

## AUTUMN 2015

### Publication of the Criminal Law (Sexual Offences) Bill 2015

Ruhama welcomes the publication of the Criminal Law (Sexual Offences) Bill 2015 which is currently progressing through parliament. As a frontline service, working directly to support women affected by prostitution and sex trafficking for over 25 years, we have long advocated for legislation to focus on the demand which drives the sex trade. However, while warmly welcoming provisions in the Bill to criminalise the purchase of sex, Ruhama notes with concern that those involved in street-based prostitution will remain criminalised.

For years Ruhama has seen the terrible consequences that women have borne having been convicted of soliciting offences and treated as perpetrators rather than vulnerable persons in the eyes of the law. We believe that nobody should be criminalised for their own exploitation.

The Joint Oireachtas Justice Committee's Report on Prostitution unanimously recommends Ireland taking its lead from the Swedish example. Northern Ireland has already done this by implementing dual measures of criminalising the sex buyer, while repealing the soliciting offence for those selling sex. The Minister indicated a desire to have an 'All-Island' approach to combating the exploitation of prostitution and sex trafficking. In order to achieve this, Ruhama is hopeful that an amendment removing the soliciting offence will be introduced at Committee Stage in the Dáil.

Through a highly successful Garda initiative in Dublin 7, we witnessed how this proposed law could work in practice. The Gardaí set up 'Operation Kerb' in 2011, which employs a victim-centred, human rights approach to policing street-based prostitution. This initiative targeted the buyers but did not criminalise those selling sex on the streets, whom they acknowledged as vulnerable persons. Instead Gardaí offered those in prostitution assistance and referral to health, drugs and other support services.

The local community welcomed this initiative as an effective means of dealing with the public order elements of prostitution. It resulted in 0% recidivism rate by the buyers that were apprehended, and increased confidence in women to come forward and report crimes against them.

At present we have a unique opportunity to do justice across the island of Ireland for those who have been sexually exploited in the sex trade. We hope the final legislation will reflect its full intention by tacking sex buyer demand and decriminalising those who sell sex.

We encourage any reader who supports this legislation to contact their public representatives through <http://www.turnofftheredlight.ie/action/> and sharing the action page.



Our outreach van which provides support to women in street prostitution (Ruhama staff pictured)

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#### INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

- Publication of the Criminal Law (Sexual Offences) Bill 2015 1
- Education & Development Update Good News Stories! 2
- A Gift for Ruhama Fundraising Update 3
- Fashion Against Trafficking Fundraiser
- Volunteering 4
- Better Together Competition — Please Vote!
- REACH Update

Ruhama is on Facebook and Twitter. Stay connected for



news and updates.

## Education & Development Update

The entire Ruhama team would like to wish good luck to all service users who are starting education programmes at the moment. A number of women are entering degree, Post Leaving Cert and QQI accredited courses. We wish them all the very best with their studies and look forward to providing them with additional support through our student centred Study Support Programme!

### Good News Stories!



Ruhama's frontline staff often deals with very difficult situations and work with women experiencing hardship, trauma and loneliness on a day to day basis. So, when there is good news to spread we like to shout it from the rooftops!

Over the past few months a number of women have had some great personal breakthroughs and successes — here are just a sample:

**Housing:** With the support of our Housing and Welfare Officer a client secured private accommodation. This area of work has been an increasing challenge with rising rents, increased demand and caps for rent allowance not keeping up with the

commercial rental market.

**Employment supports:** A woman has secured part time work experience for the first time in her life. She feels very proud to be getting up in the morning and going to what she calls "normal work."



**Repatriation:** With the support of casework a woman returned home safely to her country of origin after being trafficked to Ireland.

**Befriending:** We offer a befriending support for women who are experiencing social isolation. One of our clients who said that she was feeling very lonely has relayed to us that she is loving meeting her befriender and gets great joy and satisfaction from this service.

**Addiction:** One of clients experienced a very significant milestone in being drug free for one year!



## A Gift for Ruhama

Ruhama have recently moved office from All Hallows in Drumcondra to 25 Cork Street. A woman who is engaged with our service marked the occasion by giving us some beautiful plants for our office hallway that are a welcoming sight for all our service users, staff and volunteers. She wanted "to thank all the team of Ruhama for the hard work and concern they are giving to all women like me and for bringing a smile to me and my family". We were absolutely thrilled to receive such a lovely gift.



## Fundraising Update

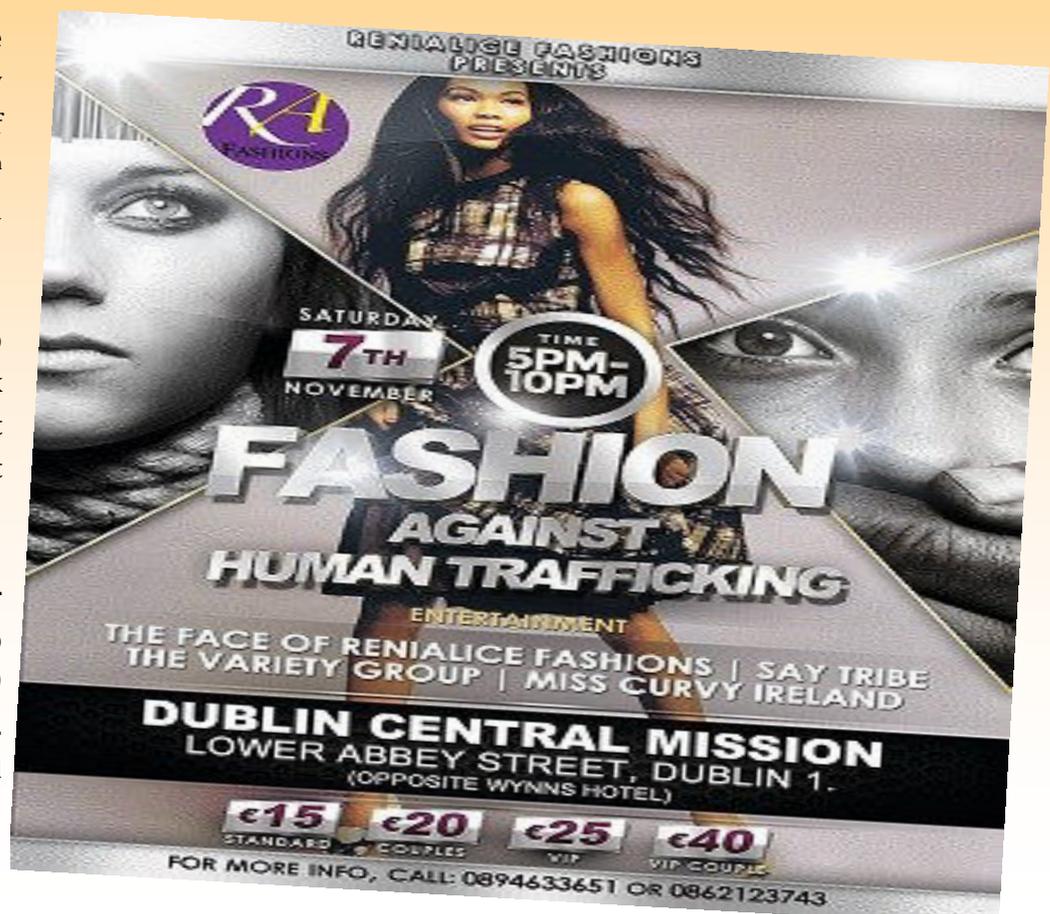
Thanks to all who have recently fundraised or signed up to donate on a monthly basis to Ruhama. As always, we are truly grateful for your support. If you are interested in supporting Ruhama's work, please consider donating on a regular basis through our website [www.ruhama.ie](http://www.ruhama.ie) or the MyCharity or iDonate websites. You can also donate by sending a cheque, postal order or bank draft to our offices. We are based at 25 Cork Street, Dublin 2. If you or someone you know is interested in hosting a fundraising event in aid of Ruhama, please contact Linda McGrath on **01 8360292** or by email [linda@ruhama.ie](mailto:linda@ruhama.ie)

## Fashion Against Human Trafficking

Reni Alice Fashions are hosting a fashion show fundraiser on behalf of Ruhama on Saturday 7<sup>th</sup> November 2015 from 5pm - 10pm.

This is a great way to support Ruhama's work whilst also enjoying what promises to be a fun night out.

If you would like further information or wish to buy tickets please call 089 4633651 or 086 2123743. Sincere thanks to all involved.



## Volunteering

We are delighted to welcome a number of new volunteers from this year's volunteer recruitment to our team! They have begun working in variety of areas and join our current volunteers in delivering Outreach, English tutoring, Study Support and Jobseeker support services.

They participated in comprehensive training and inductions in preparation for their roles and are glad to be able to get started with their work!

### Better Together Competition — Please Vote!

With the support of wonderful media students of ITT we have entered a video in the Better Together competition based on the testimony of our clients.

The competition gives us the chance of winning a much needed €2,000 but we need your vote! You can vote for the Ruhama video and share it with your friends by visiting;

<http://2015.bettertogether.ie/video/ruhama>



## REACH Update — REACH-ing Across Ireland!

The REACH initiative seeks to reach out to women and girls in both the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland who have been trafficked, or are at risk of being trafficked into prostitution, and let them know that free, safe and confidential support is available especially for them.

Following the very successful launch of this initiative in February of this year, we have been busy taking our awareness raising messages and materials right across the country. With excellent support from the HSE, we have now distributed REACH posters in multiple languages to virtually every A&E Department, Maternity Department, Sexual Health Clinic and Sexual Assault Treatment Unit in Ireland. At the same time, we have continued to target other locations that women told us were important, including Direct Provision accommodation, English

language schools, Drug support projects and a range of other services and locations that vulnerable women in the sex trade may access.

Many thanks to the brilliant Ruhama volunteers who have assisted with distribution – there are many places we couldn't have reached without you! Although we are fast running out of posters and post-its in different languages (French, Mandarin, Portuguese & Spanish, Romanian and Russian), we still have plenty left in English so if you would like to receive a pack, or would like to assist further with distribution please don't hesitate to get in touch: [ruth@ruhama.ie](mailto:ruth@ruhama.ie)

