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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**



## **Abortion Support Network Celebrates 1<sup>st</sup> Anniversary**

*Support provided to women living in Ireland forced to travel for abortions*

***'Words cannot express how much you have helped me.'***

*--Mother of three, pregnant as a result of rape*

Abortion Support Network (ASN) has been up and running for a year, and this week we're releasing our first annual report detailing the amazing work we have been doing to help women like the one quoted above: women in desperate need of financial assistance, somewhere to stay, or information from an empathetic source.

Abortion is almost impossible to access in and in Northern Ireland, and every year thousands of women come over to England to access the services that they are denied at home. The costs incurred can top £2,000 – could you come up with so much money at a moment's notice? Women also need advice, information and support to help them through what can be a difficult and stressful time.

Since launching in October 2009, ASN has heard from 66 women in need, given grants totalling £7702.51 to 34 women, and provided overnight accommodation in volunteer homes to 9 women for 14 nights. The circumstances of these women have varied greatly – from a woman with no passport or credit card who became pregnant as a result of rape, to a single mother relocated to escape domestic violence who found herself pregnant by her abusive ex-partner. But what they have in common is the fact that without financial assistance, they would not have been able to access an abortion.

ASN founder Mara Clarke said:

"Women in the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland don't have the 'right to choose' that women in England, Scotland and Wales are able to take for granted. Abortion Support Network exists to provide financial assistance and, where necessary, accommodation to women living in Ireland forced to travel to access a safe, legal abortion. Abortion Support Network exists to take money out of the decision making process for these women."

We'd like to extend a massive 'thank you' to everyone who's helped us – those who've donated money, volunteered their time to help out, and of course the clinics who give women the care they need. It's been a great first year, and we're looking forward to helping even more women in the future.

In the coming year, we hope to achieve charitable status, broaden our support base, and build a more sustainable funding system. We are also looking to extend our services to the Channel Islands and the Isle of Man, where there is limited or no abortion provision at all.

For further information or to arrange an interview contact Mara Clarke, ASN founder on +44 (0) 7913 353 530 or email [mara@abortionsupport.org.uk](mailto:mara@abortionsupport.org.uk). The Report can be viewed in full at [http://www.abortionsupport.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2010/10/ASN\\_2010\\_Annual\\_Report.pdf](http://www.abortionsupport.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2010/10/ASN_2010_Annual_Report.pdf).

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### Notes to editors:

1. Abortion Support Network is an all-volunteer organisation that provides accommodation and financial assistance to women who are forced to travel from Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland to England to access a safe and legal abortion. Our volunteers provide a meal and a safe place to sleep for women travelling to London for abortions. We also fundraise to provide grants to help towards the cost of having the procedure at a clinic in England. We are the only organisation in England known to be providing practical support of this kind. For more information or to support our work visit [www.abortionsupport.org.uk](http://www.abortionsupport.org.uk)
2. In Northern Ireland (despite being part of the UK), and the Republic of Ireland, abortion is illegal except under extremely limited circumstances and it is virtually impossible for women to access an abortion legally. In both countries, however, women can legally travel abroad for an abortion. Further information about abortion law in Ireland is available from:
  - Bpas: <http://www.bpas.ie/index.php?view=category&ID=3271>
  - Marie Stopes: [http://www.mariestopes.ie/Abortion\\_and\\_the\\_law.aspx](http://www.mariestopes.ie/Abortion_and_the_law.aspx)
3. In 2008, a total of 5773 abortions were performed in England and Wales on women resident in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland (Department of Health, 2009). Additional women are likely to have given a false address or to have travelled to other countries for an abortion.
4. Women who travel from Ireland to England for an abortion have to pay for their travel and often that of a partner, friend or family member accompanying them (last minute air fares and travel to and from the clinic), for accommodation if an overnight stay is required, and for the cost of the procedure as a private patient. The abortion procedure cost alone ranges from £350 to £1390, depending on stage of pregnancy. Some women must also pay the costs of childcare for children back home and lose wages for time taken off work.
5. Abortion Support Network is entirely dependent on donations to continue operating. One hundred per cent of donations go directly to helping with the cost of abortions, accommodation and travel, and are very gratefully received. Information on how to donate can be found at <http://www.abortionsupport.org.uk/donate/>.