



Ruhama

Fighting Sexual Exploitation, Prostitution and Human Trafficking



**Annual Report
2023**

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“Once I asked the girls what the nature of my new job would be, they said that I should know it by now. They warned me that Mr. Paul is a dangerous man, and that there was no way of escaping this place.”

Esther's Story – Page 12

Our Vision

Ruhama's vision is a world free of sexual exploitation of women, where all women's lives are valued.

Our Mission

Support and empower women impacted by prostitution and human trafficking for sexual exploitation, raise public awareness of the harms of prostitution and human trafficking and act as an advocate to influence policy that will support and protect women.

Our Values

Dignity: We create a respectful, caring, and confidential environment where our staff, volunteers and service users are valued.

Integrity: We demonstrate integrity, accountability and transparency in our practices, organisational systems, and structures.

Collaboration: We work in partnership and collaborate to achieve our mission.

Diversity: We strive for inclusivity and gender-equality in an environment that respects difference.

Quality: We are committed to quality through evidence-based practice, innovation, and continuous improvement of our services.

Survivor-informed: We recognise and value the unique perspectives of our service users based on their lived experiences and the challenges they face, and we work to ensure their views are sought and meaningfully embedded in our work.

Chair Foreword

2023 has been a very successful year for Ruhama with significant expansion of service delivery across the Outreach, Education and Development and Trauma Therapy teams, an overall increase of 30% Service User Engagement in comparison to 2022 year and Service delivery extending across the Limerick Mid-West region, with our Training reaching over 1000 participants.

Key developments in line with strategic priorities include:

- Roll out of the seeking safety ireland programme
- Increase in trauma therapy and counselling provision by 31%
- Launch of 'pathways to exit' research in partnership with the sexual exploitation and research programme (serp), a focused study with ruhama service users and staff on the barriers and complexities to exiting prostitution
- Full compliance with the charities regulatory governance code and with all other legal and regulatory frameworks.

Ruhama is working towards new strategic priorities outlined in its Strategic Plan 2024 – 2028, with purposefully ambitious goals to reach and respond to more women impacted by prostitution and human trafficking and as well raise general awareness to prevent sexual exploitation. Priorities include high profile awareness campaigns, driving a new training hub and regional expansion across the country.

Ruhama remains strongly committed to combating sexual exploitation and driving interventions to support those experiencing complex trauma in diverse circumstances.

I would like to express my thanks to the dedicated staff and volunteers for their compassion, commitment and expertise in providing support to some of the most marginalised, but resilient women in Irish society. I would also like to express my thanks to the Board of Trustees and all those who supported Ruhama including funders, donors and strategic partners without whom Ruhama would not be able to continue to develop.

I look forward to working with the organisation as we embark on our new Strategic Plan and progressing work within the sector, the Department of Justice, Cuan and the HSE on the implementation of national policy to support victims of human trafficking and sexual exploitation.



IAN CARTER
CHAIRPERSON



CEO Foreword

I am delighted to welcome all readers to Ruhama's Annual Report 2023. In addition to sharing our significant body of work during 2023, we launch this report in 2024 alongside our new strategic plan 2024 – 2028 (our road map for the next five years).

Human Trafficking for sexual exploitation is a heinous crime, hidden in plain sight. It is the worse example of what one human being can do to another human being. This report provides an overview of the work we carried out during 2023, but most importantly highlights the trauma, pain and complexities women endure because of sexual exploitation and sexual violence.

Ruhama engaged with 646 individuals (226 new) an increase of 30% from the previous year. 155 were victims of human trafficking (58 new) for the purpose of sexual exploitation, an increase of 29% on 2022. The vast majority were women from 51 nationalities.

307 individuals engaged with our casework team, based in Dublin, Limerick Mid-West and the Midlands. Throughout the course of 2023, Assertive Outreach Caseworkers engaged with 282 individuals through 93 inreach/outreach clinics and street outreach in various settings including Direct Provision, addiction and homeless services and migrant reception centres across the country.

We saw a sharp rise in those accessing the trauma therapy and counselling service, an increase of 31% from the previous year. Seeking Safety Ireland was successfully rolled out in Ruhama with four iterations of the group internally and one externally.

Our Education and Development team expanded resulting in additional 1-1s and group classes, numerous personal and professional achievements, thus creating education pathways leading to a better life and options for career progression.

Bridge to Work developed new corporate partnerships, the programme engaged with 135 service users, 36% gained employment in 2023.

Ruhama's training programme has grown in response to the ever-growing demand from our front-line colleagues, 1,126 people participated in training and workshops.

Other notable work throughout the year was Survivor Voice. During 2023, 71 service users engaged with our peer support programme. With the continued development of peer support, our intercultural group and varied research opportunities, survivor voice continue to be central to Ruhama's work. A highlight in this area was the launch of a study in partnership with the Sexual Exploitation Research Programme (SERP), 'Pathways to Exit': A study of Women's Journeys Out of Prostitution and the Response to Their Complex Needs'. The research consulted with 62 Ruhama service users, and analysed the varied barriers experienced by those who exited or are seeking to exit prostitution. The research highlighted the complex needs across the areas of housing, welfare, education, migration, financial and justice, concluding with several recommendations. We are committed to ensuring the implementation of the recommendations.

Our Policy and Comms team were very active, there were a lot of debates and progression on national and international levels on prostitution and human trafficking in 2023. We engaged and lobbied to support and influence policy and awareness raising on prostitution and human trafficking including the Stockholm EU Residency Conference, Civil Society Platform in the European Commission in Brussels, lobbying on



the EU Directive on Violence Against Women and for the adoption of the Resolution on the Regulation of Prostitution in the EU. We made numerous policy submissions and lobbied on national policy, particularly in relation to the Sexual Offences and Human Trafficking Bill 2023.

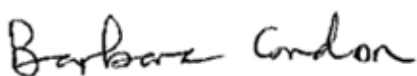
Ruhama lobbied for several years for gender specific accommodation for female victims of human trafficking. We warmly welcomed the opening of Rosa's Place (first specialised accommodation unit for female victims of human trafficking) in late 2023. Rosa's Place is run by DePaul Ireland with Ruhama providing wrap around supports to residents of the unit.

The year culminated with Ruhama being awarded the Irish Security Industry Association (ISIA) Premier Award - Paul Lynch Memorial Trophy. We were honoured to receive this award, acknowledging our work in combatting commercial sexual exploitation and human trafficking.

2023 saw the implementation of commitments in the Third National Strategy on Domestic Sexual Gender Based Violence (DSGBV). Early 2024, saw the establishment of Cuan (new dedicated DSGBV agency) with responsibility for the implementation and monitoring of the strategy. Also, in 2023 the government launched the Third Action Plan on Combatting and Preventing Human Trafficking 2023-2027. A key action of the trafficking plan is the establishment of a new National Referral Mechanism, which will make it easier for victims to come forward, be identified and access supports. We look forward to working with Cuan and the Department of Justice on the implementation of the National Strategy and National Action Plan.

While the demand for our services grows and Ruhama expands, we have a lot to look forward to in 2024. We were excited to open our new hub in Cork, serving the Cork and Kerry region. As Ruhama continues working on both national and international levels to shape and influence policy on sexual exploitation and human trafficking, it is important to furnish evidence-based research that informs and supports our work. We commissioned new research on a comparative analysis of international models of accommodation for victims of human trafficking, which will be conducted and launched in 2024. We are committed to achieving a nation-wide roll out of gender-sensitive, trauma-informed accommodation for victims of human trafficking. We will continue to raise awareness through our campaigns and lobbying on the root causes of gender-based violence, sexual exploitation and human trafficking, and advocating for further resources and appropriate supports for all impacted so they can heal and be supported to reach their true potential.

Ruhama is achieving so much through the dedication and commitment from all our staff and volunteers who bring so much passion to their work. I would like to express my sincere gratitude to all the staff and volunteers for their immense dedication and hard work throughout 2023. I would also like to thank Ruhama Board Trustees, funders, partners, and supporters who contribute to the important work and mission of Ruhama. Finally, I wish to acknowledge our service users who have so much to teach us about the impact of sexual exploitation whilst striving for resilience and determination to heal and restart their lives. We are so privileged to be a part of your journey, thank you.



BARBARA CONDON
CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER

2023 Highlights

International Women's Day

On March 8th, Ruhama celebrated International Women's Day 2023 across its Dublin, Limerick, and Midland's hubs. Our service users enjoyed a day filled with engaging activities such as drumming, art therapy, in-house pampering and poetry.



Simon Harris TD visits Ruhama

Former Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science and current Taoiseach Simon Harris visited Ruhama's Head Office in Dublin, where he met with a group of Ruhama's service users engaged with our Education & Development team. They discussed challenges regarding access to education, and varied struggles our service users had to overcome. Simon Harris addressed each service user's story and offered insight as to how their cases could be navigated, while exploring future hopes and aspirations regarding their education journeys.

Minister McEntee launches our Annual Report

Minister for Justice, Helen McEntee launched Ruhama's Annual Report 2022. Two service users spoke at the launch and shared their lived experiences.



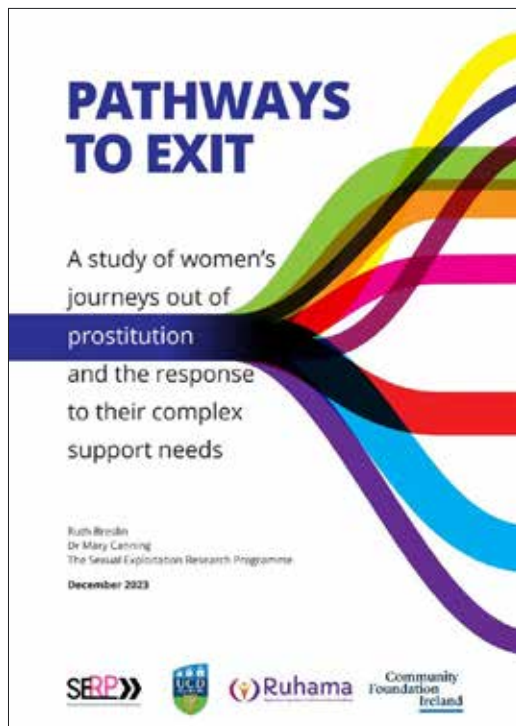
Pictured left to right: Garda Commissioner Drew Harris, Minister for Justice Helen McEntee, Ruhama CEO Barbara Condon and Chairperson of Ruhama's Board of Trustees, Ian Carter.

Growing connections with the Brazilian community in Ireland

As part of our Outreach and Training work, Ruhama continued to engage with the Brazilian Embassy in Dublin and the migrant diaspora in Ireland. In 2023, Ruhama provided training and talks to Embassy staff on gender-based violence and human trafficking. During 2023 we saw an increase in the number of referrals from Brazilian nationals who were impacted by the sex trade in Ireland.



Pictured left to right: Virginia Novaes Procopio de Araujo, Science, Technology and Innovation Officer at the Embassy of Brazil in Dublin; Mia de Faoite, Ruhama's Training Lead; and Francini Da Silva, former Ruhama Assertive Outreach Worker.



Pathways to Exit Research

In November 2023, the Sexual Exploitation Research Programme (SERP) launched a report titled *'Pathways to Exit: A Study of Women's Journeys Out of Prostitution and the Response to Their Complex Support Needs.'*



Pictured left to right: Gill O'Riordan, President of the ISIA, Barbara Condon, CEO of Ruhama; Les Sheridan, MD of Mitie Ireland; Adrienne Molloy, HFO of Ruhama

Irish Security Industry Association Premier Award

Ruhama was delighted to be recognised for our work by the Irish Security Industry Association (ISIA), when we received their Premier Award - Paul Lynch Memorial Trophy in November 2023. Since 1985, the trophy has been awarded to individuals or groups in recognition of contributions to the safety and security of the island of Ireland. ISIA acknowledged Ruhama's work in combatting human trafficking and supporting victims/survivors.

2023 Human Impact

646

Individuals
Engaged

51

Nationalities

30%

Increase in
individuals
compared to
2022

226

New
Referrals

155

Victims
of human
trafficking
(58 new)

255

Individuals at
Risk of Sexual
Exploitation

236

Individuals
impacted by
Prostitution

Casework

307

Individuals
engaged

Counselling
& Trauma
Therapy

103

Individuals
engaged

Education &
Development

228

Individuals
engaged

Bridge to Work

135

Individuals
engaged

1126

Participants
trained

Peer support

71

Individuals
engaged

Outreach

282

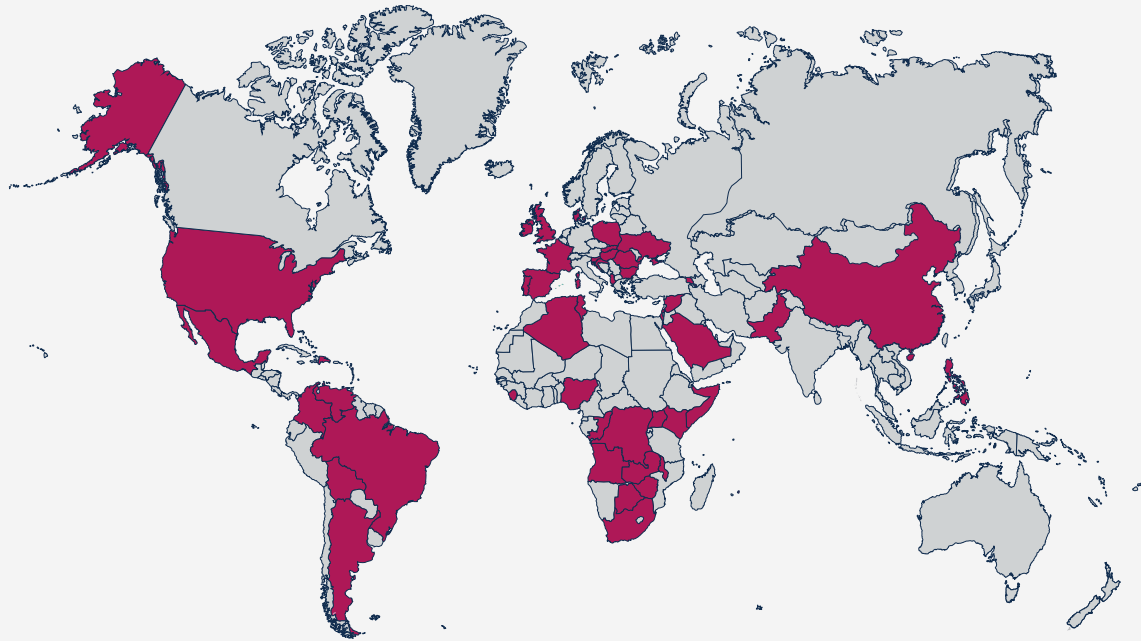
Individuals
engaged

Seeking
Safety

42

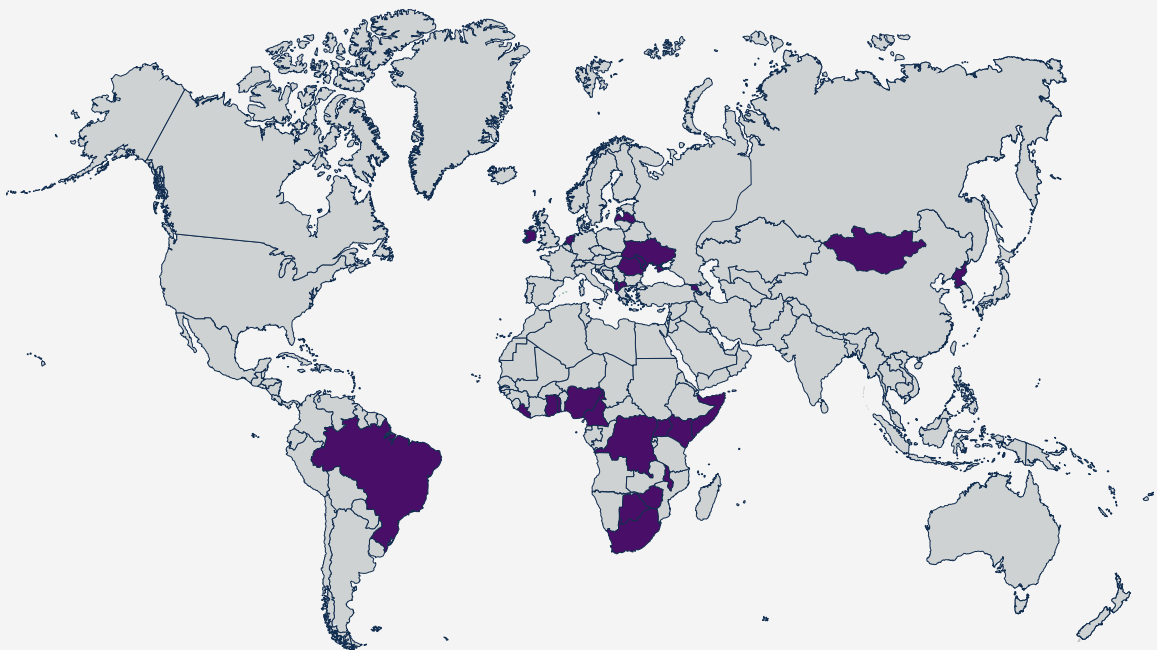
Individuals
engaged

Individuals Impacted by Prostitution Engaged with Ruhama



Albania	1	Congo Democratic Republic	5	Nigeria	21	Spain	4
Algeria	1	Dominican Republic	2	Philippines	1	Tunisia	1
Angola	1	Eswatini	1	Poland	4	Uganda	4
Argentina	1	Hungary	1	Portugal	2	UK/NI	4
Bolivia	5	Ireland	37	Romania	11	Ukraine	1
Botswana	9	Israel	1	Saudi Arabia	1	United States of America	2
Brazil	25	Kenya	6	Sierra Leone	4	Venezuela	1
China	2	Malawi	3	Somalia	9	Zambia	2
Colombia	3	Mauritius	2	South Africa (Republic of)	12	Zimbabwe	37
		Mexico	3				

Victims of Human Trafficking Engaged with Ruhama



Albania	4	Ireland	3	Malawi	1	Somalia	2
Botswana	1	Kenya	4	Mongolia	1	South Africa	13
Brazil	1	Korea (North)	1	Netherlands	1	Togo	1
Cameroon	2	Latvia	1	Nigeria	82	Uganda	1
Congo, Democratic Republic	4	Lesotho	1	Romania	6	Ukraine	1
Ghana	5	Liberia	1	Sierra Leone	1	Zimbabwe	16

Esther's Story

My Name is Esther. I am from Cameroon. I am a victim of trafficking. My journey started back home in Cameroon, when I was 22 years old. I met my husband at college where I was studying psychology. We got married as soon as I graduated. It was a beautiful day, a real dream coming true. After 2 months, I got pregnant. We were living in my husband's family home at the time, so I told my mother-in-law about it. The whole family seemed so happy for me once they heard the news. At the time, I did not know there was something behind it. A few months into my pregnancy, my husband fell ill with diabetes and had to be admitted to the hospital. He struggled to manage his blood sugar levels as we did not have a lot of money. I was left with his family for a while.

One day, my husband's mother told me that she was going to visit the village their family originated from. She insisted on me going with her. I thought that this was a good thing – her being so nice and caring, and not wanting to leave me on my own... So, I agreed to travel with her.

As soon as we got to the village, my mother-in-law broke the sad news to me. Their family had a tradition: the first child of a first-born male had to be sacrificed to a family deity. She told me how the same thing happened to her when she first got pregnant, and that I should not feel bad at all.

She shared that my husband was a child that lived, and that I will also be able to conceive a baby after the first sacrifice. 'You can have as many children as you want after that,' she assured. I felt heartbroken and disappointed. This was the biggest misery of my life, and I did not see it coming at all...

A few days later, my husband's mother took me to an elderly lady. I was told that I will be staying with the elder until I give birth to my baby. The lady was supposed to look after me, and my husband's mum was planning to go back to the city. Before leaving, my mother-in-law took my phone, so I could not contact my husband at all. At that point, he had no idea of my whereabouts. I stayed with the old lady for a couple weeks. She kept on giving me a liquid substance, promising me that my baby will be healthy if I keep on drinking it. Soon, my legs started swelling up, and I started feeling unwell. I thought of escaping, but I had no hope left. At that stage, I started thinking that I might die in this house. Endless negative thoughts came to me.

One day, I decided to run, even though the old lady warned me I might die if I try to. My logic was that I might die in this place either way. I had no way to call my family and say my goodbyes. No one knew the situation I was in. I felt so bad about not bidding farewell, but I had to flee. I am unsure how, but my legs managed to carry me to a bus station at the heart of the village. I explained my situation to one of the bus drivers I met there; he was operating a bus by the largest bus service provider in the

country. I told him that I was running for my life. The driver advised me to escape the village; it was a very small place, so the chances of my husband's family finding me were high. The driver himself had no home – he was sleeping in the bus he drove – but he agreed to take me to the final destination of his journey. I had no money to give him, so he kindly allowed me to sit on a pile of luggage for the 10 hour-long drive.

Once we got to our destination, I had nowhere to go. The driver advised me to find a Catholic church, as they might be welcoming and nice. He encouraged me to tell my story to a priest. I listened to him, and found myself entering a Catholic church at the heart of the capital. Once I was there, I broke down in tears. I begged the priest for help. At that point, it felt that I might die any minute. The priest prayed for me and for my baby, and allowed me to stay in the church for a couple of days. I managed to call my husband while I was sheltering there.

He told me he has been trying to reach me, and that every time he rang his mother, she assured him I was fine. I explained what happened to me and where I was. He promised he would come and find me. I was at the church for a few days, waiting for my husband. Once he joined me, we stayed at the church a while longer and started attending mass together.

One day, the priest introduced us to a man called Mr Paul, who was described as a charity man helping those in need. Up to this very moment, I feel very confused about Mr Paul. The same way I loved my mother-in-law and had her betray me; this man who I respected and trusted ended up doing horrible things to me. My husband and I told Mr Paul what happened to us, and why we were running from my husband's family. He asked us if we could imagine living in this country at all. My husband and I both said 'no', since we felt like we had no future in Cameroon, and that our husband's family could find us at any point. Then, Mr Paul asked me if I had an undergraduate degree. Once I confirmed, he started telling me about a master's programme I could pursue in Europe. He promised to support me along the way. I felt so happy.

Mr Paul took it upon himself to organise our trip. Within a few weeks, he had passports and all the travel arrangements sorted for us. It felt like a dream – everything happened so quickly for him... In the past, I was told that it can take months to get a passport, and there he was with all of it solved, telling us that we must run for our lives and that he will bring us somewhere safe, within days. We were given 3 days' notice prior to leaving Cameroon. Mr Paul gave us clear travel instructions; we were told to always stay by his side and, if stopped by airport officials, tell them we were travelling with Mr Paul.

The day of our departure, Mr Paul arrived in a black car and collected us. He seemed so important and popular: there was no security check at the airport and no questions were asked... His luggage was carried for him, which was a sign of wealth... He looked like a well-respected man. For the duration on the trip, we got to keep our passports, which he took back once we landed in Belfast. We never saw our passports again. 'Welcome to Europe,' said Mr Paul once he brought us to an apartment. This was my first time travelling far from home, and I had no idea where I was.

Mr Paul told us that he did us a massive favour by bringing us here. My husband and I told him how grateful we were. 'That is not the end,' said Mr Paul. 'You will have to work for me to pay back what you owe me.' I knew he did us good by bringing us far away from Cameroon; I was expecting to be given a cleaning or a housekeeping job so that I could pay him back. I was wrong.

Mr Paul told us we owed him €30,000 each. The master's degree he promised me was not mentioned at all. My husband and I were separated. I was moved into a room with 3 other girls. Some of them claimed they have been there for months, others – years. Once I asked the girls what the nature of my new job would be, they said that I should know it by now. They warned me that Mr Paul is a dangerous man, and that there was no way of escaping this place.

The next day, late in the evening, Mr Paul brought in a dress and told me to get ready. I asked where I was going. 'You will know once you get there,' said Paul. At this point, I knew that the good man I once knew was not there anymore. He became strict, violent, and would not let me see my husband. Then, Mr Paul took me out and drove me to some house. There, he introduced me to a man who raped me. Over the next few weeks, I was raped by several men. To this day, I am unsure as to what happened to my husband during our time in that apartment.

In what felt like three weeks, Mr Paul took both my husband and I to a new place. He drove us there at night, telling us we'll make great money in this other place. It was a long and dark journey. Now that I think of it, I believe he drove us from Northern Ireland to the Republic of Ireland. At the time, however, I was still unsure as to where I was. Once we arrived, I realised it was just my husband and I in the apartment. He locked us there. At night, he would bring me out to sleep with various men. At this point, since I was having sex with so many people, I started bleeding heavily. I became worried about my pregnancy. One day, it got so bad that my husband started begging Mr Paul to bring me a hospital. Mr Paul told us that we cannot leave the building, as we are in the country illegally, therefore would likely get arrested. Since the police are very brutal in our home county, we believed him. He promised to get medicine for me and left.

We waited for several hours, and I was becoming very weak. At this point, my husband felt like he had no other option but to flee and look for help, as I was fading. He broke the door of the apartment and pulled me outside. We started running for our lives. Suddenly, we saw a man who was walking his dog and asked him to help us. He told us he could call the police and let them look after us. We were really scared of the police, so asked him not to get the police involved. I felt so far away from home and that no one could save me at that stage.

Seeing that we are migrants, the man told us about the International Protection Office. This was the first time we heard of this place. We told the man that we had no money, so he offered to get a taxi for us. That is how we found ourselves in the IPO. Immediately, I was rushed to the National Maternity Hospital, where they performed a surgery on me.

That night, I lost my child. I lost my dignity as a woman; I lost my everything. I felt like I had nothing left until I was brought to Ruhama. This is where I started receiving support while trying to restore my dignity. Little by little, I started seeing light.

Nowadays, I live in Direct Provision. I have recently completed a Level 5 course in healthcare and am currently working as a healthcare assistant in Dublin. I was granted international protection in Ireland in December 2023. My husband is still waiting for news on his international protection status. We also applied for social housing, and I am hoping to start a master's in social work soon.

That's my story... That's Esther. I know that if it wasn't for the support I have received from Ruhama, I would not be here today. And though life often feels unfair, at least I have hope now.

*All names and locations in this story have been changed to protect our service user's identity.



Casework

In 2023, a total of 307 individuals engaged with Ruhama's Casework team based in Dublin, Limerick and the Midlands.

Ruhama offers support to women using a case management model and a trauma-informed approach. Casework continues to be a key part of our services, where individuals complete an assessment to identify their needs, and work with a caseworker to achieve their self-identified goals in areas of their life they want to make changes. Throughout 2023, 177 initial assessments took place across our 3 hubs, resulting in new care plans being created for each newly assessed service user.

In 2023, 282 individuals attended 1817 casework appointments both online and face to face. Service users were supported around emotional, physical, mental & sexual health, addiction, harm reduction, family and relationships, self-care, legal issues, selling sex, human trafficking, and finances. Additionally, Ruhama offered practical crisis support, including providing service users with sexual health packs, food vouchers, mobile phones and SIM cards.

Accommodation continued to be a challenge for women both in Direct Provision Centres and in private accommodation. Ruhama arranged short-term emergency accommodation for those in crisis fleeing brothels and/or trafficking for sexual exploitation.

Accompaniment to various legal proceedings has played a role in a number of service users' care plans. Throughout 2023, caseworkers supported and accompanied women to Garda Stations to report crimes, legal appointments, criminal and family law proceedings.

"When I first arrived at Ruhama, I wasn't in good shape physically, mentally, or sexually, and I didn't even speak English. But now, everything is different: I feel good in all aspects, and my self-esteem is very high. I can also speak English... Thank you to the entire team at Ruhama who helped me get up."

Ruhama Service User



Ruhama in Limerick, Mid-West Region & the Midlands

Ruhama continued to develop in Limerick, Mid-West region and the Midlands throughout 2023. Our caseworkers offered a full range of case management supports in-person and online, including but not limited to emotional, practical, legal, migration, and accommodation supports.

Ruhama's Limerick office is housed in partnership with Coolmine Therapeutic Community. In Limerick we engaged with 73 service users, 26 were victims of human trafficking.

In the Limerick region, we saw an increase in street prostitution amongst women impacted by homelessness and addiction. These women are particularly marginalised and very vulnerable, and struggle to link in with services. To reach this group, we started street outreach with the Ana Liffey Drug Project and connected with women on the street resulting in a number of referrals.

Ruhama's Midlands base operated in partnership with Merchants Quay Ireland and the HSE. Our Midlands Office caseworker engaged with 43 service users in 2023, including 14 victims of human trafficking. The Midlands caseworker ceased employment in June 2023 and the post was filled in January 2024.

In the regions, crucial and ongoing connections with local agencies have been both established and maintained throughout 2023. This included in-reach clinics and multi-agency work, training sessions for local front-line staff, and development of inter-agency referral pathways.

Casework Outcomes

- **98%** of service users self-report an improvement in their quality of life
- **98%** of service users self-report an improvement in their awareness of their rights and entitlements
- **97%** of service users self-report an improvement in their mental wellbeing
- **90%** of service users self-report feeling supported throughout the asylum process/trafficking case
- **76%** of service users self-report an improvement in managing their alcohol and drug use
- **75%** of service users self-report an increase in taking control of their sexual health

“I found Ruhama to be an avenue for positive mindset, hope for the hopeless, and a family for all of us who have been humiliated in their own countries. Ruhama made us realise that despite our various experiences and our past, we still deserve a better life... And Ruhama tries their best to give us that better life.”

(Ruhama Service User)

Outreach

Our outreach work continued to focus on very vulnerable cohorts and communities who are hidden in society and do not usually access services. Throughout the course of 2023, our team of Assertive Outreach Caseworkers delivered in-reach clinics in various settings, including Direct Provision, homeless hostels, and addiction services across the country. The team carried out harm reduction work and provided sexual health packs, support and information, as well as made onward referrals to Ruhama or other relevant services when appropriate, including migrant rights organisations and sexual health services.

A particular vulnerable community that was targeted in 2023 were individuals active in the sex trade. With a view to increase Ruhama’s reach to this cohort, a pilot partnership was developed with the Organised Prostitution Investigation Unit (OPIU) of An Garda Síochána. Outreach staff went on Welfare Checks with the Unit. The Welfare Checks were carried out in 3 different locations across the country, reaching women and men who advertised online. This initiative resulted in increased referrals to Ruhama and will be expanded upon in 2024.

Outreach Outcomes

- 559 meetings with 157 third party agencies attended while advocating on behalf of Ruhama service users
- 282 individuals engaged with the service through 93 in-reach or outreach clinics and street outreach
- 63 individuals referred to other services
- Outreach & in-reach services developed across Direct Provision centres, migrant reception centres, addiction, and homeless services
- Sexual health packs distributed to those active in the sex trade
- Successful pilot welfare initiative in partnership with the OPIU

Trauma Therapy & Counselling

Counselling and Trauma Therapy are essential elements of healing and recovery from sexual violence. Overall, 100% of our service users reported an improvement in their mental wellbeing since engaging in the Trauma Therapy services (CORE-OM). In 2023, Ruhama's Trauma Therapy team engaged with 108 service users who availed of 783 hours of one-to-one therapy sessions, both in-person and online. There was a 31% increase in the number of individuals engaged with the counselling service compared to 2022.

As a result of the successful evaluation (internal) of a pilot therapeutic group, it was further developed and embedded as a core therapy service during 2023. Wellness programmes including CAPACITAR, STEPS and WRAP continued during the year with positive outcomes for service users.

Overwhelming traumatic experiences are disorienting and debilitating. Trauma Therapy is an experiential support service which compliments all other services in Ruhama. It is the combination of psychoeducation, personal development, post-traumatic recovery and personal development skills acquired by service users during their time with Ruhama, that supports them to go on and lead fuller lives where their traumatic experiences no longer control their lives. Our therapists support service users to work on healing themselves by giving them space and guidance to develop the capacity to integrate these experiences and remove any barriers to healing.



The Trauma Therapy service continued to expand in 2023, with growth in the range and availability of counselling and wellness programmes for service users. While some service users avail of deep, uncovering therapy which can take place over months, others opt for a shorter engagement, where CBT and psychoeducation are the main tools used, as that may fit their needs better.

With this in mind, in 2023 Ruhama developed a new therapeutic group where service users learn about trauma and its impact, and techniques to self-soothe and calm their autonomic nervous response, particularly to their trauma triggers. This pilot initiative started at the end of 2023 and gained positive feedback from participants, therefore will be further developed in 2024.

Unfortunately, one of the negative trends emerging during 2023 is service users being re-traumatised and experiencing a deep sense of fear because of protests outside accommodation centres across Ireland. It is well documented that Direct Provision does not offer a safe and stable base for recovery¹. However, due to the recent rise in racist protests where public anger can be directed towards asylum seekers as they enter and leave their temporary homes, Ruhama therapists spent time supporting service users around their sense of safety in Ireland. It is important that society does not to confuse immigration with human trafficking.

As a team, our expertise lies in experiential trauma therapies including EMDR therapy (Eye Movement Desensitisation and Reprocessing), individual trauma therapy, support groups, as well as trauma informed care consultations/training for other organisations. The phenomenon of recovery after experiencing trauma can be identified as post-traumatic growth – and this is exactly what we strive to help our service users cultivate in their lives. Many of our service users go on to enjoy a good quality of life; and while they cannot change their past, they can change how these past experiences live within them in the present, ultimately leading to a bright and positive future.

¹ *The Mental Health Service Requirements in Ireland for Asylum Seekers, Refugees and Migrants from Conflict Zones* by College of Psychiatrists of Ireland (2017); *No Place to Call Home: Safety and Security Issues of Women Seeking Asylum in Ireland* by AkiDwA (2017).

Group (Wellbeing)	Attendees	Outcomes
Capacitar Programme	35	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improved wellbeing, including: reduced anxiety, stress relief, healing from trauma, improved sense of confidence and self-belief Learned tools to reduce anxiety, stress, and dealing with trauma Improved confidence and developed agency in dealing with PTSD
Therapeutic Group	23	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improved mental wellbeing
S.T.E.P.S. (Steps to Excellence and Personal Success) Programme	45	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Gained understanding of what blocks them from reaching their full potential Engaged in practicing positive self-talk, self-compassion and goal-setting Improved overall self-belief/self-efficacy
W.R.A.P. (Wellness Recovery Action Plan) Programme	23	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Learned how to develop their own W.R.A.P. in order to achieve personal wellness goals Felt empowered and motivated to take greater control of their physical and mental wellbeing

Counselling Outcomes

- **100%** of service users report an improvement in their mental health since engaging in the counselling service
- **100%** of service users would recommend the therapeutic group to others
- **75%** of attendees report an improvement in their overall wellbeing
- **48%** of service users report a decrease in anxiety, depression and suicide ideation since engaging in the Trauma Therapy service

“If recovering from heroin addiction is a lifetime journey, then so is recovering from selling sex... I can’t do this on my own... I can’t...nobody who’s recovering from a journey like that can do it alone...”

(Ruhama Service User)

Seeking Safety Ireland

Seeking Safety Ireland was designed to roll out the Seeking Safety Programme to women in Ireland who were experiencing the dual diagnosis of mental health problems and addiction with a focus on domestic, sexual, and gender-based violence. The Seeking Safety Programme (Najavits, 2002) is a peer-reviewed and internationally recognised manual, aimed at establishing safety in the lives of individuals with such a dual diagnosis. It is a programme that helps women find a safe space within, to allow healing and recovery. Ruhama is one of eight partner organisations, including the HSE who are involved in the project.

Over the span of 2023, the Seeking Safety Programme at Ruhama ran four iterations of the group, as well as one external group in partnership with Coolmine Therapeutic Community in Dublin. Overall, 34 women attended the Seeking Safety groups at Ruhama, and 8 participated from Coolmine, they also went on field trips to the Botanical Gardens and Dublin Castle. Additionally, 9 service users availed of 54 1-1 sessions.

Seeking Safety Outcomes

- **100%** of service users report improvement of overall mental wellbeing
- **100%** of service users found the sessions helpful when dealing with trauma & PTSD
- **75%** of service users found the sessions helpful in dealing with substance misuse issues

“I am living the life I am supposed to live because of Seeking Safety and the topics we covered each week. The sessions helped me understand how to practice self-compassion, to stop being hard on myself, not to be afraid to seek safe people and to ask for help. I am taking back my power. I am committed to being honest with myself, to achieve my goals and never, never, never give up. All of this learning has helped me be free from the panic attacks, flashbacks, headaches, anxiety and hatred I have had for myself. Thank you, I really appreciate all I have learned.”

(Ruhama Service User)

“Education is so, so important. It’s like a passport... It’s valuable, and it’s a part of who you are. You can take it with you wherever you go; it shows your identity. It allows you to go places, to travel the world, to see and do new things. It’s the world of work, sure, and we all need that - to have good jobs, have careers. But it’s also the way to become a fuller person, to have understanding, knowledge, power; to have a better life, to make a difference and contribute to society.”

(Ruhama Service User)

Education & Development

These are the words of Maya², a woman who accessed Ruhama’s education services in the past year. We echo what she says and continue to make education a key pillar of Ruhama’s work. We believe in the transformative power of education, both at personal and societal levels. Our Education & Development team supports the service users as they move from A to B: from where they are, to where they would like to be.

Ruhama’s Education & Development Programme offers a range of opportunities to help participants set and achieve their learning goals. Supports to (re)discover education dreams, set goals, explore strengths and interests, get information about options, and apply for courses is offered by our team. Additionally, a number of group classes and workshops are provided, including those in technology - thanks to our corporate partners in Codec and Microsoft. With support from a team of volunteers, we provide a professional guidance counselling service and regular information sessions, as well as individual classes in English, ICT, and study support, both in-person and online. We also offer material support, such as assistance with college fees, sourcing laptops, and buying study materials. Most importantly - according to our service users - what we offer is *“belief... that I can do it... and have a right to do it... and hope... so I keep motivated, I keep going.”*

When we speak of working with people where they are at, we also mean this in a literal and physical sense. As part of Ruhama’s commitment to provide more services nationwide, our Education & Development team continued to build on foundations laid during the pandemic. Online classes – both group and individual – became a standard practice. Additionally, we continued on working face-to-face with service users across the country. In addition to appointments in our Limerick and Midlands offices, individual education meetings took place: in Direct Provision centres, colleges, coffee shops.

² Name changed to protect the service user’s identity.

In 2023, 228 individuals engaged in our Education & Development service. A diversity and range of people was witnessed from young adults to those in their 50s and 60s; people with little education to those with professional qualifications; people from Ireland and from all over the world. All were united in their motivation to work on education, but the specifics and needs varied. Service users talked powerfully about wanting to *"overcome my terror of learning"*, *"develop and improve myself"*, *"be more, be better"*, *"keep learning, opening my mind"*, *"work on skills"*, *"use opportunities I never had"*, *"get qualifications"*, *"go to university"*, *"get the knowledge to understand and change things"*, and more.

There were countless moments of achievement. So many people experienced the joy of reaching significant personal milestones: have a conversation in English, use a laptop, build a website, pass an exam, write a thesis, win an award, and many achieved QQI qualifications – at further and higher education. Others worked on rebuilding their careers: getting their foreign qualifications recognised in Ireland, embarking on the process of registration with professional bodies like CORU or the Irish Medical Council. What we loved hearing was the excitement of knowing that choices were on offer, opportunities were there for the taking, goals could be reached, and dreams could begin to come true.

The successes and triumphs were all the more impressive given the massive – and systematic – challenges our service users face. Along with serious inner obstacles – including trauma, shame, stigma – well-documented external ones included the ongoing digital divide, limited part-time courses in public colleges and inadequate basic education provision, inadequate financial support for mature students, insecure (or no) housing, lack of childcare, poor transport, and a growing hostile environment for migrants in Ireland. Looking towards 2024 and beyond, we are delighted to have an expanded core team to respond to the education needs of ever-increasing numbers who access our services.

"This education path has been tough, and it still is. I won't lie. There have been huge challenges, there still are – struggling to survive financially every single day, trying to keep believing that I can do it, that I will do it. But I think it's worth it. Education gives you power, it gives you capital: to be more, to be better, to take your place and your responsibility in society. And yes, I suppose my dream, my task is still to help make here a more just and equal place for everyone".

(Ruhama Service User)

Group	Attendees	Outcomes
Codec - ICT Basic Skills, ICT Advanced Skills, Coding Workshops	10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gained a better understanding of how ICT can benefit their personal, student, and working lives • Developed a sense of confidence and excitement around using ICT • Gained essential knowledge and skills around ICT functions on mobile devices and upskilling routes
Coding Skills for Basic Website Design Workshops	10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Acquired an understanding of Hypertext mark-up language (HTML), CSS and JavaScript • Produced an individual basic static website
Education Information Workshops	126	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Received information on education options, systems, and progression routes in Ireland • Gained motivation and inspiration from their peers • 6 service users co-produced sessions with a guidance counsellor
Fundamentals of Social Media Course	10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gained awareness on online safety, privacy on social media platforms, and the image of women online • Gained knowledge regarding dealing with digital harms, such as harassment, non-consensual sexual image sharing, fake news • Learned to navigate the digital world with new safety tools and more confidence.
Microsoft Technological Workshop	6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Acquired knowledge on educational courses and career pathways into ICT • Networked with ICT employees and employers • Gained an understanding of operation processes within the area of ICT
Women in Tech – LinkedIn Workshop	4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learned about the purpose and value of a LinkedIn profile • Learned about LinkedIn etiquette and best-practice models for interacting with potential employers
Shaping Your Future	24	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identified goals for education and/or career and transferable skills to achieve those • Deepened self-knowledge and self-belief • 7 service users co-produced sessions
Succeed at College Workshop	27	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learned about key skills, practices and attitudes necessary for succeeding at college • Worked on personal college preparation plans • Gained motivation and knowledge by engaging with peers

Bridge to Work Programme

The purpose of the Bridge to Work Programme is to support women to gain meaningful employment, leading to financial security, sense of worth, and future career progression.

In 2023, Bridge to Work engaged with 135 service users, including courses.

One-to-one support was provided which included building or updating CVs, interview preparation, building job search and job application skills, registering with Revenue, and applying for work permits. We also provided funding for employment training, which included Manual Handling and Safe Pass and financial support for expenses incurred when starting employment.

60 service users participated in Bridge to Work workshops. Topics included:

- Thrive in the Workplace
- Start Your Own Business
- Interview Skills
- Introduction to Budgeting
- Income Tax

36% of service users gained employment, which included six paid placements with employer partners. One of the main barriers to employment in 2023 was the delay in work permits being issued. In 2023, it took between 120 to 150 days for work permits to be issued, compared to 30 days in previous years. In light of this we piloted an unpaid placement programme with an employer partner. The purpose of this was to provide quality work experience and to build Irish work experience for service users' CVs.

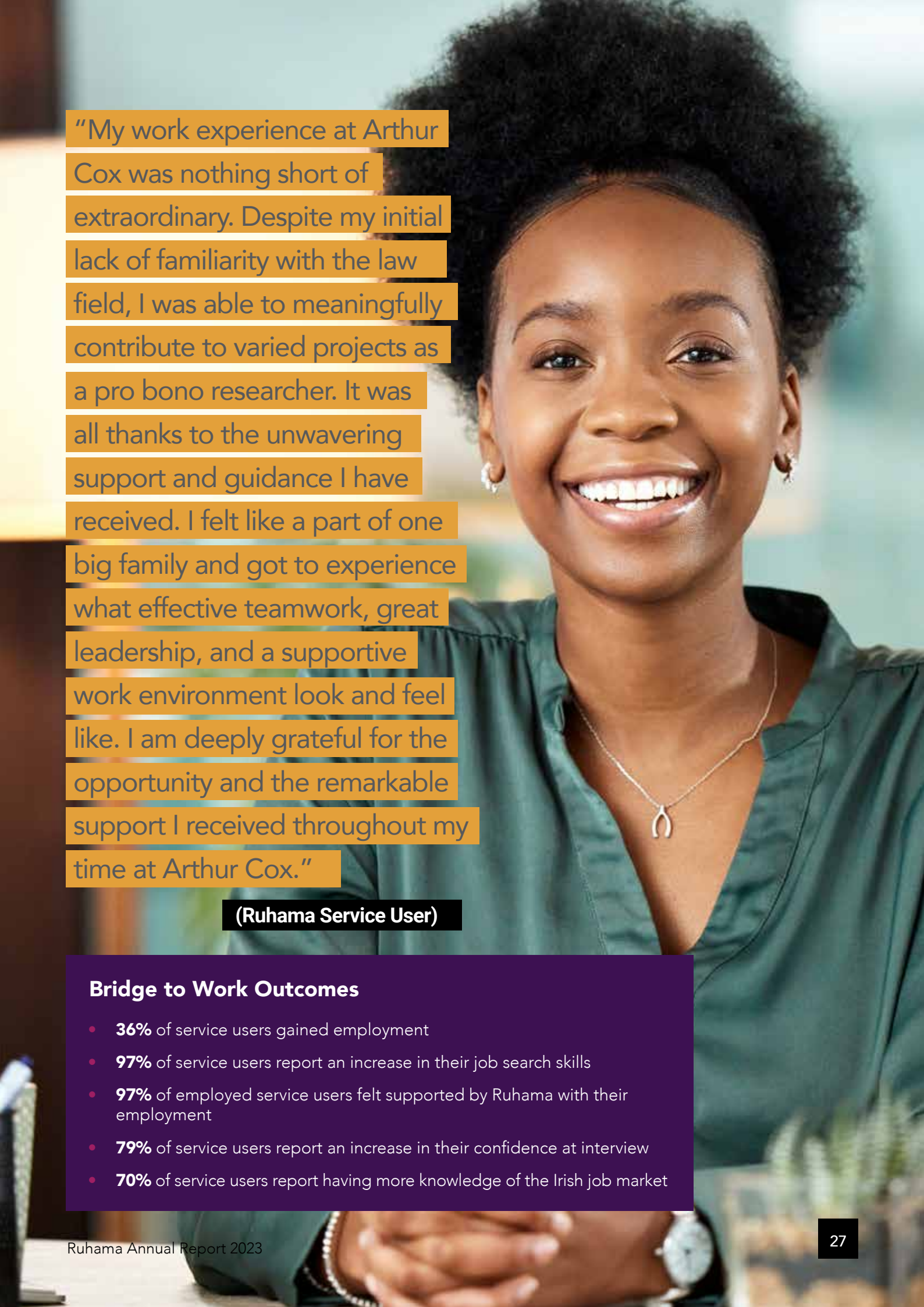
Building and retaining our network of employers was a key priority in 2023. We strengthened and developed new relationships with Financial Services Rathcoole, Arthur Cox, Maria Logan Recruitment, and The Tipperary Chamber of Commerce. We maintained our employer partnerships with Abbey Capital, Beechlawn House Nursing Home, Codec, The Conrad, Michael's Restaurant, Microsoft Step in 2 Tech, and The Hilton Group.

The Vodafone Foundation donated 100 phones and phone credit for Ruhama service users.

We were invited to speak at Women Support Project Glasgow on a CSE (Commercial Sexual Exploitation) Aware webinar discussing the topic of money, poverty and women selling or exchanging sex.

"Our partnership with Ruhama has been such a rewarding experience. The women we worked with are so utterly inspiring - the way they go about overcoming what they have been through, and how they are rebuilding their lives."

Corporate Partner of the Bridge to Work Programme



"My work experience at Arthur Cox was nothing short of extraordinary. Despite my initial lack of familiarity with the law field, I was able to meaningfully contribute to varied projects as a pro bono researcher. It was all thanks to the unwavering support and guidance I have received. I felt like a part of one big family and got to experience what effective teamwork, great leadership, and a supportive work environment look and feel like. I am deeply grateful for the opportunity and the remarkable support I received throughout my time at Arthur Cox."

(Ruhama Service User)

Bridge to Work Outcomes

- **36%** of service users gained employment
- **97%** of service users report an increase in their job search skills
- **97%** of employed service users felt supported by Ruhama with their employment
- **79%** of service users report an increase in their confidence at interview
- **70%** of service users report having more knowledge of the Irish job market

Training

In 2023, Ruhama expanded its training provision to meet growing need and demand. The training was delivered nationally to 1,126 participants from a wide range of organisations.

The *'Know Sex Trafficking and Trauma-Informed Response'* module was revised and updated in 2023 to reflect current research, latest statistics, and relevant legislation in the field. It was delivered across all three Ruhama offices in Dublin, Limerick and the Midlands, to a variety of front-line service providers.

New training was designed and delivered in 2023. *'Safety in Truth'* unpacks realities of the sex trade for those actively involved in prostitution or those who may be at risk of sexual exploitation. Knowing these realities and how to actively respond is crucial for front-line service workers who may encounter vulnerable individuals in their work. *'Conflict & Crisis'*, was developed as a response to the ongoing war in Ukraine. It outlines and dissects the risks of sexual exploitation facing women and children as a result of conflict/fleeing war.

Ruhama also delivers its specialised training for An Garda Síochána, both jointly with the Organised Prostitution Investigation Unit (OPIU) and as stand-alone sessions. The training enhances the participants' understanding of the profile, vulnerabilities, and risks experienced by those affected by the sex trade, and offers practical, victim-centred tools to support the Gardaí in their response.

Ruhama also delivered lectures to several Third Level institutions. Ruhama gave numerous talks, presentations and conducted workshops which included staff at the Brazilian Embassy, Tusla, the Office of Security & Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) Conference on human trafficking in Vienna, the Scottish Parliament and many more.

Ruhama's training workshops, lectures, and talks gathered individuals from over 70 NGO's, statutory services, and businesses in 2023.

Training Outcomes

Participants reported

- An increased understanding of the realities of the sex trade and sex trafficking in Ireland
- Gained knowledge on Irish law related to prostitution and human trafficking for sexual exploitation
- Feeling more equipped to identify signs of sex trafficking/sexual exploitation and to respond in a trauma-informed way
- A more in-depth understanding of the barriers faced by those aiming to exit the sex trade
- Greater understanding of Ruhama's services and other supports available to victims/survivors of the sex trade and sex trafficking



Ruhama Training Lead Mia de Faoite (far right) at the OSCE's (The Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe) conference on preventing human trafficking in the context of war in Ukraine, in Vienna, December 2023

Service User Engagement & Survivor Voice

Service user engagement and survivor voice are at the heart of Ruhama's front-line and policy work. We believe that individuals who engage with our services, through their lived experiences, hold invaluable knowledge as to how services should be designed and delivered. Ruhama provides space for this knowledge to be exchanged and amplified. Additionally, we believe that survivor voice can positively impact public discourse and inform policies within the area of domestic, sexual, gender-based violence, human trafficking, and sexual exploitation.

As an organisation, we seek to hold space for survivors who want to engage with one another and be involved in whatever way they find empowering, as having one's voice heard can be an important part of healing.

During 2023, Ruhama's Service User Engagement work included the Intercultural Group, Survivor Voice Art Workshops, and focus groups for research on exiting prostitution by the Sexual Exploitation Research Programme (SERP).

The Intercultural Group aims to create a safe space for connections, friendships, and cultural exchange; thus, reducing isolation amongst our service users. In 2023, the group met 11 times, engaging 44 service users in interactive activities. These included workshops in arts and crafts, music and dance, storytelling, and poetry, as well as local museum outings. The sessions were followed by culturally themed meals, allowing the participants to explore the richness of varied cultures through its cuisines.



A focal project that amplified Ruhama's service users' lived experiences in 2023 was the Survivor Voice Art Workshops, run in collaboration with Alison Byrne (Wild Bird Studio). Over the span of 3 days, 12 service users created and co-produced a stained-glass art piece inspired by the poem 'Still I Rise', co-authored by the service users themselves during a poetry workshop with Anne Tannam (Poetry Ireland). Each tile of the glass artwork was solely designed by a different service user, affording them an opportunity to tell their unique individual stories through the medium of art.

Inspired by Maya Angelou's 'Still I Rise', the joint poem by our service users speaks of hardship, resilience, and growth:

Still I Rise By Maya Angelou

Adapted version by Ruhama Service Users

Does my grace and elegance hurt you?
I am a product of every woman before me
Still, I rise.

I don't look like my problems,
Still, I rise.

My enemy tried to out me down,
I've been through so much,
Still, I rise.

I may be short,
But I am strong.
I may not be who you want me to be,
But I am a better version of myself.
We may be different
But still, I rise.

Let me not give up
I come from afar,
Let me rise up and shine
I will keep rising till I finish my journey

No matter what I am passing through
No matter my tribulations
One thing I know
I will still rise.

With the scars you left
With the damaged reputation
Struggling with single parenting
Did you think, having no one
Will destroy y destiny?
Just like a phoenix
Still, I will rise.

Life goes on,
As those times we don't take back
But, like a sprout of hope
I will still rise.

No matter how much you try
Even if you see me at my lowest
Rejoicing to my fall
'Am bold, 'Am beautiful
Just like hopes springing high
And still, I rise.

Service User Engagement and Survivor Voice Outcomes

Intercultural Group

- Intercultural exchange, creation of new friendships, reduced isolation

Survivor Voice Art Workshops

- Amplified survivor voice via an artistic medium
- Trauma processed via art - alternative way for healing

SERP Research Focus Groups

- Service users participated in the design of the research project 'Pathways to Exit' and provided critical data on their extraordinary journeys highlighting the complexities of exiting prostitution



Peer Support Programme

There are many definitions of peer support as such, all sharing common themes of reciprocal and emphatic understanding, respect, and mutual support. Peer support is an important principle of trauma-informed practice.

Ruhama's Peer Support Programme brings together a community of service users, affording them the opportunity to tap into the expertise of their own lived experiences as an invaluable resource for healing. It compliments Ruhama's holistic, person-centred, trauma-informed approach to service provision.

The goal of our Peer Support Programme is to offer women impacted by prostitution, sex trafficking and/or sexual exploitation the opportunity to experience mutual support in coping with life's challenges and to move forward with a sense of hope in their lives. Sharing lived experiences can help with building trust, developing mutual and empowering relationships, and creating safe spaces of belonging and community. It helps survivors to amplify their voices, hence informing policy and service provision.

During 2023, 71 service users engaged with the Peer Support programme, including one-to-one and groups, training for peer supporters, community gatherings, and mentoring sessions.

Peer Support Outcomes

- **98%** of trained Peer Supporters report an increase in confidence and leadership skills
- **90%** of Peer Support group attendees report having formed mutually healing and empowering relationships with their peers
- **90%** of Peer Support group attendees report finding the opportunity to draw on their lived experiences as a resource to offer mutual support to their peers
- **90%** of Peer Support community gathering attendees report having built capacity and community capital among Ruhama's service users
- **90%** of Peer Support community gathering attendees report having strengthened their survivor voice within the organisational service structure

"You don't know how important the value of Peer Support is until you start doing it, because if you have gone through something and you are there to support another person. I felt it - the person that I am supporting currently. I feel that she is a part of me already, because this is something that the two of us are struggling with. But, I think, with my own experience and with the level that I am at, that I am really the right person to support her."

Ruhama Peer Supporter

Advocacy & Policy

Ruhama engages in advocacy, policy, and awareness raising work at national and international levels, aiming to advance our strategic advocacy goal as an organisation. Our core advocacy position is that prostitution and human trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation are forms of gender-based violence. Consequently, our advocacy work seeks to better the lives of vulnerable women and girls by lobbying for adequate supports, protection, and legislative and policy changes to improve the everyday lives of victims of commercial sexual exploitation. Our advocacy and lobbying efforts are rooted in advancing Ruhama's vision of a world free of sexual exploitation, where all women's lives are valued.

National Advocacy

Ruhama engages at national level to advocate for the rights and needs of victims of commercial sexual exploitation and raises awareness of the harms and consequences of prostitution and human trafficking. In 2023, local issues such as the phenomenon of sex for rent in Ireland, the unsuitability of Direct Provision for housing of victims/survivors of human trafficking, and the need for additional supports for those exiting the sex trade in Ireland were highlighted within Ruhama's policy work.

Ruhama provides briefings to Oireachtas committees, Ministers, and other public representatives on the needs of individuals impacted by prostitution and human trafficking for sexual exploitation. Ruhama also participated in several national forums, including the National Observatory on Violence Against Women (National Women's Council), the Human Trafficking Stakeholders Forum, the Monitoring Committee for the National Strategy on Domestic, Sexual and Gender-Based Violence, the Seeking Safety Ireland Governing Committee, and the Victims Forum within the Department of Justice.

Key policy and advocacy work nationally in 2023 includes:

- Ongoing advocacy for the establishment and expansion of gender-specific accommodation for female victims of human trafficking
- Submission to the Joint Committee on Justice regarding the General Scheme of the Domestic, Sexual and Gender Based Violence Agency Bill 2023
- Submission on human trafficking for the IHREC's (Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission's) progress report for 2022
- Participation in IOM's (United Nations Migration Agency's) research on human trafficking in the Republic of Ireland
- National Observatory on Violence against Women and Girls report launch: *'Monitoring the Implementation of Zero Tolerance: The Third National Strategy on Domestic, Sexual, and Gender-Based Violence'* - Ruhama CEO was a guest panellist.
- Amendments Proposal on the Criminal Law (Sexual Offences and Human Trafficking) Bill 2023, submitted to selected members of the Oireachtas Committee on Justice.

International Advocacy

Ruhama engages in European and international platforms, including the EU Civil Society Platform, the European Women's Lobby, CAP (Coalition Abolition Prostitution International), and Brussels' Call. As part of these, Ruhama contributes to exchanging information and lobbying on policies addressing prostitution, human trafficking and sexual exploitation across the EU.

Key policy and advocacy work in 2023 includes:

- Representation and contribution to GREVIO Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence
- Submission to the European Commission on the Commission Adoption of the Review of the Anti-Trafficking Directive
- Ongoing lobbying efforts at EU level for the inclusion of prostitution as a recognised form of violence against women in the EU Directive on Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence
- Participation at the EU Civil Society Platform on Human Trafficking
- Contribution to the EU Directive on Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence

Research

At the end of 2023, The Sexual Exploitation Research Programme (SERP) launched a report 'Pathways to Exit: A Study of Women's Journeys Out of Prostitution and the Response to Their Complex Support Needs'. The research was funded by Community Foundation Ireland, conducted in partnership with Ruhama, and included interviews with our service users and staff. It was launched in the AV room, Leinster House by the Minister for Justice Helen McEntee. The study aimed to document and analyse women's exiting journeys out of prostitution, highlighting the barriers they face, and their needs arising. Additionally, the report explored Ruhama's model of practice, and the value our services provide to those involved and/or seeking to leave the sex trade.

The report found that women are driven into prostitution due to complex vulnerabilities including poverty, homelessness, addiction, domestic violence or sexual abuse experienced as minors. Respondents recounted entering the sex trade at a young age due to difficult circumstances, with poverty being a focal driver. Research participants also highlighted the high levels of violence and harms within the sex trade, often resulting in long-term physical and emotional trauma, and PTSD.

The barriers to exiting noted in the report include the lack of social connections, alternative income, a safe place to stay, as well as profound feelings of shame, ongoing trauma, and complex mental health struggles. Additionally, some women experienced threats of violence and coercion when trying to leave the sex trade. Ultimately, the research concludes that prostitution is a harmful environment, with those exiting having complex support needs. The report highlights Ruhama's response as a person-centred, trauma-informed, non-judgmental, survivor-informed approach, resulting in a unique service that aids their recovery and meets women 'where they are at'.

Recommendations of this study highlight the need to fund exiting supports, expand academic research in the field, and increase training on sexual exploitation for front-line professionals. 'Pathways to Exit' highlights the need to address the complex demands of women exiting prostitution, underscoring the areas of housing, welfare, education, health, immigration, financial, justice and public education.

"And there were times that some of these people, I don't think they see us as human beings, once they have paid their money, they are allowed to do anything to you..."

Ruhama Service User, quote from SERP research



Survivor Voice

During 2023, Ruhama offered 11 Media Information Sessions to service users who were interested in engaging with the media and policymakers as survivors. Such training empowered victims/survivors of the sex trade to share their lived experiences, thus contributing to societal and legislative change. Victims/survivors have unique experiences and sharing their stories can be pivotal in raising awareness of the harms and consequences of prostitution and human trafficking. For some women, sharing their story has helped their healing journey, however for many women the deep stigma associated with the sex trade prevents them from having a voice in a world that remains largely silent on sexual exploitation.

#InOurOwnWords Video Project

As part of 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence, Ruhama launched #InOurWords – a video campaign that amplifies survivor voices of Ailbhe and Tatiana, two of Ruhama’s service users who have a lived experience of being involved in the sex trade.



Awareness Raising

Ruhama is one of several NGO's that have received free advertising on eir digital pedestals across the city of Dublin since 2022. Throughout 2023, the pedestals continued to promote Ruhama's services, as well as other domestic, sexual and gender-based violence support services in Ireland.





Ciara's Story*

I choose to tell this story, because I know all too well the stigma attached to women like me. Even though I want to remain anonymous, I feel it is important that voices like mine are heard.

I have faced many barriers in my life. I left school early and started working at the age of 16. From a young age, I was dealing with mental health issues, both within myself and from those around me. I fell into drugs as a way to cope with life, since I hadn't learned how to regulate myself and my emotions. I was trying to make sense of a world that didn't make sense to me. I fell into recreational drug use at 16, and by 19 I was strung out on heroin.

By 20, I was involved in addiction services. By 21, I had my first experience of domestic violence. I was left confused and frightened, since no one had ever lay their hands on me before.

That encounter left me homeless for the first time at the age of 22.

The first hurdle I ran into was trying to access drug treatment services at that age. I fought and advocated for myself and went into detox and treatment for the first time. After this, I was homeless, but re-entered education. I got my Leaving Cert equivalent and landed a place in college to study Social Policy. I decided to study Policy because I wanted to understand how the decisions were made in relation to the circumstances that affected my life. Who made these choices, and why?

I got housed so was no longer homeless, but I wasn't ready to live independently. Then, as government policy changed, I was faced with the prospect of going back to a hostel-type homeless accommodation or getting properly housed. Hoping for the best, I took the second option. A few years later, I relapsed. I lost myself in education while trying to better myself. Looking back, I see that I wasn't fully equipped to deal with life at that point.

The rest of my twenties, which was the best part of a decade, were lost to addiction. This relapse was much worse than the previous one. It destroyed me: mind, body, and spirit. I lost my place in my degree, became homeless for a second time, faced coercive control, hopelessness, suicidal tendencies, and the shame of engaging in behaviour that would eventually lead me to Ruhama's services. I thought to myself: "I was reared better than that. How did I end up like this? What happened? Why is my world full of darkness?"

I felt as if I couldn't get out. I have diaries from that time of active addiction, where I consistently wrote: "I want to be back in the land of the living", but I did not know how to get there. After numerous hospital admissions, my health started failing. I thought I was going to die anytime. I started experiencing moments of clarity while using drugs, as my mind kept on repeating: "I'm going to die" and "I need help."

I reached out to addiction services again. I was told I was too unstable to access a stabilisation programme, and that I had to address my mental health issues first. The drugs were killing me at this point, but they were all I had to numb the suffering from PTSD I experienced after leaving an abusive relationship. I used to wake up at night, in cold sweat, confronting flashbacks and utter terror. Meanwhile, my days were plagued with extreme paranoia. "He's following me, he's going to kill me, I won't escape," I used to think to myself. Every waking moment was a nightmare, and every sleeping moment, too. So, I found solace in a needle full of drugs that slowly killed me, as my body started shutting down. Then, my mind started attacking itself, so I tried to end it all. I failed, thinking to myself: "I can't even take my own life properly". How was I going to return to the land of the living from this dark place?

I realised that I needed help. I sought out to addiction services again, just to be refused due to all the drugs in my system. I begged to be admitted either way, explaining I could not cut off drugs due to my PTSD. I started the process of reducing my drug intake, knowing it could take over 6 months to get stable and start producing clear urine samples that were crucial to be deemed eligible for treatment. Then, the Covid lockdown started, prolonging the waiting list I was already on. I felt that I was going to die any day, as my organs were struggling to function. I was desperately calling detox and treatment centres, begging to be admitted. I eventually made it into a Valium detox programme, and then a Methadone detox one. Finally, I began to feel safe. I started to believe I was going to live.

Today, it's been a few years since I entered my first detox programme. I have gone through a 14-week treatment, 6-month recovery house facility, 2.5-year supported transitional housing, 1-year long aftercare, 6-month day programme, 9-month

Community Studies, 2.5-years with Ruhama's services, which included wrap-around supports such as counselling services, Bridge to Work Programme, Education Programme, and Seeking Safety Programme.

When I started counselling, I was frightened, and my mind felt like a mess. However, therapy helped me overcome a lot of emotional pain. I am grateful for that. In Bridge to Work, I was supported while becoming a functioning member of society again. Education services supported me as I got back into education and finished my degree. Finally, Seeking Safety Programme enabled me to come to terms with the trauma I was stuck in, and move on from it. Seeking Safety enabled me to integrate parts of my mind that were still caught in past trauma and pain, and allowed me to feel free in the here and now. It made me feel at peace.

Today, I would describe myself as a functioning member of society. I have my own job, my own home, I finished my degree, and – most importantly – I'm at peace with my own mind. I've overcome addiction, homelessness, domestic violence, demoralisation, mental health issues, and a lack of education. I no longer struggle to survive, and with the help of all the supports and my own determination, I am thriving.

My story remains anonymous, as even though I have overcome so many barriers, I still struggle with the shame and stigma attached to how I survived by selling sex. Not many people know that about me, and not many people will know. Shame remains to be the last barrier I struggle to overcome. I believe that society here in Ireland judges me, although most wouldn't be able to go through what I have gone through. This shame must end; but it's not today, and it hasn't with me. Finally, I am grateful knowing my story will be heard.

*Name changed to protect our service user's identity.

Financial Position

Financial Position at Year End 2023

Our Financial Statements for 2023 show total income of €1.4m with expenditure of €1.4m resulting in a surplus of €5,399.

Throughout 2023, Ruhama continued to develop innovative and unique collaborative partnerships with statutory funders, and corporate partners along with building and strengthening relationships with current partners. This strategy and our ongoing focus and attention to strong financial management is evidenced in our year end position and validates our commitment to building reserves for the organisation.

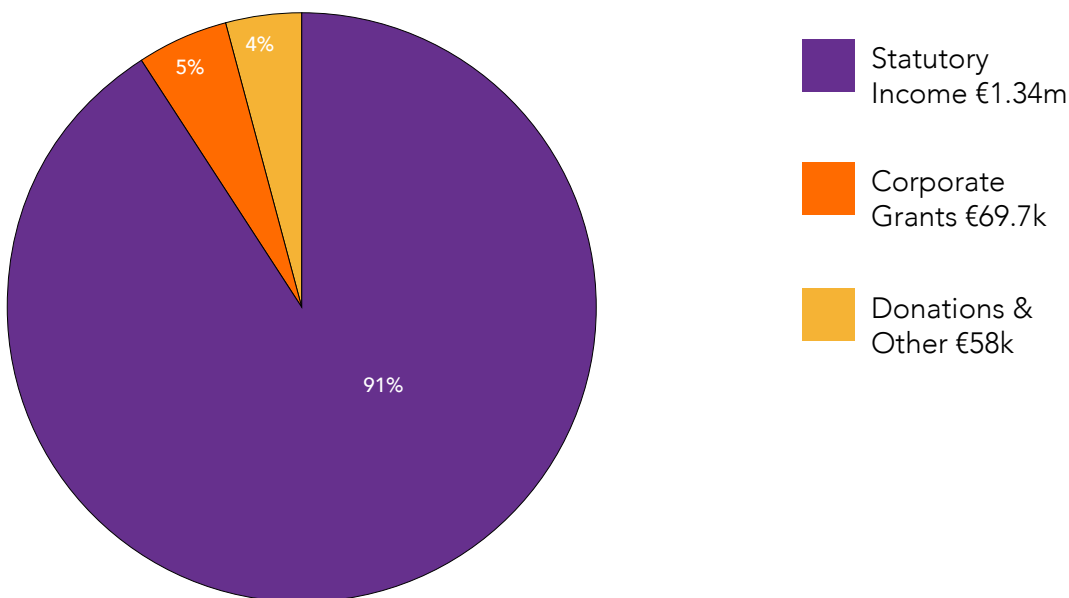
Ruhama works in partnership with statutory agencies to provide our essential services. Ruhama acknowledges the financial support it received from a range of government departments, including core funding from the Department of Justice, and additional funding from HSE Social Inclusion CH06, HSE CH07 South Inner-City Drugs Alcohol Task Force, the National Lottery, and the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth. Ruhama's staff work collaboratively with various state officials to ensure that service provision is run on a value for money basis which meets national policy.

At the date of approving this report and the financial statements, there are no uncertainties about the organisation's ability to continue as a going concern for the next 12 months.

Income

Total income for the period is €1.4m with statutory funding representing 91% (€1.34m) of our 2023 operating budget with Corporate Support and Donations representing the remaining 4% and 5% respectively.

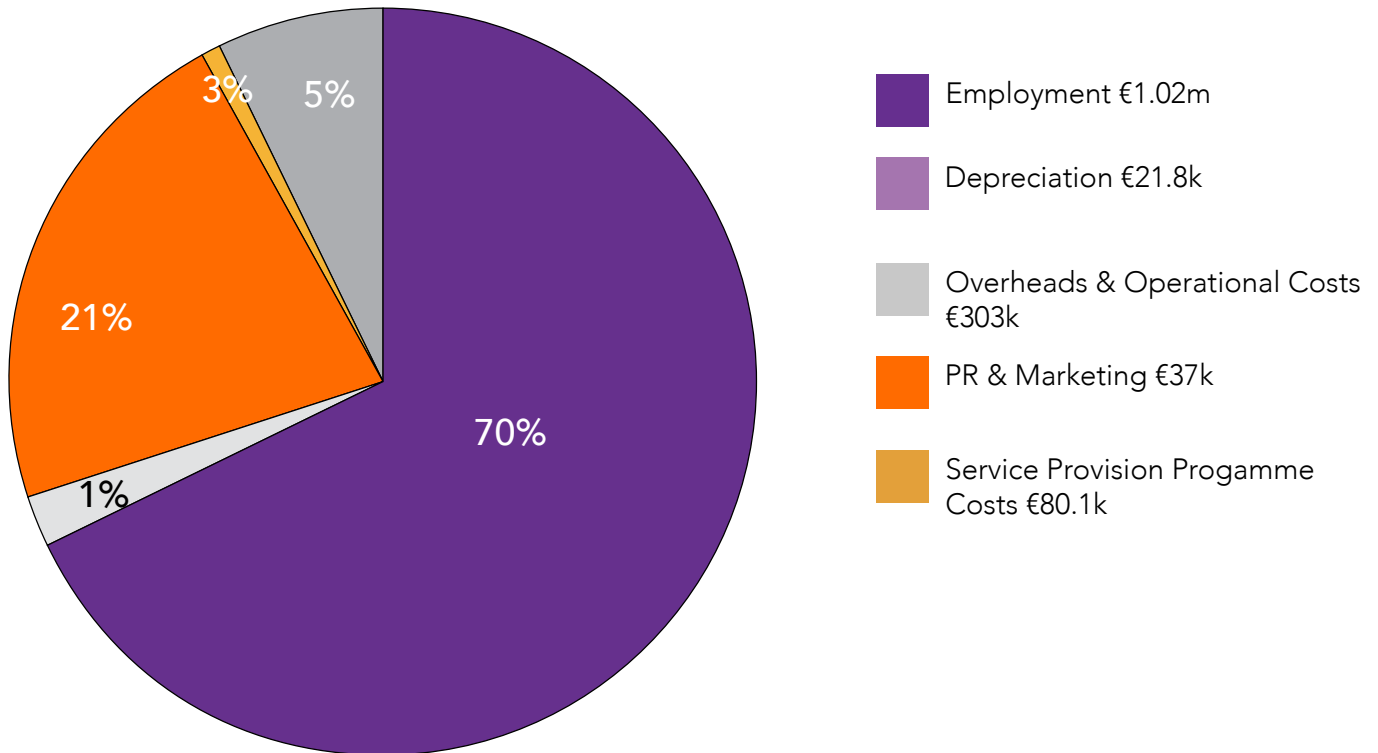
Ruhama Income at 31st December 2023



Expenditure

Total expenditure for the period is €1.46m with employment costs representing the highest expenditure at 70% with the remaining 30% going towards overheads and service provision.

Ruhama - Expenses at 31 December 2023



Corporate Support

Corporate support continued to play an integral role in our daily operations, allowing the organisation to increase the quantity and quality of service provision. New corporate funding streams allowed us to create innovative solutions for emerging problems impacting the individuals we work with and build up our education fund for our service users to enable them to engage in further education. The Community Foundation Ireland led the financial support on a number of these initiatives in key areas such as the Peer Mentoring Pilot Programme and furthering the development of our Trauma Therapy service. We acknowledge and thank our corporate partners on our Bridge to Work programme as referenced on page 27.

Plans for the Future & Building Reserves

Ruhama's Reserves policy concentrates on building unrestricted reserves as a key element of the strategic objectives for the organisation in line with the principles of good governance for effective future planning.

To continue and develop our services, we must source new funding avenues for the organisation. Whilst we have successfully grown our statutory and corporate support in 2023, we are committed to increasing this further and attracting new corporate partners.

As we move into 2024, we will be expanding our service provision including a new regional hub in the Cork/Kerry region with additional caseworkers.

Income & Expenditure 2023		
Annual Funding	2023	2022
Department of Justice - Victims of Crime	911,782	769,806
HSE Social Inclusion CH06	122,983	118,824
South Inner City Local Drugs & Alcohol Task Force (HSE CHO7)	117,249	113,284
Department of Justice - Outreach Grant	118,549	41,971
Other grant income	154,176	89,111
Donations/fundraising	47,255	79,849
Total income	1,471,994	1,212,845
Total expenditure	(1,466,595)	(1,208,345)
Operating surplus/(deficit) for the year	5,399	4,500
Balance Sheet as at 31 December 2023		
	2023	2022
Fixed Assets		
Tangible assets	90,217	36,245
Debtors	46,212	55,649
Cash at bank and in hand	522,910	576,679
Total current assets	569,122	632,328
Creditors: amount falling due within one year	(309,471)	(378,351)
Net current assets	259,651	253,977
Total assets less current liabilities	349,868	290,222
Long Term Deferred Income	(91,668)	(37,421)
Net Assets	258,200	252,801
Funds		
Restricted reserves	(538)	(12,947)
Unrestricted reserves	257,662	265,748
Total Funds	258,200	252,801

Governance

Ruhama is constituted as a company limited by guarantee without a share capital. Its purpose, objectives and how it conducts its business are set out in its Memorandum and Articles of Association. The company is registered with the Charities Regulatory Authority in Ireland in compliance with the Charities Act 2009 and has charitable tax status with the Revenue Commissioners CHY 10733.

The organisation is governed by a Board of Trustees who work in a voluntary capacity. Trustees are recruited based on skills, knowledge, and experience. Trustees do not receive any remuneration in respect of their service.

Ruhama's Board had nine voluntary Trustees in 2023. No expenses were paid to Trustees. No contracts or arrangements of material interest to a Trustee were entered into during the financial year.

Ruhama is committed to having appropriate systems and robust controls in place. Ongoing review and updating of all Ruhama's policies and procedures was conducted during 2023. Ruhama has fulfilled all obligations under the Lobbying Act 2015 and to the Charities Regulatory Authority. Ruhama is fully compliant with the Charities Governance Code, and a triple locked member of the Charities Institute Ireland.

To maintain standards of best practice across all areas of our organisation, the Board and Management adhere to the recommendations outlined by the Charities Regulator. We comply with the statement of Recommended Practice for Accounting and Reporting by Charities (SORP) and Fundraising Principles.

The Board of Trustees met on eight occasions during 2023. The Audit, Finance and Governance subcommittee met on seven occasions during 2023.

Board Membership

Board Standing Committees

The Board is assisted in its work, ensuring good governance and quality service delivery is maintained through sub-committees and working groups. Board sub-committees comprise of Board Trustees and external co-optee's for expertise, when required.

In 2023 the following Board sub-committee met seven times: Audit, Finance and Governance (AFG)

Donagh O'Farrell (Chair), Carolann Minnock, Barbara Condon (CEO), and Adrienne Molloy (Head of Finance & Operations in attendance).

Board of Trustees 2023

In 2023 nine Trustees served on the Board of Ruhama.

Board Member	Number of Board Meetings	Attended	Variance
I Carter	8	8	0
S Gower	8	4	4
D O'Farrell	8	8	0
C Minnock	8	7	1
D Daly	2	2	0
P Houlihan	8	7	1
J Sansome	8	7	1
L Maguire	6	6	0
L Hyland	4	4	0

Fundraising

Collen Construction - €8,000 raised

Ruhama was very honoured to be chosen as one of the charities for the Collen Construction Charity Cycle 2023, titled 'Building Bridges'. Symbolically, by providing supports within the areas of employment, education, and therapy Ruhama assists service users in building bridges towards a safer future.

We were moved by the passion of the Collen Charity Cycle committee who visited Ruhama, expressing their dedication to raising awareness on the needs of those impacted by commercial sexual exploitation. Whether bridging physical distance, or overcoming obstacles, anything is possible when we commit to 'Building Bridges' together. We greatly appreciate the support the staff at Collen Construction has demonstrated in choosing to highlight our work.



Team Ruhama – over €5,000 fundraised

A group of Ruhama's team members ran or walked the Vhi Women's Mini Marathon in June 2023, raising over €2,000. While some joined the event for the first time, others used it as an opportunity to get back into running, raising vital funds for service users' needs.

In August, two of Ruhama's staff completed their first ever Dublin City Triathlon. Over €3,000 was raised which enabled us to buy phones, SIM cards, and emergency vouchers for our service users.



Current Ruhama Staff

CEO	Barbara Condon
Head of Finance & Operations	Adrienne Molloy
Head of Services	Jacqueline Blanchfield
Service Manager (Maternity Leave)	Neasa Ní Fheinneadha
Policy & Communications Co-ordinator	Danielle McLaughlin
Policy & Communications Officer	Niamh McGarry
Policy & Communications Officer	Egle Karpaviciute
Outreach Team Leader	Hailey O'Shea
Assertive Outreach Caseworker Dublin	Marta Zarza Coca
Assertive Outreach Caseworker Dublin	Alice Valery Beswick
Caseworker Dublin	Vacant
Caseworker - Cork	Jennifer Murphy
Caseworker - Cork	Katriona Purcell
Caseworker - Midlands	Emma Caulfield
Caseworker - Limerick	Sara Wallace
Caseworker - Limerick	Vacant
Trauma Therapist (Maternity Leave)	Poliana Aniculăesei
Trauma Therapist	Katie Dobosz
Trauma Therapist	Sheila Crowley
Trauma Therapist	Karolina Szemerda
Training Lead	Mia de Faoite
Education & Development Co-ordinator	Anne O'Keefe
Education & Development Officer	Trish O'Brien
Education & Development Officer	Aoife Darmody
Bridge to Work Co-ordinator	Kim Haugh
Seeking Safety Project Worker	Debra Kearns
Seeking Safety Peer Worker	Melissa Magee
Administration Executive	Nazanine Nolan
Administrative Assistant/Receptionist	Jolly Abraham

Staff Development & Training

Continuous Professional Development (CPD) is strongly encouraged internally and externally. In 2023, Ruhama provided and/or supported the following training for staff:

Applied Suicide Intervention Skills (ASIST)	Resonance Factor
Certificate in Non-profit Leadership and Management	Fundamentals of GDPR
Children First Training	Health and Safety
Family Constellations	Shamanic Practitioner Course
Foundations of Sound Healing	Mental Health
Holistic Medicine	Vicarious Trauma & Compassion Fatigue
Motivational Interviewing	Case Management Workshop
Own My Life Course	PILA Applying for Citizenship in Ireland Legal Education Session
Reflective Practice	Trauma-Informed Practice Workshop
SAOR (Alcohol and Substance Use)	First Aid
Taking Referrals	Trauma-Informed Care

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS



Ruhama is committed to incorporating the UN Sustainable Development goals for peace and prosperity for people and the planet, now and into the future. We recognize that ending poverty and other deprivations must go hand-in-hand with strategies that improve health and education, reduce inequality, and spur economic growth – all while tackling climate change.

Acknowledgments

Thank you to our funders, partners and supporters!

- Department of Justice
- Health Service Executive (HSE Social Inclusion CH 06)
- South Inner City Local Drugs and Alcohol Task Force (HSE CH07)
- Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth
- National Lottery Grant
- Department of Health, Womens Mental Health Fund
- Community Foundation Ireland
- Seeking Safety Ireland Partners
- Ann Pratt Foundation
- Public Representatives
- Garda National Protective Services Bureau
- Organised Prostitution Investigation Unit (OPIU)
- Human Trafficking Investigation and Coordination Unit (HTICU)
- Ipas
- Ruth Breslin & Mary Canning Sexual Exploitation Research Programme (SERP)
- Coolmine Therapeutic Community (Limerick Mid-West)
- Merchant's Quay Ireland (Midlands)
- DePaul Ireland
- All NGO Partners
- Donors & Fundraisers
- eir and Clear Channel
- Irish Security Association Ireland (ISIA)
- Vodafone Foundation
- Collen Construction
- Abbey Capital
- Codec
- Michael's Restaurant
- Conrad Hotels
- Conrad Hotel
- Hilton Group
- Beechlawm Nursing Home
- Michael's Restaurant
- Microsoft Step in 2 Tech
- Financial Services Rathcoole
- Arthur Cox
- Maria Logan Recruitment

Ruhama would like to acknowledge the support of our statutory funders: the Department of Justice (core funders), Health Service Executive (HSE Social Inclusion CH06), and the South Inner-City Drug and Alcohol Task Force (HSE CH07), and non statutory funder: Community Foundation Ireland.



An Roinn Dlí agus Cirt
Department of Justice



An Roinn Leanaí, Comhionannais,
Míchumais, Lánpháirtíochta agus Óige
Department of Children, Equality,
Disability, Integration and Youth

**Community
Foundation
Ireland**

How you can get involved and support our work

There are lots of ways to get involved in our work supporting individuals impacted by prostitution and/or sex trafficking – whether it is through engaging employees in an impact day, fundraising individually or as a group, partnering with us in an initiative, or applying to be a volunteer. We would love to hear from you about how you feel you could contribute.




Check out www.ruhama.ie and go to “Get Involved” to learn more.
Alternatively, email admin@ruhama.ie to get in touch with us directly.

Follow us. Get in touch.



Scan the QR code to donate!
Your support is much appreciated.

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 /ruhamaIreland
 /company/ruhama

NATIONAL FREEPHONE: 1800 02 02 02

www.ruhama.ie



Ruhama

Fighting Sexual Exploitation, Prostitution and Human Trafficking

Company Registration Number: 209799 CHY: 10733

Registered Charity Number: 20027827