

Breaking the Silence

David Hennessy talks to a survivor of a rape as *Hollyoaks* and a charity single by Mundy and Roisin O tries to shed taboos.

A charity dedicated to helping male victims of rape and sexual abuse has commended the Channel 4 programme *Hollyoaks* and the Irish performers Mundy and Roisin O for tackling the issue of rape and the need for victims to speak in order for healing to begin.

From next week, *Hollyoaks* will have a storyline that sees teacher John Paul McQueen, played by James Sutton, sexually attacked by student Finn O'Connor, played by Connor Wilkinson.

Mundy and Roisin O released the single *Turn off the Silence* in November in aid of the Dublin Rape Crisis Centre.

Founder and service director of Survivors Manchester, Duncan Craig told *The Irish World*: "I think what's really important is that we start speaking about issues. It's really important that we start addressing the silence that men, women, boys and girls feel following sexual assault and rape. I

think it's important as a society we start accepting that this happens, stop turning away from it, accept that it's an uncomfortable and difficult topic to deal with but start breaking through that uncomfortable-ness. That's how we help people heal.

"At Survivors Manchester, we support boys and men and sometimes as a society, we say people choose not to talk and I'm not sure that's strictly true. As a survivor myself, I didn't know I could talk. It's not that I chose not to, it's that I didn't know I was allowed to. The things that had been said to me that 'It's a secret', the thing that everybody in the world was saying, 'We don't talk about this': I'd never been given permission to talk. It's not that I chose not to. I didn't know I was allowed to. It was only therapy that helped me do that and seeing stories on TV and dramas and films and listening to music that enabled me to step out of that silence, that darkness."



Mundy and Roisin O had no hesitation helping the cause

Duncan has a background in theatre and arts himself and worked with *Hollyoaks* ahead of their forthcoming male rape storyline: "The media has done as much damage as it has done good. Often media gets lambasted but there are some responsible broadcasters, there are some responsible writers that are writing and producing things that are getting some very clear messages out there: That if you're suffering sexual violence, there are people out there who will listen and it's not your fault and if you can speak about it: You're allowed to, no matter what the person who hurt you said.

Soap storyline

"I'm currently working with the writers on *Hollyoaks* on a big storyline involving a teacher that is raped by a pupil and I have to say they have been incredibly responsible, making sure they're not sensationalising things. They're telling a story about the impact of what can happen when someone's been raped. I've also been working with the actors, they're the ones who have to tell the story in a way that is as true to life as possible."

There is still a perception that rape happens to females although men can also be victims. Survivors Manchester and Survivors UK work to combat this perception: "We now live in a world of social media. When I was young and it was happening to me, there was no such thing as social media, there was no such thing as the internet. What happened was as soon as *Hollyoaks* announced the story, people took to social media to make comment. *Hollyoaks* is a very specific target market. We're talking about teenagers and quite a lot of teenagers were saying 'this would never happen in real life' and 'surely this character should have been able to fight them off because he's a man'. A lot of criticism was then thrown at these teenagers and I was one of the people who was saying 'don't criticise them, explain to them'. And that's exactly what *Hollyoaks* is doing. It is allowing people to have conversation and debate and understand and we only



Connor Wilkinson plays Finn O'Connor



James Sutton plays John Paul McQueen

learn by saying things and sometimes saying things wrong and learning how to say things correctly. Those young people shouldn't be shot down for saying the wrong thing, they should be taught."

Turn Off The Silence is written by Mundy and Danny O'Reilly, Roisin's brother and lead singer of The Coronas but when Danny could not record the song with Mundy as he was recording his band's new album in London, Mundy immediately suggested his sibling step in. The song focuses on sexual violence in the home and the need victims have to speak out.

Galway Girl singer Mundy told *The Irish World*: "The subject being

so hard, it was a bit of a challenge. We spent an afternoon together and we came up with *Turn off the Silence*. We wrote it from the perspective of two brothers living together in a household where there was abuse happening.

"People feel that they can't speak because they're on their own. I think the message we're trying to get across is the more people that speak, the lighter the load although it's never going to be an easy journey. There's a lot of it in the papers today, especially with recession, I think people take out their fury on their loved ones, there's a lot of pressure so it brings out the worst in people.

"It's all about the message and getting through to people and that they even have a song to sing, a song to remind them 'maybe I should speak, maybe I shouldn't be so hidden about it, maybe I should make that phone call to the Rape Crisis Centre'. It's all about un-isolating people..."

Charity single

Roisin O, who is the daughter of folk legend Mary Black, adds: "I remember someone telling me that something crazy like 95% of child abuse happens from people that know the child whether it's family or a family friend. Statistics like that are insane. When you think about rape, you think about a stranger in a dark alley and it's really not the case in many cases and I think that's what Danny and Mundy wanted to get across in the song.

"It's about two brothers and they're relying on each other and eventually together, as a unit, they speak out against it and once they let people know about the problem, things generally start to get better. That's the message that we were all trying to get across: If you just speak out about the problem and don't keep it hidden, don't feel ashamed, things will get better. If that just got across to one person, it would be worth the whole thing.

"You don't know what's going on in the house next door. It's not like world hunger or a tsunami where it's so far away from your own life. These things could be happening in the house next door and maybe it's time to put out your hand and help people and people themselves to stop ignoring any problems they may have. It's a really great cause, I'm really glad I got involved."

• **For more information on Survivors Manchester, you can go to:** <http://www.survivorsmanchester.org.uk/>. **You can watch the video for *Turn off the Silence* at:** <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9-6gzcz2lg>. **For more information on the Dublin Rape Crisis Centre, you can go to:** www.drcc.ie.



Duncan Craig of Survivors Manchester