for information and support on the helpline were down from previous year. Administration and other calls accounts for approximately one third of calls to the helpline.

The breakdown of helpline calls across the 24-hour service was, 59% morning, 32% afternoon and evening, 9% nights. This remains similar to previous years.

Outreach

Outreach and Court Accompaniment referrals were similar to 2019, with 314 individual clients with accumulated contacts of 1074 supports across the full year. These range from a single face-to-face support session to several months of regular contact support.



Day caller

Unfortunately, due to covid restrictions and the health safety measures in refuge limiting access to the building, we suspended this service from March-December 2020. We hope to recommence accepting referrals in 2021.

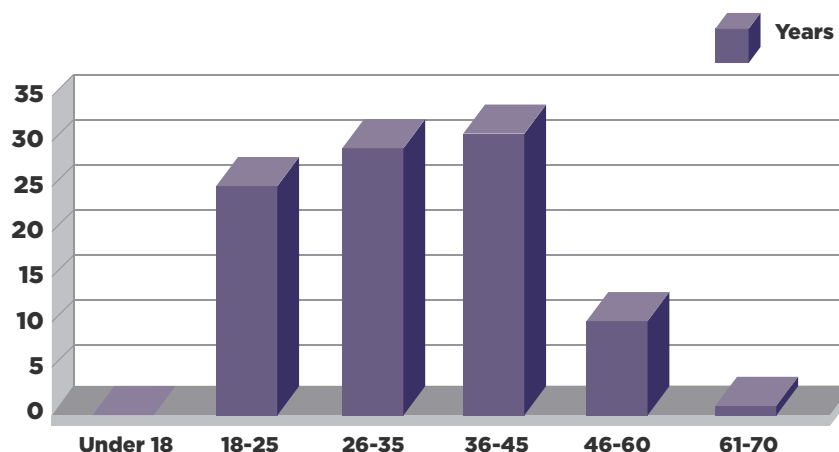
More Trends and Patterns (refuge clients)

- Self-referral admissions to refuge were 54% in 2020. Referrals from other refuges and domestic violence services 19%, Social Work 7% and an Garda Síochána 9%. Outreach was 7% and any other categories 4%.
- 33% of residents were repeat clients who had stayed at least once in Saoirse previously.
- The majority of clients (83%) residing in Saoirse in 2020 were from Dublin. 7% were from Kildare and 10% from other counties.
- 17% of refuge resident families were members of the travelling community.
- Saoirse provides crisis accommodation to an ever-increasing culturally and ethnically diverse client base. 42% of families accommodated in refuge were of non-Irish nationality.
- The average stay for non-Irish clients was 37 days – higher than the general average refuge stay of 33 days.



Age Range

At 32%, the largest cohort of adult residents were in the 36-45 year age range. This is followed closely by the 26-35 year range at 30% and 18-25 years range at 26%.

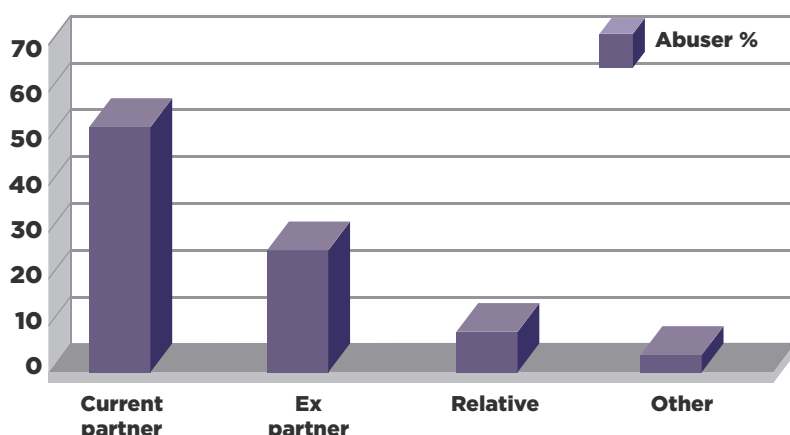


Abuse Type

In 89% of cases, two or more types of abuse were named, including physical, emotional, psychological, sexual, and financial.



Relationship to Alleged Abuser



62% of clients suffered abuse from a current spouse/partner/boyfriend. Those clients being abused by an ex accounted for 26% of refuge residents, which is up considerably from previous years. 9% reported being abused by other family members, for example, parent or adult son/daughter, which is also increased.

Where residents Moved to from Refuge

Went home to relationship (with or without a court order)	13%
Went to stay with family/friends	9%
Transitional Housing / Safe House	25%
Unknown as did not return to refuge	26%
Private Rented accommodation	5%
Homeless services	7%
Hotel Air BnB	3%
Other, incl. another refuge, hospital, etc.	8%
Were asked to leave service	4%



SAOIRSE 2020 IN FOCUS

We achieved our goal of opening a second refuge as we opened our Rathcoole refuge to families on 6th January 2020. The new, comfortable and welcoming interior of the building, with a new Rathcoole Saoirse team ready to offer care and support, is a beacon of hope for women and children coming to us in some of their darkest hours. With five en-suite bedrooms, we anticipated that the extra refuge capacity would be utilised to its full potential considering the numbers of families we cannot accommodate every year. The covid pandemic put something of a spanner in the works from March onwards in terms of the true benefit of our expanded refuge service provision being fully realised in 2020, but this will not be the case going forward we hope.

Our Outreach and Childcare service expansion was well under way before covid hit and they responded to the increasing demand for support to the greatest extent they could, through remote and phone support, including raising awareness, providing training, and celebrating the 16 Days of Action against Violence in different ways.

There were many positive initiatives born out of the impacts of the covid pandemic, as the plight of domestic abuse victims was highlighted to a greater extent. Access to crisis hotel and Airbnb accommodation in partnership with Safe Ireland was invaluable to families when refuges were full. The proactive response from an Garda Síochána with Operation Faoiseamh was very timely and much needed in light of the increased risk to victims during consecutive lockdowns. The generosity of the general public in supporting services with

fundraising and donations was much appreciated, thank you. We also want to acknowledge the group and agency grants received in 2020, including the Adelaide Health Foundation, HSE, National Lottery Funding, Pranik Healing, RTE Does Comic Relief, Amazon and the FEAD programme.

Tusla, Domestic Sexual and Gender Based Violence department continued as our core funder for staffing and running costs, under the guidance of Joan Mullan, National Manager DSBGV Programme. They supported us throughout our service expansion as well as providing essential funding for additional costs incurred because of the covid pandemic.

There is much work still to do in 2021, with the change processes still bedding down across the organisation, changes in management, new ways of communicating and working together while sometimes apart and the support needs of clients constantly moving and changing. The refurbishment overhaul of the Tallaght refuge and the re-development of the Rathmines refuge are very much live projects for us to achieve in 2021 and will be priorities once the constraints and aftermath of covid dissipates. Our new Strategic Plan will also be high on the agenda to guide and govern us through the coming years on our pathway.

We will continue, in parallel with other organisations, to raise the issue of domestic abuse in Irish Society, and to break the silence for those who experience it every day. We hope for a brighter day for more families who are suffering at the hands of domestic violence.





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