

Children at centre of pilot domestic violence service:

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THE FIRST dedicated service for child victims of domestic violence in Ireland has been launched in Co Mayo.

The Mayo Children's Initiative (MCI) in Castlebar is funded exclusively by Atlantic Philanthropies, the foundation set up by Irish-American billionaire Chuck Feeney. Atlantic Philanthropies has backed several projects aimed at helping children from disadvantaged backgrounds. This service is aimed at providing a child-centred approach to domestic violence, recognising that support services are often targeted at women who are the victims of domestic abuse and not children.

The initiative has already been working in Erris, north Mayo, where it is delivering the Protective Behaviours Programme, which is a practical approach to personal safety and wellbeing.

Many children who live in violent households do not regard it as abnormal as they know no better, and the aim of the Protective Behaviours Programme is to make children aware of the reality of domestic violence.

Helen Mortimer, manager of MCI, said that when children talk about the anxiety, fear and dread they endure when violence is part of their lives, it belies any notion that it goes unnoticed or that mothers can protect their children from its impact. "If we are to provide children with the strategies to keep themselves safe, or to help them cope with the violence they are living with, we must first listen to them," she said.

It is hoped that MCI, which will be a referral service, will be rolled out across the State if the pilot programme proves successful.

Health briefing: The Irish Times: