SONAS
Freedom from Domestic Violence

Annual Report 2015

Working for Women and Children
Experiencing Domestic Violence

The Mission

Sonas works to keep women and children experiencing domestic abuse safe by providing effective frontline support services. The safety of women and children is our priority; their needs shape our response.

Sonas... Who We Are

Sonas is the largest provider of frontline support services to women and children experiencing domestic abuse in the country.

We work across the Greater Dublin Region and Wicklow to provide a range of services delivered by our dedicated Women and Children's Support Teams.

Services include: refuge, mobile community services - outreach, court accompaniment, visiting support and Safe Home crisis accommodation in the community as well as other longer term accommodation based supports.

The Vision

No woman or child should experience, or be at risk of experiencing domestic abuse. If abuse happens, victims should receive all necessary interventions and supports as early as possible to guarantee their safety and wellbeing.

There will always be those who seek to abuse but domestic abuse is not inevitable. As a country we can make a difference by…

- Recognising and upholding the rights of women and children
- Putting in place the primary prevention strategies needed to ensure domestic violence does not occur
- Providing necessary and timely support services to victims of domestic abuse
- Recognising that domestic violence is a crime. While anyone can be a victim, it is a crime that overwhelmingly and disproportionately affects women and children
- Supporting women and children to access a justice system that recognises and understands the dynamics of domestic abuse
- Ensuring our justice system holds perpetrators accountable

ANNA'S STORY

SONAS OUTREACH SUPPORT WORKER

"It's funny when people ask what you do. Some people do ask questions but others already presume they know all about it. Like abuse only happens to a certain kind of woman.

But honestly, over the last year, I've worked with such a variety of women from di erent backgrounds. Women who own their own homes, women who work and women who don't work, Irish women, migrants. Women who have been beaten, sexually assaulted, psychologically abused. Some women who are living in fear of their lives.

People do ask questions but others already presume they know all about it.

One woman had to meet me during work time, her boss gave her the time o , she was worried her partner would be keeping an eye on her during lunch breaks because he worked locally. She said he had threatened to kill her a few times. She didn't know if he would really go through with it, but she was scared enough to look for help. Our support included o ering her refuge, helping her to safety plan and encouraging her to report the threats and keep any evidence of the threats.

So when someone says to me now that it's only this kind of woman that gets abused, I just shake my head and say that's not true. I know because that's not what I see every day."

Core Principles

How we Work with Victims of Domestic Abuse...

Sonas exists to support services to women and children experiencing domestic abuse; their safety is our priority; their needs shape our response.

We do this by providing client-centred, needs-led, quality, effective and outcomes-focused services to women and children.

Safety, welfare and protection are our paramount considerations.

Sonas's mission is to meet the support needs of women and children. This means we identify where needs are not being met and respond.

We look to the future, anticipating and planning for emerging needs.

We work from a partnership basis, with the women and children we support as our primary partners.

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CEO Foreword

Sonas exists to support women and children experiencing domestic abuse; their safety is our priority and their needs shape our response. It is a simple statement, but it reinforces our commitment to always start with the client and what they need at a particular time.

In 2015, Sonas supported 1,250 women and children experiencing domestic abuse, the highest ,I W T G U K P E G 5 Q P C U E C O G K P V Q G W I K O H Q T E E earlier.

In the midst of these numbers, we never lose sight that each of these women and children is an individual. Victims of domestic abuse do overcome these challenges; we support them every day to come through their experiences. It would be naïve and dishonest not to say that the challenges victims face can seem overwhelming when allied with poverty, homelessness or risk of homelessness, insecure immigration status, disability, addiction, mental health issues or additional criminality on the part of perpetrators.

One of the biggest challenges facing us as an organisation in 2015 was the impact of the current accommodation crisis. We know that women were afraid to seek help, particularly refuge, because they feared they would become homeless. Women in refuge told us that they felt their choice was to go back to stay with family and friends, and if that wasn't available, to go back home to almost inevitably more abuse or go to homeless services.

As a service provider, we offer all clients follow-on services and support, whether staying with friends and family, returning home or going to homeless services. This support takes the form of supporting a woman to:

- apply for a legal order
- risk assessment and safety planning with women and children
- accommodation advocacy
- advocacy with other professionals to ensure additional support or continuity of support
- structured follow-on support where we work with women and children in whichever situation V J G [, P F V J G O U G N X G U

We are highly aware that the more effective responses for clients are provided in partnership with other services and agencies, both statutory and non: Tusla social work teams across the Greater Dublin Region and Wicklow, An Garda Síochana, family support, child and adult mental health services, local authorities and other domestic abuse organisations.

Sonas Safe Home, an innovative service response to women and children in need of support and suitable crisis accommodation, was successfully evaluated by Trinity College Dublin during the year. Safe Home could only have happened through a partnership between Sonas and Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council, with the support of the Dublin Region Homeless Executive, Tusla – the Child and Family Agency and An Garda Síochana.

Our hope for 2016 is that we can maintain this service as part of our overall services' response to the range of challenges, primarily safety, facing women and children experiencing domestic abuse.

Fiona Ryan
CEO Sonas Domestic Violence Charity

Sonas: A Big Thank You...

2015 was the year Sonas moved to being primarily funded by Tusla – the Child and Family Agency. We had previously been funded by a combination of Tusla and the Dublin Region Homeless Executive (DRHE).

While 2015 marked the end of our funding relationship with DRHE, its investment in HCEKNKVCVKPI 5QPCU VQ FGXGNQR GZKUVKPI TGUQWTEGU in response to particularly complex needs of women and children experiencing domestic abuse continues.

Our work in 2015 was made possible thanks to funding from:

- Tusla, the Child and Family Agency
- Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council (Safe Home)
- Wicklow County Council

Funding is a pre-requisite in providing wide-ranging, quality services. Skilled professional staff enable the organisation to deliver effective, targeted services. It is Sonas's partnerships, however, with other agencies and services, statutory and non, that make the crucial difference in achieving better outcomes for women and children experiencing domestic abuse.

We work daily with other domestic abuse support organisations, schools, creches, local authorities, Tusla social work teams, An Garda Síochana, the courts, health professionals, legal professionals, family support programmes, government departments, mental health and homeless support organisations, etc. The list could, and should, go QP TGƒGEVKPI CU KV FQGU VJG PGGFU QH VJG YQOGP and children we support. To all our partners we say a heart-felt thank you.

Within Sonas, our work is guided by a voluntary board which oversees the governance, management and strategic direction of the organisation under the leadership of Chairperson Anne McKeon. On behalf of all of us – thank you.

Quality services require dedicated professional teams to deliver them, we are grateful to have skilled, dedicated professionals working in our women's and children's support teams. Our services' colleagues are supported in turn by an organisational back-up team consisting of - HR, ,PCPEG +6 CPF CEEQOOQFCVKQP

As ever, our ultimate thanks are to the women and children whom we work with. Their experiences remind us daily of the reality of domestic abuse. Their courage and resilience also remind us that domestic abuse can be overcome.

SONAS IN 2015

We Supported **over 1,250** Women and Children Experiencing Domestic Abuse

7,232

INDIVIDUAL 1-ON-1 SUPPORT VISITS/SESSIONS

5,574 visits with Women

1,522 visits with Children

OVER 140

COURT ACCOMPANIMENTS

3,382

TOTAL GROUP SESSIONS

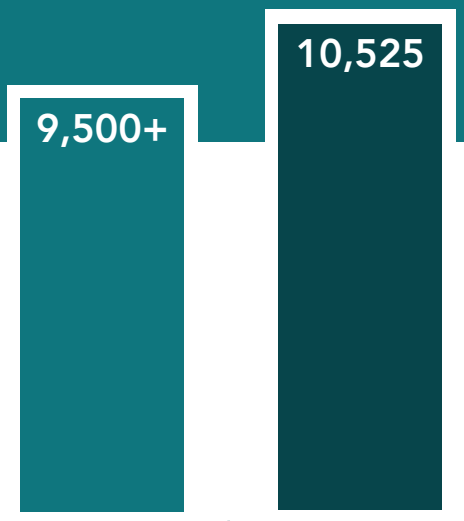
3,280

Group Sessions with Children

Group Sessions with Women

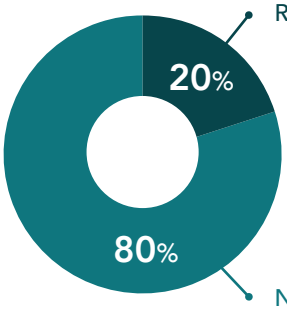
102

SONAS'S **DOMESTICABUSE.IE** WEBSITE STATISTICS



Individual Users

Individual Sessions were Undertaken



LAYLA'S STORY

"I have four children, this has been hard. My husband was very violent to me, the last time I felt he was going to kill me. He was sent to jail. Sonas has helped me to go to court without fear, knowing that we have support for myself and the children. Court has always been a challenging place to be for me, so knowing that I have support on each occasion has been something that I really appreciate.

I get support not just for court but for other important appointments. To know that I am not having to go to these on my own. I want to tell those that are dying in silence, to say that there is a place of hope for each and every one, you just need to ask."

To know that I am not having to go to these on my own.

Sonas Services

Supporting the Safety of Women and Children

Sonas exists to support women and children experiencing domestic abuse; their needs shape our response.

Sonas provides services across the Greater Dublin Region and Wicklow.

We know from providing services over the past 23 years that needs can differ from individual to individual, based on personal circumstances. Needs can also change over time which is why 5QPCU FGXGNQRGF QWT UGTXKEGU VQ DG ƒGZKDNG CPF responsive.

Sonas Services…

- **Refuge:** 24/7 crisis accommodation service for YQOGP CPF EJKNFTGP ƒGGKPI FQOGUVKE CDWUG including 24 hour crisis helpline.
- **Advice and Outreach:** A support service for women experiencing domestic abuse offering general advice and signposting to other UGTXKEGU 6JG UGTXKEG CNUQ QHHGTU URGEK,E CFXKEG on risk and safety assessment/planning, court accompaniment and legal issues.
- **Court Accompaniment:** Sonas provides court accompaniment as an additional service to women who are already being supported by a Sonas service, as well as to women who may just want support going to court.
- **Visiting Support**: An intensive form of outreach support provided on a structured case management basis over a longer period.
- **Crisis Intervention Service:** Provided by the 8KUKVKPI 5WRRQTV VGCO VJKU KU C URGEK,E UWRRQTV for women and children in homeless services and emergency hotel and B&B accommodation who are experiencing domestic abuse.
- **Children's Services:** Half of the people Sonas supports are under the age of 18; and 2 out of 3 are under the age of 10. Children's Services in Sonas are provided by a dedicated support team who work in every site-based service. The wellbeing, welfare and protection of a child or a young person is our priority across all services.
- **Long-term support via housing:** Sonas provides housing in different Dublin and Wicklow locations to women and children experiencing domestic abuse who may also have additional and/or complex needs. The aim of the housing-based service is to provide women and children with structured support in designated accommodation for a period of time before progressing on to general housing.
- **Safe Home:** Women and children out of home due to domestic abuse are provided with intensive support and housed in the community KP UWKVCDN[UGEWTKV[QWV,VVGF CE

IN 2015

7,232

INDIVIDUAL 1-ON-1 SUPPORT VISITS/SESSIONS

5,574 visits with Women

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Sonas Services to Children

Domestic abuse robs children of their childhood. It steals away their sense of safety, their understanding of the most fundamental relationships in their lives, their sense of self… Like other forms of abuse, it attacks children at their core level of being.

It wasn't so long ago that society viewed domestic abuse as an adult-only type of abuse, an adult-only experience where children were either unaware or witnesses at most. The effects of witnessing a parent being degraded, beaten and/or sexually assaulted were not fully countenanced, and a perpetrator could be viewed an acceptable RCTGPVKPI ,IWTG DGECWUG VJG[play VQ GPoV FKTGEVN[abusing the children.

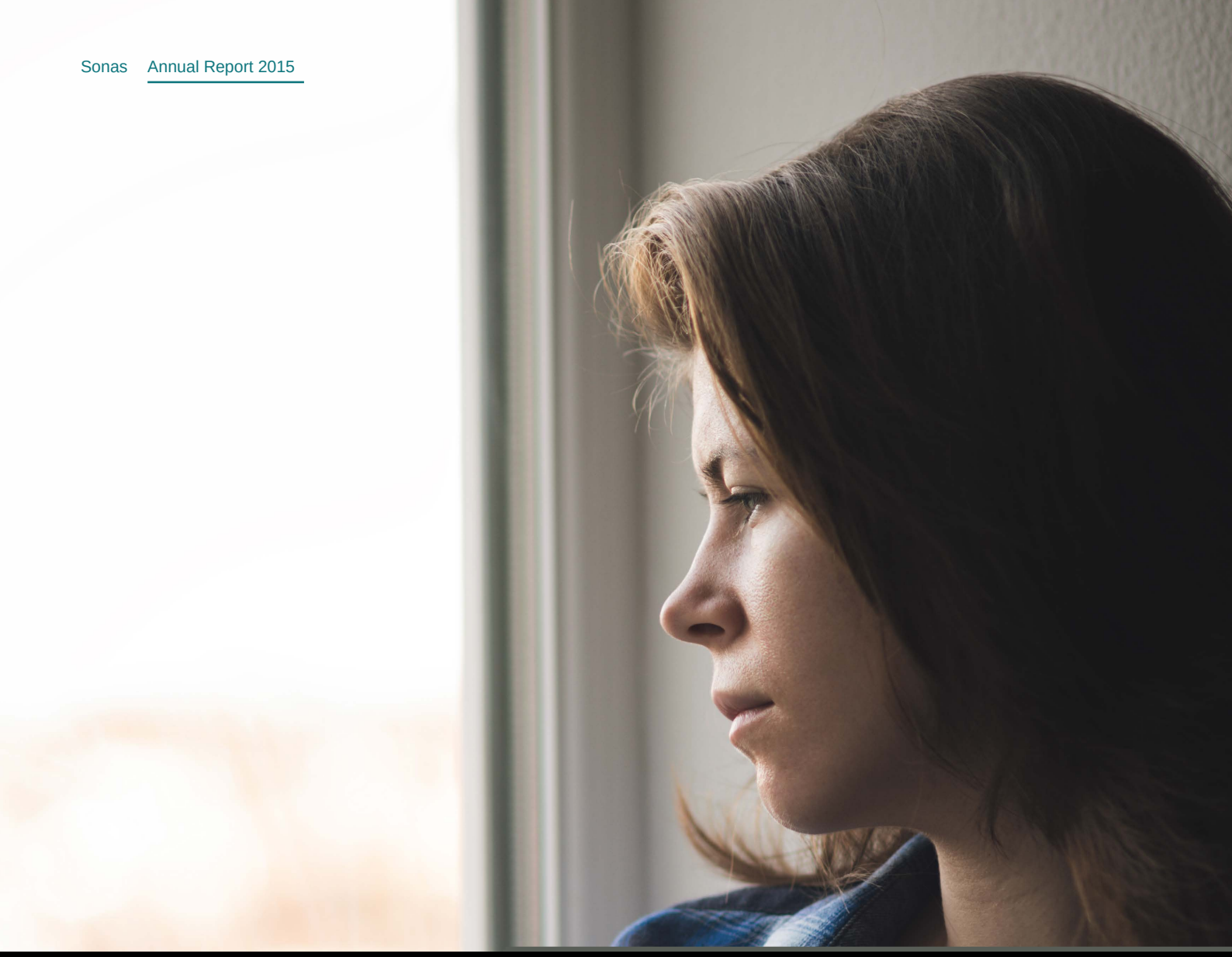
In Sonas, we have been supporting children experiencing domestic abuse for over 20 years, so we knew then, and we know now, this view is erroneous. All the evidence now shows that children are traumatised by witnessing abuse of the non-abusive parent and legislation recognises that domestic abuse is the emotional abuse of children. We also know that far from disregarding children or viewing them as collateral damage, perpetrators actively seek to abuse children as part of their coercive control of the whole family QT VQ URGEK,ECNN[HWTVJGT EQPVTQN VJG PQP-CDWUKXG parent.

Sonas supports hundreds of children every year who have witnessed abuse of a parent or been abused themselves. In 2015, our teams worked across our services to support over 700 children through direct work with children themselves, parenting work with their mothers and, frequently, a combination of both.

We supported children who had witnessed abuse and directly experienced abuse; physically and psychologically, their most basic needs for safety and care neglected. We used art, therapeutic play and structured activities to give children the space to safely disclose their experiences, process their emotions and, very importantly, sometimes to just play.

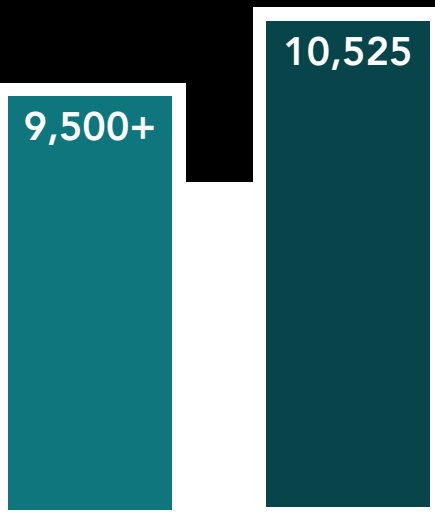
Many children struggled to make sense of their GZRGTKGPEGU *QY FQ [QW ,PF VJG YQT you are seven years old to describe seeing your mother's face covered in blood? Or reconcile the father that you still love with the man who beat your mother so badly she had to be taken from home in an ambulance? Or understand why your mother cries when all you did was call her the same things your father does?

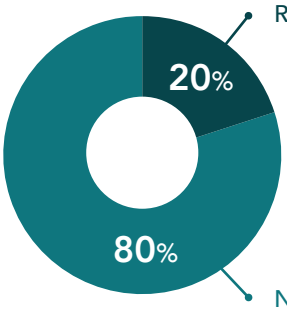
Sonas, in 2015, worked with other agencies and services to provide supports to these children; sometimes in a lead capacity and at other times providing the specialist intervention needed. Our aim was, and is, to provide the best child-centred support services we can, where the needs of the child shape our response.



IN 2015

SONAS'S **DOMESTICABUSE.IE** WEBSITE STATISTICS



Individual Users

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