

Introduction

My Arthur Troop Scholarship (ATS) Journey began in March 2023. I had just finished a Disaster and Crisis Management seminar at IBZ Gimborn and was keen to seek further development opportunities. I identified a conference that interested me and duly submitted my ATS application. Early in 2024, I received the good news that I was one of 10 police officers worldwide chosen to receive the scholarship for 2024.

The conference I had chosen was the 19th annual Conference on Crimes Against Women (CCAW) which was being held in Dallas, Texas from 21st-24th of May 2024. The CCAW is an annual in-person conference that convenes leading experts from across the world to educate and train first responders and community stakeholders on best practices regarding the identification, investigation, and prosecution of crimes against women.

Luckily, I was already in the USA, on secondment from An Garda Síochána (Ireland's National Police Service) to John Jay College of Criminal Justice in New York City to complete a Master's Degree in Public Administration, Inspection and Oversight. This coincided nicely with the good news regarding my ATS application, making travel arrangements significantly easier. On Sunday 20th of May, I departed New York JFK airport and headed for Texas.

Day 1

The conference kicked off on Monday morning 20th at 8am. It was opened by Jan Langbein, CEO of Genesis Women's Shelter. The keynote address was delivered by Tony Porter and Kimya Motley, CEO and CCO respectively of 'A Call to Men' and it was a powerful opening to the week. Kimya Motley is a survivor of domestic violence. On September 20, 2011, Motley's estranged husband shot her four times and shot her 10-year-old daughter in the head once. The shooting took place outside the Little Mountain Christian Academy daycare in Rockdale County. Miraculously, both mother and daughter survived the attack. Motley has since gone on to become an educator, activist, author, director, and producer working to end violence against all women and girls. Motley spoke about her experiences and her commitment to ending violence against women. Hers was a remarkable story and it left everyone in the audience feeling inspired and motivated for the week ahead.



The next seminar I attended was a follow on from the opening address and it was delivered by Tony Porter and Jules Perkél. Both Porter and Perkél spoke of how the effort to eradicate violence against women and girls requires the involvement of everyone, not just women and girls. Research shows that in centers for crimes against women, domestic violence, and intimate partner violence, most trainees are female-identified. This is also true in policing. Men need to become more engaged in challenging these issues. As Tony Porter pointed out during the seminar – If women could end violence against women and girls by themselves, they would have done it already.

The final session that I attended on Day 1 – ‘*Voices Unheard: Witness Intimidation’s Silent Grip*’ discussed how witness intimidation can undermine the pursuit of justice for survivors and also highlighted the vital role that law enforcement, advocates, and legal professionals all play in safeguarding the rights of victims.

Day 2

Day 2 began with a talk from retired Lieutenant Mark Wynne. Mark was one of the main reasons I wanted to attend this conference having previously heard him speak at John Jay College. His seminar titled “*Within the Ranks: Implications of Officer-Involved Domestic &*

Sexual Violence” focused on the very real issue of domestic violence involving law enforcement officials. This talk opened my eyes to the unique challenges and reporting considerations facing victims of domestic violence when the perpetrator is a police officer. Mark is a childhood survivor of domestic violence and has dedicated his life to educating and training fellow officers and other professionals who through their work, deal with these issues.

Day two also consisted of a talk on *“Using Community Policing Approaches to Address Labor Trafficking”* which distinguished between labor trafficking and sex trafficking and highlighted how a multi-disciplinary community response is the best approach to tackling trafficking issues. Policing services, owing to the nature of our work can sometimes be hesitant in accepting help from outside agencies. This talk gave real-life examples where collaboration between law enforcement and community-based groups resulted in successful outcomes.

I was not the only Garda member at the Conference on Crimes Against Women. Garda Sharon Breen, also based at John Jay College, was in attendance too. On Tuesday evening, we met with the local IPA Chapter in Dallas, Region 30. We exchanged gifts, explained the purpose of the trip to Dallas, heard of each other’s policing backgrounds, and enjoyed some delicious Texas BBQ. The Region 30 crew are a great bunch of people. I must give a particular thank you to Timothy Allen for organizing the get-together.



Day 3

The third day of the conference opened with a session titled “*Bridging the Gap Between Law Enforcement and Advocates*”. The room was divided into two groups – officers and advocates. We were each given a hypothetical sexual assault scenario and asked how we would deal with it. Unsurprisingly, the police approach focused on scene and evidence preservation, info gathering etc. We were then rearranged into blended groups consisting of both officers and advocates. Approaches to the scenario become far more well-rounded. There still existed a focus on evidential aspects of the case, but the wellbeing of the victim was central to all decision making. This exercise again highlighted the importance of collaboration between law enforcement and advocacy groups in responding to incidents of sexual assault and domestic violence.

I then listened to Anna Nasset speak in a session titled “*Dying a Slow Death: The Negative Effects of Stalking*”. Anna is a survivor of a stalker. She discussed how reports of this nature can sometimes be dismissed or overlooked. She shared her own experience with a stalker who was convicted and sentenced to 10 years in prison. Although her perpetrator received the maximum sentence available, it was not without Anna having to alter her entire life, including relocating to a new city. Her story highlighted once more how impactful crimes of this nature can be on survivors and how they are often the ones forced to adjust, not the offender.

I closed out the day by attending a talk on “*Social Media, Surveillance & Sexting: The Complex Realities of Teen Dating Violence*”. This was another informative session that dealt with the complex web of teen dating violence and provided tips on fostering healthier relationships and safer behaviors among adolescents.

Day 4

The final day of the conference afforded attendees the opportunity to catch repeats of sessions they may have missed earlier in the week. I chose to attend “*Am I Crazy? The Ramifications of Gaslighting and its Impact on Survivors*”. While I was familiar with the term, gaslighting was a relatively new concept to me. Hence why I wanted to attend this session and learn more about it. This session was delivered by Whitney Ball, a women’s and children’s therapist from Genesis Women’s Shelter and Support. The workshop delved into the world of gaslighting, perceptions of the term, and the impact it has as a form of emotional abuse.

I closed out the conference by attending a seminar titled “*Creating Connection: Centering Trauma-informed Supervision*”. I count myself extremely lucky that during my career to date,

I have been exposed to some really outstanding mentors and supervisors. In developing my own leadership style, I try to take the best attributes observed from each of them and merge them into one style. I do, however, also recognize that my skills of empathy and trauma-informed supervision need improving. I learned a lot during this session about the importance of creating safer spaces for dialogue, reflective listening, and promoting team resilience. I also came out of the seminar more attuned to the complexities of compassion fatigue, which all frontline workers are at risk of.



Conclusion

While in Dallas, I also had the opportunity to meet up with some old family friends who emigrated from my hometown of Mullingar many years ago and now reside in Texas. I visited the John F. Kennedy Memorial Plaza and learned about the faithful day in November 1963, and I got to see some of the beautiful wall art in the Deep Ellum District.

However, without question it was the learnings from the conference which were the highlight. The focus of the conference was crimes against women. Nevertheless, the key takeaway for me was that men need to play a more active role in combatting crimes against women. Not all domestic related crimes are committed by men, but the vast majority of them are. The US Dept of Justice estimates that 90% of people who commit violent physical assaults are men. 95% of reported assaults on spouses or ex-spouses are committed by men against women. As we have caused much of the problem, there is an onus on us to correct it. We often distance ourselves from the lived experiences of women because not doing so might make us less of a 'man' or diminish our masculinity. We need to change that attitude. Tony Power has an excellent TED talk titled 'A call to men' which discusses this. I would strongly encourage everyone to watch it.

I am deeply grateful to the International Executive Board of the IPA for the opportunity to attend this conference. I am excited to share and apply the learnings from the conference, not only in my day-to-day life but also in my role with An Garda Síochána.

