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## Sligo Rape Crisis Centre Press Release October 2008

### **Sligo Rape Crisis Centre Marks World Mental Health Day This 10<sup>th</sup> October - Counselling as a Positive Way Towards Mental Health**

The 10<sup>th</sup> October is celebrated as World Mental Health Day since 1992 as a vehicle for mental health education, awareness raising and advocacy.

Sligo Rape Crisis Centre has been supporting survivors of sexual violence in Sligo, Leitrim and West Cavan for more than 12 years with therapy, information and advocacy.

Mental health issues have often been considered less important than a physical illness. However we would now consider that our physical, emotional and spiritual well-being are all inseparably linked and all play an integral part in our overall health. Mental health problems, such as depression, have also been hidden because of social stigma and shame. This can be especially true for survivors of sexual violence who often carry shame around their initial experience of sexual violence and then further shame around the impact it is having on them eg anxiety attacks, depression, self harm.

There may be serious mental health impacts for survivors of sexual violence. One of the more common is Post Traumatic Stress Disorder symptoms include nightmares, panic attacks, insomnia, persistent pain, headaches, spacing out, intrusive thoughts of the incident, problems with eating, anxiety and dissociation.

A counsellor of Sligo Rape Crisis Centre stated, "Feelings of shame, anger and self-blame can create a cycle of depression. When people experience low self-esteem and shame, they isolate themselves from friends and family, feel unable to cope and too ashamed to ask for or unworthy of help and support. Survivors can be more likely to develop addictions, suicidal or self-harming tendencies, anxiety disorders including panic attacks.'

However the therapists working in Sligo Rape Crisis Centre know through experience that these effects can be temporary. "To tell your story in a safe place where you are not judged is a healing experience, we provide the space and skills for people to look at the impact of their experience and express how they feel, people often feel relieved to have broken the silence and go on to gain awareness about what supports they need in their life. We believe that, with support, everyone has the capacity and resources to move towards change and well being. An experience of sexual violence is not a life sentence, recovery is possible."

Counsellors in Sligo Rape Crisis Centre are accredited members of RCNI or IACP/ BACP. They have done specialised training to work with the trauma of sexual violence, and have undergone the ASIST programme (Applied Suicide Intervention Training).

If you would like to talk to someone please contact, we are here to listen

**Sligo Rape Crisis Centre free phone 1800 750780**