

Recommendations and Conclusions

Stemming from the research, the following recommendations are made in respect of Aoibhneas's future development.

Women's Needs

- * Women require the integrated 24-hour counselling service in the refuge.
- * Women need a far more effective professional response from the Gardai when they first contact them.
- * Women urgently require a far more effective co-ordinated response and presence when dealing with - interim court orders - barring orders - and confronting broken barring orders.
- * Women need accompaniment to court.
- * There is an urgent need for a rapid statutory response, possibly through the multi-agency initiative, to the acute problem of accommodation for women after they leave the refuge.
- * There should be thrice-yearly bloc of 'taster courses' being run in the refuge to - help women relax and have a better quality of social time - to help them build back their self-confidence.
- * Family support workers, co-ordinated through local community care areas, should be made use of, where appropriate, to help women re-establish themselves and their families in their new accommodation.
- * The Aoibhneas second-stage housing unit is an important adjunct to the work of the refuge and for some women, it prepares them to have the confidence to live on their own, without turning to inappropriate relationships because they still feel vulnerable.
- * Women may need ongoing support and counseling when they leave the refuge.

For this purpose, a venue where they can access counselling off-site should be established.

- * Women may also need up-skilling for employment when they leave the Refuge.

This is a co-ordinating task that needs to be developed through a development officer, based at off-site premises.

- * Statistically, by far the greater number of women who experience Domestic Violence never approach a refuge. To begin to serve their needs, the development of a drop in 'listening ear' service and over time, a neighbourhood work team, providing outreach support by women in the community should be one of the principal objectives in establishing an off-site premises.

Children's Needs

- * More assistant childcare staff are needed to release the highly trained childcare workers in the refuge to do more in-depth therapy work with needy children.

- * More activities needed for children on site in the Refuge.

- * Over the summer period, children should be linked in with summer projects/playbus ventures.

- * Some children may also need on-going therapy work for

a period after they leave the refuge. There is an urgent need for a rapid link-in with statutory social workers in the

relevant community care areas to take up support work for children as soon as they leave the refuge.

- * There is also a need to develop better co-ordination structures with schools and teachers to support children

- * Some children may also need on-going therapy work for a period after they leave the refuge. There is an urgent need for a rapid link-in with statutory social workers in the relevant community care areas to take up support work for children as soon as they leave the refuge.
- * There is also a need to develop better coordination structures with schools and teachers to support children who are attending school from the refuge.

Conclusion

The work to aid and protect women suffering from domestic violence has to be ongoing. It requires a strong, articulate, focussed agenda with committed participants across the entire community, from the national government to the voluntary sector; these include ground-breaking efforts like those of Aoibhneas. Because this is a human rights issue, the government and its statutory services must give the lead.

However, the final word on why it is so important, we leave it to the women themselves:

"Why do you think there are so many refuges and why do you think the men are still in their houses? There is something wrong. Women have to come in here with their children, and uproot their whole life and take their children with them.... It's wrong when there's violence in the home, and the women have to get up and walk out, and take the children and leave, take the children out of school for weeks on end...and be in a refuge, ok, a place of safety, but your whole life is thrown completely out of gear. Your children no longer go to school, you can't think straight, your thinking of all your belongings back there which really, in a way, they're just material things, but they're yours just the same, they're a home that you've built up around those. And it's the children's home, which is more important, it's a place where they're supposed to feel safe. You know, and so there's got to be something wrong."

(Aoibhneas Resident)

"Looking back on it, if I had only known then what I know now it would have been different. I am much stronger now on my own, much stronger for my children. If we hadn't split up, I would never

be the strong person I am today because of what I've learned. The strength I've got going through it and coming out the other end .



The reason I stayed in the situation was because I didn't know you could go anywhere for help."

(Woman living on Dublin's northside)