

'Though my child will have to do without Christmas presents this year, at least the children of the friend I no longer have to borrow money from will have gifts. Thank you very, very much.'

**27 year old single mother**



your decision - our support

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ASN is a volunteer-run organisation that provides accommodation and financial assistance to women forced to travel from the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland and pay privately for abortions in England. Unless specified for operational costs, all donations go directly towards the cost of women's abortions. While other organisations campaign for law reform, ASN is the only group on record providing women travelling for abortions with the thing they need the most: money. We are a company limited by guarantee (Company No. 07017607) and are working to obtain charitable status.



## **Abortion Support Network Annual Report 2009 - 2010**

# Introduction

Welcome to Abortion Support Network's first Annual Report. It's been a busy first year!

Abortion Support Network (ASN) is an entirely volunteer-run organisation that was established in October 2009 to provide accommodation and financial assistance to women forced to travel from the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland in order to have a safe and legal abortion. Our volunteer hosts in London provide women with accommodation and meals in their homes, and travel with them to and from clinics. Through fundraising and donations from our supporters we provide grants towards the costs of women's abortions, whether they are travelling to London or elsewhere in England.

In this report we tell you a little more about our work, and set out the achievements of our first year and our plans for the future.

## Why we exist

Every year more than 5,000 women travel to England from the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland in order to access abortions (Department of Health, 2009). In both Northern Ireland – despite being part of the UK – and the Republic of Ireland, abortion is illegal except under extremely limited circumstances. Even if women meet these strict criteria, it is virtually impossible for them to access a safe and legal abortion in their own country.

It is legal for women to travel abroad for an abortion, but as non-residents of England they are required to pay privately for their abortion procedure. Even with the discounted prices offered by some abortion providers to women travelling from other countries, women must pay between £350 and £1350 for the procedure alone, depending on the stage of pregnancy. With the additional costs of accommodation, last minute plane tickets, child care and time off work, women can end up paying as much as £2000 to access a medical procedure which is paid for by the NHS for women living in England, Scotland and Wales.

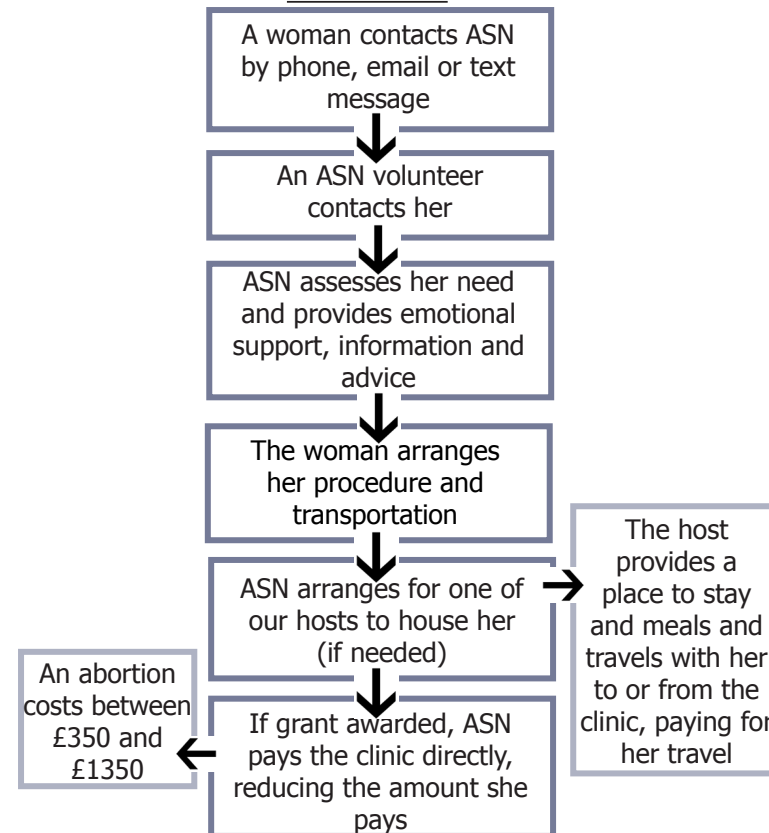
ASN was founded by Mara Clarke, who previously volunteered for a similar organisation in New York City called Haven Coalition. Although there are many other groups that campaign for law reform in the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland, ASN is currently the only organisation on record that provides accommodation and financial help to women who need abortions.

# A Busy First Year

In the ASN team we have:

- » Over **20 volunteer hosts**
- » **Five volunteer Management Committee members**, including our Founder
- » A **Fundraising Committee**
- » A **Communications and Marketing Committee**
- » Several other fabulous volunteers and interns at any one time helping out in other ways including web, accountancy, design, legal advice, research, admin, fundraising and event management support.

## How it works



## Key milestones in our first year

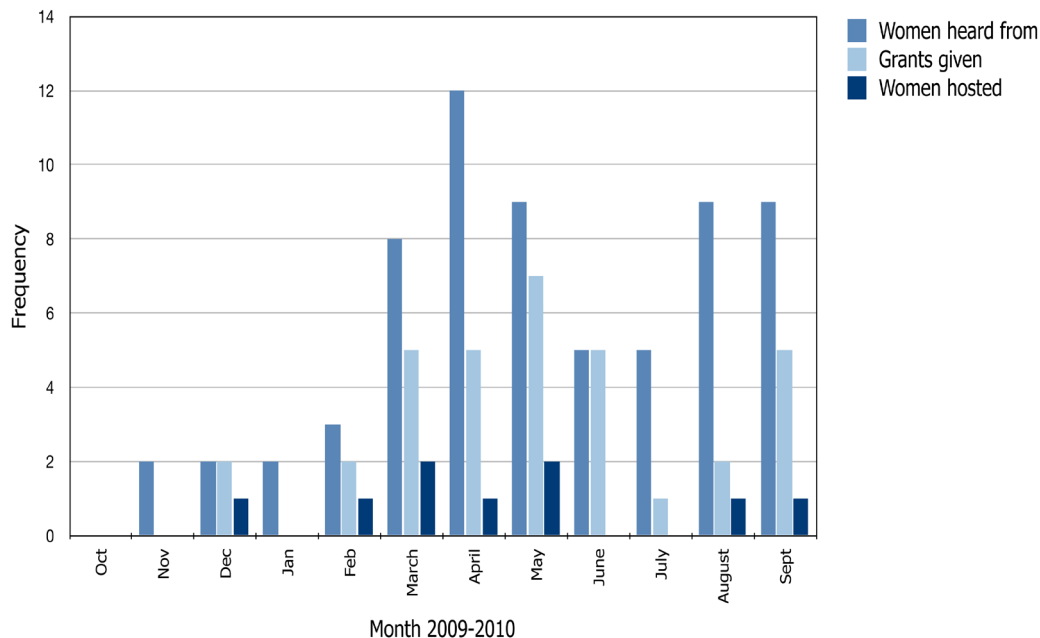
- September 2009**  
ASN founded
- October 2009**  
Opened for hosting
- December 2009**  
Opened for funding  
Hosted and funded our first client
- January 2010**  
Our first Pro Choice Happy Hour event
- February 2010**  
Our first fundraising appeal
- August 2010**  
Established our Management Committee

# Women We've Reached

## In our first year ASN has:

- » Heard from, and given information to **66 women**
- » Given grants to **34 women - totalling £7702.51** towards the cost of their procedure, and on occasion towards travel costs
- » Hosted a total of **9 women and three partners, friends or family members for a total of 14 nights**. All of these women also received a grant.

## How we've helped



'I felt vulnerable, alone and upset.... ASN offered much needed support to me at a time which I was very much in need of it.'

**37 year old mother of three**

As word continues to spread about ASN we expect to hear from more and more women. With thousands of women travelling to England each year for abortions, it may seem as though we have heard from relatively few women. Yet given that abortion is such a sensitive issue, it is likely that ASN hears from only the women in the most desperate of circumstances – those with no money and no place else to turn.

Some examples of the women we've supported:

A 37 year old single mother who was recently relocated by a domestic violence organisation to escape an abusive partner. Struggling to find work and make a life in a new place with no social support, she then realised she was pregnant by her former partner. ASN was able to help her with a grant towards her £590 procedure.

A young student who contacted us at first in the early stages of pregnancy but was then informed by her doctor that she was no longer pregnant. Several months later she got back in touch after finding out that she was over 22 weeks pregnant. ASN helped her with booking her flights, overnight accommodation and a grant towards her procedure.

A woman in her 30s who was pregnant as a result of rape. She had £250 to her name and no passport. ASN was able to help her with the balance of her procedure and her plane ticket.

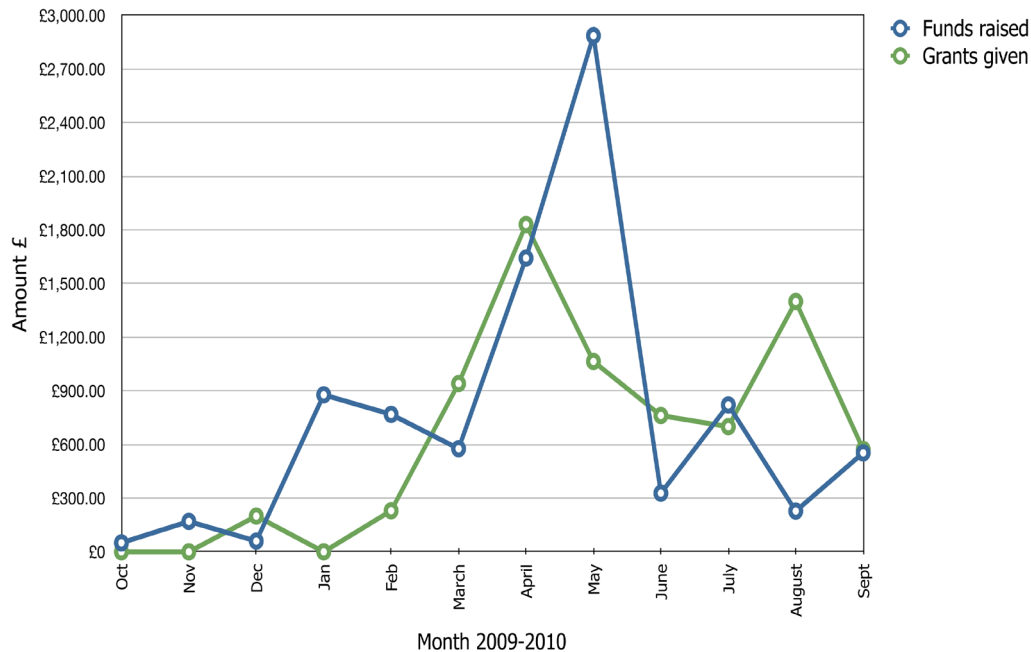
**ASN thanks these women for sharing their stories with us, and for permitting us to share them with you.**

As you can see from these case studies, the individual circumstances of the women who contact ASN for support vary greatly. Some of the women we help are in their early twenties or younger, others are in their 30s and 40s. Some have children. While some have the support of a partner, friend or family member, many are extremely isolated and travel alone. But these women all have one thing in common: the journey they make to access a safe and legal abortion is a difficult one, and they are in need of support.

# Fundraising and Events

We received our first donation in November last year, and gave our first grants in December. The graph below shows the amount of money raised and donated to us each month, as well as the amount of funding we've provided to women in grants.

Money raised and grants given



Special thanks go to our most generous supporters, the *Calthorpe Clinic* in Birmingham, which gave us a £2,000 grant, and *South Manchester Private Clinic*, which set up a standing order of £200 per month in September 2010.

We are also generously supported by individuals who either give one-off donations or help us by giving regularly via standing order. Regular payment amounts range from £1 to £50 per month. They are a vital resource, as knowing how much money we have available allows us to plan more effectively and help more women. Every little helps!

As well as the one-off donations and standing orders we receive, ASN has raised funds through various events and campaigns throughout the year; some for women in particularly difficult circumstances, some relating to the time of year, some to raise our profile and some just for fun.

## FEBRUARY

**Valentine's day:  
You can't buy love,  
but you can help buy a  
safe, legal abortion**

In February, we raised **£80** by selling Valentine's e-cards. The cards each contained a pro choice message, and were guaranteed to be signed, sealed and emailed on Valentine's Day.



*Roses are red  
Violets are blue  
Your feminist friend  
Has sent this to you*

Why say it with flowers when you can say it with a donation towards a safe abortion?



## APRIL

**"Irish women need  
cash not ash!"**

In April 2010, ASN clients also had to contend with cancelled flights and travel delays due to the volcanic ash cloud. We launched an appeal and our supporters donated **£2100**, much of which helped a teenager pay for her travel as well as her late term procedure.

## JUNE

**The ASN pub quiz**

Around 30 supporters gathered together in June to test their knowledge of Pro Choice trivia (yes, there really is such a thing!), raising **£280**.

## JULY

**July special appeal**

A couple contacted us after the 20 week scan of their fetus revealed severe abnormalities. They needed a larger grant than usual to cover the cost of their late term procedure, and our urgent appeal raised **£325** towards the **£700** grant we gave them.

## ONGOING

**Pro choice happy hours**

These are social and networking events, open to anyone and free to attend. In the past year we have held three Happy Hours around central London. Our first even featured a special guest; Ann Rossiter, who gave a brief talk about her book, *Ireland's Hidden Diaspora*.

## Spreading the Word

ASN has been featured in newspapers, magazines and radio stations in England and the Republic of Ireland. We have accounts on Facebook and Twitter to keep our supporters updated on the latest news, and we've been mentioned on various blogs around the world.

Some of the places we've been featured in the media in 2010 are:



*"As the economy improved, demand for services fell. Now queries about cost have become more frequent and more desperate."* **Irish Examiner, 2010**

*"It's estimated that around 180,000 such women have 'crossed the water' to London for the operation over the last four decades. They are usually alone, sometimes at a late stage of pregnancy and desperately in need of the support that their governments refuse to provide. Now an underground network has been established in London to help them."* **TimeOut London, 2010**

*'I don't feel like I can carry a pregnancy to term right now and am not sure my parents will understand. Thank you so much for your help.'* **18 year old woman, about to start university**

## Looking Ahead

As an entirely volunteer-run grassroots organisation, we are extremely pleased with what we've achieved in our first year.

Looking ahead to the next year we plan to:

» **Become a registered charity**

» **Raise more funds and build a more sustainable funding base.** This will include diversifying our income streams through grants as well as individual donors

» **Continue outreach and work with the media** to achieve greater visibility across England, the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland

» **Expand our volunteer host network to other cities** in England that women travel to for abortions

» **Extend our services to women in the Channel Islands and the Isle of Man**, where there is limited to no provision of abortion

» **Broaden our support base** of donors, volunteers and fundraisers

» **Launch a major fundraising campaign** with the goal of raising at least £1,000 per month in regular income

*And we'll continue to do so, as long as women need to travel outside of their own countries in order to access a safe and legal abortion.*

## A Great Big Thank You!

ASN would like to send our heartfelt thanks to all those who have helped and worked with us in our first year.

We already have strong links established with family planning clinics and abortion providers in the UK that have welcomed working with us, offered special prices or arrangements for clients from the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland and in some cases donated money towards ASN grants and operating costs. We look forward to continuing to work with you. A special thank you also goes to the agencies, organisations, and individuals in the Republic of Ireland, Northern Ireland and England that refer women to us. Your referrals enable women who might never have heard of us before to access our details through a source they trust.

Finally, we would like to thank our supporters. Whether you have set up a standing order, sent a one-off donation or dropped some cash in the donation bucket at an event, you have made it possible for us to say yes to every woman who has asked us for funding in the past year. With your continued support we can keep saying yes and helping women at the time when they need it most.

More important than anything we can say are the words of the women themselves. We end with the testimony of a woman we hosted and provided with funding earlier this year;

*"It was a very hard decision I wouldn't wish anyone to find themselves in this situation ... I felt I could contact them [ASN], that they cared and they were there to support me while in another country and alone ... I will forever feel grateful for the help and support I received."*

'Words cannot express how much you have helped me.'  
**Mother of three, pregnant as a result of rape.**

Want to help women from the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland access safe, legal abortions?

## Support Abortion Support Network!

All the women who contact ASN face enormous obstacles. They have to find the money to travel and pay privately for an abortion. Some have to find childcare and lie to parents, children, partners or employers about where they are going. The lucky ones can borrow funds from friends. The less fortunate go to credit unions and disreputable loan sharks.

Because of the generosity of *people like you*, women in Ireland will need to struggle a little less to access a medical procedure that is available free of charge to women in England, Scotland and Wales.

If you would like to help support women in the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland who desperately need access to safe and legal abortions, you could make a regular donation by standing order. One-off donations are also appreciated. Any amount would be gratefully received. Details of how to do this can be found at [www.abortionsupport.org.uk/donate](http://www.abortionsupport.org.uk/donate)

You can also visit [www.abortionsupport.org.uk](http://www.abortionsupport.org.uk) to sign up for our monthly newsletter, follow us on Twitter, or become our friend on Facebook.