



# **Rape Crisis Midwest**

## **STRATEGY & ACTION PLAN 2022-2027**

**PREPARED FOR**

Rape Crisis Midwest



# Table of Contents

---

|           |   |
|-----------|---|
| <b>3</b>  | EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE                                    |
| <b>4</b>  | EXECUTIVE SUMMARY   |
| <b>6</b>  | STRATEGY & ACTION PLAN OVERVIEW                                 |
| <b>14</b> | LEGACY OF RAPE CRISIS MIDWEST                                   |
| <b>18</b> | CONFRONTING SEXUAL VIOLENCE IN THE MIDWEST                      |
| <b>23</b> | STRATEGIC GOALS, PRIORITIES & ACTIONS                           |
| <b>35</b> | DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION FOR THE FUTURE OF<br>RAPE CRISIS MIDWEST |
| <b>37</b> | ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS  |
| <b>38</b> | ACTION PLAN   |

# Message from Rape Crisis Midwest Executive Director

A good strategic plan is a vital piece of work that every organisation needs. In the development of the Rape Crisis Midwest Strategic Plan, 2022-2027, we all have to take the time to move away from the ongoing, daily crisis we work with and examine closely what works well, what we need to do more of, what we need to do differently and where we need to expand our work in the future.

The timing of this work which we began mid 2021 is very opportune, as after 10 years of recession, the green shoots of recovery began to show in 2019 and then Covid 19 hit us in 2020. To continue to support survivors we had to adapt very quickly to new ways of working. This was difficult for clients, staff and volunteers as our work had always been in person and in the room. The space to take time and evaluate what has worked well and what will need to be incorporated into our work going forward was welcome.

Our national organization Rape Crisis Network Ireland has just completed research “working in an online/offline world” and this has been of huge value to us. Their data gathering and policy advocacy on a national level have helped to shape our future work.

All Rape Crisis work keeps the survivor at its core and I am very grateful that so many of our past and current clients contributed to this work. Our core staff, volunteers and our Board of Directors have all made valuable inputs.

Our external partnerships, all of the agencies and organisations we connect with, have been very generous in the time they have given to this work for which I am very grateful.

My thanks to the steering committee who oversaw the work. They have worked across all aspects of the plan as it was developed.

Finally thank you to Alexis and the team at Free2Transform. Stepping into the Rape Crisis world can be difficult. They have helped us to look at ourselves and our work in a very supportive way as we explored what the future may bring.

This plan will guide the work of Rape Crisis Midwest into the future and as always “keeping the survivor at the core” of everything we do, will bring our vision of a society where all adults and children live free from sexual violence closer.



Miriam Duffy  
Executive Director  
Rape Crisis Midwest

Thank you...



# Executive Summary

Rape Crisis Midwest works for the protection of women, men, and children from all forms of sexual violence and abuse. It primarily supports survivors of sexual abuse and violence through free, confidential, and non-judgmental support and counselling. The headquarters for Rape Crisis Midwest services is in Limerick with outreach centres in both Ennis and Nenagh. Our service delivery includes: counselling; Garda and court accompaniment; advice, to both survivors, and their supporters; and sexual violence training to individuals and organisations. We work nationally through Rape Crisis Network Ireland (RCNI), which we have been an active member of since its inception in 1995.

The Rape Crisis Midwest (RCM) Strategy and Action Plan 2022-2027 reflects a commitment to enhancing our ability to confront and address sexual violence and abuse in the Midwest region and nationally. It sets out a road map for our continued and expanded service delivery using a proactive and collaborative approach grounded in a feminist ideology which confronts social structures of power and oppression. Client-oriented services and community cooperation must be central to everything we do and embedded across the organisation to ensure that the needs of a changing community are met.

The 2022-2027 Strategy and Action Plan has been developed in collaboration with a community of relevant practitioners, therapists, service users, and stakeholders connecting with RCM services and supports. The overarching objective for the Plan is to shape the vision, and to guide future work for Rape Crisis Midwest.

Using a Results-based Accountability (RBA) planning methodology, the Plan builds on evidence gathered through a community-oriented development process which took place between July and September 2021.



The process drew on a deep commitment to the needs of service users and the expertise of the Rape Crisis community to inform the cycle of goal planning, implementation, and evaluation. The emerging vision for Rape Crisis Midwest is focused on embedding an empowered community model to change society. The strategic approaches to drive that vision focus on a model that is self-sustaining, digital, and engaged to reach and support service users, particularly young people, new communities, and service providers.



The Strategic Plan is guided by the following high-level objectives to:

1. Anchor Sustainable Operations for Rape Crisis Midwest
2. Expand Sexual Violence Counselling and Counsellor Training
3. Revitalise Sexual Violence Training and Development
4. Enhance Community Engagement, Education and Awareness
5. Promote Local Community Policy and Advocacy

The Strategic Plan identifies structures and initiatives needed to support the enhancement and expansion of Rape Crisis Midwest services. It presents a complete description of each strategic goal, contextual factors from community conversations, priority outcomes for change, and proposed measures to track success and progress. It is organised as follows:

### **Section 1: Strategy and Action Plan Overview**

Presents the plan development process including our methodology built on community engagement within the Midwest region. In defining the strategic goals and key terms, this section presents the RCM Ecology Framework to illustrate our focused, holistic approach.

### **Section 2: Legacy of Rape Crisis Midwest**

Provides a lens in which to view Rape Crisis Midwest's guiding principles and commitment to combating sexual violence through our vision, mission, and delivery of a range of counselling, training, public awareness, policy and advocacy services.

### **Section 3: Confronting Sexual Violence in Midwest Region**

Presents a timeline of over 40 years supporting and advocating for victims of sexual abuse and violence. While highlighting changes to the organisation resulting from COVID19, this section casts a vision for the future and a model for excellence in survivor wellness.

### **Section 4: Strategic Goals, Priorities and Actions**

This section details the strategic goals and priorities for 2022-2027 informed by "*What We Know*," highlights of data and evidence gathered through the Results-based Accountability methodology, aimed at continuous improvement actions for the future.

### **Section 5: Digital Transformation for the Future of Rape Crisis Midwest**

With recognition of the role of technology to engage, educate, and empower, this section provides the focused approach that Rape Crisis Midwest will employ to build stronger community partnerships.

### **Appendix**

Provides an Action Plan for implementation of the Strategic Plan at an operational level with summary data gathered throughout each planning development stage.

# Strategy and Action Plan Overview

With support from the Rape Crisis Midwest Board of Directors, the strategic planning process was initiated by the formation of a Strategic Planning Steering Committee in July 2021 to develop a 5-year strategic plan. The goal and objectives for developing the Strategic Plan 2022-2027, was to shape the vision and outline the future direction for Rape Crisis Midwest.

The strategic plan was developed in collaboration with a community of relevant practitioners, therapists, service users, and stakeholders connected to services and supports. Internal and external stakeholders with varying perspectives contributed throughout the planning process to ensure that the strategic plan remained client-focused and oriented towards meeting present and future needs. Rape Crisis Midwest contracted with Free2Transform Consulting, an organisational performance firm that supports non-profits, government, and other social-servicing organisations striving to improve the lives of those experiencing any form of social injustice. The strategic planning process commenced in July 2021 and was completed in November 2021.



## Strategic Planning Team Members



MIRIAM DUFFY



HELEN FITZGERALD



YVONNE MURPHY



MICHELLE WALSH



VERENA TARPEY



MARY KELLY



CATHERINE DUFFY



DEIRDRE HEDDERMAN

# Planning Process Methodology

The Steering Committee consisting of board members, management, and staff represented diverse perspectives to guide the strategic planning process, and to help champion the overall effort among external stakeholder groups. The planning process drew on a Results-based Accountability (RBA) planning methodology using an approach for stakeholders to work together to increase community impact and organisational performance goals. RBA starts with the “ends” focusing on the desired results and goals, then working backwards towards the “means” to identify strategies and activities needed to achieve them.

Given the current landscape and the reality posed by COVID-19, in-person interactions were limited. Steering committee meetings and one of the strategic planning sessions were held virtually using Zoom. Stakeholders, staff, and community members were engaged throughout the entire process (see Figure 1). The objectives of the strategic planning process were as follows:

- Explore and confirm the most pressing needs of Rape Crisis Midwest, its clients (also called service users), and the broader community through a positive, inclusive, and productive process.
- Establish a five-year strategic plan that will extend the reach of the previous strategic plan (2017-2019) to guide Rape Crisis Midwest’s response to those needs.
- Develop a framework to measure progress in meeting strategic goals and objectives.



**Figure 1: Strategic Planning Process**



# Building Community Engagement

Rape Crisis Midwest staff members, community members, and stakeholders contributed throughout the process to identify issues, needs, and potential strategies related to achieving its mission. Internal and external stakeholders were invited to participate in face to face and virtual conversations via Zoom. Community engagement was considered critical to building the strategic plan resulting in a high level of participation to the process. Strategic planning participants engaged in the process through interviews, focus groups, and an online survey directed at service users and organisations that have collaborated with Rape Crisis Midwest.

## Strategic Planning Participants

- 40 Respondents to Online Survey
- 36 Individuals participated in Focus Groups
- 9 Key informant stakeholder interviews



Figure 2: Focus Group

Strategic planning participants were presented with information gathered through stakeholder engagement efforts which discussed, synthesised findings, and drew out common themes and issues across a number of areas. Using feedback and visualisation methods, participants helped to reframe themes and issues into a vision for the future by responding to focused prompts: “*To eliminate sexual violence and abuse, Rape Crisis Midwest should...*” and “*Within the next five years, we should....to make sustainable and lasting change.*”

Initial engagement efforts focused on establishing a baseline understanding of the current state of operations and services being delivered by Rape Crisis Midwest. It considered how governmental policies, systems, family and social conditions, behaviours, service quality and availability influenced the organisation’s response to sexual violence in the Midwest region. Initial findings were shared with the Steering Committee and helped to highlight areas for exploration during strategic planning sessions.

*"Conversations like this are critical to changing the narrative about rape...we have to know what type of society we want in order to change it..."*

*-Focus Group Participant*

# Key Informant Interviews

The Rape Crisis Midwest Executive Director provided a contact list of key informant interviews with internal and external stakeholders to gather insights regarding the changing needs of survivors of sexual violence, and those who are at risk of experiencing it. From July 2021 to September 2021 phone or face-to-face interviews were conducted by Zoom. Nine key informant interviews were conducted to expand on the previous strategic plan completed in 2005.

The interviews revealed consistent demand for **expanded counselling services** to meet the growing and changing needs of survivors, and recognition of **training and educational awareness deficiencies**.

## Focus Groups

Two Focus group sessions were facilitated in-person and one conducted remotely through Zoom in compliance with COVID restrictions. Each session was facilitated to gather input from staff, service providers, caregivers, ex-clients, and advocates regarding their experience with Rape Crisis Midwest, their needs, and their suggestions for improvement. 36 individual participants, committed to RCM's future, worked through three focus group sessions to set a vision for how RCM could fulfill its mission over the next five years.

Each focus group were presented findings from preceding planning activities to highlight the successes and challenges faced by Rape Crisis Midwest to fulfill its mission, vision, and objectives. Participants discussed proposed solutions to inform the development of the Rape Crisis Midwest Strategic and Action Plan by setting the order of priorities at strategic and operational levels.

The use of shared data visualisation tools like Strategyzer helped to engage participants in the virtual focus group session, seen in Figure 2: Visualisation Board.

The focus groups revealed that many strategic planning participants felt that **training and development** required attention to creating a **holistic, self-sustaining model**.

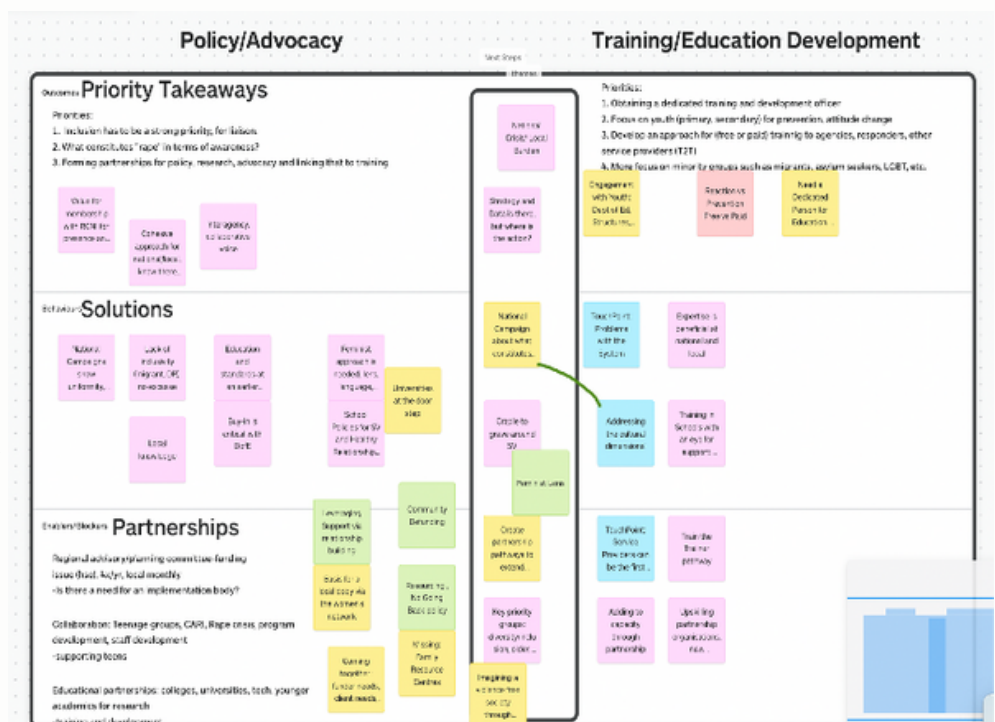


Figure 3: Visualisation Board

A confidential, online survey was issued to clients, support networkers, care providers, and advocates through a Service User Survey and a Stakeholder Survey. The survey gathered input regarding the strengths and weaknesses of the current support model, as well as suggesting solutions to address any identified deficiencies. The survey focused on the two anchors of Rape Crisis Midwest's mission: support to survivors and societal elimination of sexual violence and abuse. The questionnaire was reviewed and approved by the Steering Committee, with its promotion on social media and through direct invitations to stakeholder organisations. Rape Crisis Midwest gathered responses from 25 Service Users and 15 Community Stakeholders.

The online survey revealed that services users wanted more **support activities and options for group, family, and couple counselling**. It also revealed that stakeholders desired to support RCM through **partnerships** and by availing of **training opportunities**.

### Identifying Goals & Priorities

After establishing a clear understanding of the Rape Crisis Midwest vision and mission statements, participants framed goals around six areas of focus: operations, counselling, training, education, community engagement, and policy/advocacy. Working with the goals established in relation to these six areas of work, interviewees and participants in the first focus group considered: “*What changes are needed in order to achieve the Rape Crisis Midwest mission?*” The goals identified in the first cycle of information gathering, and linked to the six identified work areas, formed a basis for discussion and progression in the second focus group. Facilitated discussions prompted participants to consider changes in environment, circumstances, social norms, policies, systems, behaviours, knowledge, and awareness.

These identified changes, or outcomes, were prioritised within each focus area and presented to participants in the second focus group. In many instances during this part of the planning process, a goal outcome in one focus area was also supported or reinforced by efforts identified in another area. The second focus group generated the initial inventory of potential performance indicators that could be used to measure and inform the strategic objectives and priorities. Strategic planning participants were charged with framing these indicators into actions and aligning them with the goals and priorities.

### Plan Definitions

**Goals:** The desired results or conditions of success desired by the strategic planning participants, identified through the engagement efforts.

**Objectives:** Results are stated as objectives and serve to guide and focus strategic planning efforts. They are intended to be easy for Rape Crisis Midwest to communicate in order to garner broad internal and external stakeholder support.

**Priorities:** The changes needed to achieve the desired results. These are drawn from engagement efforts and discussions that considered the factors affecting service delivery including environmental outcomes and changes in knowledge and behaviours. Participants were asked to “visualise” the results and point to actions that can be used to monitor and measure improvement over time.

**Strategic Actions:** Coherent and specific set of activities that planning participants believe have a reasoned chance of working to improve the results and achieve identified objectives.

**Success Measures:** Performance based data which are closely aligned to the strategy and are intended to help Rape Crisis Midwest stakeholders know if strategies are working.

**Indicators:** Data used to measure the implementation of a respective goal. They help to directly or indirectly measure the priorities and outcomes.



# Ecological Framework

Stakeholders noted the vital importance of being able to establish evidence of that impact in order to further develop RCM supports and services. Identification of relevant measurement tools, upskilling stakeholders in their effective use, and dissemination of impact evidence were identified as necessary and key components to advancing the work. Participants in the final focus group were tasked with developing indicators and actions to establish and inform measuring each focus area explored during planning sessions. The community of participants actively engaged in combating sexual violence and abuse helped to guide the forward thinking and goals setting process.

Thus, the strategic goals, objectives, priorities, and actions described in the plan stem from an ecological view centred on the needs of the individual, extending to the responsibilities of the society.

Strategic planning participants considered current programmes and services and other contextual factors to develop strategies and actions. Through progressive planning discussions, they were refined and categorised based on short-term or long-term implementation.

The Strategic Plan builds on the latest research in sexual abuse from a knowledge base that suggests that societal structures require change in order to meet the needs of individuals. Based on the findings of Dr. Michelle Walsh's study, *An Exploration of Sexual Harassment Among Irish Adolescents: Experience and Understanding* (2020), Rape Crisis Midwest has adopted an ecological framework to reflect its service delivery approach.

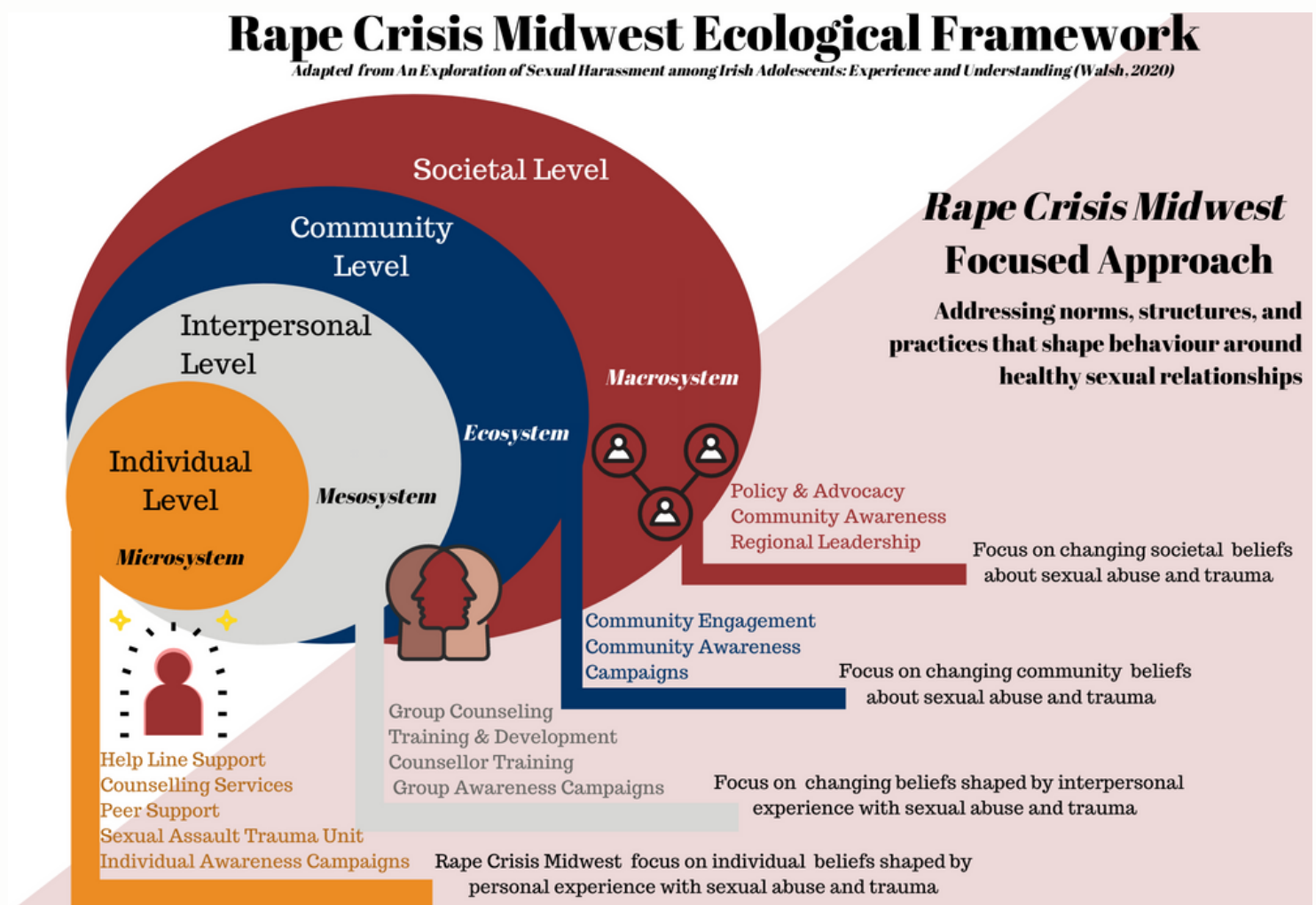


Figure 4: Rape Crisis Midwest Ecological Framework

Rape Crisis Midwest believes that in order for societal structures to change, we must begin at the individual level. We aim to change the view of individual needs and responsibilities within society by supporting the individual with education, raising awareness of these responsibilities, and supporting them through interpersonal engagement. Through a service-oriented view that focuses on addressing structures, norms, and practises that aim to decrease sexual violence, we are able to make impacts at a community and societal level. Our approach addresses individual, interpersonal, and intergenerational changes along with raising a collective awareness within the community and society.

The RCM Ecological Framework illustrates the interconnected nature of sexual abuse and violence, and the Strategic Plan reflects how we aim to effect change over time. Anything that Rape Crisis Midwest achieves within each of these levels over the next five years requires a combined effort at all levels of the ecological framework.

## Strategic Objectives

Final vision and strategic goal statements (also referred to as objectives) were drafted from multiple discussion threads which emerged during the strategic planning process. These goal statements form the basis of the outlined strategic priorities, objectives, and actions. In total, five strategic goals were established.

The subsequent sections of the 2022-2027 Strategic and Action Plan provide a description of the following strategic focus areas as identified during the planning process by Rape Crisis Midwest strategic planning participants.



### Sustainable RCM Operations

A Feminist Foundation and Response for Survivor Empowerment

1



### Expanded Counselling and Counsellor Training

Enhanced Core Services for Sustainability in Sexual Violence Treatment and Practice

2



### Revitalised Training and Development

Increase Sexual Violence Awareness and Knowledge of Healthy Relationships

3



### Enhanced Community Engagement, Education & Awareness

Build Robust Pathways for Collaboration and Impact Against Sexual Violence

4



### Local Community Policy & Advocacy

Promote Social Ownership and Accountability for Sexual Violence Elimination

5

## Strategic Plan Overview

This plan presents a complete description of each strategic goal, contextual factors from community conversations, priority outcomes for change, and proposed measures to track success and progress. The sections titled *What We Know* (located in the Strategic Goals, Priorities, and Actions) provide contextual data drawn from strategic planning participants, and may not necessarily reflect the opinions of Rape Crisis Midwest. They also include key summary findings excerpted from the Survey Summary Report that led to the development of the selected strategic goal and priority.

**In total, the Strategic Plan contains five strategic goals, 15 priorities, and 60 actions.**

## Action Plan Overview

The Action Plan provides a road map which includes information about each strategic action with measurable outcomes for success and performance. These action steps were identified by strategic planning participants and build on existing and related efforts that participants believed could be leveraged to support work. They are proposed for the implementation states of the strategic plan and organised by specific time frames.



Figure 5: Focus Group

*“...Prior to going to RCM I couldn't say the word rape, the word alone was a huge trigger along with other things. While I still have some difficulty speaking about my experiences, I now can live my life...”*

*-Service User*

*“I owe them my life.”*

*”Service User*



Figure 6: Focus Group



# Legacy of Rape Crisis Midwest

Rape Crisis Midwest was founded in 1980 as the Limerick Rape Crisis Centre with the support of grassroots volunteers concerned about services being provided to survivors of rape and sexual abuse. The original fledgling service provided a hotline service to assist survivors of rape and sexual abuse. This developed into a volunteer-led non-profit organisation providing leading counselling services, victim accompaniment, and sexual assault trauma support in Limerick, Tipperary, and Clare Counties.



## History of Success

The organisation continues its commitment to combat patriarchal power structures and sexual violence against women and men by providing information, support, and professional counselling services throughout the Midwest region. Rape Crisis Midwest is supported by a voluntary Board of Directors who provide overall policy and strategic direction to the organisation.

Based in Phoenix House at Punch's Cross in Limerick, Rape Crisis Midwest also manages part-time offices in Ennis, Co. Clare and Nenagh, Co. Tipperary. As a facility, Phoenix House provides a “*safe and cosy*” environment for survivors to meet with counsellors and space to deliver a range of other group counselling and training services. The sense of calm that is provided, both inside and outside of the building, is part of the healing process, allowing for the delivery of services that meets trauma with the highest degree of dignity, humanity, and compassion.

Rape Crisis Midwest has five full-time counsellors working at the three centres attending to approximately 70 clients per week and five volunteer counsellors who have all completed training with the organisation to support delivering crisis and long-term services.

For over 40 years, Rape Crisis Midwest has worked to respond to the needs of survivors and challenged and deconstructed stigmas associated with sexual abuse. It is through training and education, that society will change. However it is the willingness of the organisation to confront and engage in difficult conversations about sexual violence and healthy relationships that has helped to make a lasting impact in the Midwest Region.

## Vision

**The Vision of Rape Crisis Midwest is for a society where all adults and children live free from sexual violence**



## Mission Statement

**The mission of Rape Crisis Midwest is to improve the lives of those who experience sexual violence or abuse and to work towards the elimination of sexual violence and abuse in our society.**

## Service Delivery

Rape Crisis Midwest seeks to affect individual and social change through a comprehensive approach that delivers the following services and supports: helpline response; counselling; training and education; public awareness and outreach; policy and advocacy. Support and information are provided to respond to the needs of survivors of sexual violence, whether recent or past.

### Helpline Response

Rape Crisis Midwest offers free, confidential support through a phone helpline made available from Monday to Friday from 9am to 5pm. In 2020, over 1,200 helpline calls were logged. Support, information, and referral to counselling services are provided through the helpline.



### Support & Counselling Services

Rape Crisis Midwest provides a wide range of counselling support to men, women, and young people over the age of 16 years of age. Therapy is provided to survivors, carers, family members and relevant front line staff. Free, confidential, non-judgemental crisis support and counselling services include:

- Sexual Assault Trauma Unit (SATU) In collaboration with the Garda Protective Services Unit and Mid Western Hospital, the SATU provide 24-hour support to those who experience sexual violence.
- Crisis Counselling
- One-to-One Counselling services
- Prison Counselling Services
- Group Support
- Court and Garda Accompaniment



*"The main way it helped me realize that what happened was in no way my fault..."*

*-Service User*

# Training & Education

Rape Crisis Midwest has a long history of providing critical and innovative training programmes in the Midwest region focused on increasing awareness, evidence, and capacity through:

- SATU Training

Provision of crisis response training to support volunteers allow for counsellors to develop a deeper understanding of rape and sexual violence. Participants attend nine weeks of training to provide emotional support, information, and advocacy services to Rape Crisis Midwest clients.

- Counselling Training

Rape Crisis Midwest offers a year-long volunteer counselling course to professional counsellors to train them in the delivery of safe and supportive counselling.

- Sexual Violence Awareness Training

Provision of awareness level training to staff and volunteers of educational institutions, community organisations, charities, and governmental agencies on issues of sexual violence and abuse.



## Public Awareness & Outreach

Rape Crisis Midwest is actively engaged in increasing public awareness through community-based outreach and fundraising.

- Public Outreach

Rape Crisis Midwest engages in public outreach through radio and newspaper interviews focused on confronting sexual violence and increasing education.

- Social Media

Rape Crisis Midwest maintains an active presence online through Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram to reach the communities they serve and beyond. Using these social media platforms, the organisation is able to draw awareness and fundraise through Facebook campaigns and Instagram sticker donations.

- Fundraising

Companies and businesses in the Midwest Region actively demonstrate their commitment through support of Rape Crisis Midwest by way of corporate support. Many of these are based on long standing relationships built up over the years.

The organisation has hosted annual events for 10 years now organised by a small group of volunteers in each county. Examples include the annual 10k Kayaking, Dainty Daisy, Thomond Park Quiz and street collections in Nenagh. During the lockdown, our teams adapted to new ways of fundraising and our events continued, but in a different format.



## Policy & Advocacy

Rape Crisis Midwest is involved in advocacy work to protect and expand existing programme mandates and services, as well as to address gaps in services.

- Garda and Court Accompaniment

Attendee support services to victims of sexual violence or those who have made recent rape or assault reports.

- Rape Crisis Network Ireland

As an active member of RCNI, Rape Crisis Midwest engages in the supporting national efforts to provide a voice for survivors of sexual violence.



## Guiding Principles

Rape Crisis Midwest is highly regarded for its expertise in combatting sexual violence and other forms of related violence against women. That expertise draws on an informed strategic feminist analysis of gender-based and sexual violence. This analysis empowers RCM to combat the conditions that promote sexual violence in our society, against women, children, and men, and in providing survivors with relevant responsive, and empowering supports and services. In so doing, Rape Crisis Midwest draws on a feminist analysis of power and control to understand and combat all forms of sexual- and gender-based violence, and the conditions which sustain such violence.

## Feminist Framework

Rape Crisis Midwest is guided by a feminist framework influenced by the following values and guiding principles

- All women and men have the right to safe and respectful relationships and to live free from violence
- In the historical context of Ireland, work to prevent violence against women and children cannot be separated from efforts to address patriarchy and intergenerational trauma.
- Recognition that the oppression of women exists at three main levels and sexual violence prevention must work to effect change at all these levels:
  1. Broad social and cultural
  2. Structural and systematic
  3. Interpersonal, direct face-to-face
- Violence against women and girls is perpetuated by, and reinforces unequal power relations between women and men, gender stereotyping, sexual discrimination, and structural inequalities. We will not effectively prevent gender-based or sexual violence unless structural inequalities are systematically addressed.
- Violence against women and girls is an abuse of power and a violation of human rights. It affects women and girls throughout their lives, regardless of cultural, religious, or socioeconomic backgrounds.
- Violence against women and girls, inclusive of sexual violence, cannot be eliminated by tackling sexism alone. We must work to end all forms of oppression such as class, age, sexuality, ethnicity, and disability that intersects to shape the forms of violence against women as well the experience of violence by women and girls. Thus diverse backgrounds, contexts, and life experiences must be recognised and addressed in prevention strategies.
- All prevention strategies, programmes, and initiatives must ensure that accessible and appropriate systems of support are available to respond to existing violence.
- The whole community is responsible for the condemnation and elimination of violence against women and developing a culture of respect and equity. Engaging communities is essential in creating effective solutions to prevent, respond to, reduce, and mitigate violence.
- Prevailing forms of hegemonic masculinity including violent behaviour, aggression, resistance to expressions of emotion, and displays of toughness are toxic in nature and demonstrates a quest in proving masculinity by demonstrating power over women and other men. We endeavour to address stereotypical, social constructs of power that are dysfunctional for women, men, and children who might encounter it.
- Men who are violent against women must be held accountable for their behaviour and are expected to change.
- Non-violent men have a positive role to play in the prevention of violence against women, and in shaping respectful and gender-equitable attitudes and behaviours among peers, colleagues, children, and friends.

# Confronting Sexual Violence in the Midwest Region

Sexual assault and violence is widespread and devastating to Irish society. According to research from Trinity College and Maynooth University\* almost 15% of Irish adults have been raped at some point in their life, and another one in three experience some form of sexual violence. Their findings that sexual violence was considered “almost ubiquitous” in Irish society, highlight the challenge that Rape Crisis Midwest faces in combating and confronting sexual abuse and violence.



Figure 7: In Her Shoes Campaign

Rape Crisis Midwest (RCM) works for the protection of women and children from all forms of sexual misconduct, harassment, abuse and violence. Grounded by a feminist ideology, it provides counselling to victims, their families and friends, as well as the counsellors, therapists, and caseworkers who support them.

Through advocacy, training, education, and media awareness, Rape Crisis Midwest advocates for a systematic and comprehensive social response focused on helping victims heal and reintegrate into society. A 2005 strategic operations assessment found that RCM provided a range of counselling options and supports, many of which were significantly impacted by the Celtic Tiger recession. Despite the setbacks and financial cutbacks to operations, staff salaries, and service delivery, Rape Crisis Midwest was able to establish critical counselling services like the Sexual Assault Treatment Unit (SATU) and obtain Phoenix House, its headquarters.

## RCM Timeline

For over 40 years, Rape Crisis Midwest has supported the needs of survivors, their families, friends, and service providers. Unaltered alignment with a feminist ideology which calls for the protection of women and children against sexual violence has anchored RCM in its fight for social change. Survivors describe a life-changing impact as a result of receiving counselling support from RCM. Stakeholders highlight their reliance on RCM to support victims, and those at risk of sexual violence.

Responding to the needs of the community had a humble beginning, and has blossomed to a level of engagement that has resulted in Rape Crisis Midwest being a beneficiary for the McManus Foundation. This along with other notable milestones in its 40 year history highlights RCM's demonstrated commitment and acknowledged expertise in delivering services critical to supporting survivors of sexual abuse throughout the Midwest region.

1. Hyland and Vallieres, 2020, *Sexual Violence and Its Associated Psychosocial Effects in Ireland*, Journal of Interpersonal Violence

# RAPE CRISIS MIDWEST

A LEGACY OF SUPPORT TO  
SURVIVORS OF SEXUAL TRAUMA

## THE ORIGINS



1978

Limerick Women's Action Group began planning to set up a Rape Crisis Center

1980

**LIMERICK RAPE CRISIS  
CENTRE FOUNDED**

## RAPE CRISIS NETWORK

First Statutory Grant £5,000 Limerick invites Galway, Clonmel, Cork, Waterford and Dublin Rape Crisis to meet and Rape Crisis Network of Ireland is begun

1985

**CRIMINAL LAW (RAPE)  
AMENDMENT ACT, 1990**

Following many years of lobbying by Rape Crisis Centres and RCNI, Rape within marriage is criminalised and other major reforms are made.

1990

## RAPE STATISTICS

Commencement of data collection within RCNI

Catletoy Park Conference launches the Sexual Abuse & Violence in Ireland (SAVI) Report.

2001

**2002 THE SAVI REPORT**

First comprehensive investigation of lifetime experiences of sexual violence of 3000 people and uptake of services in Ireland.



2004

Purchase of Rocheville House, Punches Close with official opening on 5th July, 2004

**PHOENIX HOUSE  
OPENS**

## ENNIS SERVICES BEGIN

**2005 25 YEARS OF SERVICE!**

2006

**FME SERVICES BEGIN**

Following 18 months of hard work with PriceWaterHouseCooper, 1st Rape Crisis Midwest Strategic Plan Launched

Pornography: A violence Against Women International conference Host, October 2006



2007

**CENTRE RENAMED  
RAPE CRISIS MIDWEST**

Suite of new branding and community awareness

**SILENT NIGHT X-MAS  
CAMPAIGN**

Murphy Report in sector pay and conditions implemented by HSE

## MCMANUS GOLF CLASSIC

Rape Crisis Midwest accepted as JP McManus Beneficiaries

2009

**PHOENIX HOUSE  
EXTENSION COMPLETED**



**RAC SPEAK UP CAFE  
RESEARCH LAUNCH**

2014

**DAINTY DAISIES**

First annual fundraiser in Woodstock Hotel, Ennis

**IN HER SHOES CAMPAIGN**

**WEBSITE  
LAUNCH**



2020

**VIRTUAL RAPE CRISIS  
MIDWEST**

Due to COVID, office closure to online based counselling



Rape Crisis Midwest Supporting Survivors of Sexual Violence since 1980



## COVID-19 Impact

The impact of the COVID-19 lockdown resulted in a 54% increase in helpline calls during the first phase of the pandemic in 2020. Many of these calls were from people in their 40s confronting sexual abuse from the past, seeking help for the first time. Isolation and extended home-based restrictions both triggered many to think about past trauma and seek help and support. There was also a significant increase in contact from particular age groups in the Midwest with a spike from those in the 24-29 and 40-49 age category. For example, in the 40-49 age category, there was an increase of 58% in calls (125) in 2020, compared to 79 in 2019.

By November 2021, a nearly 75% increase in helpline calls resulted in significant demands on staff time to support the influx of demand. Data revealed the length of time on calls also increased by 77% with calls lasting up to 30 minutes. Covid-19 brought additional challenges such as a drop of 75% so far this year in 2021 fundraising income.

Counselling services were provided online and by telephone during lockdown, but data gathered by RCNI revealed that survivors felt better supported in face-to-face counselling. While these flexible arrangements have sought to facilitate the needs of service users in the context of the COVID pandemic, face to face counselling and support is the preferred mode of interaction identified by survivors.

## Voice for Survivors

Rape Crisis Midwest plays a significant role to the community in providing counselling services, training, education, and advocacy throughout the region. During interview and focus group discussions, participants reflected on what differentiated RCM from other organisations that work with sexual violence survivors. They consistently remarked about Rape Crisis Midwest's ability to connect with survivors and develop awareness about sexual abuse and violence in the community.

We are a grass-roots organisation with a unique community and survivor-based perspective. This knowledge and understanding of survivor experience and building awareness of sexual violence, brings Rape Crisis Midwest into view as subject-matter experts around the individual and community impacts of sexual and gender-based violence. This voice is critical to changing systematic and institutional forces that perpetuate violence and hinder the social reintegration of survivors.

Through advocacy, training, education, and media awareness, we are able to advocate for a systematic social response that is more effective and helps victims to heal and reintegrate into society. Insights from the Service User Survey on service limitations revealed a low level of awareness regarding some service offerings. Our approach to continue to meet the needs of survivors are addressed in Strategic Goal #1: Sustainable RCM Operations and Strategic Goal #2: Expanded Counsellor and Counsellor Training.

## Casting a Vision

Strategy planning participants were asked to envision what RCM could achieve if funding were not an issue, and at the top of the list was a dedicated, full-time Training and Development staff member. This was in direct alignment with an organisational focus on revitalising education and training activities.

### Centre of Excellence

An ideal RCM would move towards the establishment of a Centre of Excellence (COE) to provide leadership, best practises, research, support, and training in the area of sexual and gender-based violence. Through collaboration in RCNI, and a network of academic and professional institutions, RCM should be increasingly recognised and take ownership of its expertise as a collaborating force to pursue excellence in this area nationally and internationally. By leveraging Phoenix House, RCM should champion change initiatives, develop and deliver standardised training, and enhance the capacity of professionals treating victims. With a focus on the elimination of sexual violence in society, the establishment of a COE would serve in the areas of instruction, research, publication, extension, and provision of institutionally recognised qualifications.

### Public Education/Awareness

The desired state for RCM would be an increase to public education and awareness campaigns to encourage greater understanding of the impacts of sexual and gender-based violence. RCM would host quarterly regional meetings to increase awareness with professionals, providing support directly or indirectly to service users, and at-risk groups. Recommendations from reports such as the O'Malley Report and Storm and Stress\*\* reveal a need for specialised training directed to education and criminal justice respectively.



Figure 8: RCM Volunteers

### Advocacy and Public Awareness

RCM aspires to and is committed to being a proactive, strong, clear, and unified political voice where evidence and data gathered regarding the state of sexual violence in Ireland, and among youth, is addressed and adequate operational funding is obtained. Incorporating national decision making through local policy advocacy and awareness activities would aide to lobby for the necessary support to address waitlists for sexual assault services and ensure appropriate services are available to those affected.

### Equity and Inclusion

RCM has always been a voice for equality and inclusion. Participants in the focus groups spoke passionately about the importance of equity and inclusion, and highlighted the role that RCM plays as an advocate for Traveller and migrant communities as an example of such inclusion. Many spoke about how inclusiveness has to include the disability, LBGTQ+ community and those experiencing socio-economic disadvantages across the Midwest including those engaged in sex work. Many also wanted to explore how to include men in the movement.

2. Department of Justice. 2018, *Review of Protections for Vulnerable Witnesses in the Investigation and Prosecution of Sexual Offences (O'Malley)*.

3. Rape Crisis Network Ireland (RCNI), 2021, *Storm and Stress: An Exploration of Sexual Harassment Amongst Adolescents*.

## Towards a Model of Survivor Wellness

Rape Crisis Midwest continues to face increasing demand for counselling treatment and support services. Prioritisation of service users will require development of a model for holistic survivor care that is centred on counselling treatment, yet inclusive of support before and after treatment is delivered. A measure of success for the organisation at large is the development of support services offerings and pathways to transition long-term users towards social integration, making space for new service users to enter into counselling treatment. This approach was considered most suitable to address waiting lists by strategic planning participants.\*

One respondent highlights the benefit of a broader holistic approach to survivor wellbeing than currently being offered by RCM, when they stated:

*“ Providing the option of positive workshops/groups/ aftercare. A person changes after sexual violence / abuse and the option to be around others who may have also changed even just through a workshop/class could be really beneficial. That option is simply not available and needs to be. The option of facilitated meetings between survivors if both parties express an interest in talking to another with similar circumstances”*  
-Service User

\*Strategic Goal #2: Expanded Counselling and Counsellor Training aim to address this service need by providing offerings that focus on survivor wellbeing and long-term reintegration into society.





# Strategic Goals, Priorities, and Actions



## Sustainable RCM Operations

A Feminist Foundation and Response for Survivor Empowerment

1



## Expanded Counselling and Counsellor Training

Enhanced Core Services for Sustainability in Sexual Violence Treatment and Practice

2



## Revitalised Training and Development

Increase Sexual Violence Awareness and Knowledge of Healthy Relationships

3



## Enhanced Community Engagement, Education & Awareness

Build Robust Pathways for Collaboration and Impact Against Sexual Violence

4



## Local Community Policy & Advocacy

Promote Social Ownership and Accountability for Sexual Violence Elimination

5

# Sustainable RCM Operations

## A Feminist Foundation and Response for Survivor Empowerment

The Rape Crisis Midwest (RCM) ethos and response to sexual violence is embedded in a feminist analysis that exposes the roots of gender-based sexual violence and confronts the patriarchal power systems, structures, and cultural conditions that sustain it. With the challenge of attrition on the workforce, RCM operations have continued to build upon this foundation with governance and policy which have focused on sustaining operations during periods of austerity and the lockdown.

We provide a range of services that reach Limerick City, Co. Limerick, Co. Clare, and Co. Tipperary. RCM staff and volunteers are the greatest assets of, and advocates for, the organisation. It is this team who builds support around survivors, cultivate relationships with stakeholders, broaden the support base for the ongoing work, and provide the energy and inspiration to drive it forward. Insights on service limitations revealed that the service users were generally unaware of the RCM service offerings like An Garda Siochana and Court accompaniment, prison counselling, phone/online counselling, or support groups.

### Strategic Goal

Develop operational capacity and governance structure that is built on sound principles and oriented towards the empowerment of victims of sexual assault and violence.

### Strategic Objective

To support RCM's vision and strategic priorities to embed an empowered community model to change society in a way that is Self-Sustaining, Digital, and Engaged to reach young people, new communities, and service providers.

### Strategic Priorities

- Clearly communicate to community based and corporate entities the feminist analysis underpinning RCM work advocating for the elimination of sexual violence.
- Build Training and Education Functional Unit within Rape Crisis Midwest
- Develop inclusive services, supports, and governance structures to increase

### What We Know...

**93% of service users and 87% of stakeholders indicated that they were satisfied or very satisfied with their experience engaging with Rape Crisis Midwest.**

*"It's great to know its there as a support service in the community that we can signpost people to..."*  
-Stakeholder

## Success Measures

Develop operational capacity and a governance structure that is built on sound principles and oriented towards the empowerment of victims of sexual assault and violence.

| Strategic Goal #1 Actions   | Time Frame |
|---|------------|
| Document current operational activities, tasks, and associated contacts carried out by Rape Crisis Midwest management   | Year 1     |
| Anchor the Rape Crisis Midwest brand identify to advocate against sexual violence that attracts and engages the support of community and corporate entities                   | Year 1     |
| Transition new leadership into the organisation support change management and strategic plan implementation   | Year 1     |
| Build an internal capacity to map the skills and abilities of internal and external stakeholder groups  | Year 2     |
| Build comprehensive inclusive services, <u>support</u> and resources to increase community awareness and engagement   | Year 3     |
| Contribute within the RCNI network mechanisms to evaluate Irish compliance with international standards for gender-based and sexual-based violence protection and enforcement | On-going   |
| Gather and maintain data about each functional service area: counselling, training, education & awareness, policy & advocacy  | Year 4     |



# Expanded Counselling and Counsellor Training:

## Enhanced Core Services for Sustainability in Sexual Violence Treatment and Practise

Counselling services are a core service offering for Rape Crisis Midwest. The establishment of the Sexual Assault Treatment Unit (SATU) realised a strategic goal and priority identified in the previous strategic planning effort. While there was a significant reduction in the delivery of group, family, and evening counselling services, RCM has continued to recognise the importance of counselling service provision to young people and men.

### Strategic Goal

Lead the advancement of sexual violence prevention training to practitioners and expanded counselling treatment services to survivors and their support networks.

### Strategic Objective

To establish, maintain, and enhance core service areas of counselling, training, and advocacy in order to build a sustainable community of practise around sexual violence, and thus create a learning/working experience that allows for individuals, practitioners, educators, and the broader community an opportunity to thrive.

### Strategic Priorities

- Provide an approach to Survivor Wellness that is interventional and informational
- Provide counselling offerings beyond individualised, long-term support
- Incorporate a Counselling Support capacity to reach minority groups (such as young, male, ethnic minority, disability, and LBGTQ+)

### What We Know...

**91% of respondents used the core face to face counselling services with 60% rating the quality very high.**

**The majority of respondents (61%) indicate long-lasting psychological or emotional condition or mental health issues and difficulties**

# Expanded Counselling and Counsellor Training:

## Enhanced Core Services for Sustainability in Sexual Violence Treatment and Practise

### Success Measures

Develop counselling service capacity that focuses on long-term empowerment and wellness of victims of sexual assault and violence. This includes focused engagement through community partnerships to reach at-risk and marginalised groups.

| Strategic Goal #2 Actions  | Time Frame |
|--|------------|
| Conduct a skills assessment of counselling staff to identify novel and alternative treatment approaches which can be made available to support target audiences        | Year 1     |
| Engage with community organisations to identify potential staff, workers, or service users who would benefit from counsellor training                                  | Year 1     |
| Incorporate data gathered by RCNI about counselling needs for the Midwest for integration in RCM activities and operations.  | Year 2     |
| Provide group-oriented counselling supports to service users and their support networks  | Year 2     |
| Establish governmental partnerships to support therapeutic and treatment offerings   | Year 3     |
| Provide peer crisis counselling supports to community workers and governmental agencies to address waiting lists   | Year 3     |
| Build a comprehensive suite of counselling services which address peer support and group counselling for survivors' support networks                                   | Year 3     |
| Develop a counselling structure from crisis to long-range support that focuses on reintegration of service users into society  | Year 4     |
| Develop a comprehensive approach to practitioner training in the area of SV therapy and treatment in alignment to a long-range wellness model                          | Year 4     |
| Develop a comprehensive triage training programme to support organisations that refer potential service users to assist in providing support to those on waiting lists | Year 5     |

# Revitalised Training & Development

## Increase Sexual Violence Awareness and Knowledge of Healthy Relationships

Rape Crisis Midwest has a rich legacy of offering robust and innovative training and development to various audiences, especially governmental agencies which support service users. The delivery of training was limited due to resource cuts made across the entire organisation during the austerity period. The opportunity to revitalise training and development support from the Department of Education and Department of Justice will allow for RCM to increase training in sexual violence awareness and knowledge-sharing.

The decision to stop training delivery was necessary considering the significant impact of recession period funding cuts on RCM operations. Unfortunately, that has created cascading consequences impacting engagement with stakeholders as indicated by an overarching critique and focus on training and education in survey responses. RCM is highly regarded in the community, and by its stakeholders, indicating the response to training and educational initiatives would be well-received by those target audiences. Development and delivery of educational and training opportunities which are targeted towards community organisations and practitioners who refer potential service users to RCM is in very high demand.

### Strategic Goal

Establish a training and development unit designed to set the standard for sexual violence awareness and prevention to mobilise individuals, organisations, and agencies to promote gender equality, respect, and safety.

### Strategic Objective

Disseminate the knowledge, skills, and awareness of RCM to the broader Midwest region. Deepen our understanding of and capacity to reflect and act on issues which address sexual violence and abuse. In doing so, we will provide strong leadership, good governance, effective services, and resourced training.

### What We Know...

**Over 65% of stakeholder survey respondents have not attended any RCM sexual violence awareness training, with 90% stating that it would be beneficial to staff training.**



## Strategic Priorities

- Revive a legacy of robust training and development programmes for internal and external audiences
- Create a self-sustaining training model that provides education and training on sexual violence and abuse to relevant service providers, particularly those working with marginalised groups, new communities, youth and young people
- Develop a collaborative approach to training with educational institutions, schools, universities, colleges, as well as the wider community

## Success Measures

Develop training and development capacity that expands on RCM principles and is oriented towards developing a standardised approach to supporting service providers, practitioners, educators, and the wider community.

| Strategic Goal #3 Actions  | Time Frame |
|--|------------|
| Establish a Training and Development Unit to function within RCM   | Year 1     |
| Develop a training and development strategy within RCM that is self-sustaining   | Year 1     |
| Inform the design and development of SV standards for counselling, training, and development   | Year 2     |
| Develop an education and training approach that works in partnership with schools and universities to reach staff and students                                   | Year 2     |
| Develop a marketable and collaborative approach for training to government agencies, first responders, and other service providers                               | Year 3     |
| Build a comprehensive training model to sustain RCM operations which focuses on paid and free training based on established international and national standards | Year 3     |
| Establish a Sexual Violence and Abuse Centre of Excellence for research, policy development and training   | Year 5     |

# Enhanced Community Engagement, Education & Awareness

## Build Robust Pathways for Collaboration and Impact Against Sexual Violence

Rape Crisis Midwest has established a reputation as a community organisation central to supporting women, men, and children at risk of experiencing sexual abuse and violence. Central to that is community engagement, education, and awareness. This increases the capacity of the community to prevent and mitigate the risk of sexual abuse and violence. The delivery of these services must be built on creating pathways for collaboration with other organisations and measuring the impact of these efforts. A focus on engagement with special communities will require the assistance of such partnerships to leverage RCM's capacity to reach target audiences.

A legacy of delivering innovative educational programmes to secondary schools helped to bridge critical service gaps to the Midwest community. Due to budget cuts and resource limitations, these services were minimised leaving significant gaps in delivering education to first responders and youth. Establishment of robust pathways for education and awareness focus on both delivery and measuring impact to these and other audiences representing new communities within the Midwest.

### Strategic Goal

Champion sexual violence prevention by developing a sustainable capacity for community engagement, education, and awareness building that emphasises formalised partnerships, collaboration, and measurable impact to diverse audiences.

### Strategic Objective

#### Community Engagement

To engage with external stakeholder organisations to leverage opportunities to expand the reach of RCM to working with youth, new communities, and minority groups through cooperative partnerships, networking, and formal collaboration.

#### Community Education & Awareness

To design, deliver, and develop innovative educational programmes which engage the community, and increase knowledge and awareness about sexual violence prevention and response.

# Enhanced Community Engagement, Education & Awareness

Build Robust Pathways for Collaboration and Impact Against Sexual Violence

## Strategic Priorities

- Continue to provide information to survivors, their family and friends about the impact of sexual violence and abuse, sexual health, and criminal justice processes
- Establish an engaging and social media informed approach to educating the next generation about healthy relationships
- Build inclusive services, supports, and resources to increase community awareness and engagement
- Develop an educational partnership approach to focus on schools and universities
- Gather and maintain robust and reliable data on community engagement, education, and awareness efforts to obtain evidence, measure impact, and monitor progress
- Inform local and regional policy development and criminal justice reform through dissemination of statistics and participation in collaborative research where appropriate

## Success Measures

Develop community engagement capacity which supports enhanced education and awareness to challenge the norms, structures, and practices that shape behaviour around healthy sexual relationships.

| Strategic Goal #4: Engagement Actions  | Time Frame |
|--|------------|
| Build networks with organisations and agencies who support minority <u>groups</u> (such as young, male, ethnic minority, LGBTQ+) to map stakeholder capacity           | Year 1     |
| Formalise partnerships for policy, research, and advocacy with external entities for interagency collaboration   | Year 3     |
| Develop a comprehensive triage training programme to support organisations that refer potential service users to assist in providing support to those on waiting lists | Year 4     |



# Enhanced Community Engagement, Education & Awareness

Build Robust Pathways for Collaboration and Impact Against Sexual Violence

## Success Measures

| Strategic Goal #4: Education & Awareness Actions   | Time Frame |
|--|------------|
| Develop an education and awareness implementation plan to actively reach youth and young adults  | Year 1     |
| Develop mechanisms to gather data about community engagement and educational awareness services delivered  | Year 1     |
| Establish service level agreements with educational institutions within the RCM geographical territory for the delivery of SV awareness training   | Year 1-2   |
| Build and leverage volunteer base support to serve as brand ambassadors for RCM and to support its mission delivery within college and university settings                                       | Year 2     |
| Develop an education and training approach that works in partnership with schools and universities to reach staff and students   | Year 2     |
| Incorporate a comprehensive digital platform for the delivery of education and engagement through social media to teach about healthy relationships and build awareness of RCM service offerings | Year 3     |
| Offer educational awareness services and programmes through digital platforms and face to face opportunities   | Year 4     |

### What We Know...

Educational awareness, staff training, inter-agency support and information sharing were considered the most mutually beneficial approaches for stakeholder organisations to engage with RCM.

All of the approaches presented to support individuals at risk of sexual violence were considered extremely important with engaging youth (12-17 years old) (87%), reaching new communities/groups (87%), and engaging young adults (18-25 years-old) (80%) selected most

*“Increases my own awareness and that of our staff, ensures we get information out in the community, builds a network where we can refer and support those affected by sexual violence and abuse. RCM also has supported the LAN throughout it's development and kept this valuable group going through excellent, support, facilitation, volunteers, and a listening ear and sense of humour from Miriam...”*  
-Stakeholder

Community  
Engagement

# Local Community Policy and Advocacy

## Build Robust Pathways for Collaboration and Impact Against Sexual Violence

Rape Crisis Network Ireland has played a pivotal role in progressing national policy and research to support advocacy and services for survivors of sexual abuse at national level. RCM's engagement in national policy development through these pathways continue to leverage social ownership and accountability for the elimination of sexual violence. This work at national level needs to be balanced by regional and local coordination and policy implementation.

### Strategic Goal

Advance national and local policies that promote gender equality, respect, and safety in order to lead societal ownership and accountability for the elimination of sexual violence in the Midwest region and Ireland.

### Strategic Objective

To promote a supportive culture of individual ownership and shared community value of dignity, respect, and compassion towards the needs of victims of sexual violence and abuse, and the people and organisations who support them.

### Strategic Priorities

- Disseminate a strategic feminist analysis to community and corporate entities, to advocate for the elimination of sexual violence.
- Develop a cohesive approach for national, regional, and local policy and advocacy for survivors including accessing other services as necessary.
- Build local capacity to address sexual violence in the Midwest through formal partnerships and collaborations with relevant service providers
- Work with statutory bodies and other agencies to ensure a co-ordinated and informed response to the needs of survivors.

### What We Know...

**Stakeholder respondents indicated that formal partnerships (95%), research project engagement (92%), social media campaigns (86%), and virtual events (76%), would be most effective in increasing community awareness about SV and RCM**

### Success Measures

Provide policy and advocacy leadership that strengthens efforts for dialogue on sexual violence reform, justice, and support with local and regional decision makers, service providers, and community organisations working in the area of sexual violence.

| Strategic Goal #5: Policy and Advocacy Actions  | Time Frame |
|---|------------|
| Gather and maintain data about each functional service area: counselling, training, education & awareness, policy & advocacy.           | Year 1     |
| Continue to adopt and influence governmental regulatory standards and codes of practice   | Year 1     |
| Formalise partnerships for policy, research, and advocacy with external entities for interagency collaboration                          | Year 2     |
| Develop a cohesive approach for local and regional policy and advocacy, awareness, engagement, and implementation.                      | Year 3     |
| Develop a mechanism to evaluate Irish compliance with international standards for gender-based violence protection and enforcement      | Year 4     |
| Support lobbying efforts to establish a fully funded 24-hour operational Sexual Assault Treatment Unit (SATU) within the Midwest region | Year 5     |

# Digital Transformation for the Future of Rape Crisis Midwest

Digital transformation is critical to the future of delivery of Rape Crisis Midwest services, educational and training programmes, community engagement, and advocacy efforts. A significant focus of the Strategy and Action Plan is engagement using digital platforms to reach younger audiences. While not considered a focus area for the strategic goals, digital transformation was discussed in a number of the strategic planning sessions, highlighting its importance to the plan's implementation.



Figure 8: Midwest Feminist March

Rape Crisis Midwest maintains a very active presence using social media platforms for the purpose of community engagement and fundraising. Greater social media engagement was recommended as a way to extend the reach of educational awareness. With the decline in the reliance on traditional media like radio and newspaper, it is critical for Rape Crisis Midwest to use social media to reach larger audience in a faster and more cost-effective way. By focusing social media engagement on relationship-building, Rape Crisis Midwest can use digital platforms as a way to leverage content and engage with volunteers, employees, and beneficiaries.

Strategic planning participants recognised the limited availability of funds to create and implement a comprehensive social media programme, and proposed actions that could support Rape Crisis Midwest make social media impact with a small budget. This impact is evident from the high number of followers and level of engagement on digital platforms. The Rape Crisis Midwest team currently uses paid and free campaigns on Facebook and Instagram, and has been creative in using platforms to support fundraising.

## Strategic Priorities

- Use digital platforms to help engage supporters, increase brand awareness, and promote fundraising initiatives which focus on the Rape Crisis Midwest mission
- Create dynamic digital content and templates to support Rape Crisis Midwest community engagement, education, and awareness efforts
- Develop a comprehensive digital resource library to provide informational support to potential service users and to increase knowledge and awareness of sexual violence



# Digital Transformation for the Future of Rape Crisis Midwest

## Success Measures

| Digital Transformation Strategic Actions   | Time Frame |
|--|------------|
| Ensure that Rape Crisis Midwest is enrolled in non-profit programmes offered by social media platforms which allow for specialised access, training, and features  | Year 1     |
| Conduct a review of digital platform use for Rape Crisis Midwest service delivery beyond community engagement to identify gaps   | Year 1     |
| Assess the overall impact of social media on fundraising, community engagement, and educational awareness activities to determine if there <u>is data</u> that would support plan implementation   | Year 1     |
| Develop a digital fundraising strategy that can run parallel to existing fundraising efforts that may be face to face  | Year 1     |
| Gather information on the impact of content, stories, and awareness generation using social media platforms  | Year 1     |
| Develop a digital communication strategy to engage with target audiences and stakeholder organisations   | Year 2     |
| Develop a social media style guide that ensures consistency in Rape Crisis Midwest brand visuals and voice   | Year 2     |
| Promote a multi-media approach that integrates print, video, and livestreaming into messaging  | Year 2     |
| Develop an ad campaign ( <u>similar to</u> “Got Milk”) to present testimonials of survivors  | Year 2     |
| Evaluate the design of the Rape Crisis Midwest website to ensure that it is mobile-friendly. Consider adding a bot to support engagement   | Year 2/3   |
| Develop a social media policy which provides guidance on protocols for use, crisis communication, copyright, privacy, confidentiality, and online behaviour standards  | Year 2/3   |
| Consider the creation of a marketing/communications committee consisting of community volunteers and college students with expertise in social media, print, television, radio, advertising, and related fields to gather best-in-class information to enhance the Rape Crisis Midwest brand | Year 3     |
| Develop a brand/template library for use on social media to ensure consistency in content and social media engagement  | Year 3     |
| Develop educational resources and content directed towards younger audiences using a digital library and promote on social media channels  | Year 3     |
| Hire a designated individual to manage digital media for Rape Crisis Midwest   | Year 3     |
| Develop policy and advocacy focused strategy and content to inspire action to support Rape Crisis Midwest through protests, marathons, etc.  | Year 4     |
| Develop social media content (i.e., Instagram stories) library which showcases work and sponsorship through micro-influence  | Year 4     |

# Acknowledgements

---

The Board of Rape Crisis Midwest would like to thank all of the external agencies and people who generously gave of their time and expertise to the development of this Strategic Plan.

The Child & Family Agency - Tulsa - The DSGBV team with particular mention to Joan Mullen and Ann Ryan for their support

The Department of Justice – The Garda Protective Service Units.

Limerick Prison

Rape Crisis Network Ireland and other member centers

Adapt Services Limerick

Clarehaven Services

Ascend Services

CARI Foundation

Gender, Orientation, Sexual Health, HIV (GOSHH) Ireland

Bluebox

Limerick Suicide Prevention

Southill Family Resource Centre

Hospital Family Resource Centre

University of Limerick

Bedford Row Family Project

Clare Volunteer Service.

Doras Luimni

Clare Women's Network

Limerick Women's Network

Cllr Elisa O'Donovan

**All of the individual Clients, Volunteers and Supporters who took the time to contribute to this work.**

FIGHT  
LIKE A  
GIRL

#METOO

## Appendix