

WILLOW

DOMESTIC ABUSE SERVICES



STRATEGY

2026 - 2030

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FOREWORD

"Violence against women and girls remains the most widespread and pervasive human rights violation in the world."

- United Nations, 2022

Almost 40 years after the founding of our organisation, violence against women and girls remains the most 'widespread and pervasive human rights violation in the world' according to the United Nations. This stark reality underscores the scale of the challenge that exists globally, even as important progress has been achieved.

Such progress includes our understanding and awareness of domestic, sexual and gender-based violence (DSGBV), which has seen a fundamental shift in the Irish context. Abuse and coercive control, once dismissed as private family matters, are now clearly recognised as crimes. The principle that no one should live in fear in their own home or under the control of their partner, now clearly defined in legislation and policy.

This is one of the reasons we are changing our name from Meath Women's Refuge & Support Services to Willow Domestic Abuse Services. This is a significant milestone in our story and comes about after careful consultation with the women and children using our services, staff, board members and other stakeholders. This new name better reflects our breadth of services, and helps us to be a more visible, inclusive and supportive organisation for every woman and child affected by domestic violence and abuse in Co. Meath. Our services need to be agile and responsive to emerging needs over the coming years, and our new name supports that. Nothing about our core work or mandate is changing.

The legacy of the volunteers who founded the organisation lives on in the new name and in the expanded team of passionate, professional staff who ensure the highest levels of support for women and children who engage with our service.

As we look to the next five years, we are building on strong foundations and a period of significant change in the Irish context. We still have a long way to go but recent changes in legislation and the establishment of Cuan: The Domestic Sexual and Gender Based Violence Agency, are encouraging. We see a real political and social desire to create a future free of DSGBV and we are passionate about playing our role. We believe Government level support is there to ensure we can continue to scale up and reach all women and children seeking support in Co. Meath.

At Willow Domestic Abuse Services, we have an ambitious strategy for the future. We want to ensure every woman and child in Co. Meath that needs support can access the best possible services; and we will work in collaboration with others towards prevention and easier pathways to safety. We believe Co. Meath can be a centre of good practice for addressing DSGBV at all levels and we are proud to work with committed partners to be part of that change.

We are committed to the pillars of our new strategy, Listen, Respond and Collaborate. We know we cannot address the deep-rooted problem of DSGBV alone and we must learn from our community and work together for real and lasting change. We are encouraged by the initial success of our Zero Tolerance Meath project which engages the community in reflection, education and action to tackle DSGBV. We believe our community are willing, ready and have huge capacity to make Co. Meath a place of zero tolerance.

We look forward to the next five years, putting the voices of women and children at the heart of our work, sustaining and enhancing our services (including a new 12-unit refuge development), deepening our partnerships and committing to excellence in how we work.

Frances Haworth



CEO



ABOUT

Willow Domestic Abuse Services was founded in 1987 by a local voluntary women's group based in Navan. Until recently known as Meath Women's Refuge & Support Services, our initial work was the provision of refuge accommodation for women and children experiencing domestic violence and abuse. Since our foundation, our refuge accommodation has increased, and our work has expanded to provide community-based outreach and court accompaniment, as well as specialist services for children and young people who are victims of domestic violence and abuse in their own right. Over the years, we have worked closely with local and national partners to advocate for change and increase community understanding of the dynamics of domestic violence and abuse. Our work is underpinned and informed by a commitment to human rights and gender equality.

WHAT WE DO

We exist to work towards a society free from domestic, sexual and gender-based violence and abuse by:

- 1. Supporting women and children who experience domestic violence and abuse on their journey towards safety, wellbeing and recovery through a range of services and supports including:**
 - Refuge accommodation
 - Outreach and community services
 - Child and youth services in refuge and in the community
 - Counselling and play therapy
 - Education and personal development
- 2. Promoting a culture of zero tolerance of domestic, sexual and gender-based violence in Co. Meath through:**
 - Our Zero Tolerance Meath community-based programme
 - Primary prevention and community education
 - School and youth-based education
- 3. Influencing long term societal and systemic change at local, regional and national level through:**
 - Collaborating with peer organisations with a common vision to advocate for change
 - Strengthening the voice of the community in Co. Meath through our leadership

VISION, PURPOSE & VALUES



VISION

A future free from domestic, sexual and gender-based violence and abuse.



PURPOSE

Willow Domestic Abuse Services works towards a society free from domestic, sexual and gender-based violence and abuse by:

1. Supporting women and children who experience domestic violence and abuse on their journey towards safety, wellbeing and recovery.
2. Promoting a culture of zero tolerance of domestic, sexual and gender-based violence in Co. Meath.
3. Influencing long term societal and systemic change at local, regional and national level.



VALUES

- RESPECT -

We are passionate about achieving human rights and dignity for all and are committed to challenging the pillars of women's inequality in society. We embrace diversity and strive to be a fully inclusive organisation. We engage respectfully with others even when we do not agree with them.

- TRUST -

We trust women and children as experts in their own experiences. We trust each other as colleagues and act with integrity and transparency towards our purpose. We are honest and consistent in our approach and strive to achieve high standards across the organisation.

- EMPATHY -

At the core of our work is listening, supporting and using our influence for the common good. We work with compassion so that people feel valued and heard. We seek to understand the perspective of others and are non-judgemental in our approach.

- HOPE -

We believe hope is a powerful tool for change. We draw hope from the solidarity, bravery and resilience of those with lived experience and from our community. We believe change takes time, but it is possible and we all have a role to play.



CONTEXT

Over the course of our previous strategy, increased focus and investment to tackle domestic violence and abuse has resulted from important policy developments including Ireland's publication of Zero Tolerance: The Third National Strategy on Domestic, Sexual and Gender Based Violence (DSGBV) and the establishment of Cuan: The Domestic Sexual and Gender Based Violence Agency. Statutory funding for DSGBV services has increased and public knowledge and awareness of DSGBV has been raised, in part because of the focus on domestic violence and abuse through the Covid 19 pandemic.

While DSGBV affects people of all genders, women are primarily the victims of gender-based violence, accounting for 77% of incidents reported to An Garda Síochána. A domestic abuse motive is recorded for 90% of all females who were victims of murder, manslaughter or infanticide.¹ Important legislative changes have been introduced in recent years, including the creation of new offences to criminalise coercive control², image based sexual abuse³, non-fatal strangulation or suffocation and stalking⁴. Legislation has also been enacted to provide paid Domestic Violence leave⁵. Despite these developments, violence towards women and children continues to be perpetrated at endemic levels.

More than one in three women in Ireland (35% of women) have experienced psychological violence, physical violence or threats and/or sexual violence by an intimate partner in their lifetime⁶. Calls about domestic violence to An Garda Síochána have increased by 45% in the last four years and continue to rise. Census 2022 results show that the population of Co. Meath increased by 13% to 220,826, making Co. Meath one of the fastest growing counties in Ireland. Considering that one in three women in Ireland experience DSGBV, this county level population increase identifies the need for additional specialist services locally. This increase is also reflected in the rising demand for support and calls to our helpline over the past number of years.

Due to increased statutory and philanthropic funding, we have been able to meet growing demand to a point, and expand our services to support more people. In 2025, we provided refuge accommodation for 188 women and children - more than double the number supported in 2019. However, each year we receive hundreds more requests for refuge that can't be met due to a lack of space. We are also seeing a steep increase in the number of women and children who may not require refuge but are seeking advice and support in the community.

" Friends and family asked why I stayed, but never asked why he didn't stop. "



New challenges continue to emerge, including a rise in misogynist content and violent pornography online and the ongoing housing crisis. It is crucial that we are agile in responding to new forms of domestic violence and abuse and are actively helping to overcome barriers for women and children seeking safety.

In this context, we took a broad consultative approach to inform the development of our strategic plan. Our staff and volunteers, including our Board, contributed their views through a series of workshops, consultations and surveys. Women who are using or have used our services expressed their views through one-to-one interviews and surveys. The views of children and young people were captured through two independent academic studies carried out by Trinity College Dublin ⁷ and by asking the women in our services about their children's experiences. In addition, external organisations, the community and supporters inputted to the process through one-to-one consultations and surveys.

The themes identified through the process included the importance of informing our work by listening to the lived experience of women, children and young people as well as supporting the community to be able to respond with high quality, accessible services. In addition, the importance of collaborating with all stakeholders to influence change in attitudes to eradicate DSGBV was identified.

" I wasn't aware of any of the supports around housing or social welfare payments that I was entitled to. If I had known previously it might have helped me leave earlier. Finances were a big part of staying. "

¹ An Garda Siochana, 2022

² Domestic Violence Act 2018, S39

³ Harassment, Harmful Communications and Related Offences Act 2020, S2 and S3

⁴ Criminal Justice Miscellaneous Provisions Act 2023, S21, S22 and S23

⁵ Work Life Balance and Miscellaneous Provisions Act 2023, S7

⁶ EU gender-based violence survey, Fundamental Rights Agency, 2024

⁷ Where I'm At Evaluation 2023 and Truly Be Me Evaluation 2025

OUR THEORY OF CHANGE

PROBLEM

Deeply embedded patriarchal attitudes, systems and structural inequalities have resulted in the existence and tolerance of DSGBV globally.



OUR SOLUTION

Support women and children who experience domestic violence and abuse on their journey towards safety, wellbeing and recovery.

Promote a culture of zero tolerance of DSGBV in Co. Meath.

Influence long term societal and systemic change at local, regional and national level.



ACTIVITIES

LISTEN

We actively seek the insights, knowledge and lived experience of women, children and young people and the wider community to inform all aspects of our work.

RESPOND

We provide high quality, evidence-based services to respond to domestic violence and abuse.

COLLABORATE

We work closely with partners to challenge and change attitudes, systems and structures that enable DSGBV.

ENABLERS

People | Funding | Infrastructure | Governance | Communication



CHANGE

INDIVIDUAL LEVEL

Women, children and young people are safe, respected and supported.

Women, children and young people can recover and thrive.

Perpetrators are held accountable for their actions.

COMMUNITY LEVEL

A community that can recognise and respond to domestic violence and abuse.

A community that does not tolerate DSGBV.

SYSTEMIC LEVEL

An effective, integrated and collaborative system that works together to prevent and eradicate DSGBV.



IMPACT

A future free from domestic, sexual and gender-based violence.

IMPACT

As a part of the process, women were asked to identify the change they experienced in their lives as a result of receiving support from Willow Domestic Abuse Services.

These are some of the changes identified:

- **Increased safety**
- **Improved stability of accommodation**
- **Improved physical health**
- **Improved mental health and well-being**
- **A stronger support system**
- **Increased knowledge of rights and entitlements**
- **Increased recognition of the signs and impacts of domestic abuse**
- **Increased confidence**
- **Financial independence**



OUR STRATEGY

OUR STRATEGIC PILLARS 2026 - 2030

1. LISTEN

We actively seek the insights, knowledge and lived experience of women, children, young people and the wider community to inform all aspects of our work.

1.1 We create safe opportunities to hear the voices of women who have lived experience of domestic violence and abuse to inform our services and understanding of what is needed.

1.2 We listen to children and young people's lived experience and opinions to further develop our services and influence change.

1.3 We engage with the community in Co. Meath to gather insights on root causes and understanding of DSGBV to identify opportunities for progress.

1.4 We learn from research and evidence-based practice to inform our approach and response.

2. RESPOND

We provide high quality, evidence-based services to respond to domestic violence and abuse.

2.1 We expand and develop our support services informed by feedback and priorities of women with lived experience of domestic violence and abuse.

2.2 We expand and develop our support services for children and young people informed by their views and lived experience of domestic violence and abuse.

2.3 We deliver education services to the wider community to support understanding of the dynamics of domestic violence and abuse and build capacity for action.

2.4 We ensure our services are delivered to the best possible standard in line with evidence-based practice and feedback.

3. COLLABORATE

We work closely with partners to challenge and change attitudes, systems and structures that enable DSGBV.

3.1 We partner with women to amplify their voices as experts in their own experience and agents of future change.

3.2 We champion the voices and rights of children and young people through our partnerships and external representations.

3.3 We influence and mobilise key partners across Co. Meath to create pathways to safety and advance a future of zero tolerance.

3.4 We advocate for structural change in local, regional and national spaces towards our vision of ending DSGBV.

This strategy will be enabled by:
People, Funding, Infrastructure, Governance and Communication

STRATEGIC PILLAR 1: LISTEN

We actively seek the insights, knowledge and lived experience of women, children, young people and the wider community to inform all aspects of our work.

TO ACHIEVE THIS, WE WILL:

Create safe opportunities to hear the voices of women who have lived experience of domestic violence and abuse to inform our services and understanding of what is needed in all aspects of our work.

Listen to children and young peoples lived experience and opinions to further develop our services and influence change.

Engage with the community in Co. Meath to gather insights on root causes and understanding of DSGBV to identify opportunities for progress.

Learn from research and evidence-based practice to inform our approach and response.

KEY MEASURES OF SUCCESS

- An advisory panel of women with lived experience informs all aspects of our organisational activities.
- Mechanisms and forums exist throughout our services to receive feedback into gaps and potential developments for service provision.
- Changes are made to service provision based on the feedback received to ensure our services are responsive and accessible.

- An advisory panel of children and young people will inform our service developments and educational initiatives.
- Forums for children and young people with lived experience of domestic violence and abuse will offer feedback and identify opportunities for service developments and influence change.

- The Zero Tolerance Meath programme is embedded throughout Co. Meath and sustained beyond pilot stage.
- Increased engagement with local partners with in-depth knowledge of our local community.

- Research is commissioned and delivered to identify areas of focus for service development and inform our approach to advocacy.
- A culture of continual learning is embedded throughout the organisation.

STRATEGIC PILLAR 2: RESPOND

We provide high quality, evidence-based services to respond to domestic violence and abuse.

TO ACHIEVE THIS, WE WILL:

Expand and develop our support services informed by the feedback and priorities of women with lived experience of domestic violence and abuse.

Expand and develop our support services for children and young people informed by their views and lived experience.

Deliver education services to the wider community to support understanding of the dynamics of domestic violence and abuse and build capacity for action.

Ensure our services are delivered to the best possible standard in line with evidence-based practice and feedback.

KEY MEASURES OF SUCCESS

- An integrated model of service across the organisation so women and families engaging with us have a seamless experience of 'one service'.
- A new purpose-built refuge is delivered to increase the number of refuge spaces available in Co. Meath, in addition to development of other accommodation options.
- Our community outreach service is expanded to reach women in rural areas and those experiencing barriers to accessing services in Co. Meath.
- Increased recovery, educational and peer to peer supports for women accessing our services.
- Our services will be trauma informed and delivered in line with our values.

- Increased supports for children and young people who experience domestic violence and abuse both in refuge and in the community.
- Development and expansion of our education programme for schools and youth settings.

- An expanded education and awareness service to the community of Co. Meath.
- Delivery of education programmes to build the capacity of professionals supporting women, children and young people who are affected by domestic violence and abuse in Co. Meath.

- Embed measurements of change to demonstrate our impact.
- Quality standards are integrated into service delivery.

STRATEGIC PILLAR 3: COLLABORATE

We work closely with partners to challenge and change attitudes, systems and structures that enable DSGBV.

TO ACHIEVE THIS, WE WILL:

Partner with women to amplify their voices as experts in their own experience and agents of future change.

Champion the voices and rights of children and young people through our partnerships and external representations.

Influence and mobilise key partners across Co. Meath to create pathways to safety for women, children and young people with lived experience of domestic violence and abuse, and advance a future of zero tolerance.

Advocate for structural change in local, regional and national spaces towards our vision of ending DSGBV.

KEY MEASURES OF SUCCESS

- The voices of women with lived experience of domestic violence and abuse informs and advances advocacy.
- The voice of children and young people with lived experience of domestic violence and abuse is heard at local and national levels.
- Schools and youth projects are engaged with us to positively influence the attitudes and awareness of children and young people towards DSGBV.
- The Zero Tolerance Meath Interagency Group is sustained and developed.
- Strong relationships and actions are taken with interagency partners to facilitate a cohesive response to DSGBV across Co. Meath.
- A clearly defined advocacy agenda informed by those with lived experience of domestic violence and abuse.
- Strong and cohesive partnerships with local, national and regional partners to collaborate for change.

STRATEGIC ENABLERS

A strong organisational structure is required to deliver this ambitious strategy. We continuously strive to be a sustainable organisation with the right people, delivering the right services, funded appropriately to meet the needs of the ever-growing population of women, children and young people experiencing domestic violence and abuse.

We are committed to continued investment in our five foundational strategic enablers:



PEOPLE

Our services are delivered by a skilled, committed and supported staff, aligned with our purpose and values.



FUNDING

We have sustainable, diverse funding streams to deliver our core work and support innovation.



INFRASTRUCTURE

Our systems, processes and physical infrastructure create efficiencies and are fit for purpose.



GOVERNANCE

Our governance and compliance meet regulatory and best practice standards.



COMMUNICATION

We maximise clear, consistent communication across all channels to build stakeholder engagement and trust.

"Hearing other women who have also experienced domestic violence really made a difference. Makes you feel that you're not alone. Others have the same experience."

CONCLUSION

Violence against women and girls is one of the most systemic and common human rights violations globally and has its roots in gender inequality.

Our role in Willow Domestic Abuse Services will be to listen, respond and collaborate to address this violation.

We will work alongside those who have lived experience of domestic violence and abuse to ensure their voices are heard. Change takes time. We will continue striving towards our vision with respect, trust, empathy and hope to a future free from all forms of domestic, sexual and gender-based violence.



WILLOW

DOMESTIC ABUSE SERVICES

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