



From Athlone to Australia, Ballyhaunis to Brighton and Gorey to Greece, NVR practitioners from across Ireland and beyond, joined the inaugural NVR Ireland Webinar on November 25th 2020. With more than 550 people registered and six presentations with Q & A, the event was opened by Rosemary Fox, Senior Probation Officer, Irish Probation Service and member of NVR Ireland Steering Committee.

Rosemary welcomed everyone to the Webinar which she described as an important milestone in the work of NVR Ireland with the goal of the Webinar to facilitate increased awareness of Child to Parent Violence and Abuse and of Non Violent Resistance (NVR) as a response. It was hoped, she noted, that the event would lead to discussions with managers and colleagues on how to address this emerging concern in child and family work.

***Stop, Start, Stop with Non Violent Resistance* - Dr Declan Coogan, Lecturer on MA in Social Work Programme, School of Political Science and Sociology at NUI Galway and Chair of NVR Ireland Steering Committee**

The first presentation came from Dr Declan Coogan. He noted that Covid has led to huge changes in our lives and has impacted on how we find support. For those who share their homes, life has changed significantly and many relationships are increasingly stressed – with some people living with constant fear and worry. For some parents, there is no respite. Dr Coogan reminded us that the Webinar was taking place on International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women – a good day to highlight that it is mostly women who experience CPVA –although fathers too can experience violence and abuse from their children.

Explaining that CPVA exists in many different families – lone parent, two parent, affluent, disadvantaged – Dr Coogan also advised that CPVA is not a problem that is ‘out there’ but that practitioners may also be experiencing CPVA – just as they might be experiencing other forms of family violence. CPVA can bring hopelessness and fear and he suggested that as practitioners, we can also feel hopeless when we hear about this type of violence and abuse. But, there are many things we can

do. We can start by asking parents to think about who they can ask for support. We can stop giving voice to ideas that 'parents are bad' or that 'children can't help themselves'. Of course we need assessments and a diagnosis can at times be helpful but Dr Coogan reminded us that we need to be clear – there is never an excuse for violence. Understanding abusive behaviour does not mean excusing it. We can make it clear that there are ways to end violence and NVR is one of those.

At times, he advised, parents might need support beyond our expertise. We do not have to choose between NVR and such support however– both can be beneficial. We can start to build support networks for parents and we can stop giving space to violence from children.

Parentline and their NVR Service – Aileen Hickey, CEO Parentline

Aileen Hickey, former journalist, Barrister and CEO of Parentline suggested “*Never has so much been asked of parents*”. Echoing Dr Coogan’s comments on the impact of Covid 19 on families, Aileen noted how families have been required to spend more time together and this has exacerbated the stressors of family life. These stressors which are presenting to Parentline – a nationwide, confidential and non-judgemental service for parents - include child and adolescent anxiety, school refusal, anger and sexuality – to name just a few. Parents have struggled to impose Covid restrictions, to manage the demands of home-schooling and to maintain routines in the home. Recent times have been very challenging for parents, she noted, but advised that the biggest increase in parental concerns related to their child’s anger, aggression and damage to property. In fact, these concerns represent 40% of all calls to Parentline and the service is experiencing a 500% increase in the demand for NVR. While in September 2019, one NVR programme was being delivered by Parentline, by September 2020, 37 programmes were in progress.

Aileen noted that 90% of parents contacting the service are mothers and that 60% of the cases of CPVA relate to adolescent boys. Parents of adult children (18-19 years) make up 10% of NVR cases while the programme is also being delivered to parents of young children.

Aileen observed that parents report a good success rate with NVR which has been delivered to hundreds of families since 2013. Feedback suggests that relationships have improved, parents feel less alone and couples are more aligned in their parenting. This compares to when they first contact Parentline – volunteers report that parents feel ashamed and isolated and that the child has become lost and is seen just as the behaviour they exhibit. Parents are worn out and CPVA “*dominates the fibre of their family unit*”.

Aileen reported that demand for NVR has never been so high and the service is currently operating a waiting list. With this in mind, Parentline is keen to support the drive to end Child to Parent Violence and Abuse.

Local Practitioner Networks – Grace Bermingham, Family Support Coordinator, Tusla, Wicklow

Grace shared her experience of hosting an NVR Practitioners Network – an important source of support for practitioners. While agencies will have different programmes, Grace reported that the networks have supported a *“shared language across services”*. Networks also help to maximise resources by providing an opportunity for services to pool resources and to motivate practitioners. Parents have attended networks with a view to giving feedback on their experiences and report that they notice when agencies work together using the NVR model. An unintended but welcome consequence of NVR networks has been improved relationships between services. Networks also provide opportunities to link more experienced practitioners to those new to NVR – an important source of support. Just as parents are encouraged to build support networks, practitioners are also encouraged to do so.

Grace reported that perhaps 60-70% of parents attending for NVR have an autistic child. Parents are also seeking on-going support on completion of the group programme. This has led to questions on how best to support parents. Consideration is being given to drop-in clinics in 2021 to support parents to maintain the changes that they have made as part of their NVR work.

A Parent’s Experience with NVR - Lore

NVR Ireland was delighted to welcome Lore who generously agreed to give a parent’s perspective on child to parent violence. Lore, who self-describes as *“a queer parent of two secondary school age children”*, told the participants that she was eventually referred to NVR after experiencing child to parent violence and abuse for many years. She recalled how she was initially very resistant to the programme but over time, she could see the efficacy of NVR in her own personal situation. Since then, Lore has become a vocal supporter of the model and uses the approach in all of her relationships - not just those with her children.

Her presentation was an emotional and heartfelt description of her NVR experience. Lore spoke as though speaking directly to a parent who is experiencing violence.

“I have been where you are

In my own flavour of hell....”

Lore told the participants of the difficulties of experiencing such violence and reflected honestly on her own response to her child's behaviour. She noted the difficulties she had watching one child behaving violently to a younger sibling and described the damage she experienced to herself and her property. Despite her initial resistance to NVR, Lore told participants that her family is now *"living in relative, age-appropriate harmony with everyone aware of the role that they play in their small family"*.

The impact of Lore's words on participants was clear – there is nothing like hearing the direct experience of a parent to remind us how painful and challenging child to parent violence is for families. Her honesty and willingness to give time and voice to those experiences was warmly acknowledged by those in attendance.

Getting an NVR Intervention Up and Running – Niamh Murphy and Lorraine Shortt, Kildare Youth Services

Niamh Murphy, Youth Justice Team Leader and Lorraine Shortt, Youth Counsellor (MIACP) shared their experience of delivering NVR groups in Kildare Youth Services. They cautioned that parents might name CPVA differently and think that it refers only to physical violence. It is important, they advised, when screening parents for groups to think about coercion and manipulation when listening to parents talking about their experiences.

Niamh and Lorraine gave a helpful account of the process of engaging parents in an NVR group. They noted that parents can really struggle to use a support network and that can be a stumbling block. As this is such an important part of NVR, parents are encouraged to identify at least one person to support them in using an NVR approach.

Mindfulness and NVR

Niall Nolan, Senior Social Work Practitioner and John Peelo, Project Leader, NYP1, Social Worker and Marte Meo Therapist

Both Niall and John are NVR practitioners and Mindfulness teachers and presented Mindfulness as a useful resource for parents engaged in NVR work.

Niall opened the final presentation and suggested that Mindfulness is essentially a 'tool' that creates a space for parents to *respond* rather than to *react* – a key aim of NVR. Mindfulness encourages us to focus on the present moment and to approach situations without judgement and with patience, trust and kindness to ourselves. Practising Mindfulness helps parents to face what is unpleasant rather than to avoid it. This position can take us out of anger and rage – supporting people to slow down and calm racing thoughts. In supporting parents to de-escalate difficult situations with their child, Mindfulness can be particularly helpful. To illustrate this, Niall guided those in attendance through a brief Mindfulness practice.

John reported on his experiences of using Mindfulness in NVR work and advised that he had received a very good response from parents. Self-compassion is a cornerstone of Mindfulness and often absent for parents who are struggling. As NVR encourages parents to be present for their child, Mindfulness supports parents to be present for themselves. John engages parents in a five-minute Mindfulness practice before beginning NVR and reported that Mindfulness compliments NVR very well.

Throughout the presentations, participants had the opportunity to ask questions of the presenters. The level of interest was evident and it was clear that there is a growing base of NVR practitioners – and indeed parents using this model – across Ireland. As the Webinar came to an end, Dr Coogan thanked the presenters and those who had attended, noting that the event – the first NVR Webinar in Ireland was a resounding success.

Submitted by: Tara Kelly, Project Leader of Springboard Family Support Project in Loughlinstown and Member of NVR Steering Committee