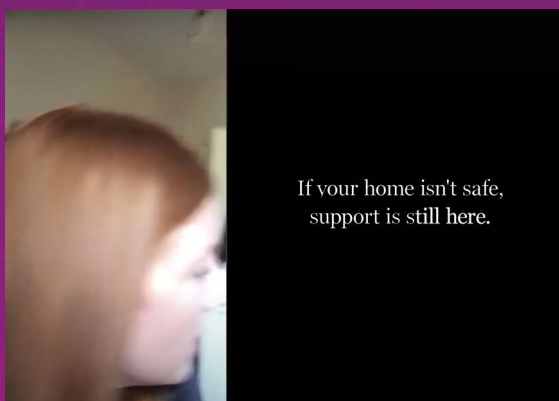


# AWARDS FOR EXCELLENCE IN **PUBLIC RELATIONS** **2021**



# Best Public Sector or Civil Service Campaign



Still image of an awareness campaign directed at victims of domestic abuse from the Department of Justice.

## Campaign

Still Here: Combatting domestic violence during the first wave of Covid-19

## Description of Campaign

Still Here was a collaboration between the Department of Justice, its agencies and domestic violence support groups to respond to the increased risk and incidence of domestic abuse during the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic.



An Roinn Dlí agus Cirt  
Department of Justice

## Organisation

Department of Justice

## Background to the Campaign

During Ireland's first national Covid-19 lockdown significant concerns were raised with the Department of Justice about the impact restrictions were having on vulnerable people who were at risk of, or experiencing domestic abuse. Global research showed that restricted movements introduced to curb the spread of COVID-19 were resulting in large spikes in domestic violence as victims became confined with their abusers. The environment of uncertainty, stress, fear and anxiety was shown to exacerbate domestic abuse situations.

While research showed domestic violence would rise, conversely frontline services in Ireland were worried that some victims would think services were not available due to Covid-19 restrictions. Equally the number of people seeking help from Justice agencies began to reduce with the implementation of lockdown.

To clearly define the challenges domestic violence victims were experiencing the Department consulted extensively with frontline services. The feedback received was that while all frontline services were receiving calls, there were significant concerns that a large proportion of people were not reaching out as they thought services were closed

due to lockdown – the intensity of the calls for help were also increasing i.e. those that were calling were more desperate. Feedback given to the Department of Justice by a frontline domestic violence worker during one of the meetings is below:

*“Victims of domestic violence are confined with their abusers at a time when they are being asked to stay home to keep others safe. They either think that support services are not available for victims due to COVID-19 restrictions, or they don’t know how to access the services. It must be terrifying due to the pressure cooker environment many are living in. We have to reach these people and let them know help is still here”*

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## Statement of Objectives

The objective of the campaign were developed following extensive consultation with frontline services and Department of Justice agencies such as An Garda Síochána and the Courts Service.

From the outset we wanted to keep the objectives simple, measurable and focused diligently on raising awareness that domestic violence supports remained available and, importantly, how to access them.

### Objective 1:

Ensure victims and the general public knew that domestic abuse support services were still available with a target of over 75% recall and awareness of the Still Here campaign.

### Objective 2:

Ensure victims of domestic abuse knew where to access support services and ensure an increase in the number of calls to help lines during the duration of the campaign.

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## Programme Planning and Strategy

### Concept – If your home isn’t safe, support is still here

The ‘Still Here’ concept came through engagement with the domestic violence support NGO group. An overriding comment continuously provided was ‘we want people to know we are still here’.

The Department took this concept and developed the tagline – ‘if your home isn’t safe, support is still here’.

### A national campaign with a local focus

The campaign focus was on diligently connecting victims of domestic abuse with support services.

While there are many different types of services available for victims, at the time there was no centralised resource that someone in crisis could easily access to tell them what supports were available.

The Department mapped every single domestic violence support service in Ireland (both Government and NGO). This was done on a county by county basis and included contact details and links to services.

Information about national help lines, Garda supports and how to access help through the Courts and Legal Aid Board was also mapped.

The Department then built a campaign website called StillHere.ie to incorporate this information and make it easy for people to find in a centralised location. The website had an interactive, mobile optimised, map of Ireland which allowed people to quickly find services in their local area. It also included information on how to make a safety plan.

The campaign team was conscious that the people using the website may have needed to do so secretly so a prominent safety button was included on each webpage. If someone clicked on the safety button it brought them instantly back to the Google home page.

### Collaborating with frontline voices to reach the vulnerable

The strategy behind developing the Still Here tag line and website was twofold. In the first instance we wanted to



have a resource where victims could easily find help. It was also developed to help unify the voice of the domestic violence sector.

The Still Here tag line and website successfully gave high profile spokespersons an overarching banner under which they could put forward a unified voice with simple campaign messages i.e help is still here, the 2km rule doesn't apply, visit **StillHere.ie** for details of domestic abuse services in your area.

This ensured that, while different stakeholders were doing media about their own services, the campaign tag-line and simple messaging gave them something to refer back to. This amplified the message and increased the reach of the campaign significantly. It was also integral to help reach local victims via trusted voices.

## **Advertising support**

To ensure maximum exposure the Department of Justice also commissioned a national advertising campaign incorporating television, radio, digital audio and video-on-demand. To ensure the adverts resonated with the general public, the Department wanted the campaign to reflect the unique pressures and realities of life in lockdown.

The TV advert was shot using FaceTime and showed woman on a video call with a friend who was then interrupted by her abuser. The advert ended with 'if your home isn't safe, support is still here'.

## **Launch**

To support the launch the Minister for Justice did a press conference at Government Buildings along with the Chief Executive of the National Women's Council on Friday 10th April 2020. To maximise exposure the Department also offered spokespeople from each of the national domestic abuse support organisations. This resulted in widespread national coverage with the story being covered by TV, Radio and print.

## **Ongoing Campaign Management:**

**Wednesday 15th April:** The campaign team used the first airing of TV and Radio ads for a publicity blitz. The Minister went on Pat Kenny at 9am. He also did interviews with RTE News and Virgin Media. The campaign was covered heavily across national and regional news reports all day.

**Thursday 23rd April:** Ireland on Call featured an interview with Women's Aid where the campaign was mentioned and linked to an increase in calls to helplines.

**Monday 27th April:** The team secured an Op Ed by the Minister for Justice in the Irish Independent about Still Here and domestic violence. This was timed to appear the same day as a Department of Taoiseach briefing from Liz Canavan about the campaign, the interactive map, and reassurances about 2km restrictions for victims. This tactic resulted in the Still Here campaign dominating the news cycle that day with pieces being carried on the Sean O'Rourke Show, the 1 o'clock and 6 o'clock news on RTE, the 5:30 and 8:30 news on Virgin Media. The campaign also featured on Crimecall that evening.

Other notable media relations included the team securing a segment on Off the Ball on Newstalk where the presenters held a discussion over Zoom with reps from Women's Aid, Safe Ireland and the Men's Development Network.

In addition, the Department worked with Shane Phelan (Irish Independent) about the Still Here Campaign and how the Legal Aid Board can support victims of domestic abuse. A similar piece was also secured on Galway Bay FM.

## **Regional media:**

As the focus was on ensuring victims knew where to access help, a regional media strategy was developed. A press release was written for every county in Ireland with local services included from the mapping phase. Each release had quotes from local frontline services along with contact details for local spokespeople. Proactive media pitching was also conducted securing radio interviews. Having local voices supporting a national message proved very effective with nearly 50 individual pieces of coverage secured as part of the regional strategy.

## **Social Media:**

To support the campaign the Department worked with frontline domestic violence groups to develop social media content. Content included video messages from domestic violence survivors. Content was often simple with a message of hope and how to find help. All content was shared under the hashtag #StillHere with a link to the

interactive domestic violence supports map. While no budget was put behind social media independent research showed nearly 3 in 10 people could still recall something about Still Here following the campaign.

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## **Measurement**

Following the campaign the Department used the NGO stakeholder group to measure the effectiveness of the campaign.

All frontline services reported a significant increase in the number of people contacting their helplines during the campaign. The stakeholders attributed this increase to the impact of the communications campaign.

In addition to this, the StillHere.ie website received more than 20,000 hits during the campaign with people looking for information on localised services.

The Department also commissioned an independent review by Coyne research of a nationally representative sample which found:

- Just under 9 in 10 people surveyed could recall something about domestic violence supports still being available during the COVID-19 crisis.
- 4 in 5 deemed the campaign effective in letting people know where they need to go if they need help or advice relating to domestic violence during the COVID-19 pandemic.

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