# Former Met officer highlights rising femicide rates and barriers to support for women in Northern Ireland



A former Metropolitan Police officer has highlighted the alarming prevalence of violence against women and girls in Northern Ireland while sharing her efforts to support victims through a UK-wide initiative. Victoria Mason, who transitioned to a volunteer role with the organisation Own My Life, is dedicated to helping women escape abusive relationships.

Mason, who joined the Metropolitan Police later in life, has a background in domestic violence advocacy. She emphasised that domestic abuse is a pervasive issue that affects communities, including those within law enforcement. “Officers are drawn from the community after all, and statistically around one in three women will experience domestic abuse at some point in their lives,” she remarked, citing the often under-recognised presence of such experiences among police personnel.

After leaving her role to care for her family, Mason became involved with Own My Life, where she acts as a relationship development lead and facilitator. The organisation offers a 12-week course designed to assist women in recognising and breaking free from harmful relationship patterns. Since its inception in 2019, approximately 15,000 women across the UK and Ireland have participated in the programme.

The initiative is particularly significant in Northern Ireland, which has recorded one of the highest rates of femicide in Europe, with 25 women killed since 2020. Reflecting on the heart-wrenching losses, including those of victims Hollie Thomson and Natalie McNally, Mason expressed concern about barriers that prevent women from accessing available support services. “My impression is that there are sometimes barriers to women accessing support. There is a police force and support services available, but their freedom to access them is sometimes limited,” she noted.

Thomson, a mother from west Belfast, was found deceased in September 2022, highlighting the dire need for effective support systems. The families of victims like Thomson and McNally, the latter of whom was murdered while pregnant in her home, have been vocal in raising awareness about domestic violence, demonstrating a commitment to preventing further tragedies.

Mason underscored the role of isolation in enabling abusive relationships, stating, “There is always help, and we want to be part of that effort to make sure nobody feels cut off within their community.” The Own My Life course aims to provide clarity for women caught in cycles of abuse, helping them recognise harmful behaviours and make informed decisions for their future. “Each woman is an expert in their own life... the course gives women hope and clarity about where they want to go as they move forward, and that could save their life,” she articulated.

Moreover, Mason critiqued the tendency to blame victims for returning to abusive partners, shifting the focus to the abuser's responsibility. “The real question should be ‘why doesn’t he stop?’” she asserted, challenging societal attitudes towards domestic abuse.

With hopes of expanding the programme's reach, Mason encouraged local organisations, employers, and faith communities to engage in this vital work. As a passionate volunteer, she remains committed to ensuring that no woman in Northern Ireland faces the same tragic fate as Thomson and others.

For those experiencing abuse or who have concerns about someone who might be, a 24-hour Domestic and Sexual Abuse helpline is available at 0808 802 1414, alongside police services which can be reached at 101 or 999 in emergencies.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

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