



Letter from the CEO, Todd Prevost

I would like to take this opportunity to thank firstly our staff team, who as essential workers, worked tirelessly through the COVID pandemic ensuring our clients ongoing safety and support needs. Also, to thank the members of our Board of Directors, for contributing their expertise and knowledge in financial, legal, governance and property related matters. We could not have achieved the aims and objectives from our previous Strategic Planning without our stakeholders and partners working with us over the last three years. In particular, Sonas would like to thank Tusla as our primary funder; without the collaboration and teamwork from the DSGBV Unit – we would not have the capacity to provide the supports and services to our clients.

INTRODUCTION

Sonas Domestic Violence Charity (Sonas) are the largest provider of frontline domestic abuse support services to women and children experiencing domestic violence in Ireland. Sonas have been providing accommodation and domestic abuse support services to women and children, across a spectrum of risks and needs for 30 years. We understand the complex nature of domestic violence, and our approach to support services is integrated, client-centred, needs-led and outcomes based. We focus on the needs of each individual woman and her children and provide a range of comprehensive supports to enable them to be safe and empowered to make their own choices.

Sonas supports over 1,250 women and children each year. We currently operate across the Greater Dublin Region – the most demographically diverse area in the country - supporting over 30 nationalities, along with particularly vulnerable and hard to reach groups. We have an experienced and dedicated staff team of 42, and an experienced Board of Directors with a wide range of experiences providing governance and oversight. Sonas has a strong background and demonstrated capacity in the provision of high-quality support services, using evidence-based approaches to assess and manage the levels of our clients' risk and needs. Our extensive case management and data collection allows for analysis, on-going review, monitoring and evaluation of our services.



Sonas is also the largest provider of Emergency Accommodation in the domestic abuse sector, with 30 years' experience as an accommodation provider and Approved Housing Body. Sonas provides 99 properties across the Greater Dublin Region consisting of Refuge units, Safe Homes, Transitional Accommodation and Permanent Housing for women and children who are forced to leave their homes as result of domestic abuse. Sonas is committed to providing quality accommodation and housing for clients and tenants, while enhancing the quality of our property portfolio.

Sonas is primarily funded through a commissioning agreement with Tusla, The Child and Family Agency, as part of the Domestic, Sexual and Gender-based Violence Programme. We work in partnership with them to ensure the quality and development of our services.

With the recent decision for the DSGBV Sector policy and services to transition to the Department of Justice, Sonas will work with Government to seamlessly transition in-line with the Department of Justice Project Plan and the formation of a new Statutory Agency for the Sector.

This document lays out our plan for the next 4 years.



OUR MISSION

Sonas works to keep women and children at risk of, or experiencing domestic abuse safe by providing effective frontline support services
The safety of women and children is our priority; their needs shape our response
Together with our partners we communicate the reality of domestic violence and advocate for change

OUR VISION

No woman or child should experience, or be at risk of experiencing domestic abuse
If abuse happens, victims should receive all necessary interventions and supports as early as possible to guarantee their safety and wellbeing

OUR POSITION

There will always be those who seek to abuse but domestic abuse is not inevitable. As a country, we can make a difference by:

- Recognising and upholding the rights of women and children
- Putting in place the primary prevention strategies needed to ensure domestic violence does not occur
- Providing necessary and timely support services to women and children experiencing domestic abuse
- Recognising that domestic violence is a crime
- While anyone can be a victim, it is a crime that overwhelmingly and disproportionately affects women and children
- Supporting women and children to access a justice system that recognises and understands the dynamics of domestic abuse
- Ensuring our justice system holds perpetrators accountable



EXTERNAL CONTEXT

Domestic Violence is now a National Priority under the Programme for Government, acknowledging, that there is an “epidemic of domestic, sexual and gender-based violence” and that the infrastructure in place to address it must be examined and improved. Sonas engages nationally as a standing member of the monitoring committee of the National Domestic, Sexual and Gender-Based Violence Strategy under the auspices of the Department of Justice and actively contributed to the 3rd National Strategy on Domestic, Sexual and Gender-based Violence, 2022.

For the last two years - due to COVID19 pandemic, and the impact this had on families resulting in increased domestic violence and an increased need for support services. Applications to the District Court under the Domestic Violence Legislation increased by 12% in 2020, Gardaí received increase of 17% in calls to respond to domestic abuse incidents in 2020. Sonas proved to be innovative and agile while dealing with the challenges and restrictions imposed by the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. This is a testament to the strength and resilience of the organisation, management, and staff in continuing to provide support to over 1,000 women and children.

Along with these challenges, there remains a national shortage of emergency accommodation for victims of domestic abuse which creates additional pressure on existing services. The Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (2011), also known as the Istanbul Convention, creates a legal framework to protect women and eliminate violence against women and domestic violence. The Convention states that signatories ‘shall take the necessary legislative or other measures to provide for the setting-up of appropriate, easily accessible shelters in sufficient numbers to provide safe accommodation for and to reach out pro-actively to victims, especially women and their children.

The Sonas Strategic Plan 2022-2026 has been developed to align with the Third Domestic, Sexual and Gender-Based Violence Strategy and will be benchmark against these frameworks as part of our ongoing monitoring processes to ensure our work remains relevant and targeted.



OUR PRINCIPLES

There are seven principles that underpin the aims and objectives in this plan.

- Safety, welfare, and protection are paramount
- Effective support services that are: high quality, evidence based, evidence informed and result in the best outcomes for women and children
- A woman and child centred approach throughout our work
- Prevention and Early Intervention – Community Services
- Recognising that domestic violence requires a range of responses and working in partnership with a wide range of partners to integrate supports
- Rights based approach and equity of access, particularly for women and children from hard to reach or socially excluded groups
- Accountability to those who use our services, our funders and the broader public

SONAS STRATEGIC PLAN 2022-2026

Primarily, our clients and past clients informed this plan, along with the consultation with staff members, analysis of our data, consultations with our key statutory and non-statutory stakeholders and partners including Tusla, The Department of Justice, An Garda Síochána, along with other domestic abuse service providers.

1. Sonas Model of Support Services
2. Accommodation within our Integrated Model
3. Children and Young People's Services
4. Community and Early Intervention Services
5. Legal Supports
6. Advocacy, Policy and Profile
7. The Sonas Organisation



1. SONAS MODEL OF SUPPORT SERVICES

Background

Sonas currently operates the following services across the Greater Dublin Area. The management and delivery of these support services operates as an integrated model, resulting in our clients receiving a continuum of preventive and practical services, according to their needs.

Sonas Refuge - 24/7 Crisis Service including 24-hour Free Phone Helpline

Safe Homes – Safe and secure short-term crisis accommodation for women and children, who have had to leave home due to domestic abuse

Transitional Housing – Housing (for up to 18 months) for women and children who have been made homeless as a result of domestic abuse

Permanent Housing – “Forever Homes” for women and children experiencing domestic abuse

Community Based Services – Visiting Support Service, Outreach and Information, Court Preparation and Accompaniment

Children and Young People Services – Dedicated Support team for children accessing Sonas services

Sonas supports women and children to be safe, empowered, and to make choices that are right for them. The Sonas Outcomes Model helps us focus on what needs to change to do that. There are 9 areas, which have been identified as critical in empowering women with experience of domestic abuse to build a new life.

- Physical health
- Where you live
- Being safe
- Relationships
- Feelings and behaviour
- Friends
- Confidence and self-esteem
- Education and learning

This model is based on an underlying model of change and an understanding of the steps to independence, empowerment, and recovery. This is a collaborative process of assessment, implementation, review, and measurement integrated into our support work.

Aims

Provide the needed, timely, evidenced-based and evidenced-informed integrated services for women

Innovate new services, working with our funders and partners to meet the needs of women and children



Work with others to develop joint working and integrated pathways	
Area	Objectives
High quality Integrated Supports	1.1 Continue to provide integrated service delivery for women and children, in line with the Sonas Outcomes Model, consistently meeting the needs of our clients, supporting them to achieving successful outcomes.
Support services	1.2 Develop support services to meet the needs of victims of domestic abuse in emerging cohorts, and higher levels of need.
Diversity	1.3 Promote social inclusion, addressing issues around gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, religious beliefs, age, disability, and race.

2. ACCOMMODATION WITHIN OUR INTEGRATED MODEL

Background

Domestic abuse can directly result in homelessness for women and children. When a woman decides that the abuse cannot continue, fleeing her home may be the only option. Unfortunately, when sufficient support services are not available, women are often faced with the decision to stay in the abusive situation or leave and face homelessness. This is why Sonas provide accommodation services. Because each client’s journey is different, we provide a range of accommodation options within our model. We have provided accommodation as part of our model since 1992, working with local authorities, homeless services and social housing providers to support our clients’ accommodation needs.

Sonas provide three distinct types of accommodation, being the key providers nationally for Safe Homes and Transitional Housing:

Aim

Provide Refuge, Safe Homes and Transitional Housing, based on the established needs of women and children, in the areas served by Sonas.

Areas	Objectives
Refuge Accommodation: 24 -hour Emergency accommodation and Support	2.1 To further develop Refuge Accommodation through increasing the capacity of our current facilities and developing new facilities (in line with the Tusla Domestic Violence Accommodation Review, 2022).

<p>Safe Homes: Emergency accommodation and Support</p>	<p>2.2 Increase the number of Safe Homes available to women and children. This includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Safe Home provision with monitoring and intensive supports for more complex needs within current Sonas sites - Safe Homes provision in community settings for lower risk groups <p>2.3 To conduct a second evaluation of the Sonas Safe Home Model to continue to develop the evidence base for this accommodation type</p>
<p>Transitional Housing: Accommodation and Support</p>	<p>2.4 As the main provider of Transitional Housing to continue to deliver and develop this as a post-crisis housing model</p> <p>2.5 To initiate and seek resources for a study of the Transitional Housing model, utilising the considerable evidence base in the organisation and noting that this accommodation type is included in the Tusla Accommodation Review</p>
<p>Partnerships</p>	<p>2.6 Over the course of the plan to develop partnerships to optimise the development of accommodation solutions for women and children e.g. sectoral organisation, Local Authorities</p>

3. CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S SERVICES

Background

Children and young people are not passive witnesses but are actively affected by their experience of domestic abuse and often have to deal with difficult and terrifying situations. At certain points, children can be at increased risk. We advocate for them and support them to tell their stories through our submissions and interagency work. Sonas has worked to improve outcomes for children and young people affected by domestic abuse for 30 years, supporting, helping them to make sense of their situation. We engage with 300-400 children (one third are under the age of 5) each year through our services. Our supports are delivered through our team of five dedicated Sonas Children's Support Workers along with external specialist child psychologists, counsellors, and play and art therapists.

<p>Aims</p> <p>Continue to develop our supports to children and young people through our Children’s Support Team To extend these supports, into the communities we serve through our Community Services Advocate with and for children and young people to have access to the specialist supports they need and ensure we prioritise their needs within our services To support parents in their role</p>	
Area	Objectives
Better outcomes for Children and Young People in our services	3.1 To maintain and continuously develop our supports for children and young people within our services and to continue to support parents in their role, in line with the Tusla Parenting Support strategy
Better outcomes through our Community Services	<p>3.2 Build on our work to date in providing evidence-based programmes for children, young people and parents , for example TLC Kidz early intervention and recovery programme, Strengthening Families and Parenting Plus and Non-Violent Resistance (NVR) Programme for parents</p> <p>3.3 To provide youth programmes and initiatives through Schools, Youth Reach, Youth Clubs, Substance Misuse Programmes</p> <p>3.4 Research with our partners the challenges associated with providing supports for children in our Prevention and Early Intervention services, to enable the provision of a community-based service for children, young people and teens impacted by domestic abuse.</p> <p>3.5 Continue to strengthen and formalise our working relationships with Tusla, recognising the lasting impact of domestic abuse on the lives of children. In particular, to build local working relationships in the context of the Tusla Regional Service Areas.</p>
Working with Tusla	3.6 To continue to examine with Tusla how to work collaboratively with children, young people and families, through casework, joint safety planning, testing new approaches, Signs of Safety pathways, Red Flag Meetings, further integrating the approaches to safety. Alongside this, work with PPFS and broader early intervention structures.



Children and Young People's right to be heard	3.7 Continue to keep the needs and wishes of children and young people affected by domestic violence to the forefront of our services and advocacy through implementing our Children's Charter and further alignment with the Lundy Model of Participation
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4. COMMUNITY AND EARLY INTERVENTION SERVICES

Background

Sonass have six staff members working in Community Based Services. Their work involves supporting women and children experiencing domestic violence, who cannot or do not wish to enter a Refuge or the Emergency Accommodation Service. This service offers general advice and signposting, as well as specific advice on risk and safety assessment/planning, court accompaniment and legal issues. It is also a post Refuge/Crisis support. The service is also preventative as it helps women increase their safety at home. We recognise that when families are referred to our crisis and emergency services, that earlier intervention may have prevented the family from having to leave their home, become homeless, and avoid injury/assault/trauma/child protection issues. Prevention strategies for domestic violence are critical and require a range of agencies and organisations to work together.

Sonass Community Based Services operate across the Greater Dublin area, including:

Crisis Intervention Service - an intensive form of structured outreach support delivered on a longer-term case management basis.

Outreach Service - providing advice and support, risk and safety planning

Court Preparation and Accompaniment

Dochas Women's Prison in-reach programme, a pre-release support programme

Information and Advice Line

24/7 Helpline

Aims

- Reach more women, children and young people through our Community Based Services
- Develop our Prevention and Intervention model including Awareness and Domestic Violence Training, whilst maintaining services at other levels of need
- Extend the reach of Domestic Violence Programmes, building on our experience to date
- Strengthen our engagement in partnership structures to build prevention and early intervention strategies in local areas



Area	Objectives
Early Intervention and Prevention	4.1 Work collaboratively in communities on the development and delivery of prevention and intervention services and referral pathways. This includes working with agencies and interagency structures: Family Support Networks, Meitheals, Family Resource Centres, CYPSC, Local Community Safety structures, housing/homeless networks.
	4.2 Provide client focussed programmes including: TLC recovery programme to Mothers and Children in community settings, the Freedom Programme for women who have experienced domestic abuse alongside the Sonas specific programmes.
Deliver Awareness Programmes	4.3 Extend the reach of our Awareness Programmes to agencies and professionals and particularly those most likely to come into contact with women and children at risk of or experiencing domestic abuse. 4.4 Continue to provide corporate programmes to organisations and employers requesting awareness programmes building on our work with Google, Microsoft, PayPal, An Post.
Community Based Services	Continue to provide outreach community-based services with intensive support services, with high risk, and or complex cases in the community. Responding to presenting needs of women and children experiencing domestic violence, who do not wish to enter Refuge/Crisis Accommodation Service.

5. LEGAL SERVICES AND COURT ACCOMPANIMENT

Information

Going to court can be difficult for victims and witnesses. Sonas provides a court preparation and accompaniment service to support our clients through this experience. As well as supporting clients emotionally, Sonas helps our clients to prepare for the court case, giving information and practical guidance. Clients can be supported after court to understand the outcome, along with emotional support. Our work involves ongoing co-operation with An Garda Síochána, The Courts Service, COSC, Irish Prison Service Victim Liaison Service, Legal Aid and Immigration Office.

Aims

Continue to provide support to women engaging in the court system
To collaborate with the multi-agency justice structures.



Area	Objectives
Provide Court Accompaniment	(a) To accompany or support women who are pursuing legal options through the court system, providing both practical and emotional support
Collaboration and partnership with the Department of Justice	Over the course of the plan to develop partnerships and collaborations with Department of justice funded services to optimise the development of legal support for victims of domestic abuse. We eagerly await the development of the new statutory agency within the Department of Justice and office of the Taoiseach which will take responsibility for Domestic Sexual Gender Based Violence.

6. ADVOCACY, POLICY AND PROFILE

Background

Policy and advocacy is an integral part of the work of Sonas as a non-governmental organisation. We work from the ground up, ensuring that the experience of the women and children in our services informs the policy process. We advocate for the protection of victims of domestic violence and the prosecution of perpetrators based on the Istanbul Convention: Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence. We work with a range of partners to advocate for change and in particular we collaborate through the umbrella group for domestic violence organisations – Safe Ireland.

Aims

Advocate with services with and on behalf women

With Safe Ireland and our partners in the DSGBV sector to raise awareness, transform the response to domestic violence and continue to make the case for change

Continue to increase our effectiveness as advocates, by raising our profile and increasing our use of new technologies



Area	Objectives
Individual Advocacy	5.1 Continue to advocate with women through supporting their engagement with services
Creating Change	<p>5.2 Engage with decision makers to inform policy development including The Department of Justice Monitoring Committee on the 3rd National Strategy on Domestic, Sexual and Gender-based Violence, 2022), and Tusla – Child and Family Agency on the Accommodation Review 2022.</p> <p>5.3 Together with our partners in the DSGBV sector, under the national umbrella structure of Safe Ireland to create awareness, the case for change and a more systematic and interagency approach to increasing safety, retaining our joint ambition to end domestic violence</p>
Profile Raising	<p>5.4 Increase the profile of Sonas in local communities, with stakeholders and with the public while retaining the anonymity required for our services</p> <p>5.5 Improve our use of new technologies to reach more the women seeking our service</p>

7. THE SONAS ORGANISATION

Information

The Sonas board maintains oversight and guides the strategic direction of the organisation. The board have established processes for risk management, monitoring, compliance and evidence informed decision-making. Sonas take a planned approach to organisation and service development, focussing on data, evidence and the feedback from clients and staff. Board members represent the diverse expertise relevant to the sector, including finance, governance, legal, social care and property. We are accountable to our clients, to the public, our funders and partners.

Sonas has an experienced, committed, skilled staff team of 42. It is a testament our staff and Board, along with the addition support from Tusla that all Sonas services remained at full operating a full capacity during the difficult Covid 19 period.

Sonas can only remain sustainable, provide the services and the developments in this plan if we have adequate funding. Sonas is primarily funded by Tusla – the Child and Family Agency (Domestic, Sexual and Gender-based Violence Programme) through a commissioning agreement. However, the structures are under

review within the current national Audit of Structures. Sonas is acutely aware of our responsible to both ensure that funds are prudently administered and that we provide value for money.

Aims

Continue to provide strong, stable governance and organisation management, ensuring compliance with all relevant legislation and frameworks

Communicate with and engage our staff throughout the organisation, supporting their wellbeing and development

Continue the planned development of the organisation: implementing organisation systems, supporting innovation and extending our partnerships

Secure sustainable funding and through impact measurement show value for money for funds received

Provide excellent, transparent financial management of the public funding and the fundraising income

Area	Objectives
Excellent governance	<p>6.1 Continue the high standards of governance and leadership, ensuring that the organisation is well positioned for the future and reflecting the core values and ethos of Sonas</p> <p>6.2 Provide effective oversight of Sonas, holding the organisation to account to the highest standards, ensuring compliance with all regulatory requirements including: Housing (AHB), Children, Charity Regulations, Financial Regulations</p> <p>6.3 Continue to evolve our established risk management systems including: audit and risk process, risk register with appropriate mitigation strategies in place and preparedness for future events, securing the provision of services to women and children in challenging environments and crisis</p>
Support and engage our Staff	<p>6.4 Communicate with and engage staff in decision making, ensuring that their experience informs our responses for women and children</p> <p>6.5 Support the health and wellbeing of our staff, through for example well-being programmes and upgraded EAP and to continuously acknowledge the challenging work undertaken by them</p> <p>6.6 Maximise the development opportunities provided to staff: supporting the academic advancement of our staff team.</p>



<p>Ongoing organisation development and learning</p>	<p>6.7 Make use of the current capacity of Sonas by developing our services and innovating new services to support unmet and emerging needs</p> <p>6.8 Extend our partnerships and collaborative opportunities to meet client needs, with particular emphasis on hard to reach, vulnerable and emerging groups</p> <p>6.9 Continue to develop our systems and processes in particular to increase the use of technology for internal operations and data collection e.g. Salesforce</p> <p>6.10 Maintain our development as a Trauma Informed Organisation, being more explicit about this practice in our work and highlighting the values underpinning this approach</p>
<p>Financing our work</p>	<p>6.11 Show value for money for the public funding and fundraising income received by integrating monitoring and evaluation into our work and using impact measures to assess effectiveness</p>

Implementation and Oversight

The plan forms the framework for the delivery of annual implementation plans with outcome measures and accompanying budgets. The Board of Sonas has oversight responsibility for the plan and delegates operational responsibilities to the CEO and senior management. The Board operates a monitoring and review framework for the implementation of all plans.