



Federation Northern Ireland

## The Department of Justice

---

# A Response to: “Building Safer, Shared and Confident Communities” – A Consultation on a New Community Safety Strategy for Northern Ireland

---

April 2011

---

---

**Women's Aid Federation Northern Ireland**

129 University Street  
BELFAST BT7 1HP

Tel: 02890 249041

Fax: 02890 239296

General Email: [info@womensaidni.org](mailto:info@womensaidni.org)

Website: [www.womensaidni.org](http://www.womensaidni.org)

24 Hour Domestic Violence Helpline - 0800 917 1414

---

---

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

### **1.0 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.

### **2.0 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.

### **3.0 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 3,617 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.

#### **4.0 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.

#### **5.0 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. \*\*

#### **6.0 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 Justice's consultation on a new Community Safety Strategy for Northern Ireland and the opportunity to comment upon the document on behalf of our ten local groups. The following comments reflect their collective views.

## **8.0 Introduction**

8.1 We would wish to preface our comments by welcoming the decision by the Justice Minister not to consider powers in respect of Parenting Orders, Dispersal Zones and Support Orders, in the context of the new strategy. In our response to the NIO Community Safety Unit's Consultation on Community Safety in Northern Ireland (2008) "Together, Stronger, Safer," we expressed our organisation's considerable concerns the some of these proposals rather than addressing specific problems may serve to expand or export them to other areas.

- 8.2 Similarly, we were concerned that the proposals were likely to disproportionately impact upon young people, many of whom often congregate in groups of two or more on the streets. There also appeared to be no consideration of the underlying reasons behind this behaviour or tendency and no recognition that in some instances young people may gather in the streets because their home environment has become intolerable due to circumstances such as domestic violence, abuse or alcoholism.
- 8.3 Women's Aid had a number of serious concerns in respect of Parenting Support Contracts and Orders. In addition to the potential adverse consequences of making parents, particularly those on low incomes, financially responsible for damage caused by their children, we were also deeply concerned that Parenting Support Contracts demonstrated no consideration of the safety and wellbeing of women who had experienced domestic violence. As such we are of the opinion that the decision by the Minister not to exercise these powers represents a very positive development.
- 8.4 Women's Aid is broadly supportive of the overall aims and objectives for a new Community Safety Strategy as outlined in the consultation document (Point 2.4.1, Pg.6). Specifically, the promotion of safer communities with lower levels of crime and anti-social behaviour; Shared communities where everyone's rights are respected in a shared and cohesive community and confident communities, in which people feel safe and have confidence in the justice agencies which serve them.

## **9.0 Safer Communities – Domestic and Sexual Violence:**

- 9.1 In the context of "Safer Communities" (2.4.2, Pg.6) we fully support and welcome the inclusion of domestic and sexual violence in the proposals and the recognition that actions to tackle this type of prevalent criminality are integral to a new Community Safety Strategy and to creating a safer Northern Ireland for all our citizens.
- 9.2 However, in keeping with the views we expressed in our response to the Northern Ireland Office Consultation on a Community Safety Strategy in Northern Ireland, "Together, Stronger Safer" (2008), our organisation remains extremely disappointed that, despite the Department's "further engagement with key stakeholders...to respond to concerns raised," (Point 4.3.4, Pg.12) in 2008, the new consultation document once again, appears to offer no fresh initiatives or to expand substantially upon existing strategic objectives, in respect of domestic and sexual violence.

- 9.3 Similarly, it is of considerable concern that whilst the multi-agency, cross – departmental strategy for addressing domestic violence in Northern Ireland, “Tackling Violence at Home”, led by the Department of Justice and DHSSPS, is referred to in the consultation document, (Point 5.7.2, Pg. 23) there is no evidence of any additional resources being made available to implement the associated Action Plans.
- 9.4 This is also the case in respect of the Department of Justice and DHSSPS’s jointly led five year Regional Strategy to tackle Sexual Violence and Abuse in Northern Ireland, published in 2008.
- 9.5 It is noted in the consultation document that, “Ministers have agreed to develop a single Sexual and Domestic Violence Strategy when the current strategies end in 2013.” (Point 5.7.6, Pg.24)
- 9.6 It is essential that this strategic approach is adequately funded and resourced if it is to have a demonstrable effect and that organisations such as Women’s Aid, which are key to both the development and implementation of the associated Action Plans, are fully supported to carry out vital work within the Community and across Northern Ireland.
- 9.7 It is also of vital importance that domestic and sexual violence are included as a policing priority in both the District and Regional Policing Plans.
- 9.8 The nature of domestic violence in particular, is such that it is not often highlighted as an issue of concern in routine crime surveys. It also remains a substantially under-reported crime.
- 9.9 However, the statistics outlined in this response (Point 6) go some way to highlight the extent this form of criminal behaviour in Northern Ireland.
- 9.10 Therefore, whilst it is important to consult the community in the establishment of Community Safety Priorities, it is essential that the Department take a pro-active lead on issues such as domestic and sexual violence in order to ensure that these issues remain a priority and that some of the most vulnerable and at risk individuals in our society, are afforded the support, protection and justice they deserve.

## **10.0 Safer Communities – Early Interventions:**

- 10.1 Women’s Aid agrees with the statement in point 5.4.2 (Pg.18) that,

“There is strong evidence linking criminal behaviour to early childhood experiences and family surroundings. Studies have shown that early years intervention reduces the risk of involvement in crime...in later life.”

- 10.2 Our organisation is pro-actively engaged in both early years and early stage interventions and would cite our age appropriate, preventative education programmes delivered to both boys and girls, in schools and community settings.
- 10.3 For example, Women’s Aid’s highly regarded “Helping Hands” Programme, delivered at the early years stage, assists young girls and boys to recognise that they have a right to feel safe and that others have a right to feel safe around them and to understand that there is nothing too big or too small that they can’t talk about it.
- 10.4 In this context, the programme also helps young children to identify who they might go to if they had any worries or concerns. The programme is also underpinned by Social Guardian Training, which is designed to ensure that there are key individuals within the community, such as teachers, who are fully trained to recognise and identify risk factors and to signpost to appropriate support services wherever and whenever necessary.
- 10.5 Women’s Aid also carries out similar preventative education work with teenagers and young people, which explores healthy relationships.
- 10.6 It is our strongly held opinion that this work is vital both in the context of preventing domestic and sexual violence and in providing support to those who have experienced it but also in identifying other forms of violence and abuse such as bullying. It also provides a context of mutual respect and communication which has the potential to produce long-term benefits.
- 10.7 It is therefore essential that this important and enormously valuable work is fully supported and resourced.
- 10.8 Women’s Aid would strongly recommend that the Department of Justice should explore some of the excellent and innovative work that has been undertaken in communities across Northern Ireland both in respect of domestic violence and the wider issue of community safety.
- 10.9 Our organisation has engaged pro-actively with several of these initiatives and partnerships and continues to do so.

10.10 We remain concerned, that the short-term nature of the funding provision for many of these projects and the impact of recent cuts, such as the removal of the OFMDFM Children's Fund, which has directly resulted in the loss of vital Children and Young People's Worker in Women's Aid, has resulted in a lack of sustainability.

10.11 As a result, achievements cannot be consolidated and built upon and in some cases an expectation in respect of service provision has been created within communities that cannot be met long-term without the provision of adequate support.

### **11.0 Safer Communities – Designing Out Crime and Addressing Environmental Factors:**

11.1 Women's Aid fully supports efforts to improve the physical environment and notes that the PSNI have been working in partnership with the Planning Service to provide Community Safety advice on new domestic and commercial properties, to ensure that they are open and lighting is adequate and so reduce the risk and fear of crime. This is a very positive development.

11.2 We further see considerable merit in providing funding and support for youth and community groups and initiatives, organising positive activities within local communities, such as art and music projects, drop-in centres and youth clubs.

11.3 In the opinion of our organisation, it is also important to encourage and fund the ability of communities to make their local areas their own, for example by the creation of gardens and play areas.

11.4 Similarly, to encourage a sense of community and communal ownership and responsibility for their environment.

### **12.0 Safer Communities – Rural Crime:**

12.1 Women's Aid agrees with the statement in the consultation document that, "A new Community Safety Strategy needs to take into account of the specific needs of rural communities in Northern Ireland." (Point 5.5.15, Pg.21)

12.2 Our local Women's Aid groups are actively involved in their local Community Safety Partnerships and District Policing Partnerships across



Northern Ireland. However, as previously discussed, we remain concerned that Domestic Violence is often ignored in the context of policing plans.

- 12.3 It is essential that issues such as domestic and sexual violence are fully considered and addressed when examining rural crime.
- 12.4 Domestic violence is a crime predicated on the abuse of power and control and is often characterised by a process of systematic isolation. Women and girls living in rural communities often experience these levels of isolation even more acutely.
- 12.5 There are additional serious concerns in respect of access to services in rural areas, including to the Police Service, as a result of a poor rural transport infrastructure and the ready access that some members of the community have, to legally held weaponry.
- 12.6 Women's Aid would wish to see improved levels of Police patrols in rural areas.

### **13.0 Safer Communities – Alcohol and Drug Misuse:**

- 13.1 We welcome the decision to encourage arrest referral schemes (Point 5.6.6, Pg. 22) and feel that it is important to stress that there are frequently underlying causes for alcohol and drug misuse, including domestic and sexual violence and abuse, which require to be recognised and addressed.
- 13.2 It is essential therefore that the relevant Departments and Agencies liaise closely with those in the Voluntary and Community Sector who can provide expert advice and support.

### **14.0 Shared Communities – Hate Crime:**

- 14.1 Women's Aid welcomes the Department's commitment to developing and publishing draft proposals, for a strategic approach to addressing hate crime (Point 6.3.8, Pg.28) and looks forward to having the opportunity to comment upon the proposals in due course.

### **15.0 Confident Communities:**

- 15.1 In the context of improving public confidence in the criminal justice system, Women's Aid would wish to see the Department take cognience of and act upon the recommendations contained in the recent Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland Report into the Handling of Domestic Violence Abuse Cases by the Criminal Justice System in Northern Ireland (2010).
- 15.2 In particular, we share the opinion that steps are urgently required to address the very high percentage of cases resulting in a decision by the PPS of "No Prosecution" (52.9%).
- 15.3 To this end, we fully support the recommendation that the PSNI should have access to head-cams and digital photographic equipment for use in cases involving domestic violence.
- 15.4 This type of evidence could prove invaluable in pursuing cases where the victim feels unable to proceed with the prosecution.
- 15.5 We also endorse the requirement for much greater care to be afforded to those who have experienced domestic violence. Continuity of care and the timely and accurate supply of information from the relevant justice agencies can be essential both to keeping the victim in the process and to maintaining confidence in the system.
- 15.6 Our organisation would also like to see greater training for District Judges in Domestic Violence and that Domestic Violence Awareness Training should form a key component of the PSNI programme of Continuing Professional Development for Officers of all ranks and tenure.
- 15.7 We would also wish to encourage the use of barristers who are fully trained in domestic violence.
- 15.8 There is also a fundamental need to address the lack of uniformity in respect of sentencing for perpetrators of domestic violence in Northern Ireland.
- 15.9 Women's Aid welcomes the Department's support for efforts to empower local communities, including the rollout and development of Community Safety Warden Schemes and the promotion of Neighbourhood Watch Schemes.

- 15.10 In respect of Community Restorative Justice (Point 7.3.7, Pg. 31), Women's Aid continues to support this approach as a potentially beneficial method of addressing some Community Safety Issues.
- 15.11 However, we are of the strongly held belief that this approach is not appropriate and should not be used in cases involving Domestic and Sexual Violence.
- 15.12 We would also urge caution in respect of some cases of "noise nuisance". Women's Aid is extremely alarmed by reported incidents of women having their tenancy agreements terminated as a result of "noise nuisance" consequent to incidents of domestic violence and abuse.
- 15.13 Care should also be taken to ensure that sectarianism, racism and homophobia are protected against.
- 15.14 It is also essential that Community Restorative Justice Programmes should continue to be closely scrutinised and monitored to ensure that both those participating in and those subject to the process are fully supported and protected and that the best interests of justice are served.

## **16.0 Confident Communities – Reassuring the Community**

- 16.1 Women's Aid respects the need to ensure that the safety of older people remains a priority (Point 7.4.6, Pg.32) and recognise that the fear of crime, despite evidence to the contrary, can be high amongst this section of our population.
- 16.2 However, we are extremely alarmed by the levels of violence against women and by the increasing levels of sexual violence in Northern Ireland and are of the view that this must be treated as a priority for action.
- 16.3 Our organisation also sees considerable merit in addressing and counter-acting negative perceptions and fears and to this end would strongly recommend increased funding for inter-generational work and projects which can be enormously beneficial in breaking down barriers.
- 16.4 We would also contend that the role of the media and the manner, in which they disseminate information about crime, should be considered and evaluated.

## **17.0 Delivering in Partnership:**

- 17.1 Women's Aid welcomes the Departments stated commitment to work with the voluntary and community sector to explore its role in the delivery of community safety solutions at a strategic level (Point 8.4.5, Pg. 35) and would refer the department once again, to our aforementioned projects and initiatives.
- 17.2 Our organisation already has extensive experience of partnership working both at regional and local level, across departments and agencies which has led to the effective delivery of key strategic approaches and initiatives, such as Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conferencing (MARAC).

### **18.0 Delivering in Partnership – Resources:**

- 18.1 Our organisation welcomes and fully supports the Department's proposal (Point 8.5.5 & 8.5.6) to, continue to maximise investment in community safety issues, by leveraging funding from a range of partners and pooling resources.
- 18.2 We also support the proposal to develop and build capacity at all levels to improve the delivery of community safety. It our strongly held opinion, that these measures are essential going forward.
- 18.3 Given the nature of the work carried out by the voluntary and community Sector and organisations such as Women's Aid, we would welcome some input into the development of any strategic indicators to evaluate outcomes.

### **19.0 Equality:**

- 19.1 We would refer the department to our comments in respect of violence against women and girls and the need to explore valuable inter-generational work, as a means to breakdown false or inaccurate perceptions.
- 19.2 We are also extremely disappointed to note that the strategy does not address the scourge of Human Trafficking in Northern Ireland. Victims of this form of modern day slavery are living hidden lives of systematic violence, abuse and torture, in our communities. They are some of the most vulnerable individuals in our society and they must be acknowledged and protected.

For further information about this response please contact:

Gillian Clifford  
Regional Policy & Information Co-Ordinator  
Women's Aid Federation Northern Ireland  
129 University Street  
BELFAST  
BT7 1HP  
Tel: 028 9024 9041

Website: [www.womensaidni.org](http://www.womensaidni.org)

E-Mail: [gillian.clifford@womensaidni.org](mailto:gillian.clifford@womensaidni.org)

24 Hour Domestic Violence Helpline - 0800 917 1414  
Open to anyone affected by domestic violence