

Amber Women's Refuge marks 20 years supporting and protecting women and children in Kilkenny

Friday 09 September : Amber Women's Refuge marked its 20 year Anniversary yesterday at a reception attended by Minister for Justice, Helen McEntee T.D. According to Amber's records, 1,040 women and 1,460 children, from Kilkenny and surrounding counties, have received refuge over the course of the last 20 years.

Amber started life as Kilkenny Women's Refuge Project in 1996 in Loughboy, Kilkenny. The Project, manned by two staff members and a team of volunteers provided a drop-in Centre & 9-5 support helpline to local women experiencing domestic violence & abuse. The purpose-built refuge building, Kilkenny Women's Refuge, officially opened in November 2001. The service is currently in its 21st year, Covid restrictions resulted in it delaying its plans to mark the Anniversary in its 20th year.

In 2019, it re-branded as Amber Women's Refuge to reflect its delivery of refuge and community-based services to women and children from Carlow and other counties, as well as Kilkenny.

Speaking at the event, Minister McEntee said "All those associated with Amber can be rightly proud of the work they have done over the past 20 years in building this into a first class service to support women seeking their help, and this outstanding work continues today. The need for the services provided by Amber Women's Refuge to victims of domestic abuse in Kilkenny and the surrounding region is increasing."

"Tackling domestic, sexual and gender based violence is a priority for me and the Government and this is reflected in the Zero Tolerance plan I published this year, which I believe is the most ambitious to date in tackling these awful forms of violence and abuse. Organisations like Amber are key to our goal of supporting victims and achieving Zero Tolerance and that is why, as Minister for Justice, I am proud that my Department provides it with support. I was delighted to accept an invitation to visit the refuge, see the Amber facilities first hand and thank Lisa and her team for everything they do for victims." concluded Minister McEntee.

Over the last 20 years, Amber has evolved into a full service 24/7 domestic violence and abuse service for women and children from Kilkenny, Carlow and surrounding counties. It provides safe, inclusive services both at the refuge and in the community. Amber currently employs 25 full & part time staff, who collectively have over 200 years' experience working with and advocating for victims of domestic violence.

"I wish to acknowledge the support of our funders, TUSLA & the Department of Justice and the many local organisations, groups and individuals who support and fundraise for us to provide vital services each year. Thank you to our Board of Directors and wonderful staff, who go above and beyond to protect and support local women and children and to our fundraising volunteers who give generously of their time to us. Finally, in what has been a particularly sad and tragic week in terms of violence against women and children, I want to pay tribute to the 1,040 women and 1,460 children who were forced to flee violent homes and seek refuge with Amber over the course of the last 20 years. We truly hope that the next 20 years will see fundamental changes in how our society values and treats women and children." said Lisa Morris, Manager, Amber Women's Refuge.

As well as emergency refuge accommodation and support, Amber provides

- 24/7 Helpline
- Community based Outreach service throughout Kilkenny city/county and in county Carlow
- Court support & accompaniment service in Kilkenny city/county and in county Carlow
- Group Support Programmes

- One to one and Group support for children and Parenting support for Mothers
- Counselling
- Amber's One Million Stars project, an inclusive community arts project connecting communities across Ireland in solidarity against domestic abuse and all forms of violence
- StartSafe schools programme, supporting teenage girls and boys in Kilkenny to develop and maintain safe, healthy relationships.

Earlier this year, Amber's Annual Report 2021 detailed an 83% increase in demand for its Outreach and Court Support & Accompaniment services. 769 women requested support in 2021, the highest number of contacts Amber had ever received for its community based services.

Other figures from the 2021 Report included,

- 395 women called Amber's 24/7 Helpline, a 46% increase on 2020
- 36 women received refuge, a 9% increase on 2020
- 58 children received refuge, a 161% increase on 2020
- 111 women who sought refuge could not be accommodated because the refuge was full
- 213 counselling sessions were delivered to 43 women in 2021

In 2021, the refuge underwent a redesign and refurbishment project to upgrade its family refuge units. Future development plans, which Amber is currently fundraising for, include the construction of a new onsite Counselling & Therapy Hub and the development of a purpose-built, active play space and sensory garden for children and adults with additional needs.

Amber Women's Refuge works to achieve equality and the right to live a life free from violence and abuse for all in the local community. 1 in 4 Irish women and 1 in 7 Irish men will experience abuse from an intimate partner in their lifetime. 1 in 2 women murdered in Ireland are murdered by an intimate partner.

Amber Women's Refuge 24/7 Helpline : 0818 42 42 44

Men's Aid Helpline : 01 5543811

Donations can be made at www.amberwomensrefuge.ie

ENDS

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