

Saol Project Annual Report 2025
30 years of Connection, Courage and Change
1995–2025



October 2026

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Celebrating our CE Scheme's anniversary; Ger O'Rourke visits SAOL for one last time; and the 'Lady of the Rock' exhibition premieres in Maynooth University

Chairperson's Statement

In 1995, Mary Robinson was President and the so-called Rainbow Coalition was in office, headed by John Bruton and Dick Spring. The Celtic Tiger was getting into its stride.

We voted, finally, for divorce that year, by the narrowest of margins, after more than 10 years of vicious battles about women's rights. The Eighth amendment to the constitution, which granted the same rights to a foetus and a grown woman, would remain in force until 2018. Two years previously, in 1993, homosexuality had been decriminalized.

The Hepatitis C scandal, where many people, overwhelmingly women, had been poisoned by contaminated blood products, some fatally, broke in 1995, and the State, which had caused these tragedies, fought tooth and nail against proper compensation for the victims.

The big songs that year were Back for Good, by Take That, Haunted by the Ghost by Sinead O'Connor and Shane McGowan, and Wonderwall by Oasis. Boyzone made a scary video for So Good, where the boyz bounced around dangerously between blazing barrels of fire. Father Ted got its first outing on Channel Four, because RTE was too windy to show it, and Mrs. Doyle served the first of thousands of cups of tea. The Dubs won the football for the first time in 12 years, and Clare, my father's county, won the hurling for the first time in 81 years, thus banishing the curse of Biddy Early.

We said goodbye to Jack Charlton. English soccer thugs tore up the stands in Lansdowne Rd. because they couldn't stand being beaten by the Irish, giving us a foretaste of the right-wing thuggery now all too evident here. Princess Diana told the world she wanted to be the Queen of Hearts, because she didn't see herself being Queen of England. Bill Clinton put the Christmas lights on in Belfast, OJ Simpson got away with murder, and Seamus Heaney won the Nobel Prize for Literature.

And here in the North Inner City, Carmel Dunne of the Eastern Health Board and Seanie Lambe of the Inner City Renewal Group came together to launch the SAOL Project, Ireland's first rehabilitation, advocacy and education project for women and their children. The first Manager of the Project was Joan Byrne, who brought a strong community development ethos and experience from Ballymun. She in turn persuaded Cathleen O'Neill, famed for her women's literacy and education project in Kilbarrack, KLEAR, and Eileen Tatchl, then welfare rights officer with the ICRG, to join her. The decision to make SAOL a women-only project came from consultation with women attending the City Clinic in Amiens St., who expressed a strong preference for a single sex environment.

We could not have been luckier with those founding employees: all of them had a strong community development ethos, all of them had extensive experience in dealing with working class communities, and they bonded quickly as three of the smartest and funniest people I ever had the good fortune to encounter.

One of the issues that inspired Seanie and Carmel to create SAOL was the reality that when women got their methadone from the clinic, they had nothing to do for the rest of the day. The solution to this was a special Community Employment Scheme, sanctioned by FAS, as it was then. This did two things: it provided structured activity each day for our women and paid them money. With this as the spine of the project, SAOL was able to expand its remit into education, advocacy, rehabilitation, healthcare, childcare, and all of the other areas that enhanced our women's lives and those of their children. Over the years, domestic violence sadly assumed an ever-larger place in our considerations, and our DAVINA project is now a groundbreaking approach to this most distressing and dangerous of issues.

Thirty years later, we are still having to explain that women cannot attend treatment if there is nobody to mind their children and cannot simply leave a violent home if there is nowhere safe for them to go. For women who use drugs, finding a refuge that can accommodate and support them remains a particular difficulty. These are not failures of motivation on the part of women. They are failures to provide the conditions in which change becomes possible.

SAOL believes in empowering our women to change or modify their lives. Our emphasis on peer-based learning and actions is a practical response to that aspiration. Nobody knows more about the issues confronting our women than themselves. Peer-based training allows them to use that knowledge in productive and enlightening ways.

In 2025, four women from our BRIO programme helped deliver a psychoeducational programme in the Dóchas Centre. This is what peer learning looks like in practice: women using knowledge earned the hard way to support other women. It is also a useful reminder that expertise does not always come with a job title.

We have been extremely lucky to have had wonderful staff over the last 30 years. SAOL is demanding; our women have levels of trauma, and stories behind that trauma, which are hard to imagine for anyone who might foolishly believe addiction is a lifestyle choice, and our staff have to absorb and mitigate that trauma. The compassion, empathy and respect for our women demonstrated by them are exemplary and are the core values of SAOL; each SAOL woman is a unique individual, and is treated with respect and dignity.

All the women and children who pass through our doors, many of them heroic people who struggle with enormous pressures to make their lives and the lives of their children better, are truly valued and loved when they come to SAOL. The multiple issues that affect women with addiction, and how they intersect with each other have been seen in 2025 as with every other of our thirty years.

In 2025, SAOL worked with 252 women. They were not all at the same point in recovery, and there is no reason why they should have been. Some were making substantial changes; others were finding enough stability to consider what might come next. Our job

is not to decide who has made sufficient progress to deserve kindness. Stigma already does quite enough damage without services adding to it.

Many of the issues discussed in this report existed in 1995, with the added misery of a massive housing crisis, toxic and dangerous social media, and continuing exploitation and objectification of women. It is to our credit that we are still here, with our core values intact, with our belief in community development principles undiminished, and with our belief in the power of change undimmed.

My thanks to my fellow Board members, to Gary and all the staff, and to our funders and partner services for keeping this work going. At the end of 2025, we said goodbye to our Head of Services, Reidin Dunne, with warm thanks for the joy and energy she brought to SAOL, and every good wish for what comes next. Above all, thank you to the women themselves, who continue to teach us, challenge us and remind us why SAOL matters.

Catriona Crowe

Chairperson
SAOL Project
October 2026



Chief Executive's Report

There is a great deal of life in SAOL: conversation, laughter, learning, occasional tears and, almost always, someone putting the kettle on. Behind that everyday activity is a serious commitment—to stand alongside women affected by addiction and inequality, and to create a place where they can feel safe, valued and able to imagine something different for themselves.

As SAOL marked 30 years in 2025, that commitment remained at the heart of our work. We recorded 252 women through our Health Research Board monitoring system during the year. Our work also encompassed the Children's Centre, support for women in the Dóchas Centre, and training for professionals. Together, these activities reflected a shared purpose: supporting women, strengthening relationships and encouraging services to respond with greater understanding.

Across the year, our programmes combined direct support with education, creative work and peer leadership. DAVINA supported 194 women, UChoose engaged 73 women, and 36 women participated in Seeking Safety. These overlapping strands of participation show the different ways women connected with SAOL, rather than separate groups to be added together.

Love, connection and bravery

Our values of love, connection and bravery are not simply words for a strategy document. They describe how we want SAOL to feel and how we try to work.

Love means treating women with warmth, dignity and respect, including when life is messy and progress is difficult to see. Connection means making room for relationships that can withstand setbacks, disagreement and the understandable difficulty of trusting again. Bravery means having honest conversations, challenging injustice and being willing to question our own practice.

The women who come to SAOL demonstrate bravery every day. Sometimes it is visible in a qualification achieved, a peer programme delivered or a contribution made at a public event. Sometimes it is the quieter courage of coming through the door, returning after an absence, asking for help or trying again.

Our job is to recognise that courage—not to set an ever-higher bar before a woman is considered ready for support.

Complicated lives, not simple labels

SAOL's feminist approach asks us to see the whole woman, rather than a diagnosis, a substance or a difficult moment in her life. Our work recognises the overlapping effects of addiction, poverty, violence, mental ill health, homelessness, care experience and justice

involvement. These are not separate compartments; they interact and shape the choices and opportunities available to women.

Stigma adds another layer to already complicated lives. Women who use drugs too often encounter judgement where they need understanding, suspicion where they need assistance, and labels that obscure everything else about them. A woman does not stop being a mother, a neighbour, a friend or a person with ambitions because she uses drugs.

During 2025, poverty, separation from children in care, domestic and community violence, and insecure living circumstances remained pressing concerns in our work. For some women, the distress of separation from their children sat alongside the demands of recovery and the challenge of navigating multiple services. These realities require practical help and sustained relationships, not an assumption that motivation alone will resolve them.

We bring together addiction support, family support, childcare and weekend provision because women's lives do not fit neatly into separate service categories. This approach reflects our funder's main concerns, especially the HSE's social inclusion priorities: reducing health inequalities, improving access to support, and providing person-centred care through partnership.

Recovery at a human pace

Our commitment is to support women wherever they are on their recovery journey. That includes women seeking abstinence, women reducing use or harm, women maintaining changes they have worked hard to achieve, and women who are not yet sure what change might look like.

In 2025, we continued to see crack cocaine use among women attending our services, alongside high levels of tablet use, often benzodiazepines. Cannabis remained an ongoing feature, as did the widespread presence of alcohol. Our response remained grounded in honest conversation, education, harm reduction and individual support—not moral judgement.

Recovery does happen. We see it in growing confidence, renewed relationships, learning, leadership and greater stability. But it is often delayed or interrupted by the complexity of women's circumstances. Mental health difficulties and the effects of both past and ongoing trauma remained constant concerns throughout the year.

A missed appointment or a return to substance use cannot be understood without asking what else is happening in a woman's life. Progress is not always a straight line, and our support cannot depend on it being one.

When the barriers are built into the system

Some obstacles require more than an individual care plan. A woman may want treatment but have no childcare that makes attendance possible. The lack of childcare, particularly within treatment services, remains a serious barrier. A woman disclosing domestic violence may need immediate safety yet struggle to find refuge accommodation able to support her alongside her substance use. Asking women to seek help is not enough if an appropriate response is unavailable when they do.

For justice-involved women, the fear of short prison sentences can sit alongside a profound lack of hope that life outside will improve. One of the most troubling realities we encountered was that prison could be understood as a sanctuary of rest—a place offering some respite from violence, exhaustion and instability.

That is a terrible indictment of our society in 2025. Rest and safety should not require imprisonment.

We continued to call for women who commit non-violent offences to receive non-custodial sentences, backed by properly resourced community supports. Accountability matters, but so do the conditions that make recovery and a different future possible.

Making room for safety and hope

At SAOL, connection is central to creating the conditions in which women can recover and thrive. Safety means more than the absence of an immediate threat. It means being able to speak without humiliation, ask for help without being dismissed, and return without having to explain why one deserves another chance.

Our groups, key-working, peer support, education, food provision and family services offer different ways into that connection. We bring together addiction support, family support, childcare and weekend provision because women's lives do not fit neatly into separate service categories.

In 2025, SAOL Beag provided full-time early years education for 11 children aged one to three, while our full-time social worker supported 25 different families. Our Mother and Baby Group, delivered in collaboration with the HSE Beag Team, continued to bring enormous value to the project.

The programme reports that follow describe this work in greater detail. Across them runs a common commitment: women's lived experience must inform not only the support they receive, but how services think and work. Our peer-led activities, work in Dóchas and professional training helped carry that commitment beyond our own doors.

Thank you

None of this happens through goodwill alone. It requires funding, partnership, sound governance and a remarkable amount of daily effort.

I sincerely thank all our funders, particularly the HSE, the Probation Service, Cuan, the Department of Social Protection and Pobal. I also acknowledge the Department of Children for its support of our Children's Centre, and the North East Inner City Initiative for its continued support.

A particular thank you goes to the Children's Rights Alliance for funding Christmas food vouchers. Such support makes a practical difference when families are under pressure, bringing some relief and greater choice at a time that can be as stressful as it is celebratory. To all our grant-makers, donors and supporters: thank you for investing in this work.

I also thank our community and statutory partners for their collaboration throughout the year. Women's needs rarely begin and end within one service, and effective support depends on our willingness to work together.

To our Board, my wholehearted thanks for your time, judgement and commitment, and for holding both the purpose and the responsibilities of SAOL with such care.

To our staff, thank you for your skill, patience, humour and humanity. You bring warmth without losing professionalism, and determination without losing compassion. Much of your most important work happens quietly, but it does not go unnoticed.

At the end of 2025, we said goodbye to our Head of Services, Reidin Dunne. Reidin brought joy and energy to the project, and I want to thank her warmly for her contribution to SAOL. We wish her every happiness and success in her new endeavours.

Finally, thank you to the women who make SAOL what it is. You contribute far more than attendance figures can convey: insight, friendship, challenge, creativity and care for one another.

As we look towards 2026, our ambition remains straightforward, even when the work is not: to keep creating a place where women are welcomed as they are, supported in the changes they choose, and never reduced to the hardest thing happening in their lives.



Gary Broderick
Chief Executive Officer
October 2025

Listening to Women: The Foundations of SAOL

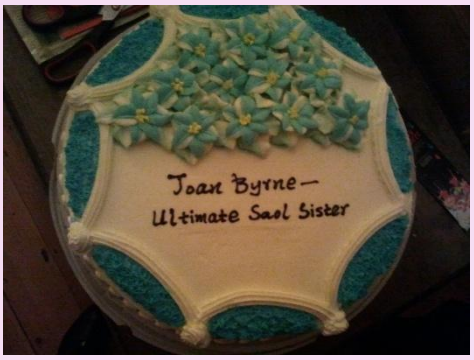
How consultation and community development shaped a women-only service

SAOL's story began with a practical concern and a willingness to listen. In 1995, Carmel Dunne of the Eastern Health Board and Seanie Lambe of the Inner City Renewal Group came together to establish a project for women affected by addiction in Dublin's North Inner City. As the Chairperson recalls, one of the concerns that prompted this initiative was the lack of meaningful opportunities available to women after they received their methadone at the clinic. Treatment addressed an important need, but women also needed opportunities to learn, participate and build a life beyond their daily clinic attendance.

Consultation with women attending the City Clinic on Amiens Street helped determine the character of the new service. The women expressed a strong preference for a women-only environment, and this informed the decision to establish SAOL as a women-only project. Their views were therefore not simply sought as background information: they influenced a fundamental decision about how the service would operate. From the outset, women's own knowledge of what they wanted from support helped shape the response.

A women-only setting was a preference articulated by women themselves, rather than an arrangement decided solely on their behalf. This established an important principle for SAOL: meaningful support begins by **listening** to the people who will use it and taking their views seriously.

Turning that principle into a working project required people with strong community-development experience. SAOL's first manager, Joan Byrne, brought that ethos and her experience from Ballymun. She recruited Cathleen O'Neill, known for her work in women's literacy and education through KLEAR in Kilbarrack, and Eileen Tatchl, then welfare rights officer with the Inner City Renewal Group. Together, they brought complementary experience in education, rights and work alongside working-class communities.



A Community Employment Scheme, sanctioned by FÁS, provided the practical foundation. It offered women structured daily activity and an income, bringing together opportunities for participation with tangible financial support. With this scheme as its backbone, SAOL was able to develop its work across education, advocacy, rehabilitation, healthcare and childcare, responding to the wider circumstances of women's lives and those of their children.

The founding process brought together three essential elements: women identifying the kind of environment they wanted; community and statutory partners recognising a gap in provision; and staff with the experience and commitment to build a response. It was not

simply the creation of another service. It was the development of a place in which women's perspectives could influence the support available to them.

Thirty years later, that founding approach remains central to SAOL's identity. The Chairperson's account connects the project's origins with its continuing commitment to dignity, respect, peer learning and the belief that women themselves understand the issues confronting them. The enduring lesson is straightforward: women should not only be offered support - but they should also have a meaningful role in shaping it.



Cathleen O'Neill and Ger O'Rourke, two much missed and much loved amazing SAOL Sisters who left us in 2025

Ar dheis Dé go raibh a hanam



1995–2025: Milestones

Thirty years of listening, learning and working alongside women

From our beginnings in 1995, SAOL has developed an approach rooted in women's experiences, community development and the belief that recovery requires more than treatment alone. These selected milestones trace the growth of education, childcare, peer leadership, creative expression and advocacy - and the relationships that have sustained this work.

1995 | Listening to women and establishing SAOL

SAOL's first classes took place on 16 October 1995, with an initial intake of 16 women. Our Community Employment Scheme provided the practical foundation: structured activity, an income and opportunities for learning.

1996 | An official opening, childcare and women's writing



SAOL officially opened by President Mary Robinson on International Women's Day, 8 March 1996. The crèche opened in June, establishing childcare as an important part of the response to women's needs. The Basic Education Group and Cardboard Box Writing Group began, and SAOL produced its first publication, *Resolute Women Recite*. SAOL's first residential overnight for women and children took place in Kilkenny.

1997–1998 | Learning across borders


AN INTERIM EVALUATION
OF THE SAOL PROJECT

Matt Bowden
September 1997

European New Opportunities for Women funding enabled SAOL to develop international partnerships, including links with Bologna and Amsterdam. Staff and participant exchanges created opportunities to share approaches to education and rehabilitation. Women also brought their perspectives to national television and radio, extending their participation beyond the project itself. 1997 also saw the publication of Matt Bowden's interim evaluation of the SAOL Project.

1999–2000 | Progression, peer work and university education

The Progression Routes Network brought together 45 agencies, while progression opportunities included two participants gaining employment as peer workers. In 2000, SAOL established a Women's Studies Programme with UCD and produced *Women in Action*, strengthening its commitment to education, women's knowledge and public expression.

2001 | Connecting addiction and domestic violence

European Daphne funding supported exploration of the relationship between addiction and surviving domestic violence. This work established an important strand of SAOL's practice: recognising that substance use, violence and access to safety must be understood together, rather than treated as separate concerns.

2002 | Supporting children and strengthening justice partnerships

SAOL opened its first summer school for children and secured project funding from the Probation Service. These developments strengthened support for families and helped build the partnership underpinning SAOL's work with women affected by addiction and justice involvement.

2003 | Women's voices in research and music

Journeying Back—Voices of Women on Methadone brought women's experiences into research. A fundraising concert at Liberty Hall and a SAOL recording, including *Stronger Woman Now*, demonstrated the growing place of music and collective creativity within the project.

2004–2007 | Developing practical responses to changing drug use



SAOL contributed to community discussion and research on cocaine use, piloted a care-planning approach and developed practical resources for services. In 2007, its cocaine conference at Croke Park launched *Reduce the Use* and associated worksheets and resources, extending learning from the project into the wider addiction sector. Reduce the Use has been updated since and is freely available on our website www.saolproject.ie

2008–2010 | Extending recovery support and gaining recognition

A dedicated cocaine worker strengthened substance-specific interventions. Aftercare groups began in 2008 and became fully established in 2010, creating further opportunities for continued connection. In 2010, SAOL received an AONTAS award for education delivery and presented its approach to working with women at a Council of Europe conference on stimulants.

2011 | A leadership transition and new resources



Although working in a job-sharing partnership from 2008, founding Director Joan Byrne moved to CityWide, and Gary Broderick was appointed Director in 2011. The launch of *Reduce the Use 2* reflected the need to respond to patterns of multiple-substance use and continued SAOL's commitment to accessible, practical educational resources.

2012–2013 | Theatre, peer leadership and domestic violence education



Veronica and Anthony bringing drama to SAOL!

A relationship with the Abbey Theatre began in 2012, opening further opportunities for cultural participation. In 2013, peer-led research, discussion and poetry were prominent features of the programme. The launch of *Solas sa SAOL* strengthened educational work on domestic violence with women affected by addiction.

2014–2015 | Emotional wellbeing, creativity and trauma informed practice

RecoverMe launched at Dublin Castle in 2014, building on *Reduce the Use* with a focus on emotions. Women contributed to social-work education in UCD, while resources explored childcare and addiction. SAOL's twentieth year included further publications, participant research, poetry and a conference on trauma informed practice, reflecting the importance of trauma awareness within recovery and community life.

2016 | Building recovery inwards and outwards - BRIO



SAOL's account of BRIO identifies 2016 as the year a group of women came together to learn to become peer support workers. Developed with the Probation Service from an original idea by Cathleen O'Neill, BRIO brought together recovery, education and lived experience. It supported women to strengthen their own confidence while developing the skills to work alongside others facing similar challenges.

2016 | Launching Object Poverty: making lived experience visible

SAOL first presented *Object Poverty* on 17 October, marking the United Nations International Day for the Eradication of Poverty. The project asked people to name three objects they associated with poverty. Drawing on 230 responses, women and staff developed a photographic exhibition of 16 objects, inviting audiences to look beyond statistics and consider how poverty is experienced in everyday life.

Supported by the Department of Social Protection, the exhibition reached Dublin City University in December, where photographs were accompanied by written contributions from students and staff. Its subsequent university exhibitions included Trinity College Dublin and Maynooth University, bringing the work into educational settings and conversations with future professionals.

2017 | Bringing Object Poverty to European audiences



Strasbourg 2017

On 15 June, *Object Poverty* was presented at the European Parliament in Strasbourg as part of the *Our Voices* delegation prepared by ATD Ireland. The meeting brought lived experience of poverty before MEPs and their staff and a meeting with European Social Charter staff at the Council of Europe.

In October, *Object Poverty* travelled to Place de la République in Paris, extending its public reach and connecting SAOL's work with wider international efforts to challenge poverty. From its beginnings in women's experiences and everyday objects, the project had developed into a platform for education, dialogue and solidarity.

2017 | National recognition for women's voices through fashion



SAOL's Fashion Show won an AONTAS STAR Award in the Learner Voice category. Using fashion to explore women's history, the project combined research, creative expression and women's perspectives. It demonstrated how community education could make learning visible, engaging and accessible to a wider audience.

2018 | Recognition for BRIO's educational work

BRIO received an AONTAS STAR Award nomination, adding to SAOL's record of recognition within adult and community education. The nomination marked another opportunity to bring attention to the programme's work with women affected by addiction and justice involvement.

2019 | Finding a collective voice through singing

Singing remained an important part of SAOL's creative life, bringing women together through shared expression, enjoyment and connection. A memorable highlight was singing with Sabina Higgins, wife of President Michael D. Higgins, at an event in Liberty Hall.

The occasion celebrated women's creativity in a public setting and reflected the wider role of music within SAOL: creating opportunities to participate, build confidence and take pride in a shared contribution.

2020 | Staying connected during COVID-19

During the first COVID-19 lockdown, SAOL remained open as a frontline service. Telephone and online support continued alongside socially distanced individual contact and home outreach. Staff delivered food, educational materials and resources for children, maintaining relationships with women and families during a period of isolation and uncertainty.

2020 | Developing DAVINA in response to women's experiences



Home outreach during lockdown brought the extent of domestic violence affecting some women into sharper focus. Recognising both the level of need and the barriers women using drugs faced in accessing safety, SAOL established DAVINA—*Domestic Abuse/Violence Is Never Acceptable*. The programme developed a more proactive, specialist response to the intersection of violence, substance use and recovery.

2021 | Recognition for Outside Songs

SAOL's *Outside Songs* project was Highly Commended at the AONTAS STAR Awards. The recognition highlighted the continuing place of music and collective creativity within SAOL's educational work.

2022 | An AONTAS award for Hepatitis C Education

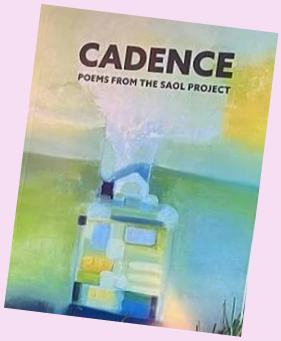
SAOL's Hepatitis C Programme won the AONTAS STAR Award for Health and Wellbeing in the large-organisation category. Combining education, peer training and practical support, the programme helped people address fears, understand their options and access hepatitis C treatment.

2022 | Publishing' In Plain Sight' with Trinity College Dublin

On 18 May, SAOL launched *In Plain Sight*, research commissioned through DAVINA and led by Professor Catherine Comiskey and colleagues at Trinity College Dublin. The report combined an international literature review with a national estimate of women experiencing both substance use and domestic violence.

It strengthened the evidence underpinning DAVINA's work and its call for coordinated responses that do not exclude women from safety because of their substance use.

2022 | Publishing Cadence



In October, SAOL published *Cadence*, a collection of more than 100 poems curated by Paula Meehan and Ray Hegarty. Drawing on writing produced across the project's first 27 years, the book brought together participants, staff and invited contributors. It celebrated poetry as a means of expression and a longstanding part of SAOL's creative life.

2022 | Seeking Safety Ireland

In the final quarter of the year, SAOL began delivering Seeking Safety as part of a national pilot led by the HSE's National Clinical Programme for Dual Diagnosis. SAOL was among the first five organisations to begin delivery.

The wider partnership included Ballyfermot STAR, Ballymun STAR, Red Door Project in Drogheda, Roscommon Women's Network, Ruhama and Sophia Housing, with all seven organisations participating by early 2023. Together, they developed a shared response to women experiencing trauma, substance use and mental health difficulties.

2023 | DAVINA shortlisted for learner voice

DAVINA was shortlisted in the AONTAS STAR Awards' Learner Voice category for large initiatives. AONTAS highlighted how women's experiences informed the revision of the programme's training manual and the piloting of its revised approach.

2024 | Challenging barriers to refuge and safety



SAOL and University College Dublin published *"They said they couldn't take me because I was on drugs."* The report examined whether women's human rights were being denied when they sought domestic violence support and refuge while experiencing addiction.

It extended DAVINA's research and advocacy, focusing attention on access to safety and the need for services able to respond to women's overlapping needs.

2025 | Deepening the role of art in recovery

SAOL formally began working with Professor John Johnston and ArtEZ University of the Arts to deepen its understanding and application of Issues-Based Arts Education (IBAE). Building on its longstanding creative practice - including projects such as 'Lady of the Rock' - the collaboration bringing a clearer narrative and theoretical framework to the role of art in recovery and assisting in the development of an IBAE methodology for UNESCO.

Developing further in 2026 and beyond, this work will strengthen the connections between creative expression, personal meaning, collective understanding and recovery; recognising women of SAOL as artists, critical thinkers and contributors to change.

2025 | Thirty years of connection and continued development

SAOL marked its thirtieth year with a recorded reach of 252 women through its Health Research Board monitoring system. Its work continued across recovery support, education, specialist responses to violence, creative activities, peer leadership, early years education and family support.

Women's contributions remained central - as participants, peer educators, artists and advocates. Across three decades, the enduring foundation of SAOL's work has been **connection**: listening to women, recognising their knowledge and working alongside them to create opportunities for change.



Dressed in Style for the Aontas Awards, 2017

What SAOL Has Meant

Published in 2022, the following are (pieces of) poems written by SAOL women over the years, recording what SAOL means to them. The pictures are from our 'Lady of the Rock art project, first exhibited at the Froebel Centre, Maynooth University in 2025:



I am so glad

I am so glad that I came to SAOL.
If I didn't start here, I don't know where I'd be today
I'd be gone downhill and wasted away
Claire O'Connor



My first day at SAOL

My first day at SAOL I was so excited
After 3 weeks I knew this was the place for me
Sitting in SAOL on a quiet morning sipping
On tea reminds me of Mam and Dad
We love to drink tea and when we
Check in and we talk it helps me
Jessica Whelan

Sting

Coming together
In all kinds of weather
Recover You
Recover Me
On the Road to Discovery
Recover me
Marie Penny



DAVINA

So anyone suffering in silence believe me you are not on your own
DAVINA is there to protect you
To let you know you are never alone
Theresa O'Donovan

Home Not Alone

Until then things were getting sad

If I hadn't of done that I'd of been left like a mat

Sitting at home, just on my phone

Now I can mix

Vicky Sheridan





7 Visits Home

Cos I'm doing great now – yes, I'm one of the few

You see, starting SAOL changed my life in ways I never knew

I've learned how to fogive and be forgiven

And how the drug changed every part of the life I was living

Michelle Kavanagh

Education not Important...

Being in SAOL I feel accepted

Getting up each day with purpose

I'm on my journey to recovery

The future's looking bright for me

Margaret McDonagh



You helped me Fly

SAOL helped me see I deserve more

Saved me from drowning – Now swimming to shore

Boozy haze lifting, now fading away

I now look forward to bright new days

Mags O'Sullivan

Fear

SAOL Sisters will have your back

And they have given me my confidence back.

For that – SAOL Sisters for life!

It's your choice.

But fear, you no longer

Have a place here.

Lorraine Kelly



What We Carry Forward

Women's knowledge, shared learning and the conditions for change

A service reveals its values in ordinary decisions: who is welcomed, whose account is believed, what happens when someone struggles, and whether support remains available when progress is uncertain. Across thirty years, SAOL has sought to make those decisions with women rather than simply for them. The challenge is not only to provide a good service, but to remain open to being changed by the people who use it.

Understanding lives through intersectionality

Women do not experience addiction separately from their relationships, income, housing, health or treatment by institutions. Kimberlé Crenshaw's work on intersectionality, developed through an analysis of racism, sexism and violence against women of colour, explains how systems of inequality interact—and how responses organised around a single category can overlook those at their intersections (Crenshaw, 1991).

Applied thoughtfully to SAOL's work, this means more than listing the difficulties a woman faces. It means asking how they shape one another: how poverty can restrict the possibility of leaving violence; how childcare responsibilities can limit access to treatment; and how stigma associated with drug use can undermine a woman's credibility when she seeks help. It also requires attention to differences between women, rather than assuming a single experience of womanhood.

Patricia Hill Collins develops intersectionality as a means of understanding inequality and informing social change (Collins, 2019). For SAOL, the implication is practical: we must consider not only what a woman needs to change, but what services and institutions need to change around her.

Practical support is part of participation

A commitment to inclusion must be supported by the conditions that make participation possible. Childcare, food, family support, advocacy and a reliable place to come are not peripheral to recovery. They help women find the time, safety and stability to engage.

This understanding connects with Antonia Darder's development of Paulo Freire's pedagogy of love: an approach to education grounded in human dignity, dialogue and a critical understanding of injustice (Darder, 2017). Love, in this sense, is not simply kindness. It is a demanding commitment to recognise people's humanity while challenging the conditions that diminish their opportunities.

At SAOL, warmth and practical assistance belong alongside education and therapeutic support. We cannot reasonably ask women to concentrate on change while overlooking hunger, violence or the absence of childcare.

Learning with women, not speaking for them

Feminist community development creates opportunities to connect individual experiences with wider patterns of inequality. A difficulty felt as private failure can become something that is understood collectively and something that can be challenged.

bell hooks, drawing critically on Freire, describes education as a practice of freedom that can challenge boundaries of race, gender and class (hooks, 1994). This offers a useful foundation for learning in which participants bring knowledge, question assumptions and help shape the discussion, rather than simply receive information.

SAOL's groups, creative projects, research and advocacy offer different routes into that process. Art, writing or conversation can help women explore what matters to them without requiring a public account of personal pain. Meaningful participation includes the right to contribute, the right to disagree and the right to keep parts of one's life private.

From lived experience to shared leadership

Peer leadership gives practical expression to this approach. Women's knowledge should influence priorities, resources, training and service design, not merely illustrate decisions already made.

This requires more than inviting women to tell their stories. It requires preparation, support, genuine influence and recognition of their contribution. Women must be free to participate without being expected to represent everyone or repeatedly disclose difficult experiences.

Challenging stigma, sustaining hope

Stigma reduces people to a substance, a diagnosis or a difficult period in their lives. Challenging it means examining our own language and expectations as well as questioning exclusion elsewhere.

What we carry forward is a commitment to **connection** with purpose: listening carefully, sharing learning, addressing practical barriers and remaining willing to change our own practice. Recovery belongs to women themselves. Our responsibility is to help create the conditions in which their choices, knowledge and hopes can take meaningful shape.



Our Women's Recovery Walk T-Shirts, 2025

Who We Are

Our mission, our vision and the purpose that connects them

SAOL is a feminist, community-based project supporting women affected by addiction and poverty, alongside their children and families. Based in Dublin's North Inner City, we bring together recovery support, education, advocacy, creative opportunities and practical assistance in a welcoming, women-centred environment.

We recognise that women's experiences of substance use cannot be separated from the circumstances of their lives. Our approach is to see the whole woman, recognise her strengths and work alongside her at her own pace.

Our Mission

"SAOL is a community project focused on improving the lives of women affected by addiction and poverty."

Our mission grounds us in everyday work: providing opportunities to learn, access support, build relationships and make choices. It also keeps our attention on practical needs. Safety, food, warmth, childcare and belonging are not separate from recovery; they help make participation and change possible.

Our Vision

"SAOL is working towards transforming the way in which Ireland responds to addiction and poverty."

Our vision takes us beyond the support offered within our own doors. Through advocacy, education, partnership and the sharing of women's knowledge, we seek responses that are more compassionate, accessible and effective. We want women's circumstances to be understood, their contributions recognised and their voices to influence the services and decisions affecting their lives.

How We Work

Our work is informed by feminism, community development and the educational principles of Paulo Freire. We understand women as people with knowledge, abilities and the right to shape their own futures, not simply as recipients of care. Peer learning and meaningful participation are central to this approach.

We welcome women at different stages of recovery, recognising that their goals and circumstances will differ. Our role is to provide support without judgement, create opportunities for connection and work with women towards the changes they choose.

Love, connection and bravery describe how we seek to put that commitment into practice: meeting women with warmth and dignity, sustaining relationships through difficulty, and challenging the barriers that limit their opportunities.

Our mission guides what we do each day. Our vision reminds us that improving women's lives also means changing how society responds to them.

Working Alongside Women

Our Approach to Support

SAOL offers women different ways to access support, recognising that needs, circumstances and readiness for change vary. Our low-threshold approach means that a woman does not have to achieve abstinence or reach a particular stage of recovery before she is welcomed. We begin with what matters to her and work together to identify realistic next steps.

Trauma-informed practice shapes both our relationships and the environment we provide. We recognise that past and ongoing experiences of trauma can affect trust, wellbeing and engagement. Our emphasis is on safety, consistency, choice and respect. Women are not expected to disclose difficult experiences to demonstrate their need for support, and we seek to avoid approaches that create shame or undermine their control.

Harm reduction and recovery are complementary parts of this work. We support women to understand and reduce risks associated with substance use while respecting their individual goals, whether these involve greater stability, reduced use or abstinence. Education provides opportunities to develop knowledge, confidence and practical skills through discussion, creative activities and shared learning.

Individual key-working gives women dedicated time to consider their circumstances, agree priorities and review progress. Where other services are involved, coordinated support helps connect the different parts of a woman's care. With appropriate consent and attention to confidentiality, staff work alongside relevant professionals so that women are supported in navigating services rather than left to manage every connection alone.

Women Shaping the Service

Women's **participation** is part of how SAOL develops its work. Their experiences and ideas inform group discussions, peer-led activities and conversations about service delivery. We seek not only to provide opportunities to speak, but to listen, consider what is raised and explain how feedback has influenced decisions.

Women can share views through individual conversations, group feedback discussions and written feedback or surveys. Participation is voluntary: women can choose how much to contribute, disagree with an approach or raise a concern without being expected to share personal information publicly. Privacy, confidentiality and clear explanations of their limits remain essential to maintaining trust.

Together, these approaches support a service that is welcoming and accountable - one that responds to women's changing needs while recognising their right to influence the support they receive.

2025 at a Glance

Our Reach

People and participation	2025
Women recorded through SAOL's Health Research Board monitoring system	252
Women supported through DAVINA	194
Individual women engaged with UChoose	73
Women engaged with Seeking Safety	36
Women actively engaged with BRIO on a weekly basis	31
Children aged one to three attending SAOL Beag's full-time early years' service	11
Different families supported by our full-time social worker	25

Safety, Recovery and Individual Support

- DAVINA delivered 87 group meetings, reaching 123 women, including 88 women in prison.
- Its individual support comprised 411 one-to-one meetings and 418 brief interventions with 71 women.
- DAVINA provided 41 accompaniments, supporting women to engage with courts, Gardaí, healthcare services and case conferences.
- Seeking Safety delivered 20 sessions across two groups, supporting women to develop practical skills in safety, emotional regulation, boundaries and relationships.
- Four BRIO women contributed to delivering a psychoeducational programme in the Dóchas Centre, while also running 88 groups in SAOL with 31 different women in SAOL; and a further 60 were worked with in 1-1 sessions with women at other stages in the BRIO journey.

Creativity, Health and Community Participation

- Open Art supported 21 women across 48 sessions, with a further five women accessing individual art therapy.
- Nineteen women participated in 46 creative writing and drama sessions, including work with Fighting Words and the Gate Theatre, leading to the performance of *Crazy Carriage* at the Seán O'Casey Theatre.
- Adventure Friday engaged 15 women across 48 sessions, including cultural visits, sea swimming and community activities.
- Seventeen women participated in 20 weeks of Couch to 5K activity, preparing for the September Recovery Walk.
- A further 17 women engaged in health and wellbeing groups.
- Creative partnerships included Fire Station Artists' Studios, while SAOL formally began developing its Issues-Based Arts Education approach with Professor John Johnston and ArtEZ.

Children and Families

SAOL Beag combined full-time early years education with close engagement with parents, including 11 individual parent meetings. The weekly Mother and Baby Group, delivered with the HSE Beag Team, complemented the work of the Children's Centre and our full-time social worker.

Food provision, advocacy and weekend support remained part of SAOL's wider response to women's and families' practical needs. The CRA (Children's Rights Allowance) also supported SAOL with grants, so that vouchers could be shared with families attending SAOL – we are extremely grateful for this support and the ease to food poverty it brings.

Women's Expertise and Wider Learning

Five Experts via Experience volunteered with DAVINA, contributing to 18 group meetings and wider education and advocacy activities.

DAVINA's workshops, lectures and training days reached 133 professionals, 104 students and 16 community members. The programme also developed its original one-day training into a two-day approach and introduced an online Community of Practice.

Behind these figures are women learning, creating, supporting one another and taking steps towards the lives they want



International Women's Day on Rosie Hackett Bridge

BRIO — Building Recovery Inwards and Outwards

In 2025, BRIO continued to provide women with experience of the criminal justice system with opportunities to strengthen their recovery, access education, develop confidence and support one another. Developed in partnership with the Probation Service, BRIO combines practical support with personal development and peer education, recognising women not only as people who may need support, but as people with knowledge, skills and experience that can help others.

Supporting recovery and positive change

During the year, 31 women actively engaged with BRIO on a weekly basis, participating in group work, intensive case management, training and advocacy activities. The programme provided a consistent point of connection for women navigating recovery, justice involvement and the challenges of everyday life.

BRIO's work reflected SAOL's women-centred, feminist and trauma-informed approach. This recognises that addiction and justice involvement cannot be understood in isolation from women's experiences of poverty, violence, homelessness, mental ill health, trauma and family separation. Our focus remained on working alongside women, recognising their strengths and supporting change at a pace that reflected their circumstances. This approach is grounded in SAOL's wider commitment to women experiencing multiple and overlapping forms of marginalisation.

The team provided practical and emotional support to women experiencing imprisonment and preparing for or adjusting to release. Case management, advocacy and links with community services helped women navigate transitions and access support. Maintaining relationships across the prison gate remained an important part of this work, offering continuity at times when women could face considerable uncertainty.

Education, peer support and participation

Women participated in a range of educational and personal development opportunities, including Reduce the Use training, hepatitis C awareness, substance-use education and creative arts projects. These activities created opportunities to build knowledge, explore experiences, develop skills and strengthen connections with others.

A particular achievement in 2025 was the involvement of four BRIO women in delivering a psychoeducational programme in the Dóchas Centre. Their contribution demonstrated the value of lived experience in supporting learning and connection. It also reflected a central ambition of BRIO: to create pathways through which women can develop as peer educators and leaders, using their experience to support others while strengthening their own recovery.

BRIO participants also contributed to community events, health-promotion activities, research and advocacy initiatives. This included contributing to discussions on the development of the Probation Service's strategy for women and working alongside educational and community organisations to raise awareness of the challenges facing women affected by addiction, disadvantage and justice involvement. These opportunities helped ensure that women's experiences and perspectives informed conversations about the services and policies that affect their lives.

Advocating for community-based alternatives

Throughout 2025, SAOL continued to call for women who commit non-violent offences to receive non-custodial sentences, supported by properly resourced, gender-responsive community services. Our position is that accountability and rehabilitation should be pursued in ways that support recovery, stability, family relationships and meaningful participation in community life.

This advocacy builds on BRIO women's longstanding contribution to discussions about alternatives to custody, the use of short prison sentences and the need for investment in early intervention and social supports. Women's lived experience must remain central to the development of a more effective and humane justice response.

For SAOL, advocating for alternatives to imprisonment goes hand in hand with supporting women who are in prison and those returning to their communities. Both commitments reflect the same principle: women should be treated with dignity and have access to realistic opportunities for recovery and change.

Acknowledgements

We sincerely thank the Probation Service and its staff for their patience, support and continued partnership throughout 2025. Their willingness to work with us through challenges and complexities, while maintaining a shared commitment to women's progress, is deeply appreciated.

We also acknowledge the continued commitment of our fellow services working alongside justice-involved people. Their collaboration, advocacy and practical support help sustain the connections on which effective community-based responses depend.

Our thanks extend to the Irish Prison Service and its staff, particularly those in the Dóchas Centre, for their care for and commitment to the people in their custody, and for supporting opportunities for connection, learning and preparation for life beyond prison.

Above all, we thank the women of BRIO for their participation, honesty, courage and care for one another. Their contributions as learners, peers, educators and advocates remained at the heart of the programme in 2025.

Community Employment Programme

Community Employment has been central to SAOL since its beginnings, providing a practical foundation for women's participation, learning and recovery. SAOL's Community Employment programme brings accredited learning together with individual support in a women-centred environment. Its educational provision includes QQI courses at Levels 3, 4 and 5, with modules in areas such as mathematics, art, personal development and addiction studies. Women are also supported to explore courses through local colleges and online learning, creating pathways towards further education, training and employment.

SAOL CE has supported 18 places but in late 2025 this increased to 21 places – 4 places for community support workers and 17 places for women working on their recovery. These places have been continually filled throughout 2025.

The emphasis is on making learning accessible and relevant to women's interests and goals. Returning to education can be an important step in its own right, alongside the opportunity to gain qualifications. The programme recognises that progression involves developing confidence and identifying possibilities, as well as completing coursework.

A Caring Environment for Recovery

SAOL describes its CE approach through three connected ideas: Certified Education, a Caring Environment and Can-Do Experiences. Together, these express a commitment to combining learning with kindness, respect, encouragement and practical support.

Women may participate while managing substance use, mental health difficulties, family responsibilities, housing insecurity or justice involvement. The programme's approach recognises these circumstances rather than treating them as separate from learning. Structure is balanced with flexibility, and women are supported to work towards goals that reflect their own recovery journeys. These may include stabilising substance use, becoming drug-free, strengthening parenting, returning to education or building greater stability in everyday life.

Confidence, Contribution and Connection

Creative work, peer participation and opportunities to contribute beyond the classroom are important features of SAOL's approach. Singing, performance, public speaking and peer work offer different ways for women to explore their abilities and participate in collective activities. They recognise participants not only as learners, but as people with knowledge, creativity and skills to share.

Within this approach, **progression** is not understood as a single destination. Employment and further education remain important possibilities, while greater confidence, stronger engagement and a more stable daily routine are also meaningful steps towards women's chosen goals.

Acknowledgements

We thank the women participating in Community Employment for the commitment, experience and energy they bring to SAOL. We also acknowledge the staff, tutors and educational partners who support their learning and development.

Our sincere thanks go to the Department of Social Protection for supporting the Community Employment programme and sustaining this important pathway into education, participation and recovery. We are particularly grateful for the work of our DSP CWO without whom SAOL could not provide the quality of service we provide; we are thankful to the tutors who give so much of themselves in the work they do with us; and we thank Jackie, our CE Supervisor for daily love and attention given to our CE participants.



DAVINA

In 2025, DAVINA continued to provide specialist, trauma-informed support to women affected by domestic, sexual and gender-based violence (DSGBV), with a particular focus on the intersection between violence, substance use and recovery. This work reflected SAOL's wider commitment to responding to the interconnected realities of women's lives, rather than addressing addiction, violence, trauma and inequality as separate concerns.

Through direct support, peer leadership, professional education and advocacy, DAVINA worked to create opportunities for women to access safety, be heard and receive support that recognised their circumstances.

Supporting Women in the Community and in Prison

DAVINA supported 194 women during the year through individual key-working, group education and support, outreach, advocacy and practical assistance.

The programme delivered 87 group meetings, reaching 123 women, including 88 women in prison. These groups provided opportunities to explore experiences, build understanding and connect with support.

Alongside group provision, 71 women received one-to-one support through 411 individual meetings and 418 brief interventions. The team also provided 41 accompaniments, supporting women to attend courts, engage with Gardaí, access healthcare and participate in case conferences. This practical work remained an important part of helping women navigate services and processes that could be difficult or intimidating.

Lived Experience at the Heart of the Programme

Women with lived experience continued to play an important role in shaping and delivering DAVINA. Five Experts via Experience (EVEs) volunteered their time during 2025, contributing to 18 group meetings and engaging with charities, statutory organisations and academic institutions.

Peer representatives co-facilitated training and presentations alongside organisations including Women's Aid, the HSE, Chrysalis, MOVE and COPE. They contributed to advocacy discussions with Rethink Ireland and Cuan and participated in a podcast with the Dundalk Institute of Technology River Project.

Their involvement brought lived experience directly into professional learning and policy discussions. It also reflected DAVINA's commitment to recognising women not only as recipients of support, but as educators, advocates and contributors to change.

Education and Professional Development

During 2025, DAVINA delivered workshops, lectures and training days attended by 133 professionals, 104 students and 16 community members.

Training reached a wide range of organisations, including Women's Aid, HSE services, MOVE, Deonach, COPE Galway, Drogheda Women's and Children's Refuge, and

addiction and community organisations. Educational presentations were also delivered to students at Trinity College Dublin and Donaghmede College of Further Education.

DAVINA strengthened its professional training model during the year, developing its original one-day programme into a two-day approach with distinct learning objectives. New promotional materials and a post-training evaluation survey were introduced, alongside an online Community of Practice for professionals who had completed the first day of training. These developments created opportunities to extend learning beyond individual training events and support continued professional exchange.

Outreach and Collaboration

Outreach remained central to connecting with women in different settings. Activities included workshops with women and staff in Tus Nua, an IPAS trafficking centre and Rendu Apartments, alongside group programmes in the Dóchas Centre and at NDTCB Trinity Court.

Information stands at Trinity Court and the Mater Hospital helped raise awareness of the programme. A coffee morning at SAOL also brought local service providers together to share information and explore opportunities for collaboration.

DAVINA joined the Haven Horizons Community of Practice and the North East Inner City Domestic, Sexual and Gender-Based Violence Working Group. Representatives participated in the Zero Tolerance Campaign and contributed to research examining how survivor engagement structures could be improved.

Advocacy and Wider Engagement

A highlight of the year was DAVINA's conference, featuring contributions from Kathleen Lynch, Hannah Lucey, Saoirse Brady and Lucy Baldwin. The event formed part of the programme's wider work to create space for discussion and learning about the issues affecting women.

DAVINA also contributed to an Irish Examiner opinion article in collaboration with Alcohol Action Ireland and MOVE, participated in podcasts, and delivered presentations to national and European audiences. These included an online event for members and contacts of the European Drugs Agency exploring the intersection between substance use and domestic, sexual and gender-based violence.

Strengthening the Programme

During 2025, DAVINA's staffing complement grew from one full-time and one part-time staff member to one full-time and four part-time staff members. This expansion strengthened the programme's capacity to sustain its direct work with women while developing its education, outreach and collaborative activities.

Across these different areas, DAVINA maintained a consistent focus: ensuring that women affected by both violence and substance use were recognised, listened to and supported, and that their experiences informed the responses of services.

Acknowledgements

We thank the women who engaged with DAVINA during 2025 for the trust they placed in the programme. We particularly acknowledge our Experts via Experience for their generosity, insight and commitment, and thank our staff and partner organisations for their contribution throughout the year.

Finally, we extend our sincere thanks to Cuan for funding DAVINA. This support sustains the programme's specialist work with women and enables its continued contribution to education, collaboration and advocacy at the intersection of substance use and domestic, sexual and gender-based violence.



SAOL's original logo

Staff Qualifications

Programme	Number of Staff	Highest Qualifications
Senior Management	2	2 x Masters
BRIO	3	2 x Masters 1x Post Grad Diploma
Children's Centre	3	3 x Level 8
DAVINA	5	2 x Masters 3 x Degree
Seeking Safety	2	1 x Masters 1 x Peer Role (Level 6)
UChoose	3	2 x Masters 1 x Level 8
Community Employment	2	1 x Accounting qualifications Level 7

SAOL Beag Children’s Centre

SAOL Beag Children's Centre continued to provide high-quality, child-centred early years education and family support in Dublin's North Inner City throughout 2025. As the centre prepares to enter its 30th year in 2026, it remains a key part of SAOL's commitment to women, children and families. It gives children a safe, nurturing and stimulating start, and supports parents as they care for their children while dealing with the pressures of everyday life.

Early years education

During the year, SAOL Beag supported 16 children aged between one and three through full-time early years education. Children took part in a wide range of educational, cultural and seasonal activities that promoted inclusion, identity, creativity and early learning. These experiences helped children build confidence, develop new skills and make connections with one another. They also gave staff ways to strengthen their relationships with children and families.

Our approach centres on each child's individual needs, interests and stage of development. We recognise that the early years are the foundation for children's wellbeing, learning and sense of belonging.

Our team

A team of four staff members ran the service day to day, providing consistent and caring support to children and families. In 2025, we welcomed a new early years educator to the team. SAOL Beag also supported two third-level student placements, which contributes to the development of the early years workforce and shares the knowledge and values that underpin our work.

Supporting families

Family engagement remained a central priority throughout 2025. Staff held individual parent meetings covering children's development, feeding routines, separation anxiety and wellbeing. These meetings gave parents space to share concerns, celebrate progress and work in partnership with staff in their children's best interests.

Our full-time social worker plays a vital role in this work. In 2025, she supported 25 families of many different sizes and circumstances. She offered guidance, advocacy and practical help, and linked families with other services in the community. Her work means that support reaches beyond the child to the wider family, recognising that children do best when their parents and caregivers are supported too. More than 30 children were directly and indirectly supported through this work.

Parent and Baby Group

The weekly Parent and Baby Group continued throughout 2025, run in collaboration with the HSE Beag Team. This partnership is of huge benefit to the project. It brings specialist knowledge and expertise into the centre and gives parents a welcoming space to connect with one another, build confidence in their parenting and get support in the early stages of their child's life. The group also helps families build their own internal relationships while also becoming more comfortable with different professionals, relationships that may continue throughout their children’s lives.

Acknowledgements

We sincerely thank Pobal, the Department of Children and the Health Service Executive (HSE) for their continued support of SAOL Beag. Their commitment has made it possible to sustain this vital service for nearly three decades. As SAOL Beag enters its 30th year in 2026, we are grateful for their ongoing partnership.

We also thank the HSE Beag Team for their collaboration on the Parent and Baby Group, our students for their enthusiasm and contribution, and our dedicated staff team for their care, professionalism and commitment to every child and family.

Above all, we thank the children and families of SAOL Beag for their trust, warmth and participation. They remain at the heart of everything we do.



UChoose: Creativity, Wellbeing and Participation

During 2025, UChoose continued to provide a welcoming, supportive and creative environment in which women could engage in recovery, develop their interests and strengthen their connections with others. A total of 73 individual women participated during the year, accessing a varied programme of therapeutic, educational, creative and health-focused activities.

The programme offered different pathways into participation, recognising that women bring their own interests, strengths and circumstances to recovery. Alongside opportunities to explore difficult experiences, UChoose made space for enjoyment, curiosity, creativity and shared achievement.

Art, Expression and Collaboration

The weekly Open Art Group supported 21 women across 48 sessions, providing a regular space for creative exploration and connection. A further five women accessed individual art therapy, offering a more personalised setting for therapeutic engagement through art.

Women also participated in collaborative arts initiatives, including ‘Are Ya Coming Out to Play’, delivered in partnership with Fire Station Artists’ Studios, and ‘Lady of the Rock’, which explored recovery, healing and a holistic approach to wellbeing as an Issues Based Art Project; this work was exhibited in the Froebel Education Building in Maynooth University and we are particularly grateful to Laura Thornton and the whole team there for welcoming us and sharing our work with the students and staff of Maynooth University. These projects extended the programme’s creative work beyond weekly sessions and offered opportunities to develop ideas collectively.

Across these activities, the emphasis was on making space for women’s expression rather than requiring a particular level of artistic skill. Art offered another way to participate, communicate and explore identity beyond the challenges that might otherwise dominate women’s engagement with services.

Creative Writing, Drama and Performance

Nineteen women participated in 46 creative writing and drama sessions during 2025. This work included workshops with Fighting Words and a collaboration with the Gate Theatre, bringing opportunities to develop writing, storytelling and performance skills.

A particular highlight was the development and performance of Crazy Carriage at the Seán O’Casey Theatre. The production brought women’s creative work to a public stage and provided opportunities to contribute as writers and performers within a shared artistic project.

The process of developing material, rehearsing and working towards a performance created space for collaboration, self-expression and confidence-building. It also recognised women as cultural contributors whose ideas and stories deserve an audience.

Physical Health and Everyday Wellbeing

Physical health and wellbeing remained important elements of UChoose. Seventeen women participated in the Couch to 5K initiative, undertaking 20 weeks of walking and jogging in preparation for the September Recovery Walk. The initiative provided a shared goal and a regular opportunity to incorporate movement into the week.

A further 17 women engaged in health and wellbeing groups exploring physical health, mental health, nutrition and practical self-care. These sessions complemented the programme's creative and therapeutic activities, reflecting an approach to recovery that made room for both emotional wellbeing and everyday physical needs.

Adventure Friday and Community Participation

Adventure Friday supported 15 women across 48 group sessions. Museum visits, sea swimming and participation in local events offered opportunities for new experiences, social connection and engagement with the wider community.

This strand of UChoose recognised the importance of having places to go, people to spend time with and activities to look forward to. It brought an emphasis on shared experience and discovery, alongside the more structured learning available within the programme.

Women also participated in awareness and community initiatives throughout the year, including International Women's Day, Mental Health Awareness Month, Recovery Month, Overdose Awareness Day, World AIDS Day and the 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence. These occasions connected programme activities with wider conversations about women's rights, health, recovery, remembrance and safety.

Participation and Responsive Group Work

UChoose's combination of creative, therapeutic, health-focused and community activities reflected SAOL's broader commitment to empowerment and participation. SAOL's service framework emphasises creating opportunities for women to articulate their experiences and concerns, with their feedback informing service development. This provides an important foundation for group work that remains responsive to the people taking part.

Within UChoose, the range of activities offered different ways to become involved: through conversation, making art, writing, movement, performance or shared outings. This variety was an important feature of the programme, rather than an expectation that every woman would engage in the same way.

Staff Development and Acknowledgements

Staff continued to develop their practice through training including Safer Together YPAR Trauma Responsive Train the Trainer and DRIVE. This learning supported the programme's commitment to trauma-informed and responsive work.

We thank the women who participated in UChoose during 2025 for their creativity, engagement and contributions to group life. We also acknowledge the commitment of

staff and the generosity of our creative and community partners, particularly Fire Station Artists' Studios, Fighting Words, the Gate Theatre and the Seán O'Casey Theatre.

We are very grateful to the North Inner City Drug and Alcohol Task Force and the HSE for funding this programme.

Together, these contributions sustained a programme in which recovery could include not only addressing difficulties, but also discovering interests, developing abilities, building relationships and making room for enjoyment.

Attendance and Service Delivery for Meals (including Weekend Service)

The service reports average weekend attendance of **14 people**, comprising **10 adults and 4 children**. Daily meal provision totals **28 meals**, consisting of **16 breakfasts and 12 lunches** along with a further 11 breakfasts and 11 lunches for children in SAOL Beag.

Summary Table

Measure	Reported Level
Average total attendance	14 people per weekend
Average adult attendance	10 adults per weekend
Average child attendance	4 children per weekend
Breakfast provision	27 breakfasts per day
Lunch provision	23 lunches per day
Combined meal provision	28 meals per day

Seeking Safety Ireland

In 2025 the Seeking Safety Programme was delivered by SAOL as part of the national Seeking Safety Ireland initiative. This evidence-based, trauma-informed and recovery-oriented programme supports women affected by trauma, addiction and co-occurring mental health difficulties, including women who have experienced domestic and gender-based violence.

During the year, 36 women engaged with the programme across two groups, with 20 sessions delivered. The programme provided a structured and supportive setting in which participants could explore the relationship between trauma and substance use while developing practical skills to support their safety, wellbeing and recovery.

Building Safety and Supporting Recovery

Through a psychoeducational approach, sessions focused on establishing safety in everyday life, managing difficult emotions, strengthening personal boundaries and developing healthier relationships. The emphasis remained on women's present-day needs and the steps they could take towards greater stability.

An important feature of Seeking Safety is that it does not require participants to revisit traumatic experiences in detail. Instead, it offers opportunities to develop understanding and coping skills while preparing for further stages of recovery. This approach was consistent with SAOL's commitment to supporting women at different points in their recovery journeys, with respect for their individual circumstances, choices and pace of engagement.

Partnership and Acknowledgements

Participation in Seeking Safety Ireland connected SAOL's delivery with a wider collaborative commitment to women affected by trauma, substance use and mental health difficulties. We congratulate our partner agencies - Ballymun Star, Roscommon Women's Network, Ruhama, Ballyfermot Star, Sophia Housing and Red Door, Drogheda - on their continued excellent and inspirational work. Their dedication to women and their contribution to the initiative are deeply valued.

We also acknowledge the women who participated in SAOL's groups during 2025, thanking them for the trust, engagement and perspectives they brought to the programme.

Finally, we extend our sincere thanks to the HSE's Dual Diagnosis programme for funding this work and supporting the continued delivery of Seeking Safety within SAOL.

Seeking Safety Ireland

Legal and Organisational Information

Registered Name:	The SAOL Project CLG
Public Name:	The SAOL Project
Legal Structure:	Registered Irish Charity legally incorporated as a Company Limited by Guarantee
CRO Number:	240461
Registered Charity Number:	20065805
Revenue Charity Ref:	20065805
Registered Office	58 Amiens St Dublin 1 D01 K253
Principal Service Address:	As above
Governing Document	Articles of Association

Chairperson:	Caitriona Crowe
Secretary:	Seanie Lambe
Treasurer:	Nessan Vaughan
Director:	Fergus Cronin
Director:	Hannah Lucey
Director:	Phillip Evans
CEO:	Gary Broderick

Auditors:	Itas Accounting 6 Marino Mart, Fairview, Dublin 3
Accountants:	Howlin O' Rourke
Bank:	Bank of Ireland
Solicitors:	Ferrys Solicitors

Working Beyond Our Doors

Collaboration, Creativity and Shared Learning

Partnerships extend what SAOL can offer and create opportunities for women's knowledge, creativity and experience to influence others. Our collaborations bring together community organisations, artists, educators, researchers and statutory services, connecting direct support with wider learning and change.

Arts and Creative Partnerships

SAOL's longstanding relationship with the Abbey Theatre forms part of our commitment to cultural participation. Alongside this, collaboration with the Gate Theatre and Fighting Words supported creative writing and drama during 2025, contributing to the development and performance of *Crazy Carriage* at the Seán O'Casey Theatre. Work with Fire Station Artists' Studios on *Are Ya Coming Out to Play* provided further opportunities for shared artistic exploration.

We also formally began developing our Issues-Based Arts Education approach with Professor John Johnston through our relationship with ArtEZ and UCAL. This collaboration brings a clearer narrative and theoretical framework to creative recovery work, connecting personal expression with critical reflection on poverty, inequality and belonging. It is an area we look forward to developing further in 2026 and beyond.

Education, Research and Student Placements

Our relationship with Maynooth University's Froebel Department of Primary and Early Childhood Education continued to support reciprocal learning between SAOL women and student teachers. Through dialogue, creativity and reflection, women contributed perspectives that challenged assumptions and enriched students' understanding of education and community life. The partnership also included Alternative Service Placements within SAOL.maynoothuniversity+1

Relationships with Trinity College Dublin, University College Dublin and Maynooth University supported our wider engagement with research and professional education. Student placements across social work, social care, youth and community work, and early years education created opportunities to connect academic learning with community-based practice. SAOL Beag supported two third-level placements during the year.

Working Together for Safety and Recovery

Collaboration also remained central to programme delivery. The HSE Beag Team brought valued expertise to the Mother and Baby Group, while Seeking Safety Ireland connected SAOL with Ballymun STAR, Ballyfermot STAR, Roscommon Women's Network, Ruhama, Sophia Housing and Red Door, Drogheda.

Through BRIO, we continued working alongside the Probation Service, Irish Prison Service and fellow community services. DAVINA's relationships with organisations including Women's Aid, HSE services, Chrysalis, MOVE, COPE and refuge providers supported training, outreach and discussion about the intersection of violence and substance use.

Across these relationships, our emphasis remained on **reciprocity**: women were not simply accessing opportunities, but contributing as artists, peer educators and people whose knowledge could strengthen the practice of others. We sincerely thank our partners, placement students and participating women for the generosity, curiosity and commitment they brought to this shared work.



The SAOL Sisters at the Fire Station, working on the exhibition 'Are ye coming out to play?'

Thank You to Our Funders and Supporters

SAOL's work is sustained by funders and supporters who recognise the importance of women-centred, community-based responses to addiction, poverty and inequality. Their investment helps us provide practical assistance, education, recovery support and opportunities for women and families to build safer, more connected lives.

We extend our sincere thanks to the Health Service Executive, the North Inner-City Drug and Alcohol task Force, the Probation Service, Cuan, the Department of Social Protection, Pobal and the Department of Children for their support throughout 2025. We also acknowledge the North East Inner City Initiative for its continued support of SAOL's work within our community. We are also grateful to the individuals who work in each of these agencies, who put the human faces on the support we are given and whose genuine interest and care for the work we do does not go unnoticed.

Our particular thanks go to the HSE's Dual Diagnosis programme for supporting Seeking Safety, and to the Children's Rights Alliance for funding Christmas food vouchers. This additional assistance helped families meet immediate needs while preserving their choice and dignity at a time of financial pressure.

We are equally grateful to the trusts, grant-making bodies, businesses, individual donors and friends of SAOL whose contributions complemented our core funding. Financial donations, gifts in kind, fundraising and practical help all contributed to the life of the project.

We value not only the resources provided, but the **partnership** behind them: the willingness to listen, understand the complexity of women's lives and support work whose progress cannot always be captured in a single figure.

To everyone who invested in SAOL during 2025, thank you. Your support helped sustain a place where women and families could find welcome, practical care and opportunities for change.

Financial Summary

SAOL presents a review and extract from the audited financial statements of the company for the financial year ended 31 December 2025. The Statement of Financial Activities is set out below and the full audited accounts can be found on our website and with the Charities Regulator. We are constantly seeking new opportunities and funding lines to maintain and grow our service offerings to meet participant needs. SAOL is financed by a mix of statutory (majority) and voluntary funding through small grants and fundraising donations. SAOL and all those we support would like to thank all our funders and those who donated to our Project – we are truly grateful.

	Unrestricted Funds 2025 €	Restricted Funds 2025 €	Total Funds 2025 €	Unrestricted Funds 2024 €	Restricted Funds 2024 €	Total Funds 2024 €
Income						
Charitable activities - Grants from governments and other co-funders	-	1,407,257	1,407,257	-	1,117,286	1,117,286
Other income	29,935	-	29, 935	68,152	-	68,152
Total Income	**29,935**	**1,407,257**	**1,437,192**	**68,152**	**1,117,286**	**1,185,438**
Expenditure						
Charitable activities	17,638	1,434,855	1,452,538	-	1,119,266	1,119,266
Other expenditure	16,265	-	16,265	37,186	-	37,166
Total Expenditure	**33,948**	**1,434,855**	**1,468,803**	**37,186**	**1,119,266**	**1,156,452**
Net income/ (expenditure)	**(4,013)**	**(27,598)**	**(31,611)**	**30,966**	**(1,980)**	**28,986**
Transfer between funds	**(47,696)**	**47,696**	-	-	-	-
Net movement in funds for the financial year	**(51,709)**	**20,098**	**(31,611)**	30,966	(1980)	28,986
Reconciliation of funds						
Total funds beginning of the year	**179,960**	**162,984**	**342,944**	148,994	164,964	313,958
Total funds at the end of the year	**128,251**	**183,082**	**311,333**	179,960	162,984	342,944

SAOL Project CLG:

58 Amiens Street, Dublin 1 D01K253

00353 1 8553391

admin@saolproject.ie




SAOL
project