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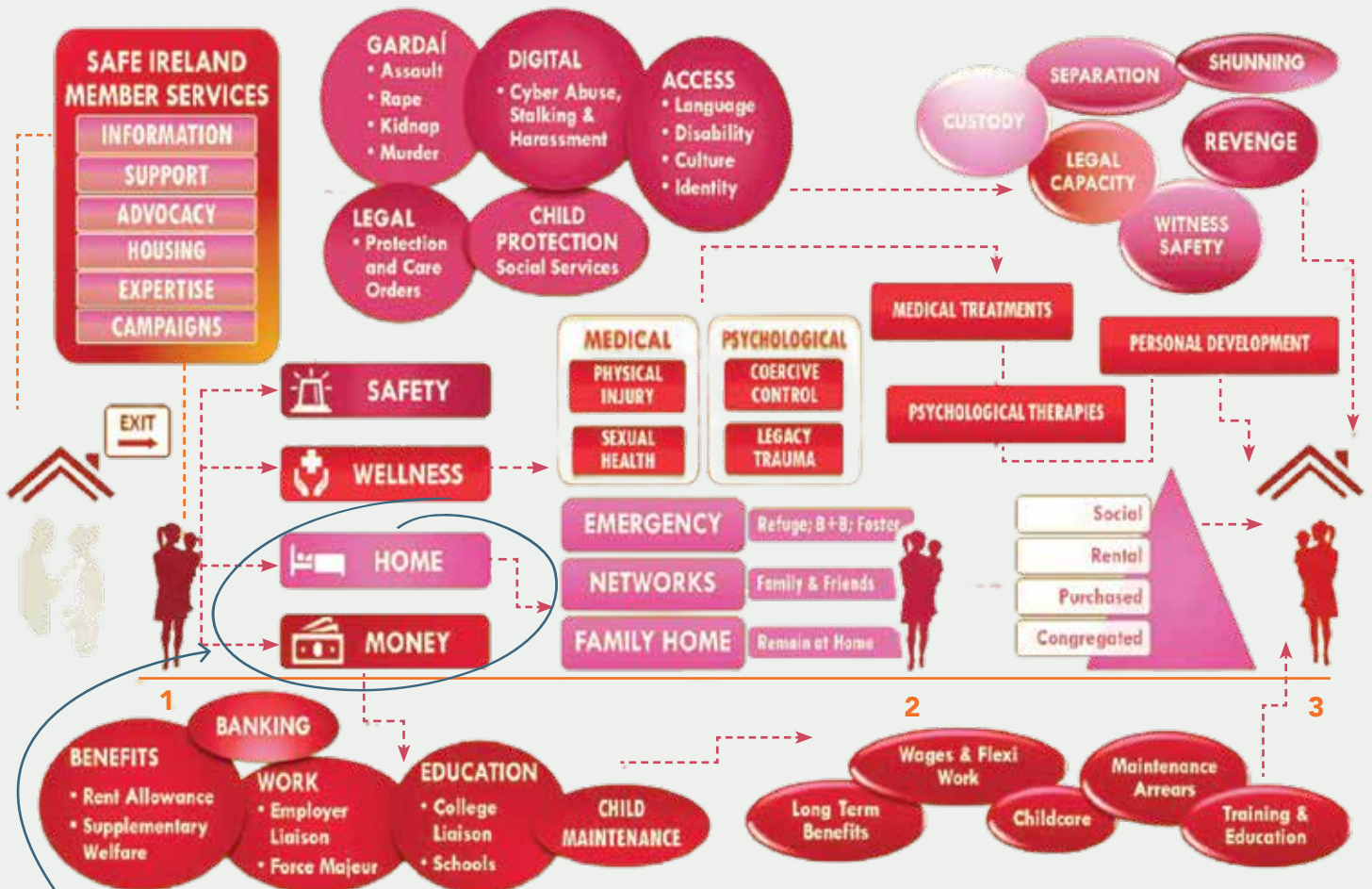
WEST CORK BEACON

TACKLING DOMESTIC ABUSE & SEXUAL VIOLENCE

West Cork Whisper

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Journey of a woman from DSGBV to independent living



We have focussed on the issues of Home and Money in this edition. In Issue 86, we will consider Safety and Wellness

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Finding Safe Ground:

How housing challenges affect DSGBV survivors — and what's changing

When someone makes the brave decision to leave an abusive home, their first priority is always safety. For many survivors of Domestic, Sexual, and Gender Based Violence (DSGBV), that moment of leaving also brings an unexpected and often overwhelming challenge: finding a stable place to live.

This issue is becoming increasingly visible across Ireland. National homelessness figures reached record highs in late 2025, with thousands of families affected. Yet the official data still doesn't fully reflect those who become homeless because they are escaping abuse. Women and children in refuge, those staying temporarily with friends or family, and those who relocate for safety reasons are not always counted as being homeless and often cannot access homelessness supports.

While the national picture can look stark, understanding these realities helps us advocate for change — and here in West Cork, there are supports, pathways, and growing momentum for better solutions.

Why DSGBV Survivors Face Unique Housing Obstacles

Survivors often encounter barriers that don't affect other people seeking housing:

1 Income rules don't reflect sudden life changes.

Eligibility for social housing depends on the previous 12 months of income. For someone who has just left an abusive partner, their income stream can often be affected with some relying completely on social welfare. Some applicants may be refused access to the social housing list for this reason, meaning a delay by up to a year.

2 "Local connection" rules don't fit the reality of fleeing abuse.

Many survivors must relocate for safety, which means they may not meet residency requirements in the county they escape to. While councils can use discretion, responses vary widely.

3 Joint home ownership complicates eligibility.

If a survivor's name is on a mortgage with the abusive partner, they may be considered "not eligible" for social housing unless formal legal separation documents are in place — a process that can be costly, slow, and easily obstructed by the perpetrator.

All of these challenges don't reflect personal failure; they reflect systems that were not originally designed with domestic abuse in mind. The good news is that national reviews and policy updates are underway, and organisations like Safe Ireland are pushing strongly for change.

Positive developments and what's changing

Although gaps remain, several important shifts are promising:

✓ National awareness is increasing.

Domestic violence is now recognised as a leading driver of family homelessness. This recognition is prompting new conversations at the government level.

✓ Plans to update Local Authority guidelines are in progress.

The national housing strategy has committed to reviewing longstanding rules — including residency requirements and how time on social housing lists is transferred between counties.

✓ New models of safe housing are being discussed.

Approaches such as SafeAtHome (where survivors can safely remain in their homes with the perpetrator removed), StepDown / transitional accommodation, and community-based DV informed housing supports are gaining traction.

These developments won't solve every issue overnight, but they reflect a growing recognition that safety and stable housing must work hand in hand.

What we see here in West Cork

At West Cork Beacon, we regularly support women who are navigating the dual challenge of trauma recovery and housing insecurity. Despite the complexities, every week we see resilience, resourcefulness, and courage.

What often helps most is:

- Early support, even before the survivor leaves the home
- Clear information on local options
- Advocacy with local services
- Connection with legal, financial, and community supports

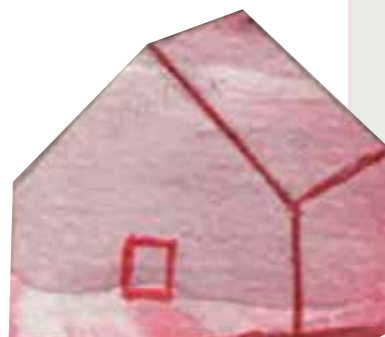
Nobody should have to face these systems alone — and thankfully, in West Cork, they don't have to.

How West Cork Beacon can help

If someone is experiencing abuse and unsure about their housing options, our team can:

- Offer confidential advice and safety planning
- Support applications for housing, HAP, Domestic Violence Rent Supplement, or emergency accommodation
- Liaise with local agencies on a survivor's behalf
- Provide emotional support through the whole process
- Help navigate legal steps such as barring orders or tenancy issues

Even when the system is complicated, support is available — and every survivor deserves a safe, stable place to call home.



Safe House

West Cork Beacon's Safe House project is a specialised short-term, emergency accommodation for women and children experiencing domestic abuse. Since the opening of our first Safe house in 2021, we have accommodated ten women and fifteen children.

We have a Safe House Worker who, prior to admission, would be guided by risk assessments to measure the level of support the family requires, which could mean a refuge referral instead. Refuges have high support family units, which are staffed and operational 24 hours a day. A safe house is for lower risk cases, is not staffed on-site, accommodates only one family at a time with regular support off-site, which supports a more independent living. It is a private, secure, and self-contained home whose location, protected by various safety measures, enables individuals or families to feel safe and secure.

Prior to admission, our support workers devise safety plans with the client before leaving the family home. Using a trauma-informed response, the safe house support worker collaborates with the women and families consistently to help with the transition from the abusive situation to living independently. They will devise a support plan in the initial stages to incorporate both her and the children's needs with clear objectives to assist in the development of a sense of safety. The safe house worker meets with the women on a weekly basis to provide support and care plan sessions, with ongoing access to the service to promote continuity of care and family support. This allows the women to begin to put long-term support structures in place in a safe and stable environment.

Access to specialised internal programs can be immediate: Referral into our subsidised counselling scheme is an option for women to access professional

psychotherapeutic support. Our Children and Young Persons' Project is available to provide tailored play, art, and talking psychotherapy for children. Interagency collaboration is one of the pivotal pieces for progress. Our court support program can assist in legal options with court accompaniment available for legal orders such as Barring and Safety Orders. Assistance with completion of applications for social welfare, solicitors, and housing is immediate. A priority remains around the continuation of children's educations. Whilst hoping to continue children in their original schools, other placements are sometimes needed and sourced accordingly. Access to ongoing housing options is crucial and workers will assist clients with accompaniment to homelessness assessments with Cork County Council. They offer guidance with housing applications and help people access key supports, including the Domestic Violence Rent Supplement, HAP, and private rental schemes.

Our Advocacy program is central to progress all these objectives. Our accompaniment program also can assist in engagement with agencies such as Citizens Information in Bantry and/or social welfare agencies to enable the client to gather information and financial supports. Continuation in employment is supported with collaborative work with employers when needed. The provision of regular emotional support to the families after occupying the safe house is also a pivotal role of the safe house support worker.

CUAN has sanctioned West Cork Beacon to provide ten more refuge beds in the West Cork area, and we are working hard towards that aim

with other agencies. The nearest refuges are in Cork or Tralee and can be hard to access due to being at high occupancy most of the time. This can mean reduced options for women and children when trying to leave their abuser.

A home should be somewhere that is safe, warm, happy, secure, and - when needed - a respite from the outside world. Women and children experiencing domestic abuse are denied the right to housing by their abuser. It is of the upmost importance to West Cork Beacon to assist in this transition process, prioritising safety and providing a sense of belonging for those people who have no other option but to leave their family home due to domestic violence.



HOME



If you would like to support West Cork Beacon, please scan the code to donate

Restorative Justice

Beyond criminal responses: calling for more options for survivors after harm & violence

The global movement seeking to end gender-based violence (GBV) has, in many countries and regions, relied exclusively on criminal legal responses to harm. However, some communities engage in culturally appropriate and alternative responses beyond the criminal legal systems, often collectively referred to as restorative justice. Restorative justice is a process that allows those harmed by a crime and those responsible for that crime to communicate in a safe way, if they wish to do so, rather than a focus on punitive response to violence and harm. Restorative justice practices put the survivors and their communities central to the process, aiming to move collectively toward healing.

Survivors of GBV are diverse in every way, and trauma-informed care calls for options so that survivors can make choices that suit them in their journey and/or healing after violence. Many may not be sure what is the right course of action for them, and services like West Cork Beacon strive to offer support services that are client-led, transparent, present appropriate options and resources, and aim to restore a sense of agency that's damaged by domestic and sexual violence. Having options beyond the criminal legal system is critical to meaningfully disrupt the cycle of violence while also increasing sense of safety, agency, and ability to heal for survivors.

When it comes to options for justice or accountability, options for survivors of gender-based violence are limited at present. Survivors can choose to report their experiences to Gardaí, with the possibility of charges and a criminal pathway to holding the person who harmed them accountable. However, there are several risks with reporting GBV, and some can result in further trauma for survivors. To name a few, here are some examples of why survivors may be fearful or reluctant to engage in criminal proceedings as a response to their experience(s):

1

Once a survivor discloses to the Gardaí, they have little control or voice over how their case is handled. This can deepen the feeling of not having control over their story, what steps are appropriate, and can ultimately result in additional trauma.

2

The Director of Public Prosecutions (DPP) may or may not choose to pursue the case; this may leave survivors to feel like their experience (and even themselves as people) don't matter. For example, only 1 in 3 sexual violence (SV) cases referred to DPP are prosecuted¹.

3

Victim blaming can be common throughout the legal process, ultimately reinforcing the narratives that survivors are at fault for their experiences of abuse, rather than the person who hurt, coerced, stalked, and/or violated them. From Garda minimising survivor experiences, community members questioning the credibility of survivors, to judges who don't understand the power dynamics and nuances of gender-based violence. Some survivors name the legal process as being as or more traumatising than the original experience(s) of violence.²

4

For some survivors, engaging with An Garda Síochána (AGS) can increase the threat of further violence, particularly if the person who harmed the survivor has more power, influence, and/or resources than the survivor. This may be particularly a risk in the case that the person who harmed the survivor is a Garda themselves.

5

If a survivor is from a marginalised community, whether that be based on their gender identity, sexual orientation, race, ethnicity, ability status, or otherwise, there can be mistrust or even bias when engaging with the criminal legal system.

For survivors who would prefer to have options outside the criminal legal system, restorative justice is a framework that offers possibilities. Although its infrastructure is quite thin at the time of writing this article, Ireland has been exploring and beginning to engage in restorative approaches to respond to various forms of harm. Presently, AGS Probation and a handful of community organisations offer restorative options to communities who have been harmed. The only community organisation in Cork at the time of writing is Le Chéile, which focuses on serving youth between the ages of 12-23 years old.

Restorative justice is a process that allows those harmed by a crime and those responsible for that crime to communicate in a safe way, if they wish to do so, rather than a focus on punitive response to violence and harm. Restorative justice practices put the survivors and their communities central to the process, aiming to move collectively toward healing.

REFERENCES <https://survivors.org/why-dont-survivors-report/> <https://restorativejustice.ie/> <https://lecheile.ie/restorative-justice/>
<https://www.irishlegal.com/articles/just-one-in-three-sexual-offence-cases-sent-to-dpp-results-in-prosecution#:~:text=Almost%2020%2C000%20files%20relating%20to,further%20224%20remain%20under%20consideration>

¹ (www.irishlegal.com)
² (survivors.org).

Pathways to Justice after Sexual Violence

There are several pathways to justice if you have experienced sexual violence. There is no right or wrong decision, you can choose what feels safest and most helpful for you. Justice after sexual violence is a deeply personal and ever evolving concept that shifts over time and varies between individuals. The main legal and support options available in Ireland are as follows.

1. Criminal Justice (Reporting)

- You can report what happened to An Garda Síochána at any time; there are no time limits in reporting recent or historical incidents of sexual violence.
- Specialised Garda units (Divisional Protective Services Units) investigate sexual offences in Ireland.
- The Director of Public Prosecutions (DPP) decides if there is enough evidence to prosecute and take a case to court.
- If a case goes ahead, it will be heard in court, and a judge/jury will decide the outcome.
- If the DPP decides not to prosecute, you can ask for a review of that decision.

2. Civil Justice (Suing for Compensation)

- You may choose to take a civil case against the person who harmed you, or against institutions, employers or religious groups that failed to prevent the harm.
- If successful, civil cases result in financial compensation.
- The level of proof needed is lower than in a criminal case.
- A time limit of six years from the date of the assault applies, but this may be extended for historic incidents.
- It is recommended to seek specialised legal support from solicitors experienced in personal injury and abuse law.
- You can also apply to the Criminal Injuries Compensation Tribunal for out-of-pocket expenses, such as medical costs or loss of earnings.

3. Restorative Justice

- Restorative justice is a voluntary process that only happens if the person who caused harm accepts responsibility and admits wrongdoing.
- It is often facilitated by probation services and can involve face-to-face meetings in a safe supportive setting, or indirect communication (letters).
- The focus is on giving you a voice and helping you express the impact of what happened.

4. Medical Services

- If you experienced a recent rape or sexual assault, you could contact your nearest Sexual Assault Treatment Unit (SATU).
- SATU's provide free 24/7 medical care and examinations to anyone aged 14 years and over.
- You will be offered a health check and medication whether you decide to have a forensic exam or not.
- It is best to attend within 72 hours, but you may still attend up to 7 days later.
- You do not have to report to the Gardaí to attend.
- Forensic samples can be stored (with your consent) for up to one year in case you decide to report later.
- Contact Cork SATU at the South Infirmary Victoria University Hospital on 021 4926297 for more information.
- GP's can also provide medical care and support.

You have choices. You can report to the Gardaí, take a civil case, seek medical care, explore restorative justice, or access counselling and advocacy services. You do not have to decide everything at once. Help and information are available so you can choose what feels right for you.

5. Advocacy and Counselling Services

- Contact your local rape crisis or sexual violence support service.
- At West Cork Beacon we offer advocacy and counselling support to all survivors of sexual violence (men & women aged 14 years and over) who have experienced sexual abuse in childhood, sexual assault, rape, or any other form of sexual violence.
- We also offer information to supporters of survivors – family members, friends, partners and practitioners.
- Contact 1800 832 001 or www.westcorkbeacon.ie for more information.
- For out of hours helpline support, you can contact the National 24-hour Rape Crisis Helpline on 1800 77 8888.



Under the Criminal Justice (Victims of Crime) Act 2017, you have rights under Irish law, including: to be treated with respect and dignity, to receive information about your case and to access support services.



MABS, the Money Advice and Budgeting Service, is the State's only free money and debt advice service. We work with all kinds of people, who may have all kinds of personal debt. Our Service is fully funded by the government, making it completely free to the public. The Service is independent, with no links to any banks or credit unions, and all your dealings with MABS will be confidential, in accordance with our confidentiality policy.

Where are we?

South Munster MABS, one of eight regional MABS companies, has offices in Cork City, Dunmanway, Mallow, Charleville, Tralee and Killarney.

Our Dunmanway office is located at 11 Underhill Commercial Park and can be reached by phone on 0818 07 2450 or by email at dunmanway@mabs.ie. We run outreach clinics in Bandon, Bantry, Castletownbere, Clonakilty, Macroom, and Skibbereen. We also have a website – www.mabs.ie.

What do we do?

MABS works with people who may be struggling with debt or who need help in managing their money. We also talk to government and lenders to find better solutions for those who have money problems, as

well as developing tools and resources to help people avoid getting in over their heads. MABS does not give out any money – instead, we work with clients to ensure that they are getting all income they are entitled to, that they are getting the best value out of this income, and in working out sustainable payment plans with creditors, where debt becomes a problem.

How do we provide help?

We are an appointment-based service. To make an appointment, you can give us a call or drop in to the office. We are open from 9am to 1pm and 2pm to 5pm Monday to Friday. We will take some details about the help that you require, and we will then assign you to one of our Money Advisors who

will make an appointment with you either in our main office or in the clinic that is closest to you. You will then work with that same Money Advisor until your situation is resolved.

Who goes to MABS?

MABS is for everyone who has concerns about money. People with all kinds of personal debt come to MABS. We cannot help with debt arising from a business but will help business-people in dealing with their personal debts. We make no judgement on those who come to us – we know people can get into money difficulty all too easily – sometimes getting out of trouble needs a helping hand. That's what we're here for.



10 Top Tips to End Rape

- 1 Don't put drugs in women's drinks.
- 2 When you see a woman walking by herself, leave her alone.
- 3 If you pull over to help a woman whose car has broken down, remember not to rape her.
- 4 If you are in a lift and a woman gets in, don't rape her.
- 5 Never creep into a woman's home through an unlocked door or window, or spring out at her from between parked cars, or rape her.
- 6 **USE THE BUDDY SYSTEM!** If you are not able to stop yourself from assaulting people, ask a friend to stay with you while you are in public.
- 7 Don't forget: it's not sex with someone who's asleep or unconscious – it's RAPE!
- 8 Carry a whistle! If you are worried you might assault someone 'by accident' you can hand it to the person you are with, so they can call for help.
- 9 Don't forget: Honesty is the best policy. If you have every intention of having sex later on with the woman you're dating regardless of how she feels about it, tell her directly that there is every chance you will rape her. If you don't communicate your intentions, she may take it as a sign that you do not plan to rape her and inadvertently feel safe.
- 10 Don't rape.

Looking for information and ideas on how to campaign against rape?
Check out the following websites: www.thisisnotinvasiontorapeme.co.uk
www.notever.co.uk



Life shrinks or expands in proportion to one's courage.

This card has been designed for you to cut out and keep.

Our freephone number is on the other side

some useful numbers

Cork

West Cork Beacon, Freephone 1800 203 136

Cork Sexual Violence Centre,
Freephone: 1800 496496
email: info@sexualviolence.ie

Cuanlee Refuge, Cork 021 427 7698

Domestic Violence Social Work Cork, 021 492 1728

Legal Aid Board, Cork, 021 455 1686 / 021 427 5998

Free Legal Aid Clinic, Locall 1890 350 259
Information and referral

Mná Feasa (Domestic Violence Project),
021 421 1757

OSS, Cork, Freephone 1800 497 497 (Domestic
Violence Resource Centre for men and women)

Sexual Assault Treatment Unit 021 492 6100

Y.A.N.A. North Cork 022 53915



Citizens Information

Open for Drop-in and Appointments

Bantry CIC, Vickery's Complex, New Street,
Bantry, P75 TV77

Monday - Thursday: 10am - 5pm
Fridays: 10am - 4pm Closed: 1pm - 2pm

West Cork Helpline: 0818 07 8390

Email: bantry@citinfo.ie www.citinfo.ie

National Phone Service: 0818 07 4000

Kerry

Kerry's Women's refuge and Support Services
(Adapt) 066 712 9100

Kerry Rape & Sexual Abuse Centre.
Freephone 1800 633 333

Legal Aid Board 066 712 6900

Tralee Women's Resource Centre 066 712 0622



South Munster Money Advice and
Budgeting Service – West Cork office
is a National FREE, Independent,
Confidential and Non-judgemental
Service. If you are already in debt or feel
you are in danger of getting into debt,
please do not hesitate to contact our
office to arrange an appointment.

Open Monday to Friday 9am - 5pm
Closed 1pm - 2pm.

Contact us: Dunmanway 0818 07 2450 /
email: dunmanway@mabs.ie
National Helpline number 0818 07 2000
or www.mabs.ie

Postage Address: Unit 11, Underhill
Commercial Park, Dunmanway Co Cork

National

Women's Aid Freephone, 1800 341 900

Dublin Rape Crisis Centre
National Helpline 1800 77 8888

We're here to support you

FREephone
1800 203 136

Office 027 53847
Mon to Fri: 9am to 4.30pm



WEST CORK BEACON Wolfe Tone Square, Bantry, Co. Cork P75 TN96

www.westcorkbeacon.ie

Helpline: 1800 203 136 during office hours

Bantry Office: 027 53847 Mon to Fri: 9.00 am to 4.30 pm

email: admin@westcorkbeacon.ie

www.facebook.com/westcorkbeacon

www.instagram.com/wcb_domestic_violence_service/

West Cork Beacon assures everyone who contacts us that four core values underpin our service:
Confidentiality | To be listened to | To be believed | Respect for your choice

Speaking to someone, perhaps for the first time, about experiencing violence or abuse is never easy.
Placing your trust in a stranger on the end of a phone or meeting someone for the first time face to
face takes courage. These first stages of seeking support can be a time of stress and fear for callers.

It is important that you understand that you have the right to remain anonymous when contacting
the service. If you are comfortable with giving identifying details, these details are not passed on
to any other agency except at your request.

There are two exceptions to confidentiality:

- If a disclosure raises concerns with regard to Child Protection issues
- If you disclose that you intend to harm another person.

