



Federation Northern Ireland

RESPONSE TO

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

CONSULTATION

EARLY YEARS (0-6) STRATEGY

November 2010

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24 Hour Domestic Violence Helpline - 0800 917 1414

Core Work of Women's Aid: Background Information & Statistics

1. Introduction

Women's Aid is the lead voluntary organisation in Northern Ireland addressing domestic violence and providing services for women and children. We recognise domestic violence as one form of violence against women. Women's Aid seeks to challenge attitudes and beliefs that perpetuate domestic violence and, through our work promote healthy and non-abusive relationships.

2. Core Work of Women's Aid

The core work of Women's Aid in Northern Ireland, including Women's Aid Federation Northern Ireland and the 10 local Women's Aid groups is:

- To provide refuge accommodation to women and their children suffering mental, physical or sexual abuse within the home.
- To run the 24 Hour Domestic Violence Helpline.
- To provide a range of support services to enable women who are leaving a violent situation to rebuild their lives and the lives of their children.
- To provide a range of support services to children and young people who have experienced domestic violence.
- To run preventative education programmes in schools and other settings.
- To educate and inform the public, media, police, courts, social services and other agencies of the impact and effects of domestic violence.
- To advise and support all relevant agencies in the development of domestic violence policies, protocols and service delivery.
- To work in partnership with all relevant agencies to ensure a joined up response to domestic violence.

3. Women's Aid Statistics (2009 - 2010)

- 12 refuges with 300 bed spaces, playrooms and facilities.
- 1077 women and 854 children sought refuge.
- 15 resource centres for women seeking information and support; group work and training.
- 2,938 women and 4,489 children accessed the Floating Support service enabling women to access support whilst remaining in their own homes and communities.

- Move-on houses for women and children leaving refuges.
- In 2009/10 the 24 Hour Domestic Violence Helpline, open to anyone affected by domestic violence, managed 32,349 calls. This represented an increase of 17% on 2008/09.
- Volunteers are a core part of the Helpline team: throughout the year they contributed a total of 3,337 hours to the service, an average of 9 hours per day, 365 days of the year

4. Additional Women's Aid Statistical Data

- Since 1999, Women's Aid across Northern Ireland gave refuge to 13,656 women and 13,602 children and young people
- During the last 15 years Women's Aid Federation Northern Ireland managed 244,564 calls to the 24 Hour Domestic Violence Helpline

5. Statistics: Domestic Violence & Violence Against Women

- Domestic violence is a violation of Article 5 of the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights – that “no one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment”;
- The joint NIO, DHSSPS Strategy “Tackling Violence at Home” estimates that the cost of domestic violence in Northern Ireland, including the potential loss of economic output, could amount to £180 million each year.
- UNICEF research released in 2006, showing per capita incidence, indicates that there are up to 32,000 children and young people living with domestic violence in Northern Ireland.
- Where the gender of the victim was known, 75% of adult victims of domestic crimes recorded by the PSNI in 2009/10 were female.*
- Over 30% of all domestic violence starts during pregnancy.**

6. Domestic Violence: Crime Statistics

- Domestic Violence is a crime. PSNI statistics for 2009/10 indicate that there were more recorded crimes with a domestic motivation (9,903) than the combined total of all the following crimes (9,864). These include all recorded sexual offences (1,944), robbery (600), armed robbery (557), hijacking (119),

theft or unauthorised taking of a motor vehicle (2975), arson (1980) dangerous driving (865), handling stolen goods (226) and offences under anti-terrorism legislation (7).

- PSNI Statistics for 09/10 indicate that they responded to a domestic incident every 21 minutes of every day of the year.
- The total of 9,903 crimes with a domestic motivation in 09/10 represents an average of approximately 1 domestic crime every 53 minutes in Northern Ireland.
- The number of all recorded offences of murder in Northern Ireland in 09/10 total 18. Those classed as having a domestic motivation total 7. Therefore, 38.9% of all murders in Northern Ireland in 09/10 had a domestic motivation.
- There were 461 rapes (including attempted Rapes) in Northern Ireland in the period 2009/10.

(Source: PSNI Statistics 2009/10)

- Official sources (NISOSMC) estimate that up to 80% of sex crimes are not reported.
- Violence Against Women is not limited to domestic violence, it includes amongst other crimes murder, rape, sexual assault, sexual exploitation, trafficking, sexual stalking and sexual harassment.

(*Findings from the PSNI Crime Statistics Report 2009/10
N.B. "Adult" defined as aged 17 and over)

(** Women's Aid Federation NI)

7.0 Comments

- 7.1 Women's Aid Federation NI welcomes the publication of the Department of Education's consultation on an Early Years (0-6) Strategy and the opportunity to comment upon the document on behalf of our ten local groups. The following comments reflect their collective views.

Human Rights:

7.2 Women's Aid joins with the Women's Support Network (WSN) in welcoming that the document makes reference to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) in Annex 3. However, we would also like to see a much greater emphasis given to international human rights standards in the Strategy as we share the belief that an Early Years strategy needs to be fully located within a human rights framework. We also note from the information in Annex 3 that some of the objectives of the Strategy would only partially meet the standards set out in the UNCRC.

7.3 Our organisation shares with WSN, the concern that the section which sets out the UNCRC makes no reference to Article 2 of the Convention which sets out the principle of non discrimination.¹ Therefore we support WSN in recommending the inclusion of Article 2 of the UNCRC given one of the department's objectives is equity of access to early years services. We also note that the Early Years Strategy is only partially compliant with a number of the articles of the UNCRC. Women's Aid and WSN therefore recommend that the strategy is made fully compliant with international human rights standards.

¹ Article 2 of the UNCRC contains two paragraphs:

1. States Parties shall respect and ensure the rights set forth in the present Convention to each child within their jurisdiction without discrimination of any kind, irrespective of the child's or his or her parent's or legal guardian's race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national, ethnic or social origin, property, disability, birth or other status.

2. States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to ensure that the child is protected against all forms of discrimination or punishment on the basis of the status, activities, expressed opinions, or beliefs of the child's parents, legal guardians, or family members.

The Role of Parents: The Impact of Domestic Violence

- 7.2. Women's Aid welcomes the recurring focus in the document, on the essential role played by parents in the early development of their child, as a fully functional, healthy, self-confident and self-assured individual and as a potentially successful learner.
- 7.3. However, in this respect and in the context of equality of access, Women's Aid would wish to highlight that education does not occur in a vacuum and that extensive research has clearly evidenced that children of any age, can struggle to attain the best possible educational outcomes if their home life is severely disrupted and affected by experiencing violence and abuse. Indeed, the consultation document makes reference to studies which argue that, "successful learning requires the provision of a safe, secure and stimulating environment." (Pg.2)
- 7.4. Research by ²Mullender et al, 2003 indicates that children in violent homes face the risk of observing traumatic events, being abused themselves and the risk of being neglected. This research further evidences that in 90% of incidents children are in the same or next room to the violence. ³Margolin (1998) contends that witnessing domestic violence can be as harmful to children as suffering physical abuse.
- 7.5. ⁴Humphreys (2006) demonstrates that children living with domestic abuse have higher rates of depression, trauma

² Mullender, A, Burtin S, Hague, G, Iman, U, Kelly, L, Malos, E &Regan, L (2003); "Stop Hitting Mum!" Children Talk About Domestic Violence, East Molesey, Surrey, Young Voice

³ Margolin, G (1998) Effects of Domestic Violence on Children; American Psychological Association

⁴ Humphreys, C, Thiara, R.K., Shambalis, A & Mullender, A, (2006) Talking About Domestic Abuse, London, Jessica Kingsley

symptoms and behavioural/cognitive problems than other children.

- 7.6. Children living with domestic violence also have a greater chance of experiencing physical or sexual abuse. ⁵Walby (2004) evidenced that there is a co-occurrence of domestic violence and sexual abuse in 40% of cases.
- 7.7. Domestic violence is a contributory factor in 75% of cases on the child protection register and is a contributory factor in half of all serious case reviews⁶.
- 7.8. It is therefore extremely disappointing to note, that whilst recognising the parent's vital role as a child's first teacher (Pg.2) and that the, "nature and quality of care a child receives plays a significant role in how he or she develops," that there is no specific reference made in the document, to the enormous impact of violence in the home, both on the child's physical, emotional and psychological development and upon the ability of the mother to parent effectively in the face of sustained violence and abuse.
- 7.9. Similarly, our organisation would strongly contend that there is a need to recognise that mothers, who have experienced domestic violence whilst remaining fully committed to the well-being of their children and to their educational attainment, may face barriers to full participation and engagement in the process.

⁵ Walby, S & Allen, J (2004) Domestic Violence, Sexual Assault and Stalking: Findings from the British Crime Survey, London: Home Office

⁶ Hester et al (1998) Making an Impact: Children and Domestic Violence: A Reader; University of Bristol, NSPCC, London

Parents & Children with Complex Needs:

7.10. We also note the reference in the strategy to, “Children who start with reduced life chances.” (Pg.2) In this context, those living in disadvantaged areas are mentioned as are those in rural areas. However, outside of PSA targets referenced in Annex three of the strategy, no mention is made of children living with domestic violence and those experiencing sexual violence and abuse. There is also no recognition of those with multiple and complex needs, including those experiencing rural isolation and/or socio-economic deprivation coupled with domestic violence. Similarly no specific reference is made to the legacy of the conflict and its impact on children in Northern Ireland. The absence of any detailed consideration of these vital issues, we would contend, represents a serious and significant omission.

7.11. Women’s Aid statistics indicate that more than one third of cases of domestic violence begin during pregnancy. During the period from 1st April 2009 – 31st March 2010, 33 women were supported by Women’s Aid during their pregnancies and 11 babies were born to women staying in Women’s Aid refuges across Northern Ireland.

7.12. It is frequently the case that women experiencing domestic violence can struggle to obtain consistent early years educational provision for their children. This is particularly the case for women leaving abusive relationships, who may be living in refuge or in temporary accommodation during the process of relocation and of re-building their lives.

7.13. It is essential in our view that these children are not abandoned by the system and that any strategy for early years provision should include a targeted commitment on the part of the department, to provide services to these mothers and their children. We further see considerable merit in the department taking active steps to identify, target and support of these vulnerable mothers during their pregnancy.

Training for Early Years Teaching & Support Staff:

7.14. Women's Aid are also of the strong opinion that in ensuring that those working in the early years sectors have the highest qualifications and access to support (Pg.15), the provision of domestic violence awareness training is essential and should therefore be a requirement for teaching and support staff, to enable them to better identify this issue, in the context of safety and of barriers to children's learning. Additionally, we feel that this training provision would enable staff to feel confident to seek and signpost to appropriate support services where necessary.

Women's Aid Preventative Education Programmes: Helping Hands

7.15. Women's Aid would also commend to the department our "Helping Hands" preventative education programme, with which they are already pro-actively engaged at primary level. This highly respected and regarded programme provides an invaluable, age appropriate tool to education professionals, to assist children in developing their self-confidence, self-awareness and protective behaviours at an early age.

7.16. It is our view that training in the delivery of this programme should be provided to teaching staff at early years and that

funding should be provided to extend the programme across statutory and non-statutory early years provision

Gender Neutrality:

7.17. Women's Aid shares with WSN in noting with disappointment, that this strategy is gender neutral and fails to recognise the vital role of women as primary caregivers. Women often make arrangements for children to access provision and pay childcare costs.

7.18. In keeping with WSN we would refer to a research briefing recently published by the Department of Education which highlights that lower maternal education is associated with children's lower attainment levels in subjects such as English and Maths and that these effects continue to be felt across primary school years. This research contrasts with lower paternal education which is also associated with lower attainment in English and Maths but the effects of these fade over primary school years.⁷

7.19. Furthermore, section 3.2.1 of the evidence paper accompanying the strategy highlights that investment in early education and care addresses the needs of mothers as well as benefitting children in allowing women to "continue education, careers and learn new job skills."⁸ In addition, 6.2.6 of the evidence paper states that "Early childhood policies should be concerned not only with education and care services but also linked to issues of women's employment, child development, child poverty, health and social welfare."⁹

⁷ Department of Education "Effective Pre- School Provision in Northern Ireland (EPPNI) Pre School Experience and Key Stage 2 Performance in English and Mathematics", Pg 2, available on www.deni.gov.uk

⁸ DE(2010) Early Years (0-6) Strategy Evidence Based Paper, pg 18

⁹ DE(2010) Early Years (0-6) Strategy Evidence Based Paper, pg 63

7.20. In this respect, Women's Aid would refer the department specifically to our comments earlier in this response in regard to the impact of domestic and sexual violence and issues specific to those mothering through domestic violence. Similarly, we would emphasise the need for the department to take a holistic approach, which focuses on the needs, challenges and barriers faced by the mother as well as those faced by the child.

Voluntary and Community Sector:

7.21. In highlighting the reference made to the role of the voluntary and community sector on page 18 of the document, however we note that the focus is on quality learning environments and services for children, however the evidence paper accompanying the strategy makes reference to Early Education and Care (ECEC) which has been defined as "all services providing education and care for children below compulsory school age or before starting school."¹⁰ We share the disappointment expressed by WSN, that reference to Early Education and Care have not translated into the draft strategy as the document makes reference to Sure Start, but there is a lack of reference to other provision for example, crèches, daycare and homebased childminding.

7.22. The Strategy also states that its scope covers from birth to six years but there is no reference to pregnancy or the role of midwives or health visitors in this strategy, however the strategy does state on page 27 that DE needs to address better involvement among the key partners in education, health and social care.

¹⁰ DE (2010) Evidence Based Paper to Inform Early Years Strategy, 36. Available at the following link http://www.deni.gov.uk/early_years_evidence_based_paper.pdf

- 7.23. We would wish to support WSN's recommendation that the strategy explicitly sets out the role of health workers such as midwives or health visitors amongst other key partners to make it clear that the strategy covers the scope of birth to six years.
- 7.24. Women's Aid feels this is particularly important given the aforementioned figures regarding of the rates of domestic violence in pregnancy and the ongoing process of routine enquiry in respect of domestic violence, carried out by Midwives in Northern Ireland.
- 7.25. We share the recommendation that the Department of Education should address these gaps in services in the final strategy.
- 7.26. Women's Aid notes that the strategy takes an approach that there is a split between Early Years Education and Childcare. Our organisation would wish to fully endorse a briefing paper by Children in Northern Ireland (CiNI) which highlights that drawing on the EU experience of Early Years services, services which are not integrated can exacerbate inequality.¹¹ We also support CINI's call for the establishment of lead Ministerial responsibility for fully integrated early years and childcare services.¹²
- 7.27. Women's Aid would also wish to endorse the following observations by WSN. Specifically, that the strategy states on page 21 that DE needs to address strengthening the links on an area basis between early years providers (from birth to age six), at points of transition (currently Sure Start 0-4), pre- school (3-4) and foundation stage (4-6).

¹¹ CINI (2010) Briefing Paper on DE (0-6) Early Years Strategy, 6, available at http://www.cini.org.uk/events_specific.aspx?dataid=446670

¹² Ibid, pg 7.

- 7.28. Other than references to Sure Start for 0-4 years, this strategy appears to primarily focus on 3-6 years, rather than 0-6. We also note the department's commitment on page 24 to expand the reach of Sure Start and the Programme for Two Year Olds which was introduced as a pilot within Sure Start in 2007. WSN wishes to highlight that Sure Start is targeted at the 20 percent most disadvantaged wards in Northern Ireland, therefore children in 80% of wards are unable to access this provision.
- 7.29. We join with WSN in highlighting the important role of community based women's early years and childcare provision. Including children's programmes and crèche facilities provided by Women's Aid across Northern Ireland.
- 7.30. Similarly, Women's Centres are well established organisations situated within areas of social and economic disadvantage in Northern Ireland. A recent report by WCRP has highlighted a range of early years and childcare provision in the women's centres including free childcare places for women accessing education and training, after schools provision, places for social services referrals, Sure Start childcare, respite childcare and summer scheme childcare.¹³ In 2009, there were 1364 individual children registered for childcare provision within women's centres, 4914 childcare places and 9828 hours provided on a weekly basis. The majority of the thirteen women's centres support children in the age range of 0-4 years.¹⁴
- 7.31. This report also highlights the benefits of provision in community based women's centres including enhancing children's learning and development, addressing child poverty, improving physical and mental health and promoting social integration. Women's centres community based childcare provision also benefits

¹³ WCRP (2010) Childcare Mapping and Research Report, Pg 3.

¹⁴ Ibid, Pg 14

mothers and families including promoting health and well being, positive family relationships and assisting in identifying developmental issues.

7.32. Furthermore the findings indicated the women's centres provided high quality service provision and contributing to building an effective childcare infrastructure in providing placements for students. The funding programmes which enable the women's centres to provide childcare end in 2011 and without these resources, the centres would be unable to sustain childcare provision.¹⁵

7.33. Women's Aid also notes that there is no reference in the strategy as to how DE will collaborate with the Department for Social Development (DSD) and the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD) on early years services. However DSD funds the Women's Centres Childcare Fund and DARD funds the Rural Childcare Programme. We also recommend that DE addresses in the strategy how it will collaborate with DSD and DARD on early years services.

7.34. Our organisation also recommends that DE recognises the important role of community based provision, particularly provision in the women's sector.

Funding:

7.35. The strategy highlights that "there can be no assumption, at this point of substantial new resources becoming available and that it may be a case of making better use of existing resources."

7.36. In keeping with WSN, it our strong opinion that it is vital that resources are made available to sustain existing early years

¹⁵ Ibid, Pg 6

services provision. We again draw the department's attention to Article 4 of the UNCRC which states "with regard to economic, social and cultural rights, state parties shall undertake such measures to the maximum extent of their available resources."¹⁶

7.37. Women's Aid and WSN also note that the Committee on the Rights of the Child has highlighted the importance of public investment in "services, infrastructure and overall resources specifically allocated to early childhood."¹⁷

7.38. We join with WSN in strongly recommending that the Minister for Education makes a case for investing in Early Years services and seeking new resources in the forthcoming Budget.

The Child Poverty Strategy:

7.39. We share the disappointment that there is no reference to the forthcoming child poverty strategy which is currently under development and has to be published by March 2011. This is surprising given that links between low levels of child poverty and the existence of universal early childhood services was highlighted in the evidence paper.¹⁸

7.40. We note that OFMDFM have recently published a pre-consultation paper on a child poverty strategy and have been conducting public events. It is vital that the issue of child poverty strategy is also addressed in this draft Early Years document, given that the Department will have responsibilities in contributing to the development of a child poverty strategy.

¹⁶ <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/law/crc.htm#art2>

¹⁷ Committee on the Rights of The Child General Comment No 7, para 38 CRC/C/GC/7/Rev.1

¹⁸ DE (2010) Evidence Based Paper to Inform Early Years Strategy, 31. Available at the following link http://www.deni.gov.uk/early_years_evidence_based_paper.pdf

7.41. Women's Aid and WSN also wish to highlight that anti poverty strategy "Lifetime Opportunities" has not been referenced, which we find surprising as this strategy also includes objectives for Early Years in the 0-4 range.¹⁹

Policy Context:

7.42. Women's Aid and WSN observe that there are no references to the recent policy and economic appraisal on options for a childcare strategy or the Programme for Cohesion, Sharing and Integration which has recently been consulted upon which we believe indicates a lack of joined up thinking and we strongly recommend that DE addresses this gap.

7.43. The document refers to the role of the ESA, however this body has not yet been established and the Bill has been delayed. There needs to be clarity as to what will happen in the interim period, for example will ELB's converge and take on this role? We recommend that the final strategy clarifies which body will be responsible for the ESA's responsibilities in the interim period.

7.44. The document states on page 27 that the department needs to address the contribution of Early Years Provision to the wider Executive's consideration of childcare policy. Whilst this is welcome, it again indicates a split between early years education and childcare services. It is also unclear from the document how the department views its role in a future childcare policy, for example would the DE view itself as having a lead role? We join with WSN again in reiterating the need for fully integrated early years and childcare services. We also seek

¹⁹ OFMDFM Lifetime Opportunities: Government's Anti Poverty and Social Inclusion Strategy for Northern Ireland , pg 15

clarification from the department as to how it views its role in relation to the development of childcare policy.

Development of Skills:

- 7.45. The Draft strategy states on page 24 that DE needs to address “qualification levels, professional development and access to specialist support for the early years workforce in the interest of greater equity between the statutory and non statutory providers and of raising standards.” The document subsequently states that DE will work with DEL and ESA towards raising the minimum level qualifications in DE funded Early Years settings including Sure Start to an NVQ level 3.
- 7.46. Women’s Aid and WSN welcome this commitment to partnership working in relation to raising the skills of the childcare workforce. However we also strongly recommend that the childcare workforce across the board should have access to a professional career path.
- 7.47. Women’s Aid would also recommend the need for the specific domestic violence awareness training, addressed earlier in this response and the need for the training to be embedded in the process of continuing professional development.
- 7.48. We share the view that this is vital to ensure high quality childcare provision and to attract and retain a highly skilled childcare workforce in the statutory/private/voluntary and community sectors.

Equality Impact Assessment:

7.49. Women's Aid has already raised the issue of children and parents with complex needs in this response and we join with WSN in noting that there are no references in the draft strategy to Traveller children and few references to rural children and children with disabilities despite the evidence paper referring to these particular groups of children. There is also no reference to screening or an EQIA accompanying the document. We share the recommendation that DE clarifies that a screening process has been undertaken in relation to the strategy and urges DE to undertake an EQIA to determine if there are particular groups of children and parents who potentially could be adversely impacted by these proposals.

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