

saoirse

SAOIRSE HOUSING ASSOCIATION CLG
(Saoirse Domestic Violence Services)

SDVS STRATEGIC PLAN **2023 – 2027**





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Introduction and Context

About Saoirse Domestic Violence Services

Saoirse Domestic Violence Services (SDVS) provide a range of support and accommodation services across South-West Dublin and West Wicklow including 24 hour helpline, safe refuge accommodation, safe house accommodation, children's support services, community outreach support and court accompaniment.

Our organisation was founded in 2004, with our first refuge officially opened, in Tallaght, by the then President of Ireland, Mary McAleese in December 2006.

Our aim is to provide a safe, respectful and confidential continuum of care and services for women and children experiencing domestic violence/abuse, to explore their options.

SDVS focuses on empowering the women who contact us and we work from the ethos that they – the women experiencing domestic violence/abuse - are best placed to make decisions for themselves and their children.



We operate a **24/7 helpline** and refuge accommodation service 365 days per year and receive our core funding from Tusla, the Child and Family Agency, alongside funding from Department of Justice for our Court Accompaniment Service. We receive a small level of private fundraising and donations which contributes to providing additional services to the women and children we support.

We provide a range of life saving and life changing supports empowering women and children on their journey to safety and recovery. We do this by:

- **Providing accommodation and specialist domestic violence support services to families, through our refuges, childcare and outreach services.**
- **Working with communities to educate and challenge attitudes to domestic violence through prevention and awareness raising.**
- **Campaigning and advocating for societal change, legislation and government policy.**



Context

In 2013 Saoirse Women's Refuge set out to develop the organisation's first Strategic Plan. The 3-year strategy took longer to implement but set a foundation for SDVS to grow and develop beyond the aspirations of our first strategic plan. Almost ten years on, SDVS now operates two refuges (Tallaght and Rathcoole) alongside a number of safe house accommodation units. We also achieved a major development and expansion of our outreach services, with a specialist focus on prevention and education as well as outreach support and court accompaniment. Our childcare and young person's support services are delivered in both refuges with dedicated space for the needs of our younger clients.

SDVS is operating in a rapidly changing Ireland. Our plans for the future take account of those changes and address their implications for the support of women and children affected by domestic abuse.

COVID 19 shone a light on the reality of gender-based violence in Ireland. This raised awareness of the issue has resulted in more women and children seeking access to supports where resources are severely limited.

Every person has been touched by the Covid-19 pandemic and none more so than survivors of domestic violence. The *Shadow Pandemic* refers to the escalation of the violence as a consequence of families being locked-down with perpetrators during restrictions. They were unable to make a call to family, friends, a support service or even the Gardaí, as their every move was being monitored. Children out of school due to Covid-19, living in abuse 24/7, with no escape from the environment for even short periods, or to get support from a grandparent or teacher, has been devastating to them.





Context

Domestic Violence is an escalating pattern of abuse where one partner in an intimate / family relationship abuses and controls the other, through force, intimidation, fear or the threat of violence to cause distress. Statistics from Safe Ireland have shown that the number of women and children who have looked for support from a domestic violence service since March 2020 has increased significantly.

With 155 families accommodated in refuge between 2020 and the end of 2021, we supported 155 women and 189 children, directly in refuge. We also supported 712 outreach clients and answered 7,245 helpline calls. We are still not meeting the increased demand for our services, with 74% of requests for refuge in 2021, not being accommodated due to our refuges being full.

*Zero Tolerance - Third National Strategy on Domestic, Sexual and Gender-Based Violence, 2022- 2026*¹ published by the Department of Justice in June 2022, places a priority on integrated structures and service delivery alongside a focus on prevention and reduction, specifically including a National Preventative Strategy. From 2024, SDVS funding and service delivery agreements will move from Tusla (Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth), to a dedicated agency under the Department of Justice. We are committed to aligning to this National Strategy and to structuring our work around a continuum of care for women and children. We want to ensure that SDVS supports women and children not only at the point of crisis but throughout their recovery journey.

¹ - <https://www.justice.ie/en/JELR/Pages/DSGBV-Strategy>



About this Plan

This Strategic Plan process provided us with the opportunity to look to both the past and the future. We came together and celebrated our strengths and growth as an organisation. From reaching and supporting a record number of women and children to building partnerships and influencing change, we have a lot to be proud of.

While celebrating our achievements, we reflected on the growth of the organisation and asked ourselves, what next? How can we support this growing demand and increase safe spaces for women and children experiencing DV? How can we help make Ireland a society that refuses to accept domestic violence?

Through the strategic planning process, our strategic planning group made up of staff and board members refocused our vision and values affirming who we are and how we work best. We validated that our guiding philosophy and values remain relevant and inform and guide all our actions. Finally, we committed to being deliberate about where we are headed and how we can align to the National Strategy on Domestic Violence.

SDVS has grown from a single refuge in Tallaght to providing a complex range of services and accommodation to women and children. We are active in challenging the narrative on DV through our outreach and education programmes.

We know we are one part of a bigger group of stakeholders working to support women and children affected gender-based domestic violence. It is only by working together that we can affect real policy and social change. We will continue to network, collaborate, contribute to dialogue and we will work with decision makers to affect change.



SDVS Strategy 2023 - 2027

This five-year strategy is built upon on a wide ranging consultation with staff, management, board directors and the women who engage with SDVS. It sets out our ambitions for the future based on what is achievable now and how SDVS can continue to strengthen and build on strong foundations.

Our strategic priorities reflect the collective experience and knowledge of these stakeholders to provide guidance for our activity over the next five years. This strategic plan is based on:

- The challenges facing SDVS and the changes most likely to occur over the coming years.
- SDVS's role and specifically what it can contribute both as service provider and an advocate for those experiencing DSGBV and a contributor to shaping social change on gender based violence.
- Priorities for the next 5 years and the approaches to take.

Our Vision

Our vision is a society where DVA is never tolerated or silenced, empowering women and children to live in safety, free from fear.

Our big idea

Our long term goal is to provide a 'one stop shop' for women and children who experience DV. A space where the many complex needs of those who attend our service can be met. A warm, welcoming and safe space where women and children can come to explore their options and journey towards recovery. We know that this is ambitious and won't happen overnight. This big idea will act as our guide for this and future strategic plans. We have achieved significant growth and impact since 2006 and we are confident we can do it again.

We are committing to taking action to develop our services, our organisation and our infrastructure. We see clearly the need for a root and branch change in how services to women and children are delivered and we believe that we can be central to delivering that change. Over the next five years:

- We will further develop our services, to ensure we are in a position to respond to both current and emerging needs.
- We will focus on expanding our services across all areas of the organisation, including accommodation; recovery support, community outreach, education and community engagement.
- We will work towards a sustainable structure for the delivery of all our services.
- We will work to ensure our organisation has a sustainable funding model and is governed to the highest standards.



Our Values and Purpose

Our values and principles underpin how we deliver against Vision - they are central to everything we do. They influence our every action and interaction at SDVS, when working with women and children and when advocating on their behalf.

Our teams live and work through these values on a day to day basis, and they are reflected across our philosophy and approach, our business planning and daily practices.

COURAGE

EMPATHY

EMPOWERMENT

HOPE

INTEGRITY



High level strategy

In developing our strategy we thought about our journey - envisaging where we could go with the right foundations (our enablers) and priorities underpinning our strategic focus for the coming five years. Our vision guides us and our mission/purpose is our reason for existing as an organisation.

Our plan is centred on a collective commitment and overarching goal that we will bring the voice of women and children to everything we do.

We are striving towards a sustainable securely funded organisation with the right teams, delivering appropriate services to meet the needs of an ever growing population of women and children experiencing DV. As part of our advocacy work we are committed to changing the conversation and

informing new approaches to address DV and promote gender equality.

We have big plans, guided by our big idea to develop and grow our infrastructure and spaces so we can deliver modern, connected, supports to the women and children who use our services.

More families, more communities need to know we exist, to do that we must raise our profile so that women know where to find us and how we can help.

We have summarised our strategy below. This will be our guide – for our strategic journey all of our decisions and our plans.

VISION

Our vision is a society where DVA is never tolerated or silenced, empowering women and children to live in safety, free from fear.

MISSION & PURPOSE

We provide a range of life saving and life changing supports empowering women and children on their journey to safety and recovery. We do this by:

- Providing accommodation and specialist domestic violence support services to families.
- Working with communities to educate and challenge attitudes to domestic violence through prevention and awareness raising.
- Campaigning and advocating for social change, legislation and government policy.

VALUES

Courage

Empathy

Empowerment

Hope

Integrity

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

Sustainable Funding

Organisation & People

Service Development

Profile & Brand

ENABLERS

People & Organisation

Our way of Working

Buildings & Spaces

Technology

Stakeholders

SDVS One Stop Shop

Our 'big idea' is about seeing how our service could be delivered differently, about how we can meet multiple needs in a single location. It's about putting our arms fully around the women and children we serve, building them up and empowering them in a supportive community hub that has everything they need.

We must start to provide a support space for women to start the healing process after the 'crisis'. We know that we could do more to break the cycle of DV by closing that gap and empowering women to make the decisions that are right for them and their children with access to all the supports and information that they need.

We believe that a Saoirse 'One stop shop' in the community could meet the needs of women and children in an integrated way – focusing not only on the immediate crisis but also on a longer term set of supports and a continuum of care.

We want there to be a place where a woman and her family could access many services and supports in a single location, close to transport and other ancillary community services and supports. We envisage providing:

- Connection spaces – for single women and families.

- Group Spaces for therapeutic work and training (English classes, life skills).
- A Shop (for women & children) with everything a woman might need to start to rebuild.
- Specialist DVA Therapeutic services – for women and children.
- Dedicated Legal Advisor on site.
- Children's spaces and supports – focusing on the hidden harm children experience in DV.
- A coffee shop and space to meet informally and feel supported.

This 'big idea' will only be possible if we continue to build on our strong foundations. We know that we must keep our focus and stay true to our vision and values. By focusing on our four strategic priorities we will over the next five years make progress towards our 'big idea'.



Strategic Priorities

Priority 1 – Sustainable Funding

To secure the future sustainability of the organisation by developing sustainable funding structures is a critical focus in this our new strategy. Without secure funding we cannot grow or develop in the way that we want to; we know that

we will need to take action to become more self-reliant, building partnerships and having more control over our income sources.

Why is it important?

To be a sustainable and effective organisation we must be funded and governed to the highest standards to meet the needs of women and children, not just today but into the future. This is important to:

- Ensure we become more self-reliant by having more control over our income sources.
- Be resilient in times of change and flux so we can respond and adjust quickly to shocks and changes.
- Ensure that SDVS is positioned to meet the needs for services that present in our work not just today but over the next five years.
- Be transparent and accountable in meeting our legislative and statutory obligations in how we are governed.

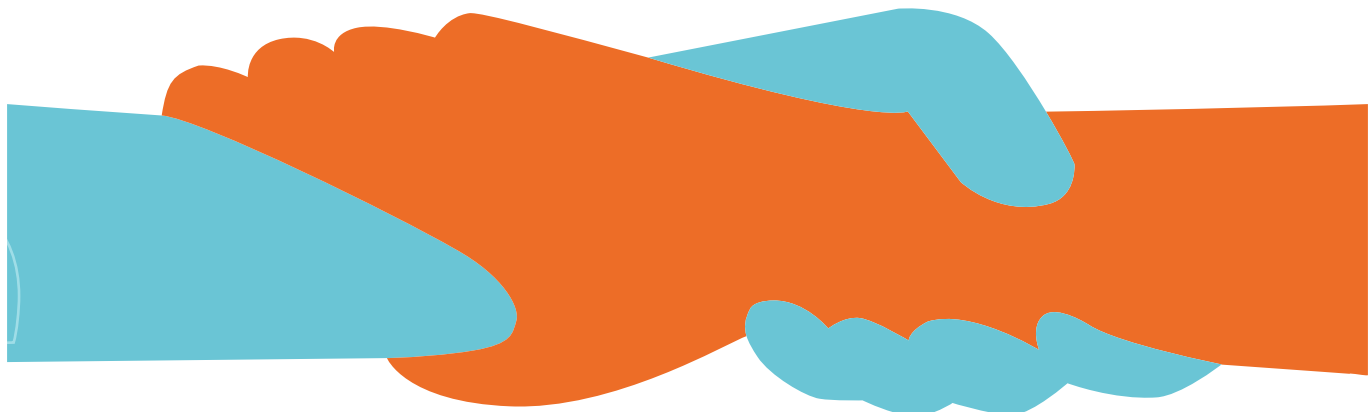


What are we trying to achieve?

- A **balanced mix of funding streams** – fundraising, core funding and philanthropy.
- **Sustainability** to ensure the continued growth of SDVS.

What will we do?

- Build relationships with new potential funders in order to diversify our funding streams to ensure the strategy goals can be implemented.
- Establish a fundraising sub-committee of the Board with specific annual targets.
- Develop and implement a new fundraising strategy aligned with our overall strategic plan.
- Employ a fundraiser/business development resource and a social media lead.
- Review the work and role of the Board to ensure there are robust structures in place for oversight.
- Explore the opening of a retail charity shop to supplement our income streams.



Priority 2 – Organisation and People

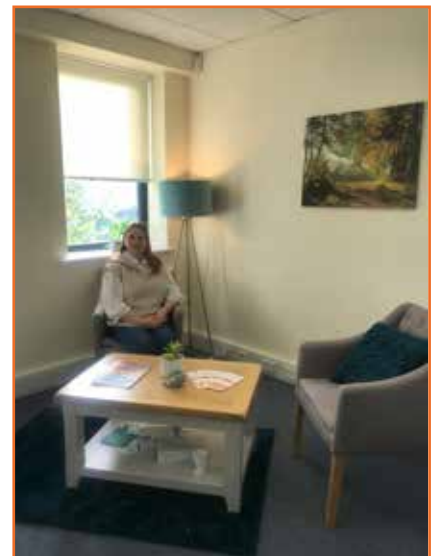
We know that to meet the needs of the many more women and children contacting us for support and increase the positive impact we need to have a resilient and well trained organisation. We are committed to investing in developing our own capacity and capability.

This will ensure we can continue to deliver a high quality set of services and supports to the women and children we work with while also maintaining a strong and healthy organisation.

Why is it important?

We have recognised the need to broaden, deepen and enhance the scope of services we provide in line with the national DGBSV strategy. This is important so that we can:

- Have the right people with the right skills in place to deliver our services.
- Ensure we are visible in the community as a credible specialist support agency who can contribute and inform community based approaches to addressing DV.
- Be transparent and accountable in meeting our legislative and statutory obligations in how we are governed.
- Meet the highest quality standards in how we do our work as a women and child centred organisation.



What are we trying to achieve

- **Improve internal communications and productivity** as a staff team.
- **Build on the skills base in our team through increased training and development** across all teams and programme areas to enable future growth and strategic focus.
- **A strong robust organisation** backed up with structures, policies and processes that support all our teams.
- **Embed the children's programme** across the organisation's work ensuring we uphold the voice of children and reflect their needs in our work.
- An **inclusive and diverse organisation** in how we are structured that can meet the needs of all the women and children we serve.

? What will we do?

- The board, in conjunction with CEO, to conduct a review of our management structure in order to ensure that it is appropriate for the implementation of this strategic plan, and the envisaged growth of the organisation over the next five years.
- Review the work and role of the Board to ensure there are robust structures in place for oversight.
- Review our organisational policies and benefits so that we remain an employer of choice.
- Consider staff retention initiatives to retain experience and knowledge in SDVS.
- Review and improve employee education programme including our commitment to continual professional development in responding to changing client needs.
- Review roles and responsibilities for all and consider recruiting for the following key positions.
 - o Outreach Childcare Worker.
 - o HR Manager.
 - o Policy and Research Officer .
 - o Housing Officer.
 - o Training Officer.
- Explore the possibility of introducing a Volunteer Programme – voluntary counselling hours etc.
- Enhance the scope of children's services e.g. designing / implementing a specialist DV childcare pillar and the provision of play and other creative therapies for children as part of a continuum of supports for children and young people.



Priority 3 –Service Development

We are committed to align with the Department of Justice ‘Zero Tolerance - Third National Strategy on Domestic, Sexual and Gender-Based Violence’. Our current plans are to expand refuge accommodation and we will further explore our approach to step down accommodation to ensure families have access to other options alongside refuge and safe houses.

Why is it important?

We know that the need is great, women and children are being turned away from DV services daily. We must increase and improve our capacity and infrastructure to be able to do more, to meet an ever growing need for services in line with the national DGBSV strategy. This is important so that we can:

- Respond to the increasing contacts from women and children in crisis situations.
- Work more effectively and efficiently in the way we deliver services, so that we can do more.
- Provide an appropriate workspace for our team so that they can do their best work.





What are we trying to achieve?

- **Creative solutions to supporting more women and children** despite the lack of accommodation.
- **Expanded refuge provision** meeting the needs presented by population growth, the changing demographic of Irish society and growing awareness of DV.
- Bring **outreach services closer to women and children** to continue to reduce accessibility barriers and ensure we are part of community supports.
- A **research informed** development of our services.
- **“Crisis to Recovery” model** of accommodation that meets the needs of women and children throughout their journey.



What will we do

- Implement Peer Support Groups as part of our Community and Outreach programming.
- Develop and roll out a full children's programme as a separate and core pillar of our work.
- Build a sensory room into each of our refuges.
- Consider after school and breakfast clubs.
- Review and improve our weekend service offering.
- Review our accommodation service to look at longer term accommodation options and step down as a core part of the offer.
- Develop a Research and Evaluation Programme to inform the development of our services.
- *Counselling services Specialist DVA Therapeutic services – for women and children.*

Priority 4 – Profile and Brand

We know we are part of a bigger movement working to eliminate DV. We have the unique position of being in a position to challenge the narrative by listening and bringing

the voices of women and children to everything we do. We know that through our work we can create change in individual families and at a societal level.

Why is it important?

Raising our profile will have multiple benefits. Firstly it will ensure that we are recognised as the expert provider of DVA services by bodies we want to influence to effect change. Secondly, by raising our profile and building awareness we build trust - the more familiar SDVS becomes to government and other funding agencies, the more likely they are to see SDVS as a worthy and trusted recipient of increased resources / funding when and where available. Finally and critically, raising our profile will ensure we are visible and therefore accessible to those [women and children] who need our services.



What are we trying to achieve

- Increase **our profile so we are known** to women, funders, volunteers, local community groups / agencies and state services.
- **Increased awareness of who we are and the services we provide.**
- **A clear position as advocates** for the women and children we support.



What will we do

- We will implement a new Brand and Communication strategy (including social media) over the next five years aligned with our overall strategic plan.
- Look for a Brand Ambassador who will represent the work of SDVS and attract profile and funding .
- DV awareness campaign for West Dublin.
- We will collaborate with other agencies to build strategic alliances with key players who to raise our profile and further advocate for women experiencing DV.
- Our newly recruited Digital Marketing and Fundraising Officer will fully support the delivery of our strategy.



Strategic Enablers

This section identifies the strategic enablers – or inputs – we draw upon to support the delivery of our Strategic Plan. These enablers will be critical to realising the priorities in our strategic plan efficiently and effectively.

People &
Organisation

Our way
of Working

Buildings
& Spaces

Technology

Stakeholders

1. People & Organisation: This is the core of who we are and what we do, and it encompasses our Board, staff team, and ultimately the women and children we work with and work for. A sustainable and vibrant organisation is vital to ensure we deliver on our goals.

2. Our way of working: The Saoirse Way is a recognised way of working that allows us to deliver high quality, trauma informed services to support women and children. Continuing to focus on the quality of service we deliver through staff induction and training will enable the achievement of our strategic goals.

3. Buildings & Space: Safe, secure and welcoming spaces that reflect our ethos and approach will create the conditions for us to deliver a high quality set of services.

4. Technology: this will assist us to be more effective in how we do our work enabling us to respond quickly to new needs.

5. Stakeholders & External Environment: Our work is about relationships with women and children; those who fund us; those who make decisions about policy and legislation. Being able to interact and work proactively with stakeholders and respond to environmental changes will ensure we are a sustainable and strong organisation.





Saoirse Housing Association CLG trading as Saoirse Domestic Violence Services, is a registered charity (Charity Reg. No. 20058296); Companies Registration Office number 390548; Revenue CHY number 16281.



An Roinn Leanaí, Comhionannais,
Míchumais, Lánpháirtíochta agus Óige
Department of Children, Equality,
Disability, Integration and Youth



An Roinn Dlí agus Cirt
Department of Justice

TÚSLA

An Ghníomhaireacht um
Leanaí agus an Teaghlach
Child and Family Agency