



Ruhama

Supporting women affected by prostitution



Summer Newsletter 2020

Follow us. Get in touch.



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Donate [here](#). 🙌

See our video for the #StillHere campaign [here](#).

Thank you to our frontline heroes!



Some of Ruhama's current and former service-users have been working in essential and frontline services throughout the pandemic.

We want to thank them for their dedication and bravery in keeping Ireland going throughout this difficult time!

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- Emergency Care Packages
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- We are still recruiting for volunteer counsellors! Visit www.ruhama.ie/volunteer for more information.

Read about the SERP webinar on Sexual Exploitation in the Shadow of Covid-19 on pg.3!



Emergency Care Packages

Reaching service-users across the country

Since the restrictions came into force in March, Ruhama staff and volunteers have been travelling all over the country delivering emergency care packages to our service-users. We have delivered over 125 so far.

The packages are helping to meet women's practical and material needs at this time, and include vouchers, food, health and safety supplies, sanitary products and more.

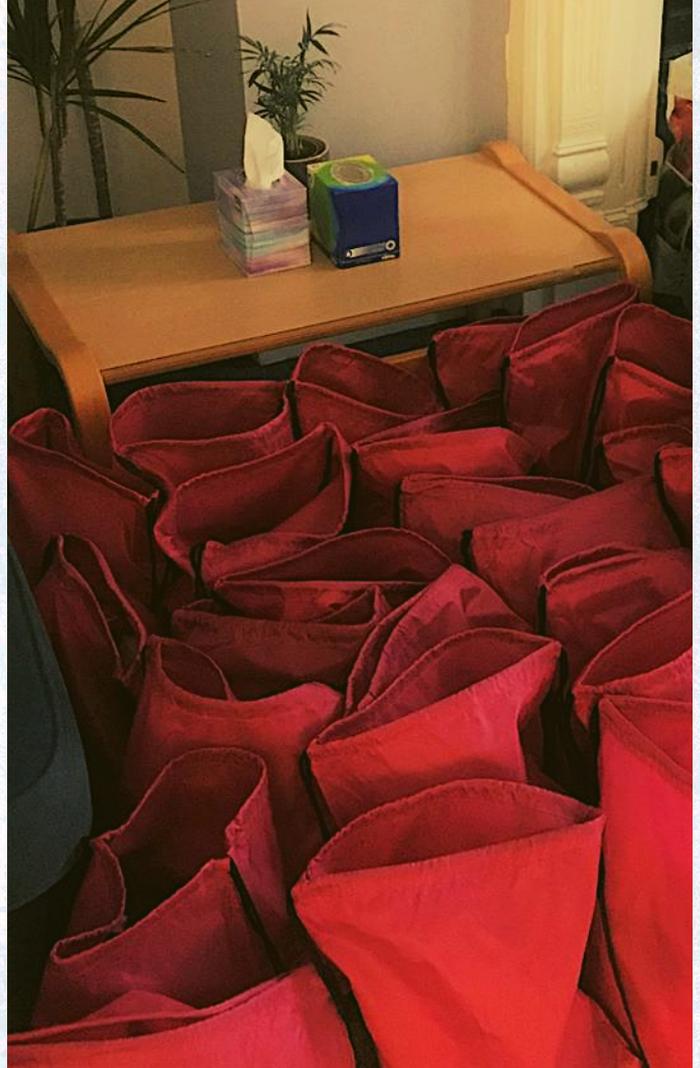
We have also been able to supply women with technology such as smart phones and tablets. In a time of isolation, loneliness, and stress it has been imperative that they have access to these devices so that they can connect with friends and family at this time and link in with services, including Ruhama's counselling, casework and education and development groups.

We are grateful for the funding received from the Department of Justice and Equality for the packages.

Below are some responses:

"I don't feel alone anymore"

"Thanks so much for the goodies, your care, love and kindness"



"Thanks for thinking of me, it's good to be remembered."



Sexual exploitation in the shadow of Covid-19



On Wednesday the 21st of May, the UCD Sexual Exploitation Research Programme (SERP) hosted a live webinar on the realities of the sexual exploitation that is taking place in the shadow of the Covid-19 pandemic. Over 150 people listened in from across the world!

Speakers included: Ruhama's CEO Barbara Condon; Survivor and Policy Advisor, Mia De Faoite; SERP researcher Ruth Breslin; Gender and Anti-Trafficking expert at the Immigrant Council of Ireland, Dr. Nusha Yonkova; Head of Policy at the National Women's Council, Jennifer McCarthy Flynn; and Linda Latham, Head of the HSE Women's Health Project. The webinar was moderated by Denise Charlton.



Follow SERP:



The panel discussed issues such as buyers continuing to demand to see women during the pandemic, advice that has encouraged women to engage with the sex trade, and the call for an emergency fund for those in prostitution during the crisis. Ruth Breslin presented her research on sex buyers during this time noting that many were requesting women to carry-out sexual activity that would put the women, themselves and their families at risk.

Mia De Faoite closed the webinar with a message to other victims and survivors: **"You're already resilient. You're enduring something that most women will never experience, and you're stronger than you know - help is there. Reach out."** You can watch the webinar [here](#).

Congratulations!



Education

Congratulations to our service-users who have passed college exams in a variety of disciplines and to those who graduated from courses and programmes. One service-user said:

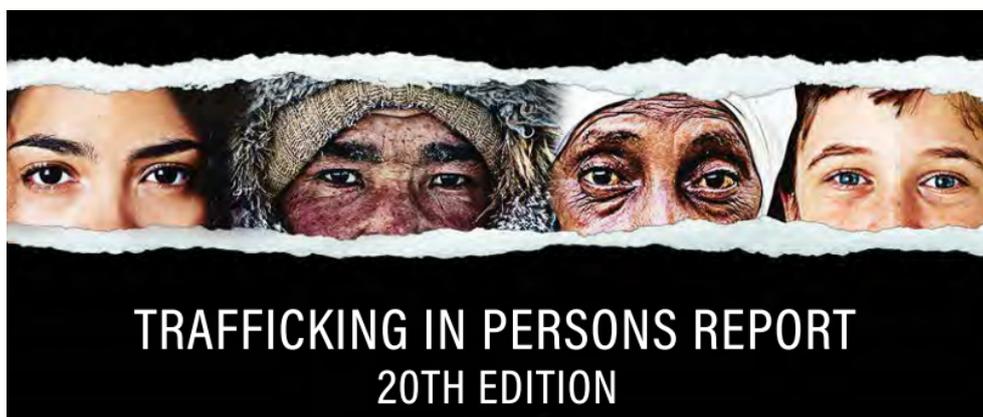
"I have never worked so hard in my life but now I can hold my head up and have a normal life. I do not have to hide and I can feel proud"

Housing

Best wishes also to our service-users who have recently moved into their own homes! One young woman spoke about the joy of her closing her front door and being able to choose who comes into her apartment, noting: *"I feel safe here."*



Trafficking in Persons (TIP) Report 2020



Following its downgrading to a Tier 2 country in 2018, Ireland has now been placed on the 'Tier 2 Watchlist' by the US Department of State for failing to meet the minimum standards for the elimination of human trafficking.

Once again, gaps in the identification and protection of victims have been criticised, as has the fact that no convictions have been secured for traffickers.

You can read the full report [here](#), and read our reaction the report in our latest press release [here](#).



Teamwork during the pandemic



As with most organisations, at Ruhama we adapted the way we work during the pandemic in order to keep service-users, volunteers and staff safe while continuing to provide our services. Staff have been mostly working from home, continuing to provide everything from counselling, casework, classes, administration and advocacy. We have returned to Ruhama HQ on Camden Street on a phased, rotational basis while adhering to public health advice.



Some of our frontline staff have written about their experiences of service-provision during the Covid-19 pandemic. Caseworker Poliana said:

'I've been running a support group online with service-users where we laugh, sing and connect. I didn't expect so much connection through technology!'



Education and Development Assistant Trish O'Brien in her home office.

You can read about their experiences [here](#).



Aurea's Story



I was 19 when I discovered that I was transgender. It was difficult to come out as the transgender community are highly subjugated and marginalised where I am from. I experienced discrimination and abuse as a result of my gender identity and expression, but I did make a group of close friends many of whom are also trans women. Some of them were involved with prostitution to fund their gender-reassignment surgery and hormone replacement therapy. This is how I first started selling sex.

As time went on, many of my friends moved to countries in Europe where there were more opportunities and trans people were less persecuted. I began researching ways to obtain a visa and I came across a Facebook advertisement for an international language school based in Dublin. I spoke with one of the tutors on the phone and she seemed really nice and explained that I could start with any level of English. I would also be granted a student visa.

I was so excited for my new adventure in Ireland! But it's so expensive here, and the student visa only allows part-time work so I ended up in prostitution again to get by. I advertised online and sold sex to get through college. When I started struggling with different elements of my course a friend put me in touch with Ruhama. I got support with my assignments and I met other people who had stories like mine. I was still involved with prostitution but they were completely non-judgmental and never pressured me to leave.

My student visa is about to expire but I am hoping to continue with my education and attend a private business school in Dublin. The fees are high and I am worried about how I will support myself. I am now in a place where I want to get out of the sex trade - my body constantly aches and I dread seeing clients. I am working with my caseworker in Ruhama to find a way to support myself without the sex trade and I am hopeful that we will find an alternative that means I can live a life where I am happier, healthier and safer.

**name has been changed to protect confidentiality*