

“4Empowerment”: An Interagency Initiative Empowering Domestic Violence Survivors

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Abstract

The “4Empowerment” initiative, launched in County Donegal in February 2024, is a collaborative effort between Donegal Domestic Violence Services, The Donegal Sports Partnership, and the Donegal Local Development Company. This initiative focuses on the holistic development of women and their children who have experienced domestic violence and are currently receiving support from DDVS. The programme incorporates various sport and physical activities, including equine therapy, dance fitness, circuits, yoga, and swimming, aimed at enhancing participants' well-being and expanding their educational and economic opportunities.

In addition to physical activities, the women have participated in a number of well-being/education workshops, covering topics such as numeracy and literacy through cooking, CV writing, and confidence building. These workshops help them form valuable connections within their communities, reducing isolation and creating a support network that has been shown to improve mental health, well-being, sobriety rates, and reduce involvement in unhealthy relationships.

The programme empowers women by teaching them to recognise their own behaviours, helping them make meaningful, long-lasting changes in their lives. A key strength of the initiative is the strong interagency partnership, which keeps participants engaged and motivated, even when they face personal challenges.

The objective of the 4Empowerment initiative is to develop and implement individualised, person-centred programmes which support participants on their domestic violence recovery journeys, using a holistic approach to enhance their overall well-being. By fostering a sense of belonging and creating meaningful opportunities through sport and physical activity, 4Empowerment aims to address social issues with innovative, user-focused design thinking. This approach encourages creative problem-solving and scalable solutions, positioning sport and physical activity as key mechanisms for engaging and empowering women who have experienced domestic violence.

4Empowerment is the first programme of its kind in Ireland, serving as a strong example of intersectional work by engaging women and children from diverse backgrounds. The initiative promotes innovative ideas and user-focused design thinking to address key social challenges. Since its launch in February 2024, it has achieved remarkable progress in areas such as sobriety, physical and mental well-being, social engagement, participation rates, and increased involvement in education and employment programmes. 4Empowerment demonstrates a model of work that has invaluable lessons to share about the strength of interagency cooperation, the impact of peer support and the cross connection of sporting activities and employment, all of which embody this unique mode of engagement.

