



Drogheda Women's & Children's
Refuge Centre C.L.G.

**BECAUSE IT
NEVER STOPS.....
NEITHER DO WE!**

CONTACT US AT:

RECEPTION: 041 9844998

24 HOUR HELPLINE: 041 9844550

**OUTREACH SERVICE: 085 8744238 / 085
8744158**

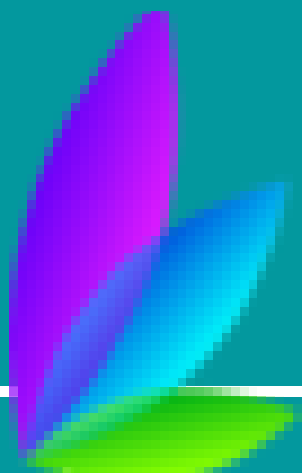
Web: www.droghedarefuge.org

**Facebook: Drogheda Women & Children's
Refuge**



**24 HOUR HELPLINE
041 9844550**

ANNUAL REPORT 2020



**DROGHEDA WOMEN
& CHILDREN'S
REFUGUE CLG**

CHAIRPERSONS REPORT

Welcome readers to the Drogheda Women & Children's Refuge Annual Report 2020. 2020 was a year unlike any other globally. The arrival of the Covid-19 pandemic in March challenged the organisation in every way imaginable; from the safety of women and children subjected to abuse in their homes, unable to get out during the crisis; to protecting staff and residents from Covid infection and the loss of key Staff and Board members.

The beginning of the year had an interim Manager in place and it fell to her to manage the initial implementation of the Covid-19 protocols and engagement with our funders. Both she and the staff rose to the challenge impressively, resetting rosters, and redeploying staff, processes of engaging with women and children remotely and securing PPE. The recruitment of a new Manager in April, brought a sense of a new direction for the Refuge. This was not any easy new appointment given the restrictions Covid-19 had brought to the staff, residents and refuge as a whole. It was a challenge to view the refuge and its day to day workings through any other lens than Covid-19.

The resignation of some older members of the Board and the step down of Frances P Byrne from her tenure as Chairperson were a big loss. Frances held this role for a number of years, and helped steer the refuge through the many challenges.

However out of every loss comes new opportunities and we were able to recruit six new board members with a wide variety of skills and insight to drive the Refuge forward.

I would like to thank Frances specifically for her dedication and commitment to supporting women and children experiencing domestic abuse and homelessness over these years. She was an incredible inspiration as Chairperson and her legacy as Chairperson will remain with the Refuge for many years to come.

Between the collective vision of the new Manager and Board members, the Refuge has begun the process of organisational change focused on ensuring the refuge delivers the best quality of service, to better prevent domestic abuse, and to protect victims and survivors. We look forward to implementing the recommendations of an organisational review in 2021.

I want to wholeheartedly thank our incredible staff, volunteers and my fellow highly dedicated Board members for their work. They truly went above and beyond throughout the whole year.

A BIG THANK YOU

We would like to thank our funders: Tusla (Child & Family Agency) who rallied to the aid of all DV services with additional support during the crisis. To Louth Co Council working with us to find accommodation for women who found themselves homeless during the pandemic . Pobal and Dept of Justice for continuing their support.

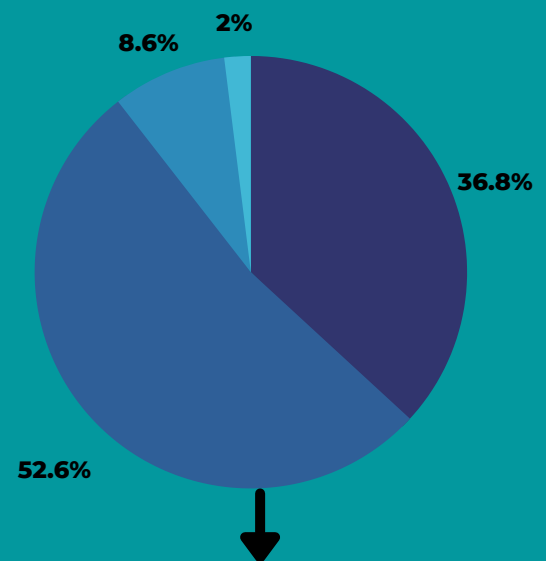
Despite all the challenges of 2020, there have been outstanding examples of brilliance, generosity, and self-sacrifice on the part of so many in the community. Corporate and individual donors reached out to support the women & children in experiencing domestic abuse.

With such uncertainty and stresses, it would be understandable that people would turn inward and try to protect their assets. However, just the opposite has occurred as people with varying resources “walked in the shoes of the other” and rose to the challenge brilliantly.

We are deeply grateful to you all, as there are too many to mention. *Your generosity shines through in difficult times....*



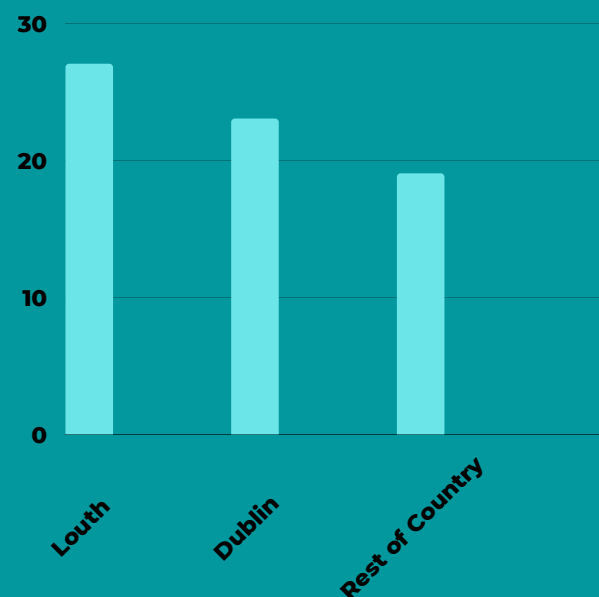
Our Refuge Admissions



36.8% domestic abuse women
52.6% domestic abuse children

8.6% Homeless women
2% Homeless children

Where were they from?



BUTTERFLY BOUTIQUE

2020 was an eventful year for the shop. I would like to take the opportunity to thank all our Staff and volunteers for their hard work and commitment over the year. I would like to thank Theresa Judge (Shop Supervisor) for providing training to the staff and volunteers and setting a great example for her co-workers. Through her expertise, knowledge, and guidance, she and the Staff have done an amazing job in bringing the shop which is situated on a quiet street in Drogheda to life, with their welcoming presence and beautiful display of stock and window displays. The shop window won prizes from the Fleadh in 2019 and 1st prize in 2020 for the best Christmas shop window. Well done.



It's amazing how the staff are always able to overcome any obstacle thrown their way and Covid being no exception. The shop closed its doors on two occasions in 2020 due to the Covid restrictions covering a period of 22 weeks. As you know the revenue generated from the shop goes towards the running cost of Drogheda Women's and Children's Refuge Centre, but this much needed source was no longer available to the service during lockdown, but I would like to thank our landlords Melcorpo Commercial Properties for their understanding and support during this difficult time.

Through hard work and determination, the staff worked tirelessly behind the scenes to prepare the shop for opening and our loyal customers old and new welcomed us back. I would also like to thank Catherine Bermingham (Refuge Housekeeper) and her team for all their hard work in implementing our donation Covid procedures. Catherine does a fantastic job in organizing twice weekly the drop off, of donations and supplies to the shop. Thank you.

Our social media advertising platform (Facebook) has become the new way forward for advertising the Shop. Theresa Judge (Shop Supervisor) and I provide posts for our followers to enjoy every week.

Though the shop was closed for 42% of the year it did generate a profit of over eleven and half thousand which is a testament to work the staff do.

Income:	30,357.05
Expenditure:	18,726.77
Profit:	11,630.28



I also want to thank all our partners in the community and voluntary, private and statutory sector as 2020 required a concerted whole community response to domestic violence and abuse. 2020 was the year for imaginative and creative ideas on fundraising and donations and the community rallied marvellously, even with the shutdown of our main source of income, the Butterfly Boutique. The donors and fundraisers donors who are too many to mention here, reached out to us at a time of real uncertainty and we thank them for all of their efforts and generosity. Their support ensured that all the Refuge's vital services could adapt and continue to be available 24/7.

It was also a year for Drogheda became more nationally engaged as ZOOM offered us an opportunity to meet more regularly with the other 39 domestic violence services around the country, facilitated by Safe Ireland. Through these active and energetic discussions, we managed to keep the issue of domestic abuse including coercive control and its devastating impacts high in the public awareness and on the agenda of decision makers over the lockdowns. We warmly welcome the empathic and urgent public response to this call, including that of the Government itself who made the scourge of domestic and sexual violence policy priorities at the formation of the new government.

In the midst of uncertainty going in to most likely most of 2021 will continue to advocate with, to seek opportunities, work in partnership and to innovate so that we can all do better for the one in four women in Ireland who need our support and solidarity at some point in their lives.

There remains much more to be done.

PADRAIC GRENNAN
CHAIRPERSON 2020

The refuge has been a valuable support for myself and my two children over the years.

The refuge was professional, confidential, and an amazing support from Counselling, a roof over our heads when we walked out with nothing to our name.

The staff were friendly and so helpful, we will be forever grateful for the day we picked up the phone for this continued support system, for women and families in need. Thank you from the bottom of my heart.

Past Resident

ABOUT US

MISSION

To work with others to prevent domestic violence and homelessness and to offer safe accommodation and support to women, children and families

VISION

Creating an environment where women and children will be safe

OUR VALUES

- We provide informed support in a caring way'
- 'We empower women to take control of their lives'
- 'We collaborate as a team and with others who can help women, children and families'
- 'We aim to work to the highest standard and best practice'
- 'We are transparent in our work and how we conduct our business'
- 'We are an agent for change'

OUR STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

Strategic Priority 1:

- Preventing domestic violence and homelessness

Strategic Priority 3:

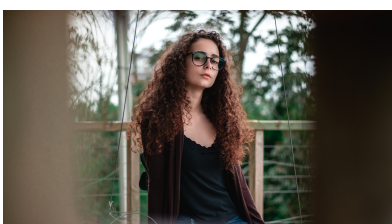
- Helping women and children to move on

Strategic Priority 2:

- Supporting women & children in crisis

Strategic Priority 4:

- Strengthening the organisation



TRAINING & COMMUNITY EMPLOYMENT

In 2020 there was a total of 26 participants in Drogheda Women’s and Children’s Refuge Community Employment Scheme consisting of 18 care staff, 1 Caretaker, 3 Housekeeping staff and 4 in the Butterfly Boutique.

There was not much movement in participants leaving during 2020 pandemic as those due to finish were extended to July and further extensions out to September and still continuing into 2021.

The challenges of 2020 were many for the scheme. Due to the pandemic, anyone who had finished could not secure employment; a delay in sourcing training as providers had to adjust to a new way of delivery. Other challenges were staff with underlying conditions out long term due to Covid, and there was a freeze on new hires during the pandemic.

Despite this in 2020 we rediscovered what we can achieve through the power of teamwork. From the start of the pandemic the team came together in solidarity to ensure the safety of the Women and Children using our services and of our colleagues. We did this by adhering to mask wearing, extensive cleaning and reduction of working hours to facilitate social distancing. 2020 was also a year where we found new ways of communicating with each other as yearly external monitoring was completed remotely as well as our meetings and all interviews taking place via zoom.

Staff were all trained in Covid protocols and towards the latter part of 2020 all CE staff received vital piece of Domestic Violence Training with Women’s Aid Dundalk via zoom. As online training started to develop, more opportunities came for participants to resume working towards major awards in their chosen fields. Other training completed such as First Aid, Children’s First, CV Preparation and interview preparation was completed. The staff review took place in December, where staff got the opportunity to voice their views and be a part of the upcoming changes planned to 2021.

Financial and training monitoring took place remotely in May 2020 and went well. All financial accounts are prepared by Matthew Walsh and Associates in Dec for yearly rollover in January 2021.

2020 Spending

WAGES	291,407.00
TRAINING:	2,135.00
MATERIALS:	8,627.00



SUPPORTS TO CHILDREN



Domestic Violence Specific Supports

- Development of care plans to meet individual needs
- Therapeutic supports for children
- Delivery of a 6 week programme on the impact of domestic abuse
- Development of safety plans with mothers & children
- Collaborative work with external agencies
- One-to-one sessions with mothers on domestic abuse parenting supports

480 children
availed of
childcare
service

83 Children
resided in
refuge

152 Child
Protection
Referrals

Impact of Covid-19

- Childcare service closure March to July
- Development of policies & Procedures
- Professional development of staff through training
- Engagement with service users via technology

On-site Childcare
Service

Pre-school: ECCE
& NCS

After-school
service

Drop-in service:
refuge residents
to attend Court
&
appointments

Summer &
Christmas
Projects



MANAGERS REPORT

We pride ourselves on providing safe accommodation. In 2020, 152 people were admitted to our refuge. Of these, 56 were women fleeing a domestic abuse crisis and 80 were children. we accommodated 13 women and 3 children who were experiencing a homeless crisis.

2020 was a year like no other. Coming in to run a Refuge in the middle of an global pandemic was no mean feat for everyone concerned. Everything was viewed through a Covid lens, and the initial challenges were keeping everyone safe, both physical and mentally, from the women and children we support to the staff team. Many staff were carrying out different roles than they normally did and some were doing what they could from home.

Being able to build a picture of the brilliant work of the Refuge remained a challenge due to Court and Childcare closures, remote support and the absence of county and regional meetings for a period.

In the midst of this crisis, we should never lose sight of the experiences of women and children and that their pain and trauma were still happening. The pandemic did not slow down domestic abuse, instead trapped them more in their homes with their perpetrators.

Linking in to the national Domestic Violence services forum facilitated by Safe Ireland was a lifeline. We were able to feed into national issues, build public awareness around the issue, and support each other during each of the lockdowns.

Our hope for 2021 is that we can return to full services' response to the range of challenges, primarily safety, facing women and children experiencing domestic abuse and bring the lessons learned from 2020 with us to always improve and develop.

Susan Keogh, Manager



OUTREACH SUPPORT

Many times families try to break the cycle of violence for themselves in the long term with essential support. The Outreach service is a very important support for many of these women who cannot source refuge or are not in a position to leave the home.

2020 was a challenging year for the Outreach team. Outreach Clients and Court Accompaniment referrals were down due to court closures in Drogheda and a halt to face to face meetings with clients. The Outreach staff had to seek alternative ways of supporting women to access orders and providing information along with supporting them to get to the Courts in Dundalk and access supports there. The majority of the activity was in the provision of advocacy (287 advocacy calls) and information (176 calls). 88 women were supported through the service in 2020.

All promotion and awareness of the service moved to online with referrals coming through, some self-referrals, some through links with the Courts services, Garda, Tallaght CIC, Social Work and Mental Health services. Support is also provided to a number of clients both pre and post refuge. The outreach staff also continued to work closely with the Tenancy Sustainment Officer to support the resident in the Transition House to secure permanent accommodation opening up space for a family in the refuge in 2021.

MARY'S STORY

First and foremost I want to express my gratitude to everyone at the Drogheda Women's Refuge, each one of you played a very important part in ensuring that I was safe and received the best advice services.

When I first approached the Women's Refuge in Drogheda, I have to say I didn't know what to expect but it was the only option I had at a time and it sounded like the only place that I needed at the time. My story was heard empathetically, I was allowed to express myself without any distraction.

That night I was given a place to stay as I didn't have anywhere to go. The staff were really helpful, all facilities were available to anyone, even food stuff were plenty.

I was accompanied by Alison & Michelle several times to the court, I would have been lost without them to be honest. I couldn't imagine being alone in court as my ex would often come and intimidate me in front of everyone. It really meant a lot to me. Thank you !

I was given the right information to detail that helped me get to where I am today. So if not for Drogheda Women's Refuge, I wouldn't be where I am now !

BOARD OF MANAGEMENT

2020 saw a big change in the membership of the Board of Management. Frances Byrne stepped down in her long serving role as Chairperson, with the mantle being taken up by Padraic Grennan. Sadly 2021 saw the resignation of long serving board members. Six new members joined the team at the AGM in September, bringing fresh new ideas and skills for the development and direction of the Refuge. The Board of Management focus for the remainder of 2021 into 2022 is on Governance, organisational review, and strategic planning for the Refuge into the future.

The 2021 membership is:

- Padraic Grennan (Chairperson)
- Deirdre McHugh (Company Sec.)
- David McKeown
- Paddy Woods (New Member)
- Anna Shakespeare (New Member)
- Brenda Finnegan (New Member)
- Sarah Judge (New Member)
- Celine Clinton (New Member)
- Antoinette Rourke (New Member)



FRANCES P BYRNE.....

Frances P Byrne stood at the helm of the Refuge for over 20 years.

During her time with us she was viewed by staff as a fierce advocate for the women and children who used the services of the Refuge. She maintained a large public presence when it came to highlighting the issues of domestic abuse and homelessness in the area, ensuring the issues were kept high on the public and decision making agenda.

She was focused on delivering the best service being delivered to the women and children, supporting and encouraging the staff in their professional development. Her dedication and kindness towards women and children will be sorely missed when she leaves the Board.

OUR SUPPORT WORK

The Support team work to ensure every woman is safe and is given options to enable her to overcome trauma and regain control of her life free from abuse, violence and fear. We listen to women; we give them the space to describe their experiences; we empower them to rediscover their own needs, gradually overcoming the trauma they have suffered.



Our refuge comprises of 6 family units and 5 single rooms. The support the refuge offers is an essential element of the response to violence against women and children. They provide a lifeline to the women who need to flee their abuser and find safety and support in secret locations in new parts of the country. When you're safe and supported, you can achieve.

In 2020 the refuge operated a key working system which means every family is allocated a keyworker when they arrive to the refuge. These staff commence a care plan which is client-lead, to ensure all aspects of support are offered and in time, options and moving on to a safe home can be addressed. This year proved to be a huge challenge for the support team with Covid-19 restrictions preventing face to face meetings with clients as they come into the refuge and when developing care plans. The Support team had to think outside the box to ensure connection and support continued for the clients using the refuge and helplines, often having to carry out support visits and needs assessments over the phone in very stressful situations and environments for everyone involved.

Due to the lack of movement and available accommodation during the lockdowns, many families and women found themselves unable to move from the refuge for long periods. The support team also had to respond to the mental health and family support needs beyond the scope of their work, however they rose to the challenge and continued to work on approaches to the support to keep the longer term residents engaged and upbeat during the lockdowns.

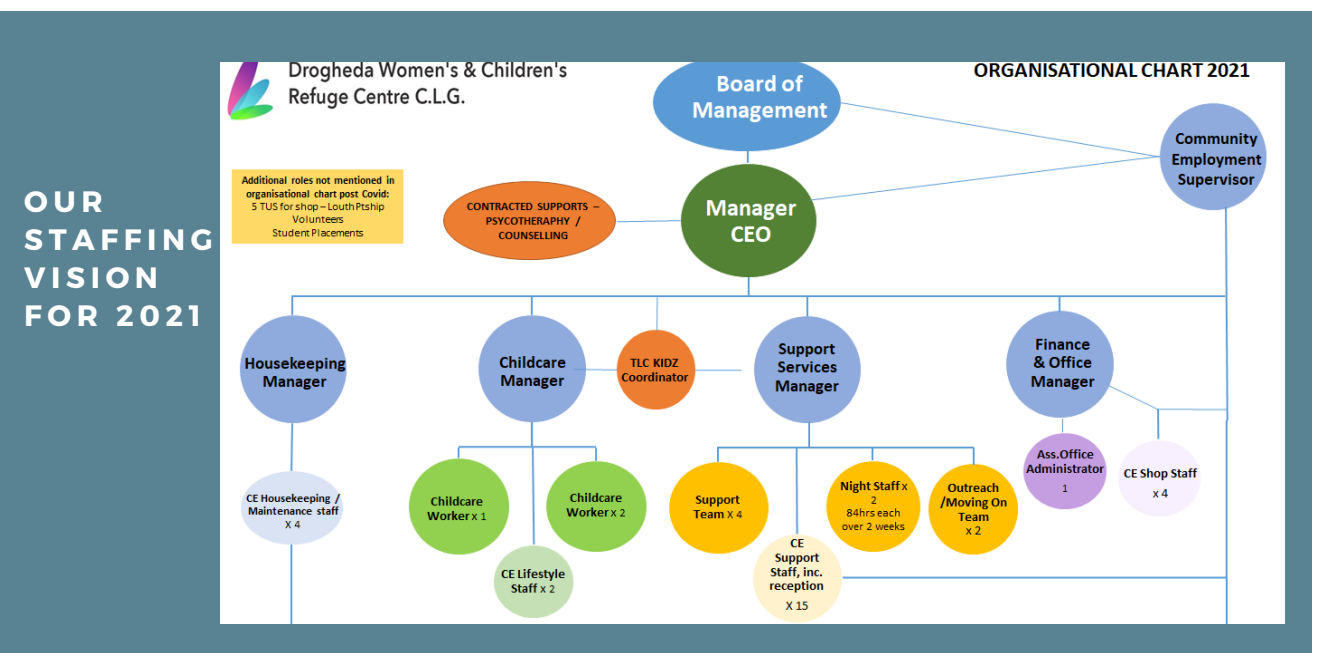


OUR STAFF TEAM

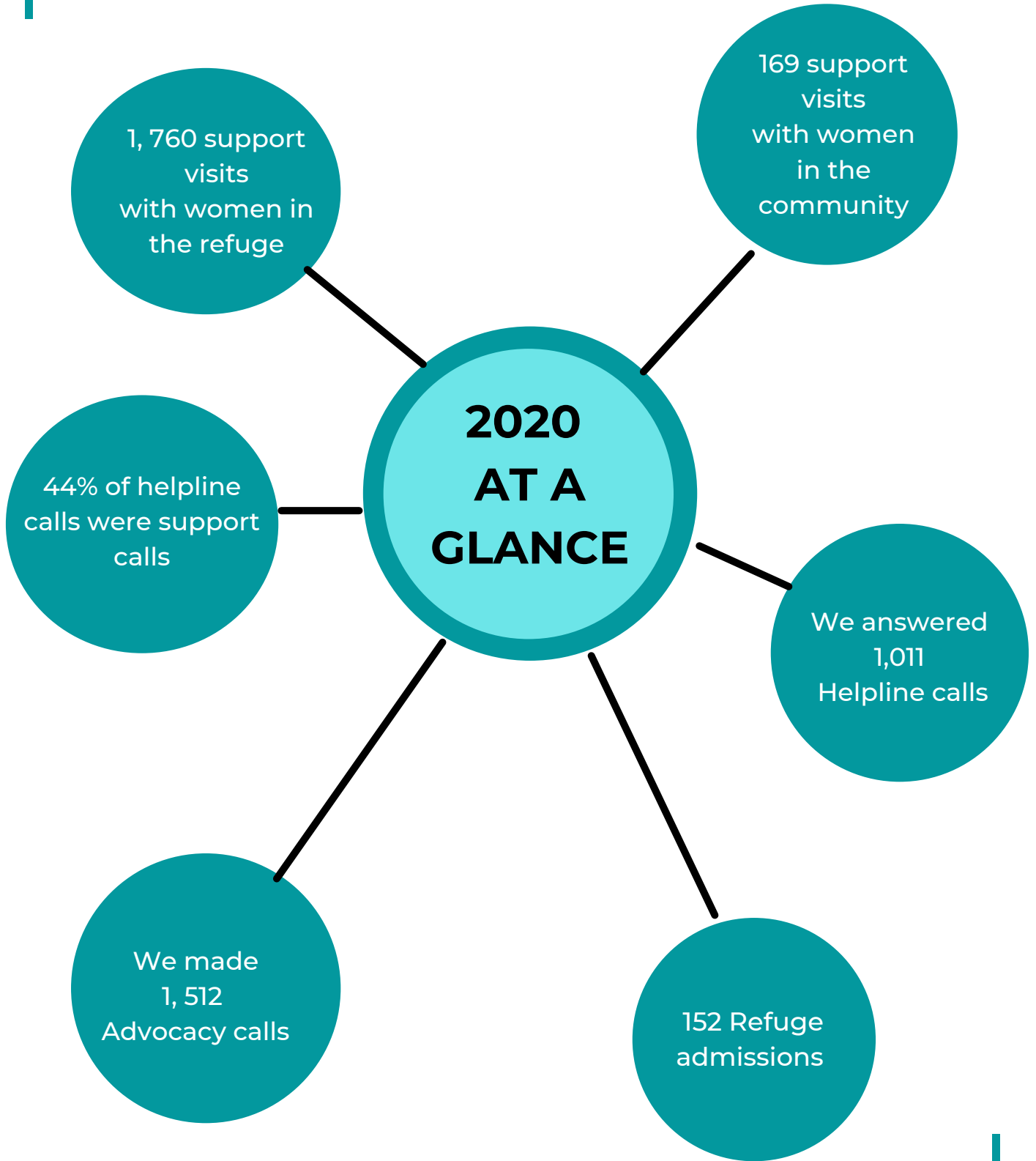
2020 saw huge changes in the staff team, from the recruitment of a new Manager to the departure of 4 key staff in March, August and November. While this at first appeared a great loss to the service, particularly during a global pandemic, it was also an opportunity to review the staffing structure and identify the optimum service for women and children we support. An independent HR review was carried out in the latter part of 2020 with the staff and the interim report highlighted the need for a stronger management structure and a reorganization of the Support Service. See *sample organisational structure 2021, Table 1*.

During all of this uncertainty, the staff continued to support women and children through the crisis, while facing the challenges of moratoriums on rented accommodation which increased the difficulty of moving people on from the Refuge. This resulted in families and individuals making the refuge their home for longer period than they hoped, leading to additional therapeutic and emotional support needed from the staff. Nonetheless, the support to the women and children continued, and the staff found creative and imaginative ways to work around this.

The staff rose to the challenge of increased workload, working differently and mainly remotely, redeployment, working different hours, managing childcare, working in pods while trying to keep everyone around them safe.



FACTS AND FIGURES



OUR SUPPORTS & SERVICES

We provide Refuge/Safe Accommodation. Our refuge comprises of six family units and five single units for women with no children. In the Community we have a Transitional House that can accommodate two families, where service users can avail of our support service and tenancy sustainment. We have an outreach and accompaniment service, supporting women to stay in their homes through advice, court accompaniments and legal supports.

Our childcare service and facility provides a pre-school service, toddler sessions, after-school sessions, summer camps, one-to-one parenting support and childcare for mothers to attend appointments related to their care plan, for example Court, Gardaí, solicitors.

We provide therapeutic and developmental Support Programmes for women and children.

We provide support and information services on issues associated with domestic abuse and homelessness which involves support visits, low cost counselling, referral service, advocacy work, aftercare support and a 24 hour Helpline. We aim to re-establish a Support Group for women who have experienced, or are currently living with, domestic abuse.

We engage in social enterprise through our Butterfly Boutique Charity shop.



"My stay in the women's refuge was very comforting, everyone was very welcoming and I got amazing help from all the stay which I appreciate greatly"