

## **Chairperson's report**

2015–2016 has been a year of change.

In January 2016 we said farewell to Annie Campbell, our CEO of last twelve years. We would like to thank Annie again for her hard work and dedication throughout those years and we wish her every success. Following Annie's departure, the Board recruited Jan Melia to the CEO role in February 2016. Having worked in the voluntary and community sector for over 25 years, including work with the Regional Helpline, Refuge in Ireland and Rape Crisis in Scotland, Jan has a wealth of experience to bring to the role. The Board would like to take this opportunity to formally welcome Jan and look forward to working with her in the years to come.

Change was also a feature for the Helpline team. Sonya McMullan took over the role of Helpline Manager from Deidre Teague in December 2015. Sonya has been involved with the Helpline since 1997, initially working as Volunteer Co-ordinator before advancing to Deputy Manager in 2010. Her commitment has been demonstrated and her skills developed throughout her time in the organisation. Also in December 2015 we welcomed Naiobh Adams back to the organisation as Deputy Manager of the 24-Hour Domestic and Sexual Violence Helpline. We wish Sonya and Naiobh every success in their roles. We would also like to thank Deidre Teague who held the role of Helpline Manager up until 2015. Deidre's work and dedication over the years has been invaluable to the Helpline and the Organisation as a whole, and we wish her every success for the future.

I would like to thank the whole staff team for all their work during this last year. We have worked together to manage the difficult changes and the loss of staff following the streamlining process undertaken in 2014. Change within the sector has been a key focus this year, and will remain so throughout the coming year, as it is likely that the sector will continue to change. There are challenging times ahead with funding reductions threatening the sustainability and provision of vital services. Our Finance and Training Manager, Sarah Mason, with the support of the Board has continued to ensure that the organisation is in a strong financial position. In the coming year, the aim for the organisation will be to continue to reduce costs as well as to identify new funding opportunities in what remains a challenging environment.

The need to work together has been a key theme for the year and the team will continue to develop this in the coming year across all aspects of our work, sustaining and building relations across the Women's Aid Network in Northern Ireland and beyond. We are acutely aware of the need to work together to change lives and support women and children whose lives are devastated by

domestic and sexual violence. Levels of domestic violence continue at a high rate. This year the Helpline has managed 25,935 calls; the PSNI responded to a domestic abuse incident every 19 minutes; and there were 28,287 incidents, with 21 women killed – 17 by their partners or ex-partner. The need to continue to raise awareness and challenge attitudes is paramount, and we must all work together to eliminate domestic and sexual violence, strengthening the network and building partnerships.

Thanks are due to our partners, the Women's Aid groups, our supporters and our funders, all of whom have supported our work throughout the year. I wish to thank again our Chief Executive Officer Jan Melia and her staff team for all the hard work and what they have achieved this year. Finally I wish to acknowledge the dedication of the members of the Federation Management Board, and their support to myself as Chair and look forward to their continued support and involvement in the forthcoming year.

**Christine Whiteman**

Chairperson  
Women's Aid Federation Northern Ireland