

A US plan to reduce domestic violence and murder may be rolled out in Clare

“There are women alive today that would otherwise have died as a result of domestic violence.”



Garda Chief Superintendent John Kerin; Christy James, survivor of domestic abuse; and John Mark Harrington, Chief of Police, St Paul *Source: Arthur Ellis*

A US PROGRAMME aimed at reducing domestic violence may be rolled out on a pilot basis in Co Clare.

The [Blueprint for Safety](#), which was devised in the city of Saint Paul in Minnesota, involves greater collaboration between police, prosecution services, court services, advocacy groups, prison services and probation services “to keep victims safe and make the offender accountable”.

Here are the Blueprint’s six core principles:

- Adhere to an interagency approach and collective intervention goals
- Build attention to the context and severity of abuse into each intervention
- Recognise that most domestic violence is a patterned crime requiring continuing engagement with victims and offenders
- Establish sure and swift consequences for continued abuse

- Use the power of the criminal justice system to send messages of help and accountability
- Act in ways that reduce unintended consequences and the disparity of impact on victims and offenders

The programme has been rolled out elsewhere in the US and a delegation from St Paul visited Clare and Dublin during the week to talk about implementing the programme here. [Haven Horizons](#), a charity based in Clare, set up the visit. A delegation from Ireland visited St Paul last year.

Speaking in Ennis during the week, St Paul's Chief of Police John Mark Harrington said the initiative has saved lives: "There are women alive today that would otherwise have died as a result of domestic violence.

"This is about advocates and police, judges and courts, probation and victim all coming together to solve a problem, and together we are quite literally saving lives."

Since it was introduced in St Paul in 2010, calls to police about domestic abuse have reduced from 11,000 a year in 2009 to about 5,000 in 2016. Authorities say this is due to the fact offenders are being jailed earlier than they previously would have been, decreasing repeat and more serious offences.

In 2016, there was a [64% conviction rate](#) for domestic violence offences in the city, up from 52% in 2012. Five of the 21 homicides in St Paul to date this year were related to domestic violence.

"There are literally women alive from that period, that by all the statistics and all the probability, would not be alive today if we hadn't done what we are doing," Harrington stated.

Women murdered by their partners

Garda Inspector David Finnerty, Domestic Abuse Liaison Inspector for the Clare Division, said the region is "well positioned" to implement the pilot programme "as many of the mechanisms and interagency relationships are already in place here".

"In Clare alone between 1996 and 2016, six women were murdered by someone they knew intimately," Finnerty added.

A recent report found that men who are convicted of the manslaughter of current or former intimate partners in Ireland [serve less time in jail than other men convicted of the same charge](#).

According to the 2017 Women's Aid report, such men are sentenced to, on average, 2.8 years less than other men convicted of manslaughter of women. Eight women have died violent deaths in Ireland this year and the report details how women are more likely to be killed at home than any other location.



Christy James, survivor of domestic abuse; Mary Fitzgerald, Chairperson of Haven Horizons, and Bree Adams Bill, Programme Director of Paul & Ramsey County Domestic Abuse Intervention Project Source: Arthur Ellis

Domestic abuse survivor Christy James addressed an event in Ennis during the week, telling people: “I am here today because all of these agencies have been working together.

“I didn’t know when I was in the situation what was happening in the background, but literally from the time I dialled 911 to the time the family violence officer arrived, I was just taken care of.

“All of these people here and the agencies they work for put an umbrella over me and made me safe. Without that I don’t know would I be sitting here,” she said of the approach in Saint Paul.

More cases are being reported, but ‘an awful lot’ are not

Sergeant Caitriona Holohan is in charge of community policing in Ennis and is also chairperson of CLAN, the Clare Local Area Network on Violence Against Women. Holohan told *TheJournal.ie* there are hundreds of reports of domestic violence in Clare every year, with an increase in figures in 2017. She says almost all of these relate to violence against women, but a few cases have been violence against men.

Over my 18 years of service, I’ve encountered a significant number of cases.

Holohan said a protective services unit that will examine domestic and sexual violence will soon be set up in Clare, adding that the Blueprint pilot would be part of this if it gets the green light.

She said the increase in the number of domestic violence reports being made to Gardaí is partially due to more people feeling able to report crimes that they previously wouldn't have, following an awareness raising campaign by Gardaí and organisations like Clan and Haven Horizons.

“That has encouraged women and men to come forward and report domestic violence. Domestic violence is centuries old, it's not as though it's something that just started happening in the last 20 years,” Holohan says, adding that “an awful lot” of cases still go unreported.

She said Gardaí are also looking into how they can encourage ethnic minority groups and people in same-sex relationships who experience domestic violence to come forward.



Chief Superintendent John Kerin; Axel Henry, Saint Paul Police Department, Saint Paul; John Mark Harrington, Chief of Police, St. Paul; Sergeant Catriona Holohan, Garda Inspector David Finnerty; Superintendent Brendan McDonagh and Inspector Kieran Ruane
Source: Arthur Ellis

Holohan said there seems to be a willingness from the relevant stakeholders in Clare, such as Tusla (the Child and Family Agency) and the local probation office, to be involved in the Blueprint initiative.

If the project gets the go ahead, she said it would likely be 2019 before it's rolled out, given the preparatory research that would need to take place beforehand. If successful, Holohan hopes the plan would be replicated elsewhere in Ireland.

'Hold offenders accountable'

Madeleine Mc Aleer, Research and Development Officer with Haven Horizons, said Blueprint has been "proven to increase victim safety and hold offenders accountable".

"It gives meticulous attention to the details of inter-agency case processing. Nationally and international research shows that when agencies do not coordinate their interventions on multiple levels, using sound intervention approaches, tragedy can occur – Blueprint changes that."

Senior Commander Axel Henry of the Saint Paul Police Department helped to develop Blueprint. He told *TheJournal.ie* the programme looks at "the entire process from the 999 all way through to the courts system".

Henry said the biggest gap that was identified was the lack of information sharing between relevant agencies. Since this issue has been addressed, he said police can "identify faster if a person is extremely dangerous and harmful" and act accordingly.

Convictions happen faster and for lower level crimes, meaning repeat and more serious offences are less likely to occur.

That is why I think Blueprint is so powerful. It doesn't just make the individual system – whether it is police or dispatch or prosecution or courts – better on their own, it makes them all interlinked. It means everyone is speaking the same language.

Henry said he was "very impressed" by the work being done to combat domestic violence in Clare.



Senior Commander Axel Henry, Saint Paul Police

Source: Arthur Ellis

“Obviously there are things that are different, there are different laws here ... I think [Gardaí] can replicate some of what we have done and can possibly do other things better.”

Garda Detective Chief Superintendent Michael Daly described the visit of the delegation from Saint Paul as “an excellent opportunity for sharing experience and knowledge”.

“This ties in well with An Garda Síochána’s plans for domestic abuse intervention, supporting the victim and their families whilst effectively dealing with the perpetrator,” he added.

Domestic Violence Bill

Domestic violence legislation is currently making its way through the Oireachtas. After discussions in the Seanad, a number of amendments were added to the Bill during the week.

These include dealing with the issue of coercive control – emotional and final control; aggravating factors in sentencing and a non-exhaustive list of factors to consider when dealing with applications for domestic violence orders.

The addition of coercive control to the Bill means psychological abuse within a relationship could be punishable by up to five years in prison.

