



PROJECT DOCUMENTATION

COERCIVE CONTROL CONFERENCE REPORT



EU INTERREG VA MACE Project (Multiple Adverse Childhood Experiences)

Trauma Informed CBCN No/Area: 1 & 2
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Purpose of Document

To provide the Project Board and CAWT Development Centre with a summary of the Coercive Control conference in Letterkenny on 11th December 19. This conference was a collaboration between MACE areas one and two and The Donegal Children's Services Committee (CYPSC).

Date of Report: 13th December 19

Background to the conference:

Whilst completing scoping reports for MACE areas one and two research, statistics and anecdotal information from practitioners working within these areas, highlighted significant concerns about the prevalence of Domestic abuse, lack of services particularly in Donegal and the impact on victims and children. In particular, the area of coercive control was highlighted as an issue which required further expertise and training, particularly in Donegal with the implementation of The Domestic Violence Act 2018, which came into effect on 1st January 2019.

On 24th July 2019 the MACE Project co-ordinators from areas one and two met with a number of services: An Garda Síochána Domestic Abuse team, Donegal Domestic Violence Service and HSE Sexual Assault Treatment service. These meetings prompted an invite to attend the multi-agency sexual assault response Team (SART) meeting on 25th July 2019. This multi-agency team included representatives from An Garda Síochána (Domestic abuse and Continuous professional development teams), Tusla, HSE, Donegal Domestic Violence Service. The chair of the Children and Young People's services safe and secure sub-committee, who is also a member of An Garda Síochána, was also present. The discussion at this meeting was the catalyst for the Coercive Control Conference and workshops.

A working group was formed from this meeting to take forward the conference and workshops, with CYPSC and MACE providing the funding.

Planning meetings:

The working group included representation from An Garda Síochána CPD and Domestic abuse teams, CYPSC, MACE, Tusla-Child Protection and Child and Family support Networks and Donegal Domestic abuse service.

It was agreed the remit of the conference would focus specifically on coercive control, as it is a complex type of abuse which can often be difficult for families and professionals to recognise. Research from the UK also evidences the link between coercive control and homicides, with Coercive Control being present in 92% of UK domestic killings. In Ireland 230 women and 16 children were killed between 1996-2019, 56% of these women were murdered by a current or ex- partner. It was agreed that whilst other types of domestic abuse would be referenced within the conference the focus would be specific to coercive control.

Whilst the working group acknowledged that men can also experience coercive control and other forms of domestic abuse the research in the UK and Ireland overwhelming evidences that the majority of victims are female and the majority of perpetrators are male. Under reporting of domestic abuse in males, the different sexual orientations/relationships and also the data in relation to domestic killings were all considered and it was agreed the conference would focus on Coercive Control against women, perpetrated by males.

The working group met on seven occasions from August –December 2019 to agree and plan the agenda (attached).

Other partners were also consulted in relation to the agenda and registration, including Fermanagh Women's Aid, Foyle Women's Aid, PSNI and HSE. It was agreed that the registration for the conference would be delegated to partner agencies with each agency

allocated 50 places to register, with the exception of Donegal Domestic Violence Service which is much smaller and therefore allocated 20 places. This ensured that each organisation could have autonomy in relation to prioritising staff attendance. The organisations allocated tickets included:

- Tusla
- HSE
- An Garda Síochána
- CYPSC
- Child and Family Support Networks (C & V)
- MACE-Cross Border
- Donegal Domestic Violence Service

A nominee from each organisation undertook the registration and also completed this on the morning of the conference. This multi-agency approach also ensured that each sector felt a sense of participation and involvement and also ensured that registration for over 300 delegates was completed effectively.

Summary of the conference:

The Conference Compere was Fergal Landy, Tusla Regional Implementation Manager for Partnership, Prevention and Family Support. Fergal is also the Tusla representative on the MACE project Board, on behalf of Aisling Gillen. He is also the Line Manager for the MACE Co-Ordinators for areas 1, 2 & 3.

There were 329 registrants with 295 of these attending the conference.

The conference started with a reflection and remembrance of all those who had lost their lives as a result of Domestic Abuse and each table was asked to light a candle which remained lit throughout the conference.

Professional guest speakers included representatives from Fermanagh Women's Aid, PSNI, Foyle Women's Aid, An Garda Síochána National Protective Services Bureau, Tusla and Donegal Domestic Violence Service.

The voices forum from Foyle Women's Aid also presented a DVD 'From Hurt to Hope'; which documented their lived experience of Coercive Control and how they rebuilt their lives with support from Women's Aid.

Two inspirational speakers shared their lived experience of coercive control.

Jenny shared her experience of coercive control, the significant trauma on her children, how her oldest child availed of therapeutic support to help him to process some of the trauma he had experienced. Most significantly she shared her experience of the legal systems in NI and ROI and how her partner continued to use the judicial system as a means of coercive control. She shared how, with the support from Women's Aid, she has rebuilt her life and now has a new home and is studying Law at university.

Luke Hart, whose mum and sister were murdered by his father in 2016, shared his experience of living with Coercive Control over a twenty-five-year period. Luke spoke about resilience and how his ability to be resilient and keep going despite the adversity he experienced was a barrier for those around him to identify he needed support and has also resulted in him being emotionally void. Luke also discussed how the murder of his mother and sister was reported in the media, with a sympathetic view and justification of his father's actions, which was reported as suicide, rather than a focus on the murders of his mother and sister. Luke also reflected on the sources from the community, which the media used, and their view of his father which again evidences the secret nature of domestic abuse and how

little the community actually knew. Luke explained the complex nature of coercive control, in particular how difficult it is to explain and how important it is to ask victims 'what can you not do?' rather than asking what is being done to them as it is often so subtle that victims can't identify it.

The day ended with a panel discussion with questions from the audience.

Media Coverage: The conference was featured on the RTE news at 6pm. It was also reported in a number of local newspapers.

Evaluations:

There were a total of 196 evaluations completed-The working group and speakers did not complete evaluations. The highest proportion of evaluations were completed by professionals from community and voluntary organisations across Derry, Donegal and Strabane.

Cross Border Community and Voluntary: 66

An Garda Síochána: 52

Tusla: 37

HSE: 27

WHSCT: 12

Probation Services: 2

All the participants have provided overwhelming positive feedback with a number of participants noting that it was the best conference that they have attended.

Future areas of work identified in evaluations:

An evaluation report has been attached however the themes emerging for future work include:

- Further training and workshops
- Early intervention and work within schools
- Multi-agency working
- Breaking the silence with public awareness Campaigns-Posters, social media
- Media training for those who report on domestic abuse incidents, in particular homicide
- MARAC or another multi-agency assessment tool to be implemented within Donegal

An evaluation report is also attached.

Workshops:

The working group also identified training needs in relation to other professionals and it was agreed that two workshops would be facilitated with CBCN area 1 –The first workshop was specifically for Solicitors and judges, with 26 attendees. The rationale for this was to ensure that those who provide legal advice, decide contact arrangements or are involved in domestic abuse proceedings should be aware of the complex nature of domestic abuse and the impact on women and children, which the working group felt was an area for improved practice.

The second workshop included professionals from statutory, community and voluntary services. This was a half day workshop which allowed more input and was more successful.

In addition to providing knowledge and skills to local practitioners these workshops provided a learning forum which enabled us to seek feedback and improve the content of the presentations for the Conference, which is reflected in the feedback from the conference.

There are a further two workshops planned in CBCN area 2 in February 2020.

It is also hoped that further cross border links can be developed with Foyle Women's Aid and Donegal Domestic Violence Service, as this cross border collaboration would have greater outcomes for children and families who are experiencing domestic abuse.