

# CHANGE & CHALLENGES; RESPONDING TO SUBSTANCE USE & TRAUMA IN AN IRISH DOMESTIC VIOLENCE SERVICE.

Geraldine Mullane, Project Leader

Mary O'Gorman Services Manager

CUAN SAOR WOMEN'S REFUGE & SUPPORT SERVICES CLG

# OUTLINE

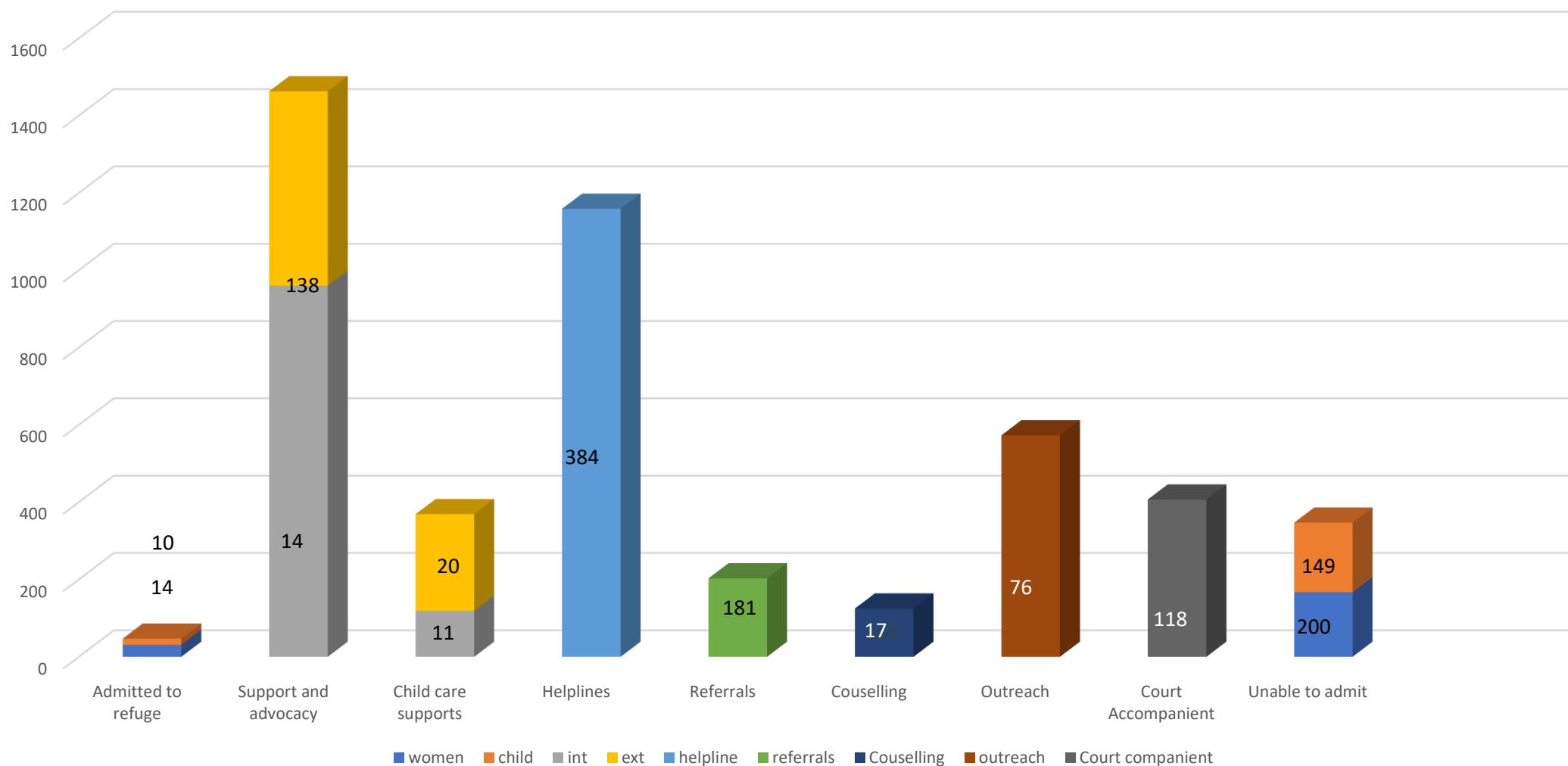
We are going to look at the approach, policy changes, outcomes, and learning points for a domestic violence agency in Ireland which implemented a harm reduction response to women living with violence and problematic substance use. Focus will be given to both the impact of trauma how we support mothers who are or have used substances.

# CUAN SAOR WOMEN'S REFUGE & SUPPORT SERVICES

- Provides self-contained refuge accommodation, support and advocacy, outreach, court support, 24 hour helpline, children's support, play/art therapy, counselling, parenting support & group work.
- 10.4 FTE staff, annual budget €581,076.00
- Over the past 12 years engaged in policy, practice and inter-agency change in addressing co-existing domestic violence, substance use and trauma.



# NUMBER OF WOMEN ACCESSING DIFFERENT SERVICES IN CUAN SAOR IN 2021



# WHAT WE KNEW-USE OF SUBSTANCES IN THE CONTEXT OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE.

Perpetrator of domestic violence may:

- Encouraging her use/dependence.
- Control of medication.
- Stigmatising woman because of her use.
- Utilising her intoxication to physically/emotionally abuse her.
- Invoking shame and using threats re:  
work/family/children/child protection in order to control  
her.
- Women drug users often considered ‘doubly deviant’-  
injecting and failing in traditional roles as mother/wife.

# WHY CHANGE OUR PRACTICES?

- Ongoing presentation of women/family with dual issues.
- Refused accommodation to women actively using. Referral to Social Work Department if she was in the care of children.
- Collaborative approach with women embedded in service - conflict with presenting issues of substance use, trauma histories, inter-generational patterns and sexual exploitation.
- Asking women to address their substance use issues before they could avail of refuge service.



# IMPLEMENTING ROUTINE ENQUIRY

We started to ask all women:

*“Some of the women I work with use drugs and alcohol as a way to cope with Domestic Violence - is this something you would like to talk about?”*

## Harm reduction approach

- Accommodating women actively using.
- Screening and active substance use harm reduction strategies.
- Sharps boxes and medication cabinets.
- Overdose training.
- Engaging re medication use and misuse.
- Discussing sexual health and sexual risk.
- Referrals, outreach and active support.
- Relapse recognition.

## Key points

- Achieved with very limited resources.
- Address the structural deficiencies of the building.
- Importance of good training and leadership within the organisation.

# CUAN SAOR - TRAUMA INFORMED RESPONSES WHERE THERE IS PARENTAL SUBSTANCE USE

MARY O'GORMAN  
CUAN SAOR SERVICES MANAGER

## ADVERSE CHILDHOOD EXPERIENCES (ACE'S)

An increasing body of research identifies the long-term harms that can result from chronic stress in childhood

Stress arises from the direct **abuse** and **neglect** of children, and/or **growing up in households** where children are routinely exposed to issues such as domestic violence and drug taking.

# OVERVIEW - CUAN SAOR PRACTICE RESPONSES

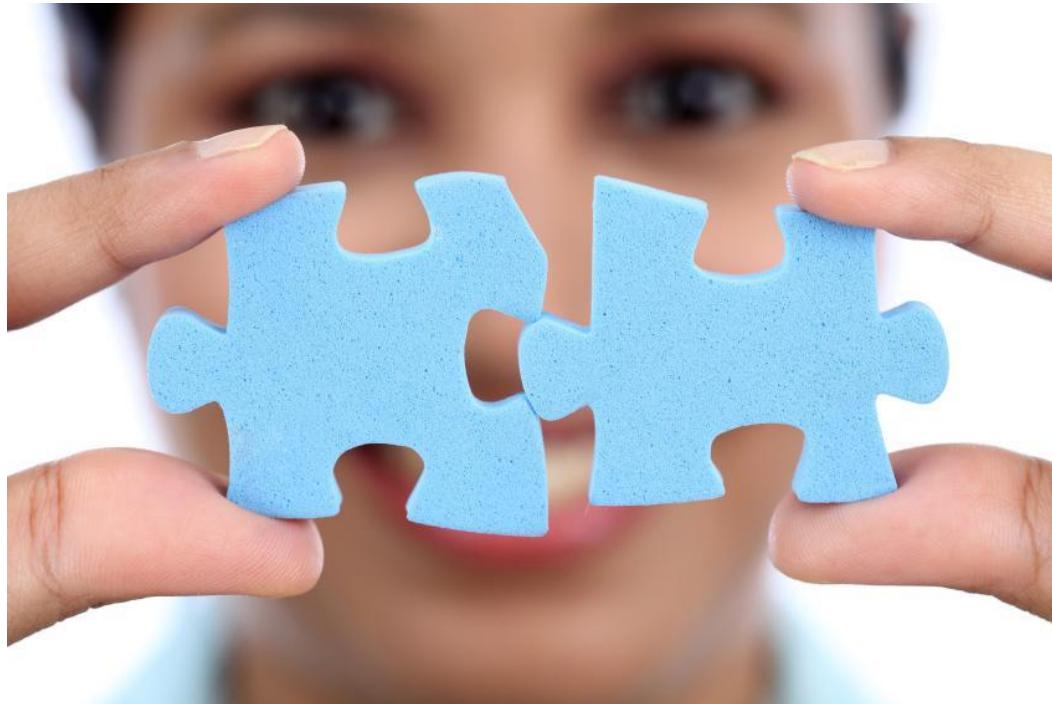
We provide a range of integrated services but these 3 aspects of our care are key for mothers using substances:

- Routine enquiry on Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)
- Walking the Walk - collaborative support
- PuP - Parenting Under Pressure Programme



# ACES ROUTINE ENQUIRY

- Asking the questions ACES routine enquiry
- Opening conversations
- Connecting the dots
- Interagency links
- Pathways to addressing trauma



## WALKING THE WALK - COLLABORATIVE SUPPORT

- Mother connects with Support Worker weekly & young person/child links with childcare worker - separate advocacy systems.
- Supportive space provides mother with necessary information & concrete support to explore her options and make changes where possible
- Harm minimisation daily
- Community drugs support worker - on site visit or clinic based
- Social Work Intervention/reunification

# PARENTING UNDER PRESSURE PROGRAMME (PUP)

- Evidence based intervention specifically developed for families experiencing adversities such as parental substance misuse, mental health problems, homelessness, family conflict etc
- Aims to develop positive & secure relationships between parent and child.
- Cohort of staff trained to deliver the programme with mothers onsite.
- Currently delivered to 4-8 mothers at a time.



# FACTORS THAT HAVE ENABLED CHANGE

- Recognising the need to change our practice for better outcomes for the women that use the service.
- Training
- The openness of staff to embrace change.
- Recognition of the correlation of the dual issues.
- Relationship with the substance use services
- Visual posters.
- Asking the question.
- Talking about the shame women feel around their substance use and impact on children.
- Open conversations about substance use relapse and/or problematic patterns of use of substances including alcohol.

## CONTACT DETAILS:

- Project Leader:
- Geraldine Mullane
- Email: [projectleader@cuansaor.org](mailto:projectleader@cuansaor.org)
- Phone: 087 1493566
  
- Services Manager
- Mary O'Gorman
- Email: [servicesmanager@cuansaor.org](mailto:servicesmanager@cuansaor.org)
- Phone: 0871015055