

**DVR**

**2023**

**ANNUAL**

**REPORT**

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

2023 was an extremely busy year for all the services provided by DVR. Consolidation, collaborations, and creating a response to the ever-increasing demand of women looking for support, including counselling, support and information sessions, crisis support, peer group support, and educational support programs, were standout features of the work.

In 2023, DVR saw a significant increase in the number of service users and clients. 151 new service users and 289 clients in total sought our services. Over 50 women participated in our peer support coffee mornings, group activities, educational support programs, Paths to Freedom, and Parenting in the Aftermath of Domestic Abuse. Our counselling support workers provided 1613 support sessions, with over 125 clients receiving this service monthly. 951 emergency calls and texts were responded to during 2023. This growth is a testament to the increasing reach and impact of our services.

DVR carried out 243 advocacy accompaniments in 2023, a substantial increase from 2022. This reflects the service's hard work in educating clients about their legal rights and the work done through various public awareness campaigns regarding changes to DV law. The accompaniments involved court preparation, attendance at courts and with the Gardai, follow up safety planning, and assistance with Coercive Control and victim impact statements. Court accompaniment was provided at the following court houses in 2022: Galway City, Derrynea, Tuam, Loughrea, Clifden and Ballinasloe.

In 2023, DVR saw a significant rise in older women seeking support, representing over 36% of all clients. Our services in Irish-speaking communities also expanded, with staff members organizing well-attended community events in Irish in the Gaeltacht areas. This expansion reflects our commitment to providing inclusive and diverse services.

The expansion of DVR activities created many opportunities to raise domestic abuse awareness and present training and education. DVR continued to foster excellent relationships with the numerous statutory and non-statutory agencies tasked with responding to domestic abuse daily.

Several key collaborations took place in 2023. These included a presentation to Gardai in HQ Renmore, the participation in the development of a Tusla App, a Crime Prevention Officer meeting on site in DVR, a scoping of court advocacy with COPE, awareness raising with ALONE, the onsite visit from the Galway West Traveller Project and the translation of appropriate materials for Ukrainian Immigrants are examples of specific initiatives. The delivery of educational inputs to secondary and third level institutions continued as did DVRs participation in several health and well-being community initiatives around the county including the Islands.

DVR was also delighted to attend an Aras Garden Party hosted by the President and engaged with Mairead Farrell TD and Catherine Connolly TD in promoting the services.

DVR continued to strengthen its governance with an expansion of the Board in 2023. Accountancy, Irish language proficiency, rural development expertise, standards in policy and procedure, IT proficiency and fundraising expertise were welcome additions to the Board's capacity. Regular Staff sub-committee and Financial sub-committee meetings and 12 full-board meetings ensured excellent governance.

In 2023, DVR received the widest statutory and non-statutory financial support, including a one-off €30,000 bequest. This created stability for the service and allowed it to apply our expertise and develop new directions in the work including strategic planning for the comprehensive development of the services already in place.

A big thank you to the dedicated staff team at DVR who worked tirelessly to ensure women's safety and promote general service in the community. And a big thank you to the voluntary board of directors who worked ceaselessly to ensure professional oversight and governance throughout the year.

## **INTRODUCTION TO DVR**

Founded in 1998, Domestic Violence Response (DVR) is a feminist organisation that provides a range of supports to women and their children who experience domestic violence. DVR is a rural-based community led service, responding to the needs of women and children impacted by domestic abuse and works to devise long-term responses to the issue in Galway city and county. A limited company and registered charity, our service is informed by a gender-based analysis of violence against women as well as community development principles. Our aim is to provide services that are client-led, needs-based, consistent, professional, holistic and delivered to service users as a right and in a spirit of solidarity.

We have created a dynamic, innovative responsive service for Galway city and county. Our success in providing a high-quality service is evidenced by nominations for its professionalism and expertise by service users and community groups for the Mayor's Awards in Galway City in 2015, with DVR being the outright winner for outstanding work in the Community Facilities category at the Cathaoirleach's Awards for County Galway in 2019.



## THE AIMS AND OBJECTIVES OF DVR

DVR is informed by current legislation on domestic abuse including the *Istanbul Convention*, the *3rd National Strategy on Domestic, Sexual and Gender-Based Violence* and the *National Strategy for Women and Girls 2017-2020: Creating a Better Society for All*.

The key aims of DVR are as follows:

- To meet women's practical and emotional support needs through all stages of dealing with an abusive relationship.
- To meet women's safety and support needs with a range of interventions, before, during and after they leave the relationship, as appropriate.
- To provide service users with appropriate information and initiating referrals to agencies that can help.
- To deliver a range of specific interventions which respect diversity and take into account service users' nationality and ethnic group.
- To provide an opportunity to service users to avail of peer support, empowerment and wellness through our Educational Support Programmes.
- To facilitate the safety needs of children by implementation of DVR Safeguarding policy.
- To network with other agencies and promote an increased understanding of domestic abuse by providing training to these groups.
- To ensure a high level of service user involvement in the development of programmes, policies and governance.

The key objectives of DVR are as follows:

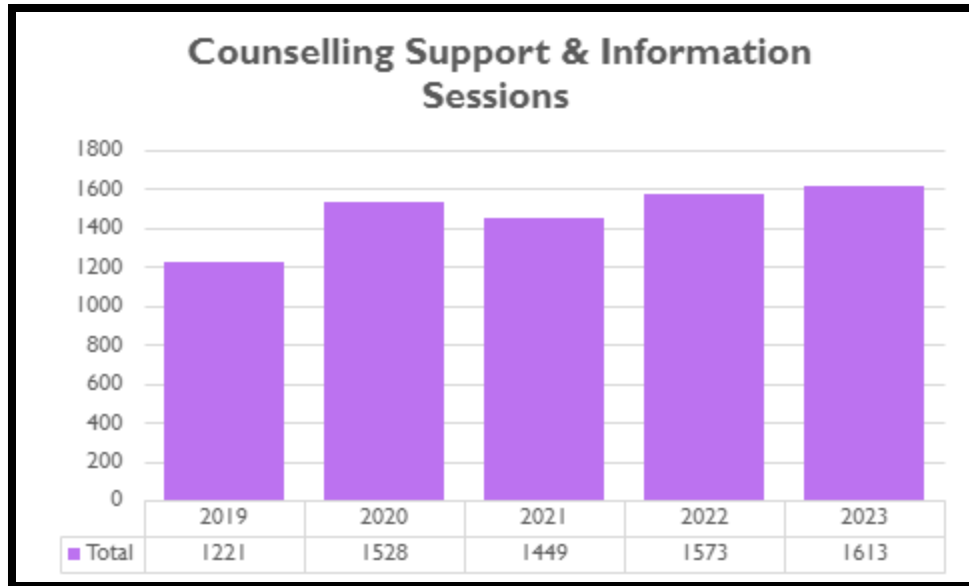
- Objective 1: To provide a range of highly skilled interventions that meet the complex and diverse needs of women who present to our service at all stages of need.
- Objective 2: To Build collaborative relationships and links with key stakeholders, locally, regionally, and nationally.
- Objective 3: To contribute to national policy on domestic abuse.
- Objective 4: To build awareness of domestic violence and the profile of DVR.
- Objective 5: To ensure organisational development and sustainability.

## SERVICE PROVISION FOR WOMEN IN 2023

2023	New Clients	Return Clients	Admin & calls/ texts from clients	Emergency Calls / Texts / From Clients	Scheduled Telephone Support Calls In Lieu of F2F	F2F	Total Appcs	Total Acc'ments	Solicitor	Court	Garda	Other	Missed Calls	Total Indiv Clients
January	14	91	583	56	65	70	135	17	0	13	1	3	65	105
February	15	112	720	116	61	74	135	19	1	13	1	4	60	127
March	10	100	599	48	54	68	122	27	1	19	0	7	75	110
April	12	98	540	67	55	84	139	20	1	14	1	4	80	110
May	19	112	623	121	68	81	149	25	3	15	3	4	61	131
June	15	108	758	122	46	97	143	27	0	18	5	4	68	123
July	10	94	511	69	26	73	99	16	0	15	1	0	41	104
August	20	93	550	44	38	97	135	8	0	4	0	4	41	113
September	10	109	733	86	33	96	129	19	0	12	4	3	59	119
October	10	119	948	83	48	135	183	29	3	20	5	1	68	129
November	13	127	985	97	45	113	158	28	0	25	3	0	85	140
December	3	94	506	42	23	63	86	8	0	7	1	0	54	97
<b>Total</b>	151		8056	951	562	1051	1613	243	9	175	25	34	757	289

### 1. Counselling Support and Information Service for women

One of the most important roles for DVR is to create a safe, confidential space, where a relationship of trust can be established to deal effectively with domestic abuse. 1613 support sessions were provided by our support workers to service users in 2023 which was a modest increase on the previous year. Overall, the demand for this service was steady, and used by women who were in relationships that were abusive, women who were leaving and in crisis and women who were experiencing post separation abuse. Counselling support workers are counsellors or pre-accredited counsellors who provide initial assessment with each new client, explore immediate danger, devise safety plans and thereafter, continue to work with service users, exploring the impacts of domestic violence on them and their families. Information on coping strategies, self-care, perpetrator tactics, types of abuse, parenting issues and healthy relationship dynamics are covered in these sessions. Due to their traumatic experiences of domestic violence, many victims/survivors have specific additional needs and may experience depression and PTSD for example.



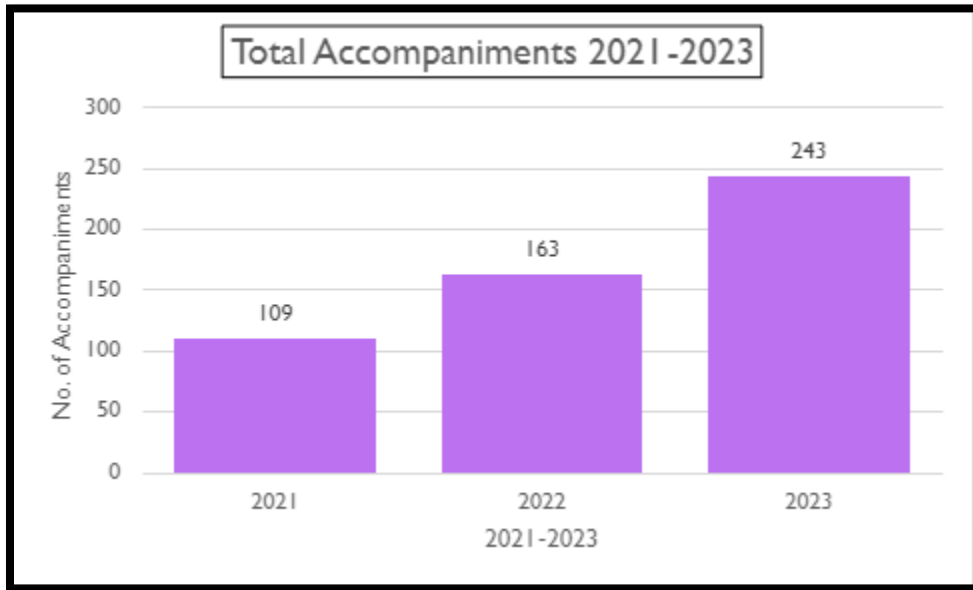
## 2. Advocacy Accompaniment Service

It is widely accepted that domestic abuse requires a multi-agency response and that the legal system, both family law and criminal law, must be an integral part of this. However, for many victims/survivors of domestic violence, the legal system itself remains a daunting, hostile and confusing place. Without appropriate specialised advocacy, many women’s experiences of domestic abuse and their specific needs of protection, prevention and support get lost. Advocates from DVR are highly trained and provide an essential liaison, buffer and contact between the women experiencing domestic abuse and the legal system. The immediate benefit arising from an in-court presence is the reduction of some of the unintended harms such as traumatisation, re-traumatisation and secondary victimisation, associated with attending court. The presence of support from our advocates also reduces attrition rates and assists clients to persist with their engagement with the legal system. The advocacy service is partially funded by the Commission for the Support of Victims of Crime and is provided by dedicated DVR advocacy outreach workers in Galway city and county.

243 advocacy accompaniments were carried out by DVR in 2023 which is a very significant rise from numbers from 2022, encountering an increase of 40%. This reflects the hard work of the service is educating clients of their legal rights, and the work done in various public awareness campaigns of changes to DV law. Court accompaniment was provided at the following court houses: Galway City, Derrynea, Tuam, Loughrea, Clifden and Ballinasloe in 2023. 72% of these



appointments were Court accompaniments. The rest were made up of advocacy accompaniments to solicitors/Legal Aid, Gardaí, Departments of Housing and Social Protection, Community Welfare Officers, Social Welfare Offices and Tusla, and the vital work of preparing a client to face the courts.



### 3. Telephone Support

Telephone support is available Monday to Friday from 9.30am to 4.30pm. This confidential support is operated by the organisation to provide help, information, listening, advice, support and/or counselling to those who call. Typically, this service deals with the information, support or safety needs of callers who directly or indirectly experience domestic abuse. 951 emergency calls/texts were received during 2023. These included calls from first-time service users looking for immediate support and return service users who required emotional and practical support.

## 4. Educational Support Programmes

DVR has worked for many years to facilitate women's groups, with a focus on exploring domestic abuse, self-development, personal resilience and healthy relationships. Specific programmes devised and delivered by DVR include:

- Paths to Freedom
- Assertiveness Post-Separation
- Exploring Healthy Relationships
- Estrangement and Loss in the Context of Domestic Abuse

Two programmes were delivered in 2023. Paths to Freedom, and Parenting in the Aftermath of Domestic Abuse. Paths to Freedom is a programme designed for women who have left their abusive relationship and are beginning to rebuild their lives. Parenting in the Aftermath of Domestic Abuse is a programme which promotes child welfare/ parenting and creates an improved understanding of how domestic abuse impacts on child welfare and increases access to community resources including Tusla and opportunities which support positive parenting.

In 2023 DVR continued with a hybrid of in-person and remote programmes funded by the SSE and Galway Roscommon Education and Training Board (GRETB).

Paths To Freedom and Parenting in The Aftermath of Domestic Abuse programmes took place on successive Thursdays Between January and February and Parenting in the Aftermath of Domestic Abuse ran between October and December 2023. Up to thirty women participated in these programmes which have been evaluated and shown to create solidarity, increase resilience and understanding, provide peer support, decrease isolation, and offer educational inputs to avail of peer support. These are pre-training courses and afford women further opportunities in gaining access to education and employment.

## 5. Peer Support Activities

In addition to the above programmes, DVR ensures that peer support activities are available and to this end organises a Zoom monthly support meeting and coffee morning.

## INTERAGENCY COLLABORATION

Women who are seeking help to escape domestic abuse and improvements to their safety often have a myriad of complex and intersecting needs, involving many different agencies. Of note in 2023 are the following specific interagency initiatives:

- Interagency referrals were received from Social Workers, Gardaí, GPs, Counsellors, Galway Rape Crisis Centre, Women's Aid and Family Resource Centres (FRC).
- Interagency referrals were made to specialist support services including Sonas Dublin, ALONE, Adapt House, Mayo Women's Support Services, Inchicore Dublin FRC and Clare Haven House.
- Specific interagency work through Irish in South West Connemara with Tusla staff.
- Specific interagency work about the services we provide for older women.

## COLLABORATIONS AND PUBLIC AWARENESS ACTIVITIES 2023

- **Presentation to Gardai in HQ Renmore**

In February 2023, DVR gave a presentation at Galway Garda HQ to 8 Sergeants and 1 Inspector from across Co. Galway. The aim of this was two-fold: to introduce DVR to the Gardai and provide information about who we are and what we do; and, to form collaborative relationships and establish key contacts within our local Gardai so we can more effectively support our clients who require the assistance of the criminal justice system.

- **App development in 2023**

DVR worked in collaboration with a number of services including Tusla, Gardaí, Amach, Cope Galway, University of Galway, Galway Rural Development, Men's Aid among others to develop an app for women, men and children who are suffering from domestic violence in the home. This app is being released.

- **Crime Prevention Officer meeting**

DVR met with the Galway Crime Prevention Officer Michael Walsh to discuss ways in which the Gardaí can support the service. This project is ongoing and has led to the Gardaí working on projects with DVR such as the White Ribbon Campaign to support Men against Men's violence and Go Purple Day to highlight domestic violence in the community.

- **ALONE meeting**

DVR met with Alone to discuss supports available to the older people in the community if there is domestic violence in the home. DVR has specific programmes for older people. As a result of this meeting Alone can refer women in need to the service.

- **Translating materials for Ukrainian Immigrants**

DVR created a programme specifically for the Ukrainian community to inform the community about healthy relationships, domestic violence and Family Laws in Ireland. This was attended by women from the Ukrainian community and as a result a contact was created between Galway Volunteer group and DVR to refer any women who disclose domestic violence and are seeking supports.

- **NWC Observatory and AGM**

In June 2023, DVR attended the National Women's Council AGM and supported SiSi by seconding two important motions: addressing the problematic use of the term 'parental alienation' in family law; and secondly, the need to re-evaluate the use of the 'in camera' rule during family law proceedings. Both motions were successfully adopted by the Council.

- **CSVC/Cope meetings**

The Coordinator of DVR and the Head of Cope Modh Eile services met to discuss advocacy protocols and services needs in Galway City and County at the request of

the Department of Justice to ensure adequate advocacy was available to all women in the county.

- **Social Prescribing HSE initiative**

DVR attended a meeting with Social Prescribing Agency to support clients who may need support to regain confidence and or decrease isolation following domestic violence. This project has many health benefits both physically and mentally. DVR can refer clients who feel they could benefit from support around building personal resilience resources .

- **DSBVG Traveller Project on site meeting**

Two representatives of Galway West women's support programme attended DVR to learn about each other's services and exchange protocols for referrals.

- **Community Response to Domestic Violence Western Regional Network (CRDVWRN).**

DVR took part in monthly meetings with this group to raise awareness of domestic abuse. Its members work on many large-scale projects throughout the Western Region coordinating White Ribbon Day, Go Purple Day, International Women's Days & Steps to Safety leaflet. These projects have reached thousands of through various events. The outcome of this work is that through the various services involved in the west of Ireland it makes public awareness and response to domestic violence much better.

- **Information Stands**

DVR attended Men's and Women's Health days in Headford Family Resource. DVR also had a stand in Ballybane for a Health Day in March and in Oughterard in September to provide information about our service.

## **PODCAST INTERVIEWS**

Two podcast relevant to DVR were part of the work of 2023.

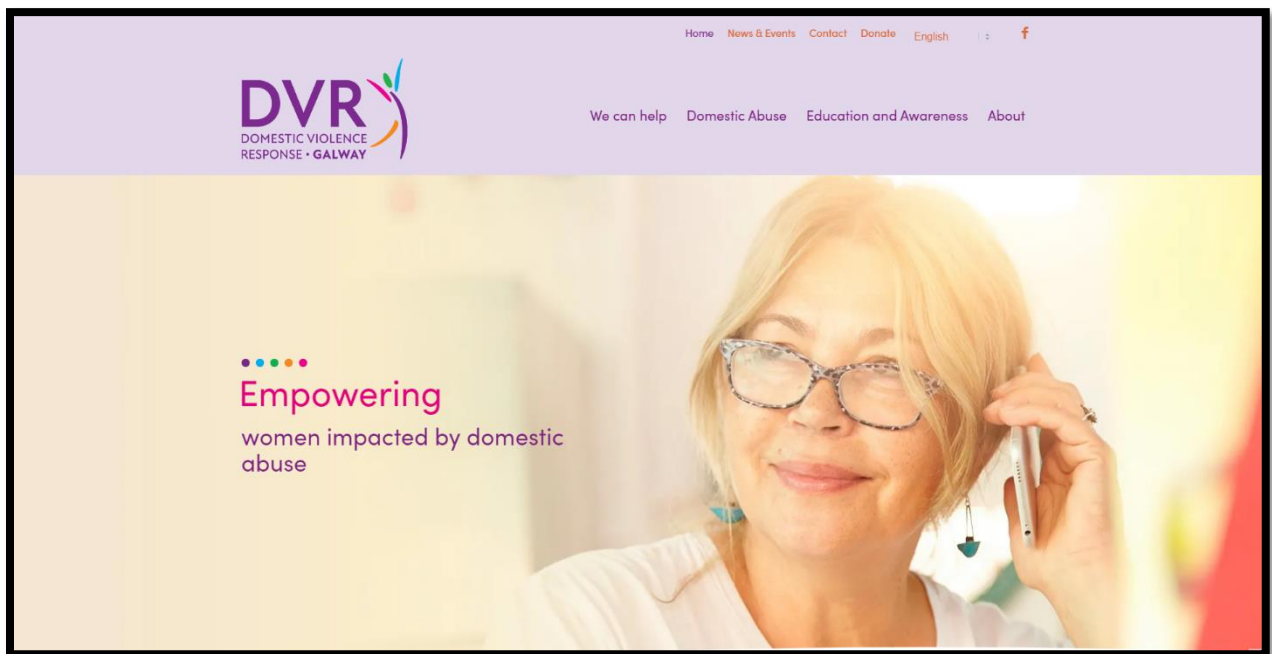
<https://www.salthillmedia.com/thegalwaypodcast/episode/aeb13b7f/domestic-violence-response-elizabeth-power-coordinator>

A past DVR client also gave a very brave and illuminating interview about her past relationship with an abuser to an American podcast. You can listen here:

<https://narcissistapocalypse.com/saoirse-the-torturous-20-year-marriage-narcissistic-abuse-domestic-violence/>

## WEBSITE

Our website continued to attract new referrals to our service and was a valuable information tool in creating awareness. You can find us at [www.domesticviolencerresponse.com](http://www.domesticviolencerresponse.com)



Home Page of DVR Website

## EDUCATIONAL INITIATIVES 2023

### 1. Youth Work Ireland Talk

DVR presented a presentation on domestic abuse to Youth Work Ireland.

## **2. Irish Language Activities**

DVR continued its commitment in 2023 to ensure our work is more accessible to Irish Speakers. The following initiatives were completed in 2023:

- Inishbofin/ Inis Bó Finne attendance at Healthy Islands Event
- Aran/ Arainn attendance at Healthy Islands event
- Inis Meáin attendance at Healthy Islands Event
- Inis Óirr attendance at Healthy Islands Event

## **3. Presentation on Healthy Relationships**

TY Talk was presented to the pupils of Carroe in SW Connemara transition year students.

## **4. Maynooth MA in Community Development**

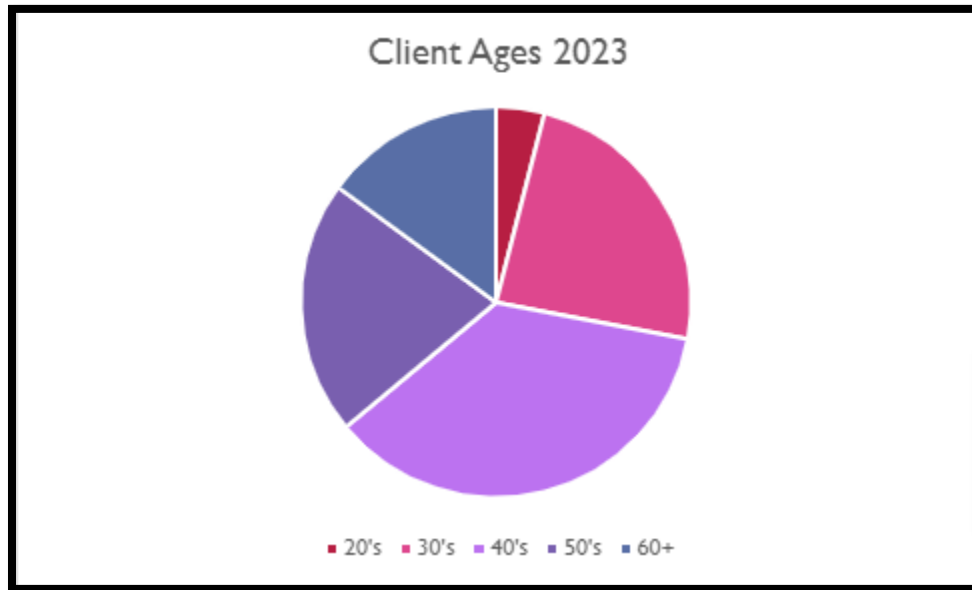
40 students from National University of Ireland Maynooth came on site to DVR to receive an annual lecture on rural issues relating to domestic abuse.

## **5. NUIG Student Awareness Activity.**

- I. DVR staff manned a stall in NUIG to distribute leaflets and create awareness of the service for young women.
- II. An extensive interview was also carried out by the Coordinator of DVR on the student Radio service Flirt FM.
- III. A video was recorded on site in DVR to discuss the role of the Community Knowledge Initiative (CKI) and its collaboration with the service through the years. This was posted on the CKI website.

## HSE OLDER WOMENS PROJECT

In 2021, the HSE tasked us to develop and deliver a capacity-building project across a range of agencies to increase understanding of coercive control and the role of agencies in responding to this issue. This work continued and developed further in 2022 and 2023. This included the development of our understanding of the specific needs of older women, the typical presentations to services and the specific obstacles this cohort have in addressing domestic abuse.



DVR saw a substantial increase in client number in the older women cohort and it represented over 36% of all clients presenting to the service for support aged 50 or older. The perpetrators in older women experience of domestic abuse included: Husband, Ex-husband Adult child. For some women it is both husband and adult child/children.

Most referrals for older women who experienced domestic abuse were referred by Social Workers. Referrals were also received from GPs, Women's Aid, Counsellors, and Word Of Mouth. Presentation of abuse typically included physical, financial, verbal, threats and intimidation and less frequently sexual violence.

DVR staff met throughout the year to regularly access the issues being presented and these are substantially documented. The additional issues for older women which impacted on how women experienced supports.



## **FINANCIAL SUPPORT FOR SERVICE USERS**

Funds were received from Women's Aid to assist service users who experienced hardship with expenses related to domestic abuse. This funding was used to assist service users with relocation and establishing new homes, the purchase and installation of CCTV, applications for Legal Aid, the purchase of mobile phone credit and financial assistance with petrol / travel costs.

Cruinniú, a local charity based in Moycullen which has supported DVR for many years, donated €4500 in food vouchers to assist service users from the area with Christmas expenses.

## **STAFF**

### **Staff overview**

- In 2023, DVR staff included 1 Coordinator (CEO), 1 Office Administrator, 1 Financial Administrator 2 Counselling Support Workers, 1 Tusla Support Worker and 2 part time Advocacy Accompaniment workers. All staff work on a part time basis.

### **Staff Training**

- Ongoing training was provided in house and externally. Substantial internal and external training was provided to all staff commiserate with their role including:
- Safe Ireland Trauma Informed Response Initiative. This was delivered over 4 days to one staff member who then trained all DVR staff in the following weeks. Many beneficial outcomes came of this training.
- Principle and practices in working within the domestic abuse sector.
- Court Advocacy Training
- Training in specific accountancy package
- Communications & Media Training
- Microsoft Word Training.
- Domestic Violence & Substance Abuse

### **Team Building and Clinical Supervision**

- Staff meetings were held weekly onsite to facilitate teamwork and clinical supervision of client work was offered by the Coordinator as required: Biweekly / Monthly.

### **The Staff Subcommittee of the Board of Directors.**

- This comprised membership of the Coordinator and Board Members who met as needed in 2023 and proposed changes in contract details, annual leave cover, a review of job descriptions and new policies on a variety of workplace practice were also developed in 2023.

## **Annual Appraisal**

- All staff received an annual appraisal of their work in 2023

## **GOVERNANCE**

DVR strengthened its governance with an expansion of the Board in 2023. Accountancy, Irish language proficiency, rural development expertise, policy and procedure administration were welcome additions to the Board's capacity. The Board of DVR complies with the Charities Governance Code. DVR has a comprehensive Financial Policy that outlines all aspects of corporate governance, financial policies and procedures for the day-to-day transactions of the organisation. Accounts are audited annually and published on our website. DVR has a Financial sub-committee which oversees budgetary management and planning. It meets each quarter to monitor cash flow and generate reports for the Board, review financial reports, propose changes to policy, approve spending and monitor accounts.

The Board met monthly in 2023 and reviewed variance budgets, cash flow, approve purchases, created policy on reserves, on budgeting and carried out a travel expenses review.

The AGM of DVR took place on the 21st September 2023. Audited accounts were presented by the auditor at this meeting. Thanks to the generosity of donations, bequests and fundraising, DVR was able to establish a reserves fund and implement a reserves policy in 2023.

The DVR 2021 audit was carried out by McDonough & Associates, Galway.

The Board of Directors met 10 times during 2023 to review financial reports, propose changes to policy, approve spending and monitor accounts and a risk register. It held its AGM in September 2023.



## FUNDING 2023 OVERVIEW

FUNDER	PURPOSE
HSE	Older Women's Project Counseling Support and information
TUSLA	Core Funder
Commission Support of Victims of Crime	Advocacy Accompaniment Service
GRET B	Educational Support Programmes
SSE (Wind Farm)	Operational Costs
Galway County Council	Community Enhancement
Community Foundation of Ireland	Public Awareness Initiatives
Women's Aid	Client Hardship fund
TE Connectivity	Fundraising outcome