



*Meath Women's Refuge
& Support Services*

Strategic Plan
2018 - 2020

ABOUT US

MWRSS is an NGO and a local domestic violence support agency with a catchment area of Co. Meath. We are working in the community for 30 years and have a strong track record of supporting women and children experiencing domestic violence. We work closely with a wide range of stakeholders to fulfil our mission statement and seek innovative responses to domestic violence in Co. Meath and Ireland through our membership of Safe Ireland. We are clear that domestic violence is a violation of human rights and through our work we seek to vindicate the rights of women and children affected by domestic violence.

THE ROLE OF MWRSS

- To provide a place of safety where women can take time to look at the options available to ensure their future safety.
- To support and assist women in dealing with the impact of the abuse on themselves and their children through the wide range of services and supports provided.
- To recognise and care for the physical, emotional and educational development needs of the children who attend the service.
- To respect and, where necessary, foster parent/child relationships.
- To offer support, relevant and accurate information to any person in relation to violence against women
- To raise awareness of violence against women and the impact it has on the wider society

MWRSS VISION

To have a society where violence against women is no longer tolerated and where women are truly equal. To contribute towards creating communities in which women and children live violence and abuse free lives.

MWRSS MISSION STATEMENT

Meath Women's Refuge and Support Services works to ensure the safety of women and children who are experiencing all forms of domestic abuse in Co. Meath through the provision of high quality supports and services that are women centred and evidence based.

MWRSS VALUES

- Women and child centred – this means that all of our responses are led by the needs of women and children experiencing domestic violence. Being safety focused is central.
- Equality and human rights – MWRSS response is rights based. We recognise that everyone has equal rights and aim to ensure that all women have equal access, participation and outcomes from our services regardless of their social status or identity.
- Empowerment – this includes responding with empathy and compassion and demonstrating respect for women's decisions and promoting the agency of women
- Trust and integrity – Maintaining confidentiality and being honest and open about our work and how we respond is crucial to ensuring the trust of women, children and all stakeholders and the integrity of MWRSS.

INTRODUCTION & HISTORY

Meath Women's Refuge and Support Services [MWRSS] is a non-governmental organisation providing a range of services to women and children experiencing domestic violence in County Meath and to the wider community. MWRSS was set up by a group of women in Navan in 1987 and like many other domestic violence services, it is an autonomous organisation managed by a voluntary Board of Directors and is a registered charity and company limited by guarantee.

Meath Women's Refuge and Support Services began as a grassroots women's organisation in 1987. Emerging from the Navan Women's Forum, the group was established by a group of local women who worked on a voluntary basis to research the needs of women in the area in the 1980's. Discovering that domestic violence was one of four key issues affecting women in Meath, this group of women went on to research best practice responses to women's experience of intimate partner violence, mobilise community and institutional support and established a refuge in 1987.

The refuge was initially staffed on a voluntary basis but such was the need for its service, that it became clear by 1990 that securing ongoing funding was an imperative. Meath Women's Refuge secured ongoing funding from Meath County Council and the HSE and was able to embark on a significant re-development of the refuge with a grant from the Department of Environment. A publication about the organisation marking our 20th birthday shows that in this time we grew from a small grassroots organisation to a professional service with a comprehensive range of services for women and children at risk of domestic violence in County Meath.

The organisation also delivers education and awareness activities at a community level and seeks to influence positive change in society towards our stated vision of zero tolerance of violence against women and children. In 2017 we celebrated 30 years of our work in Meath.



CURRENT ORGANISATIONAL CAPACITY

In 2017, the organisation conducted a strategic review in preparation for this plan and identified several crucial issues which impact on the organisational capacity to be effective in our work in the context of a new strategic plan. These issues are summarised below:

- The organisation experienced a 19.88% or just under one fifth, cut to its funding base between the years 2009-2014. This included a 16% cut to our core funds in this period.
- The demands on the outreach service¹ have grown exponentially since it began its work in 2008 with 80 women to 313 new women engaged in 2016 with no additional staff compliment. Given the levels of court work in 2016 alone, 31% of 1,208 contacts with 313 women were court accompaniments, 20% were support to women to complete court paperwork and 21% were supporting applications for court orders, there is limited time available for one to one supports, follow up support and risk assessment, safety planning and the development of new programmes or awareness raising, areas of work that are equally important. The work of domestic violence services is increasingly happening in the community and on an outreach basis so a capacity to grow this work is vital over the next three years.
- The organisation currently has no dedicated children's worker and this impacts on our capacity to deliver innovative developmental programmes to children who are affected by domestic violence in their family.
- Emergency refuge accommodation: cuts to funding mean that our staff compliment on refuge duty is limited after 5pm. The ideal situation would be two staff on duty at all times during the day until 10pm at night including weekends. This would facilitate more face to face time, key working and advocacy supports and would also assist us in meeting the more complex needs that are increasingly presenting in our work.
- Counselling services: Counselling and other therapeutical supports is a key element of recovery and healing for women and children affected by domestic violence. Since the shift of domestic violence services into Tusla, this separate funding no longer exists. This impedes a woman's recovery and her children's and impacts on her wellbeing, reducing the positive impact that a domestic violence support service could potentially have. Ensuring that continuous and secure funding is available for counselling and other therapeutical services are key over the next three years.
- through the completion of a recent feasibility study, the need for a new purpose build refuge and support services building was identified.

¹ Outreach service works with women in the community who experience domestic violence, they provide one to one support, attend court, undertake court paperwork and deliver a number of peer to peer support programmes

STRATEGIC REVIEW & THE DEVELOPMENT OF THIS PLAN

The process of developing this plan included the following actions:

- We undertook a review of our previous strategy, conscious that we had not developed one since 2011, and we recruited an external consultant with expertise in the field who undertook a desk top review,
- Facilitated sessions² were held with staff, board members and women we work with and a survey was undertaken with key stakeholders relevant to our work.
- This consultation process informed the basis for stage two of our strategic planning process. In order to develop a new plan, we explored and reflected on the national and EU context in which we are currently working and potential future developments in terms of current strategies and frameworks that would impact on our work over the next three years and these are documented at the end of this plan.
- Finally, a review of the above processes undertaken and further strategic planning sessions with staff and the board has culminated in this new strategic plan.



2 Report of a Strategic Review MWRSS, June 2017 (Niamh Wilson)

NATIONAL & EU CONTEXT

EU policy contexts

There are two key policy documents at EU level that have implications for MWRSS's strategic direction and delivery of its mission and goals. These are the Istanbul Convention and the Victims' Rights Directive.

Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (The Istanbul Convention)³

The Council of Europe have agreed a set of comprehensive standards to prevent and combat violence against women and domestic violence. The convention was adopted by the Council of Europe Committee of Ministers on 7 April 2011. Countries signing up to the Convention obligate themselves to fully address violence against women and domestic violence in all its forms, to take measures to prevent violence against women, protect its victims and prosecute the perpetrators. Ireland signed the Convention in 2015 and has committed to ratification. To ratify the convention, the Irish State must increase investment in a number of key areas covered by the Convention.

The Convention sets standards across all aspects of service provision, prevention work and criminal and civil justice remedies. Many of these are relevant for MWRSS current and future work. For example, Article 23 states:

Article 23 – Shelters

Parties shall take the necessary legislative or other measures to provide for the setting-up of appropriate, easily accessible shelters in sufficient numbers to provide safe accommodation for and to reach out pro-actively to victims, especially women and their children.

The EU Victims' Rights Directive

The EU Victims' Rights Directive is a binding legal document for all EU members. The directive sets out minimum rights for victims, wherever they are in the EU. There are a range of provisions in the Bill requiring Gardaí and other legal practitioners to shift to a victim centred response. Ireland brought the provisions of the directive into Irish law in 2015. Recognition of and referral to victims' rights organisations by Gardaí, Court staff and other legal personnel is one of the key provisions under the bill.

³ The Istanbul Convention has led to the Istanbul Action Plan which is a plan the government must implement in order to be meet the standards of the convention as it has signed up to it. It includes actions on refuge supports, the judicial system, supports for children in families where domestic violence occurs

Irish policy and funding contexts⁴

The primary policies and strategies in Ireland that have implications for MWRSS work are:

Cosc Second National Strategy on the Prevention of Domestic, Sexual and Gender-based violence

This document outlines a whole of government approach focused on three high level goals:

- Change societal attitudes to support a reduction in domestic and sexual violence
- Improve supports available to victims and survivors and hold perpetrators to account
- Implementation of monitoring and data collection measures

Partnership with the voluntary and community sector is emphasised as an important factor in the implementation of this strategy. The second Cosc Strategy draws many of its priorities from the Istanbul Convention. It also incorporates actions that are driven by the introduction of the Victims of Crime Bill 2015 and recommendations that were included in the Garda Inspectorate Crime Investigation report. A challenge in the Cosc National Strategy is that no additional resources have been committed to its implementation.

Other relevant policies and legislative changes that are relevant to the work of MWRSS include national housing policy, An Garda Siochana Policy on Domestic Violence, the HSE policy on Domestic, Sexual and Gender –based violence, the Children and Family Relationships Bill, the Children First Act 2015, the Domestic Violence Bill 2017 and the Victims of Crime Bill 2017.⁵

⁴ The National Agencies consulted for this strategic review were Tusla, Cosc, MOVE and Safe Ireland.

⁵ These policies and acts will have implications for the work of MWRSS over the next three years and have been taken into account in this plan in terms of the goals and objectives.

CURRENT CONTEXT & ENVIRONMENT IN WHICH WE WORK

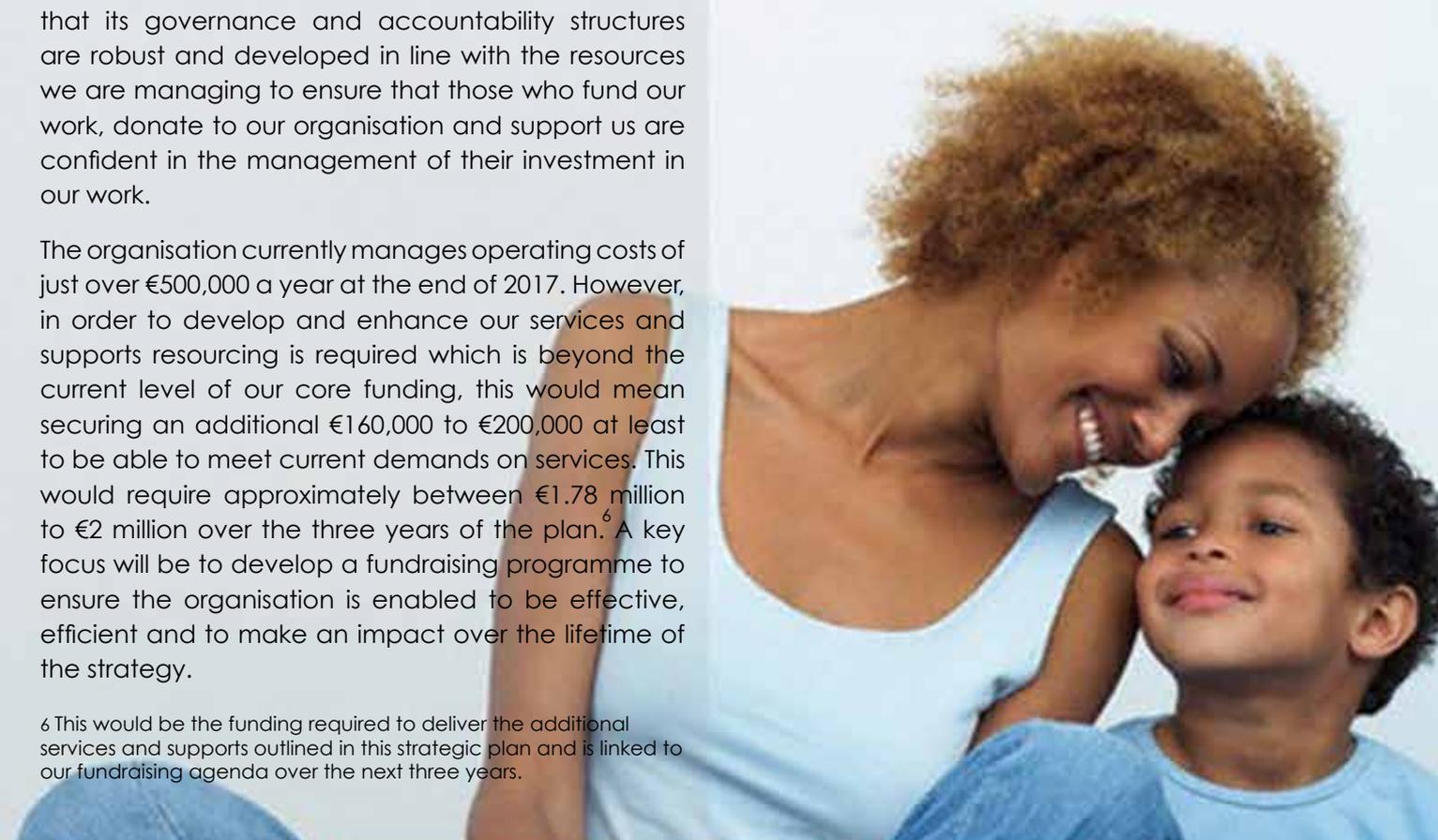
MWRSS are part of a network of organisations that provide domestic violence services in Ireland. We have a county wide remit and work with a range of stakeholders including Tusla social work services, department of social protection local office, Meath County Council and other statutory, community and voluntary organisations in the county.

Our core funding is provided by Tusla, the Child and Family Agency through an SLA agreement with the Domestic, Sexual and Gender based Violence Programme and we work in collaboration with other domestic violence services also, including Safe Ireland, the umbrella body for domestic violence services. This strategic plan takes cognisance of the current context but also as cited earlier a broad number of policy and legislative developments which will impact on our work over the next three years.

We will work through this strategy to ensure the organisation can maintain and grow its resources in line with the needs presented to us to be positioned to support the women and children we work with into the future. To do this, the organisation will ensure that its governance and accountability structures are robust and developed in line with the resources we are managing to ensure that those who fund our work, donate to our organisation and support us are confident in the management of their investment in our work.

The organisation currently manages operating costs of just over €500,000 a year at the end of 2017. However, in order to develop and enhance our services and supports resourcing is required which is beyond the current level of our core funding, this would mean securing an additional €160,000 to €200,000 at least to be able to meet current demands on services. This would require approximately between €1.78 million to €2 million over the three years of the plan.⁶ A key focus will be to develop a fundraising programme to ensure the organisation is enabled to be effective, efficient and to make an impact over the lifetime of the strategy.

⁶ This would be the funding required to deliver the additional services and supports outlined in this strategic plan and is linked to our fundraising agenda over the next three years.



STRATEGIC PLAN 2018 - 2020

Strategic Priorities of MWRSS 2018-2020

We have identified three strategic priority goals which are:

- **Delivery of High Quality evidence-based Services and Development Supports for Women and Children at risk of or experiencing domestic violence**
 - **Development of a New Purpose-Built Refuge Building and Ancillary services**
 - **Ensuring the organisation is governed to the highest standards and that we are accountable to our funders, the public and the women and children we work with**

Goal 1 - Delivery of High Quality evidence-based Services and Development Supports for Women and Children at risk of or experiencing domestic violence

MWRSS aim to provide a range of services to women and children experiencing domestic violence that are sustainable and responsive to women and children's needs. This will be actioned through individual, group and other flexible approaches that maximises the safety of women and children.

Objectives

- Board will agree an optimum level of staffing complement for the organisation and the specific staff positions that need to be resourced and filled following a review.
- Board will identify potential funders and the level of resources required to meet the identified needs and will seek to develop strategic funding partnerships in this regard.
- Organisation will continue to provide a broad spectrum of supports which are needs led, women and child centred services for those at risk of or experiencing domestic violence
- Evaluation processes will be enhanced in order to capture the impact of the work of the organisation with women and children and provide an evidence base to support further service development requirements
- Organisation will work towards adopting the nationally agreed principles and standards for Domestic Violence services developed by Safe Ireland by the end of the life time of this plan
- Continuous professional development will take place in line with identified training needs for all staff will be implemented over the life time of the strategy linked to our key roles and responsibilities e.g. child protection, risk assessment and safety planning, data collection and data protection, analysis and understanding of domestic violence in Ireland etc.

KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS (KPI)

- The ratio of staff to women and children will be increased across refuge and outreach service over the lifetime of the strategy to meet the needs of women and children in the case of refuge it will be two workers at all times between 9 am and 10pm. In the case of outreach, the ratio of worker to women in court will be reduced and the number of one to one sessions to women in the community will increase
- Women will access one to one support that responds to their individual needs. Risk assessment, risk management and safety planning will constitute part of the one to one support women receive and will be measured using the appropriate tools
- Funding will be accessed for a children's worker and a development programme e.g. play therapy identified
- Identification of a three-year funding stream for counselling services for women and play therapy for children
- Women seeking the support of MWRSS will receive a prompt response and this will be reflected in the quantitative and qualitative evaluation processes undertaken and published. Feedback from women will indicate that:
 - Women feel that MWRSS responded well to their safety needs
 - Women will feel that they got the time they needed in one to one support and the support group programmes.
 - Women will feel they had time to address the issues of importance to themThis feedback will inform the future planning and development of supports and services to women and children.
- Board and Staff Review of Quality Standards Framework developed by Safe Ireland and plan developed for implementation of same over 3 years completed
- Training plan framework developed with timeframes and training themes, training plan reviewed at the yearend in each of the three years

EXPECTED OUTCOMES & IMPACTS FOR STRATEGIC GOAL 1

- Women and children at risk of/ experiencing domestic violence will receive the required supports and services to meet their needs which will be demonstrated through evaluative processes.
- MWRSS will employ a full-time children's worker with programmes suitable to the specific needs of children
- MWRSS will have a full complement of outreach services including follow up and aftercare support for women and children. One additional full-time staff member will be added to the outreach team
- Refuge provision more effective and efficient with additional accompaniment supports for women in refuge, swifter implementation of care plans, additional key working supports and stronger interagency working
- Dedicated therapeutic services with a specific focus on domestic violence will be provided to women and children who access the organisation
- Quality standards embedded into core practice for all workers in MWRSS
- Training plan implemented with staff competencies across a range of areas strengthened

Goal 2 - Development of a new purpose-built refuge building and ancillary services and supports

MWRSS will provide custom built refuge accommodation that enhances and promotes the safety, privacy and dignity of women and children experiencing domestic violence.

Key Objectives

- Establish a subcommittee of the Board to oversee and direct the development of a new refuge facility and service centre.
- Identify potential funding to employ a project coordinator/architect on a temporary contract to assist in the development of a CAS application and to develop a building plan design
- Be project ready at the end of the first half of this strategy ready to begin the build
- Develop a fundraising strategy to resource elements of the build that require additional funding over the next two years
- Building work to be completed by the end of the lifetime of this strategy December 2020.

KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS (KPI)

- The completed feasibility study will be circulated to key funders and potential supporters of the project
- Greenfield site will be identified and sourced for purpose built emergency refuge accommodation
- Resource plan to fund the build will be put in place with additional funding and fundraising initiatives identified
- CAS application will be made to resource the building of six individual residential units for women and children
- Design plans will be drawn up for a high spec new build
- Project manager, architect and contractor will be contracted to undertake the work
- Tendering and procurement processes for the new build completed
- Contractor to complete the work contracted
- All works completed in line with tender agreement

EXPECTED OUTCOMES & IMPACTS FOR STRATEGIC GOAL 2

- New purpose-built refuge and ancillary services building completed to the highest standards of design and build
- Individual units for women and their children will provide support for family life and the continuing safety of residents of the refuge.
- A flexible and open communal space will facilitate peer to peer support and reduce isolation and increase access to support services
- The health and safety of women, children and workers will be enhanced through the provision of increased personal space. This will result in decreased levels of stress amongst all.
- Seamless services will be delivered to residents and non-residents in a building jointly attached or adjacent to the refuge.

Goal 3 - Ensuring the organisation is governed to the highest standards and that we are accountable to our funders, the public and the women and children we work with

MWRSS consistently attains the highest possible standards ensuring efficiency, effectiveness and accountability in all areas of work, giving confidence to all key stakeholders.

Key Objectives

- Board to establish a governance sub group who will oversee and guide MWRSS in becoming fully compliant with the Governance Code
- Audit undertaken of MWRSS current governance structures, policies and processes will be carried out and made available to the sub group by the first half of 2018
- Governance sub group will identify goals, actions and timeframes for the full adoption of the Governance Code to the full Board for consideration and agreement
- MWRSS will invest in a management reporting system and data collection system that is fit for purpose and efficient.
- MWRSS will ensure that its financial reporting systems and documentary reporting systems are in line with best practice
- Board will develop a fundraising plan to grow and diversify its resources

KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS (KPI)

- Completed review of audit by the end of 2018 on internal policy gaps
- All sub groups of the board functional by end of first half of 2018 with agreed terms of reference/roles
- Plan developed and implemented with a timeframe and policies named between June 2018 to June 2020
- Review and identification of reporting systems to meet the needs of the organisation and funding for same by end of 2018
- Reports to funders including financial and otherwise completed in line with requirements set out by funders
- Fundraising actions implemented in line with action plan on an annual basis

EXPECTED OUTCOMES AND IMPACTS FOR STRATEGIC GOAL 3

- Audit of policies completed and timeline for the development of new policies and review of old policies identified
- Sub groups functional and reporting on work into the main board as and when required
- MWRSS signed up to the Governance Code by end of the lifetime of the strategy
- Robust accountability and reporting mechanisms in place to meet the needs of the organisation and funders
- Organisation appropriately funded to meets its aims and objectives

POLICY WORK & POLICY DEVELOPMENT

MWRSSS are members of Safe Ireland, the national social change agency working on Domestic Violence and we contribute to policy development and policy responses through our membership of this umbrella organisation. MWRSS will keep up to date with policy developments and will be proactive in preparing for changes in the external environment, including policy and funding changes that will impact on our work. We will continue to work with local policy makers advocating for change in our role as a local domestic violence agency.

IMPLEMENTING THE NEW STRATEGIC PLAN

This plan will be implemented through an annual operational action plan developed over each of the three years of its life time based on costed budgets. The three strategic goals and objectives will be implemented through a series of actions identified, with performance indicators, identified resources and staffing. A separate financial resource plan will be developed linked to the strategic plan which will identify the additional resources and potential funders required to implement the three goals. This plan will be monitored and reviewed over the life time of the strategy.

MONITORING, OVERSIGHT AND EVALUATION OF THE STRATEGIC PLAN

MWRSS works to several voluntary and regulatory frameworks which are reflected in our day to day work in terms of organisational management, work with women and children, housing, financial reporting and health and safety. We are state funded in the main by Tusla Child and Family Agency through a commissioning agreement and this sets out our obligations and service level requirements in terms of reporting all activity including operational and financial information.

As part of the monitoring of this strategic plan, unexpected events or developments that may impact in a significant manner will require an immediate review of the plan and this will take place in a timely manner under the guidance of the board of directors.

At the beginning of each year, the action plan from the previous year will be reviewed along with the resource plan to explore gaps in implementation. A midterm review of the strategy will take place in June 2019. This strategy expires in December 2020.





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