



volunteer centre

Ionad d'Obair Dheonach Corcaigh

CORK

PRESS RELEASE

Criticall Cork: How Cork Volunteer Centre is empowering Domestic Abuse Victims across Cork City and County

The Cork Criticall project emerged as a direct response to issues emerging during Covid-19 lockdowns. Substantial increases in reports of domestic abuse were outlined in the media and discussed widely by members of the Community Response Forums in both Cork City and County. In Dublin, a number of Volunteer Centres came together to set up Criticall as a means to provide critical physical items to those emerging from domestic abuse situations after the first lockdown.

Volunteer Centres are part of a national network and collaborate and share ideas. 'For us in Cork it was an easy decision to become involved and establish Criticall Cork' remarked Dr Julie Connelly, Manager of Cork Volunteer Centre. Cork Volunteer Centre coordinates the project. This would not be possible without the support of students on placement from UCC and of course volunteers. We schedule donation days, coordinate the donation timetable and arrange for the distribution of donated items to the relevant services. The project was kick started with a very generous donation by the Community Champions programme. This allowed us to get a mobile phone for the project coordinator and purchase vital PPE and sanitizing equipment for volunteers and staff.

From October to December, we arranged 6 donation days and were overwhelmed by the level of support the project received. Then we benefited from a very generous anonymous corporate donation which has allowed us to continue with the project in 2021. Thus far in 2021, we have had two donation days. 'We assumed that there would be challenges during Level 5 restrictions. However, the people of Cork continue to amaze us with their levels of generosity'. Our more recent donation day was 8th March (International Women's Day). As a result, we distributed 60 bags of physical items (such a non-perishable food, feminine hygiene products, toiletries and baby products), vouchers worth over €1000, and Phone Credit €115.00. We would like to sincerely thank all those who have donated to date. In particular, those you have donated on repeated occasions.

Our next donation day is scheduled for **9th April**. Please check our website for details on how to get involved.

Running a project like this during Level 5 lockdown has had its challenges. Due to contact tracing requirements, we ask that everyone interested in donating register with Cork Volunteer Centre first. To ensure people are not travelling excessively, we have three donation points – City Centre, East and North Cork. To avoid people congregating, we have a strict donation timetable for those volunteering to donate.

This project contributes to making Cork a safer space overall. For those donating, it allows them to feel like they are making a meaningful contribution to those worse off during this really tough time. Arranging a collection amongst friends and colleagues provides a way to connect with each other in some small way. For those receiving the donations, it gives them hope and encouragement. Volunteers can also support those in a very difficult situation by writing anonymous letters to them (in English or any other language). Victims who are migrants, can feel particularly isolated. Receiving words of courage in their native languages helps them feel less lost and lonely. Our letter writing project lets victims know they are not alone.

Phone credit can form an important part of a safety plan for a domestic abuse victim. It can mean the difference between life and death in some cases. *'We recently attended domestic abuse awareness training delivered by West Cork Women Against Violence. It really helped us to understand that domestic abuse is about control. Abusers take away their victims power. Donations of vouchers give victims back a little bit of their power. They are empowered to make small decisions for themselves'* Julie noted.

How to Get Involved.

- Register with Cork Volunteer Centre
- Register Your Interest in Donating at one of our donation sites.
- Register Your Interest in letter writing.
- You will be contacted by our coordinator to schedule a time.

For more details: <http://www.volunteercork.ie/critical/>

Notes for Editors:

In Cork, there are six members of Safe Ireland who benefit from donations from members of the public.

- Good Shepherd Cork (Edel House) provides help to women and children who are at risk of homelessness.
- Cuanlee Refuge provides aid, assistance, advice, accommodation and guidance for experiencing domestic violence.
- OSS Cork a domestic violence information and resource centre located in Cork City.
- Mná Feasa: a community-based support group established by women who have themselves survived domestic violence.
- West Cork Women Against Violence: provides free and confidential support, listening and information service to women who have experienced domestic abuse.
- Y.A.N.A. (You are not alone): A North and East Cork based service which provides helpline, information, referral to other agencies, court accompaniment and general support.

Cork Volunteer Centre was established in 2000. We provide information and advice to people interested in volunteering and assist non-profit organisations in recruiting and managing volunteers. This service is free of charge. Cork Volunteer Centre is one of a network of Volunteer Centres

nationwide affiliated with Volunteer Ireland. Cork Volunteer Centre is a registered charity that is supported by the Department of Rural and Community Development. Cork Volunteer Centre is located at 13 North Main Street, Cork.

Impact of the project

“The women end up living in homeless hostels or B&B accommodation, with entire families sharing one room. They then face enormous pressure to find long term accommodation and move out of homeless services quickly. The stress the lack of secure accommodation has on the women and children is unimaginable, particularly as it comes at a time when they are already traumatised by their experience of Domestic Violence.

The donations help in a myriad of ways but most significantly they help to reduce financial hardship. Most of the women and children living in B&B accommodation do not have access to cooking or laundry facilities so have to rely on expensive takeaways and outside laundry facilities. Being able to give a woman some toiletries means that's one less item she has to worry about buying”. (Good Shepherd Cork).

“Some clients suffer mental health challenges often brought on by the effects of Domestic abuse. This may manifest itself as low self esteem and lack of personal care. Donations such as shampoos, shower gels, toothpaste and toothbrushes are a wonderful way of showing care to our clients, reminding them that they are valued while giving them a little boost” (OSS)

Domestic Abuse Statistics

- ▶ 1 in 4 women in Ireland who have been in a relationship have been abused by a current or former partner.
- ▶ Domestic violence has a higher rate of repeat victimization than any other type of crime.
- ▶ Since 1996, 230 women have died violently in the Republic of Ireland. 61% were killed in their own homes.
- ▶ 60% of people who had experienced severe abuse in intimate relationships experienced the abuse for the first time under the age of 25.

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