

Roscommon Safe Link, Elphin St., Boyle Co. Roscommon

National Strategy on Domestic, Sexual and Gender-based Violence, 2010 – 2014

Name of Organisation. Roscommon Safe Link Ltd

Positive Developments

- Spotlight on issue of domestic, sexual and gender-based violence has shown up some of the issues. For example, the diversity in women's experience of Domestic Violence, Domestic Violence as a crime, the prevalence of Domestic Violence, the impact on victims and their children and the implications for same, the complex issues for children living with Domestic Violence, post separation violence, the direct abuse of children during contact visits, and understanding children's perspectives and implications for practice.
- Another important aspect is highlighting the broader more complex understandings of Domestic Violence, which have been developed in recent years, for example Don Hennessey's sharing of experience and his training. There is now a wider recognition that Domestic Violence is about the perpetrators power and control over women and involves not only physical and sexual violence, but can include a number of behaviours, such as intimidation, threats, isolation and humiliation, behaviours often named as psychological, coercion or "violence". This is a positive development.
- Some awareness and change of attitude has come about under the current strategy. Positive feedback and up take of services as a result of media and other advertising. This includes a wider understanding of the nature and diversity of Domestic Violence, understanding Domestic Violence as gender violence, understanding it as a crime and the impacts on victims, their children and wider families.
- Reasonable progress with Policy and Service Planning, considering how far changes in policy and practice have increased the safety of women and children experiencing Domestic Violence, enabling them live their lives free from violence. This is a positive development in the past years
- For our organisation, the relationship between statutory agencies have improved, e.g., Gardai, Court Services, Child & Family Agency.
- Improved court services, and knowledge about Domestic Violence have made a positive difference for many victims of domestic violence locally in some cases.

Undesirable Developments

- There is evidence that state services to be slow to grasp the dynamics and seriousness of domestic violence. Slow to label it as a crime, slow to understand its prevalence and its impacts on victims and their children and slow to recognise the seriousness on post separation violence, especially the direct abuse of children during contact visits.

- There is a serious lack of data and understanding on the wider effects of domestic violence. As front line workers who sit with victims and their children we experience a lack of understanding of children's perspectives and this has huge implications for practice.
- Children of Domestic Violence victims are being referred to services with little awareness about the dynamics of the problems and complexities.
- There is poor expectation of accountability where perpetrators are concerned
- As a result, not enough work is being put into preventative measures and actions.
- The qualities of the activities being undertaken are questionable, especially where perpetrators programmes are concerned with regards to abusive fathers and children's safety.
- The data base on domestic violence is frustrating.
- Statutory agencies for the most part are resistant to understanding fully the underlying issues of domestic violence for victims, children and perpetrators. This has been well researched now and there is abundant evidence available. Therefore this is confusing for victims and service providers alike.
- The loss or absence of the RAC meetings in the area has had enormous disadvantage for our project in that it creates isolation for us in our rural setting.
- There is lack of clarity around Child & family Agency transfer and function; especially where implementation of the strategy is concerned. This is worrying for us especially with regards to funding.
- Confusion around NGO commitment and lack of same to the current strategy, what is this about?

Outside the Strategy

As an organisation, we have experienced difficulty with NGO's in the region. This history has left us somewhat isolated. We have no place to take this issue as it is impossible to know where to trust.

There appears to be many conflicts over approaches, practices and different understandings of Domestic Violence and the marginalising of voluntary sector women's services occurring in some localities with funding being severely reduced. It is difficult to provide a good service without adequate resources.

The Evidence

- Our experience within the project is evidence of all of the above.
- We produce a Progress Report of our activities on a yearly basis and include same for years 2009 – 2013 (Appendix A)
- Violence is being stopped and eliminated for the majority of our clients and their families
- A good majority of our clients have moved on with their lives and some have completed third level education and have taken their place in the work force.
- As we have become an independent entity in our own right, we have not had the time or resources to conduct evaluations. We plan to do this in the coming year.

What can be done better in the future by our organisation in the period 2015 – 2019

- Keep a steady and forceful spotlight on the issue of domestic violence within our own community and especially where state services are concerned with respect to victims, their families and their offenders.
- Working collaboratively with other agencies, especially in rural Roscommon.
- Demand strict accountability of perpetrators who have sanctions and have gone through the court systems
- Review working practices with clients on a continual basis to improve services.
- Offer training and awareness ongoing to organisations and agencies throughout the county
- Play an integral part of future structures or processes to support the strategy in the 2015/19 period
- Conduct a research project on the value of our services, to clients and their families and to our community.
- Awareness raising in schools as part of the curriculum, with regards to domestic, sexual and gender violence should be undertaken. This is impossible without additional resources.

By Others

- A true evaluation of service provision nationwide should be undertaken by an objective team of evaluators to see what is working well at present and what is not working well, and why. This should be funded and contracted for a specific period of time, with specific goals, outcomes and data.
- With regards to policing, prosecution and courts, a more innovative practice should be put in place around Domestic Violence. There could be provision made for specialist Domestic Violence courts with Judges who were appropriately trained and informed. There could be new and definite sentencing guidelines introduced as a matter of urgency.
- Only solicitors who are trained in family law and in the nature of Domestic Violence should represent victims, otherwise clients are being misrepresented.
- There is a need for primary prevention where Domestic Violence is concerned.
- Perpetrator programmes should be evaluated and managed for good and safe practice.
- A multi-agency response to domestic violence would be ideal, and any multi-agency practice to date could be examined for its impact.
- A new focus on perpetrators and the criminalisation of Domestic Violence to alleviate blame on victims.
- More attention could be given to the issues around the impact of Domestic Violence on children as “hidden victims”. Children’s views are most often ignored in family law proceedings.

Finally

We as an organisation have strong commitment to supporting the COSC strategy in its work and goals and overall we feel it has benefited clients by and agencies

toward common goals to create awareness about the issue of domestic, sexual and gender-based violence.