

WORKING TOWARDS A SOCIETY FREE FROM ABUSE

January - April 2016

RCNI is moving

We're making the move to Dublin. You may have noticed that we have a new postal address, 30 Merrion Sq. Dublin 2. Over a period of time and with the pressure on us given the smaller team it became clear that we were not as effective as we could be with the limited resources being based outside the capital. We now have an office with the support of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions, its Women's Committee and the Public Service Executive Union who have lent us a room to get ourselves off the ground here in Dublin. The PSEU executive voted unanimously to support us and are being wonderful and generous hosts. Their support is very welcome. This is a temporary arrangement and we will shortly be looking for permanent accommodation here in Dublin.

The ICTU Women's Committee and relevant unions are also working alongside us on getting an exciting initiative off the ground to advance our policy position on 'safe to learn' and we will have more on this as it develops.

The office in Galway will be closing at the end of April at which point our postal address will become 30 Merrion Sq. Dublin 2. (We will update you with contact details as that changeover happens). Mary D'Arcy who has been a stalwart with the RCNI for the past 14 years and who has kept everything ticking over seamlessly will unfortunately not be coming with us to Dublin and has opted to take redundancy. We will miss her greatly as a friend and a member of the team. She will be finishing up at the end of April and a leaving party has been planned for the 10th of May in Galway. I'm sure you will all join with us in whatever way you can to wish her well.

Data and EIGE

First the good news. We are pleased to inform you that the European Institute on Gender Equality (EIGE) has shortlisted the RCNI Data, Knowledge and Information System as an example of best practice administrative data collection in the area of gender based violence across Europe (announcement 30th March 2016). This is something that we should all be justifiably proud of.

EIGE is an autonomous body set up by the EU Parliament and the Council of Europe to contribute and strengthen EU and National Policies on gender equality. Their priority area of interest in terms of gender based violence is data collection across the EU on this issue.

LGB Statistical report

The LGB Statistical report is now drafted and we are engaging with LGB organisations and individuals to finalise our recommendations. We will have a lunch in Dublin in May/June depending on the schedule of the person launching it. We will brief you in advance on its content so that you can comment on it and you will be the first to get an invitation once we have the date and venue fixed.



Our usually sunny
new address



<http://eige.europa.eu/>



National statistics report 2015

We are also in the process of drafting the national statistics for 2015. We will let you know when we are launching same and brief you on the contents beforehand.

Data protection and the future of data collection in Rape Crisis Centres

And now for the bad news! As you are aware the RCNI data system has not been funded for the past year. This has meant letting go of Elaine, our data manager, and also not being able to support and train RCC Data Collection Officers throughout centres as we have done in the past. This has implications for the system. Alongside this, Tusla have not yet answered the queries and concerns regarding data protection and your contracts that the Office of the Data Protection Commissioner, our legal advice, RCNI and yourselves have put to them.

Tusla have made the data question a priority and inform us that they will have something for you mid-April, however, we do not yet know how far they will go to fix the problem.

The RCNI system is best practice because we developed a sophisticated system of data protection both in the software and in the investment in process and personnel across the sector which secures survivors of sexual violence's rights under data protection. We can only collect data in this way and make the voices of the otherwise silenced survivors of sexual violence heard and available to provide an evidence base for policy if we can collect that data safely. Without this data protection infrastructure and given the changing landscape and risks being introduced by Tusla we may have to consider RCC's safety in collecting data.

For Tusla to receive the necessary aggregated data it requires from RCCs they fund, a uniform data collection system within RCCs is a prerequisite, as Tusla have acknowledged. Given the nature of sexual violence, the rights of sexual violence survivors under data protection and under the EU Victims' Directive and the contractual relationship between Tusla and Rape Crisis Centres there is no alternative to the RCNI system eg no statutory agency can legally collect this data directly, no centre can collect and aggregate other centre's data. Our analysis has been developed with guidance from the Office of the Data Protection Commissioner and our legal advisors who clearly identified the contractual relationship as problematic for data protection. Please find attached an up to date briefing document for political and other actors. We have outlined three asks.

Data protection concerns - three steps to the solution:

1. Tusla need to clarify and detail in writing what data they need from centres in aggregate format as advised by the ODPC (we think this is what Tusla will look to deliver in April).

2. The sector needs one collection system with agreed mechanisms that can give the assurance of accuracy and reliability of the data being collected in that format. Given survivors' rights that database has to be held within the sector as Tusla cannot collect this data directly. In our view it should be funded by Tusla given they draw upon and require its outputs in the form of relevant aggregated and fully anonymised data from RCCs they fund.

3. Survivors and RCCs as their data controllers must have independent data protection advocacy and advice capacity (that needs to be funded) which collaborates with formal authorities to ensure the statutory agencies get as close to what they need to drive best practice while survivors' rights in accessing RCCs are protected.

We have two exciting pieces of research that we hope you will engage on

1. **‘Always Women’** - As part of our ongoing response to the growing debate on the 8th amendment and ensuring the facts, information and impacts on rape survivors is properly understood and articulated we are initiating a small scoping study. We want to hear from survivors’ about their experiences of engaging with fertility, maternity etc services, if they feel being a survivor impacted those experiences given the impact of the eight amendment on women’s consent in matters reproductive (we will also have a control group of non- survivors in the research). We are looking for the input of women in an initial scoping study in order to begin to give voice to survivors and hope you can put up the accompanying flyer on your notice board and bring it to the attention of anyone you think might be interested. Women are asked to fill out an anonymous short survey on-line. If they wish they can also be interviewed by one of the academic team of researchers we have assembled for this study.

2. **‘Survivor Centres RCCs’** - Celebrating and making visible survivor engagement in the sector - ideally we would have all centres engaged on this (non-member centres included). It is an important piece to consider and to give thought to but not a big piece of work for you or your staff once you decide to engage. One of the objectives of the study is to meet funder needs to have measurable and visible survivor user engagement. Please read the attached flyer for more detail.

In terms of the RCNI (and/or centres) moving beyond information giving and identifying our appropriate advocacy role in the 8th Amendment and Abortion debate and rape, the paper discussed at the AGM is attached.

Also if you haven’t already got this service for accessing sign language services online do check out www.slis.ie or phone the Sign language Interpreting Service (SLIS) at 0761 078440

Legal Update

Our packed legislative change agenda, including the Criminal Law (Sexual Offences) Bill and legislation under development on sexual offenders and victims’ rights, and lobbying around those is ongoing in preparation for the new government. As you know the vetting changes are also happening at present. In addition we have queried with Tusla the preparations for when the Children’s first Act policies, training and guidance will be in place for RCCs.

*‘We were victims,
we are
survivors,
we were always
women and girls’*