



Federation Northern Ireland

RESPONSE TO

The Department of Social Development Join In, Get Involved: Build a Better Future

October 2009

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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 (2007 - 2008)

- 12 refuges with 300 bed spaces, playrooms and facilities.
- 1102 women and 896 children sought refuge.
- 15 resource centres for women seeking information and support; group work and training.
- 24 Hour Domestic Violence Helpline managed 24,153 calls.

- 2,205 women and 1,831 children accessed the Floating Support service supporting women in their own home.
- 2,767 children and young people accessed protection and support services.
- Move-on houses for women and children leaving refuges.

4. 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”;
- Domestic Violence is a crime. PSNI statistics for 2008/09 indicate that there were more recorded crimes with a domestic motivation (9,211) than the combined total of all the following crimes (9,155). These include all recorded sexual offences (1,943), robbery (650), armed robbery (508), hijacking (125), theft or unauthorised taking of a motor vehicle (2,954), arson (2,002) dangerous driving (746), handling stolen goods (220) and offences under anti-terrorism legislation (7).
- PSNI Statistics for 08/09 indicate that they responded to a domestic incident every 22 minutes of every day of the year.
- The number of all recorded offences of murder in Northern Ireland in 08/09 total 24. Those classed as having a domestic motivation total 7. Therefore, 29.2% of all murders in Northern Ireland in 08/09 had a domestic motivation.
- There were 381 rapes and 23 attempted rapes in Northern Ireland in the period 2008/09.

(Source: PSNI Statistics 2008/09)

- Official sources (NISOSMC) estimate that up to 80% of sex crimes are not reported.
- 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, 76% of adult victims of domestic crimes recorded by the PSNI in 2007/08 were female.*
- Over 30% of all domestic violence starts during pregnancy.**
- 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.

(*NIO Statistics & Research Branch Bulletin 16/2008 “Experience of Domestic Violence: Findings from the 2007/08 Northern Ireland Crime Survey, 2008, pg.2. N.B. “Adult” defined as aged 17 and over)

(** Women’s Aid Federation NI)

Women’s Aid Federation NI welcomes the publication of this consultation on a volunteering strategy for Northern Ireland and the opportunity to comment upon it on behalf of our members.

Comments:

We would wish to preface our comments by acknowledging the enormously valuable contribution which volunteers have made to the work of Women’s Aid over more than three decades. Our volunteers work tirelessly in roles across the organisation. As an example, volunteers are a core part of the 24 Hour Domestic Violence Helpline team. Throughout the year 2008/09 they contributed a total of 3,268 hours to the service. This represents an average of 9 hours per day, 365 days of the year. Volunteering provides not only an essential functional component of Women’s Aid and the services we provide but is also a vital opportunity to bring together all sections of the community in Northern Ireland.

Chapter 1: Aims and Objectives

- Women’s Aid has no fundamental objection to the stated aim and objectives of the strategy as outlined on page 15 of the consultation document.

- We are concerned however that certain aspects of the key performance indicators will be resource dependent. In particular the proposal to increase the number of volunteer managers, paid and unpaid with accredited qualifications in volunteer management. We will address this further later in our response.

Chapter 2: Definition of Volunteering

- In respect of the definition contained in Chapter 2 (Pg.16) of the consultation document, we feel that this is an appropriate reflection of the nature of volunteering.

Chapter 3: Our Vision of Volunteering

- The Government vision for volunteering as stated in Chapter 3 (Pg.17) also contains appropriate components. However once again, Women's Aid has a number of concerns regarding resources and logistics which will be outlined later in our response.

Chapter 4 - Objective 1 Volunteering: Recognising the Value and Promoting the Benefits

- Women's Aid is broadly supportive of proposals 1-15 (Pgs 18-22) as stated in the consultation document and acknowledges the importance placed on Central and Local Government, Employers and the Voluntary Sector to contribute to fostering an environment in which volunteerism is respected, encouraged and recognised as an enormously valuable endeavor for both society and the individual.
- In particular, we welcome the recognition as stated in Proposal 2 (Pg.19), that good volunteering practice should be a priority.
- To this end, we recommend that an exploratory study be carried out by the Department, to establish and codify existing best practice.
- Women's Aid supports Proposal 4 (Pg.19) which recommends engaging the Northern Ireland media both to promote, encourage and influence attitudes to volunteering and to provide opportunities for the recognition of volunteers.
- We would however request additional detail as to how this strategy is to be constructed, financed and implemented. It is essential that the

voluntary sector should be involved in determining the key messages contained in any campaign. This is particularly important given the highly diverse and often sensitive nature of the work carried out by the sector.

- We acknowledge the recommendations contained in Proposals 6-9 (Pgs. 19-20) regarding the measurement of the impact of the work of volunteers and the importance of communicating information about volunteering in an accessible manner.
- Women's Aid sees considerable merit in the establishment of a national database of volunteering opportunities or a helpline.
- We would further see the database as one potential tool in the recruitment process, as we recognise that there is a possibility of limiting diversity by employing this methodology.
- In this context, in welcoming proposals to encourage younger people to engage in volunteering, Women's Aid would wish to stress the invaluable contribution made by older people who bring a lifetime of experience and enthusiasm to their voluntary work.
- However, in light of the highly sensitive and confidential nature of the work of Women's Aid and that of other colleagues in the sector, we have concerns regarding the suggested use of social networking sites as a means of harnessing word of mouth.
- We feel that this would require to be carefully "policed" by our staff to avoid potentially serious breaches of staff and client confidentiality and as such could be an additional strain on limited resources.
- Women's Aid would also request further detail on the recommendation to develop and implement a volunteer recruitment programme. (Proposal 9, Pg.20)
- We would suggest that existing recruitment programmes within the voluntary sector should be explored in any development process.
- Women's Aid welcomes Proposals 10-13 (Pg.21) to encourage Employer Supported Volunteering and sees this as an important opportunity both in respect of skills, training and employment and as a means of encouraging Corporate Social Responsibility in Northern Ireland.
- We support Proposals 14 and 15 (Pg.22) in respect of protecting volunteering from the unintended consequences of legislation and Government policy and exploring opportunities with the Government of the

Republic of Ireland, to develop volunteering in border areas and on an island wide basis.

- In this context, we would recommend building upon and consolidating work already being carried out by those working in border areas and by colleagues who have developed links with sister/partner organisations in the South.

Chapter 5 – Objective 2: Volunteering: Enhancing Accessibility and Diversity

- In supporting the principles underpinning Proposals 16-17 (Pgs.23-24) designed to encourage volunteer involving organisations to develop practices that enable them to involve a diverse range of volunteers and offer a welcoming environment to everyone, we would stress that there is a need for funding to be made available to organisations to ensure that any physical resources or infrastructure necessary to ensure diversity, are put in place.
- Given the nature of the work of Women's Aid, we remain committed to ensuring the stringent protection of children and vulnerable adults and to utilising existing legislation in order to ensure their safety and to mitigate risk. As such we would seek greater clarity on the precise nature of Proposal 20 (Pg.25).
- Women's Aid supports the view that volunteering can have enormous benefits in respect of developing skills, building upon and consolidating experience and enhancing self-esteem and confidence. We therefore welcome Proposal 21 (Pg.26) which addresses real and perceived barriers which may prevent people on benefits from volunteering.
- We are however somewhat concerned by the suggestion of encouraging people on benefits to, "try out volunteering to demonstrate how easy and worthwhile it is to become involved." It is important that the nature and variety of volunteering opportunities are properly conveyed. Not every organisation is in a position to offer short term "turn up, take part" opportunities.
- In the context of our work, we are highly invested in our volunteers and they are required to undergo extensive internal training by our staff.
- In addition volunteers are in vital and important functional positions within our organisation. As such, we are committed to them and their development and require their commitment in turn. Volunteering is not a casual activity but a responsible and serious commitment of time and effort and should be conveyed as such.

- Women's Aid host information sessions for potential volunteers which we feel gives a useful grounding in the work we carry out and the benefits of volunteering.

Chapter 6 – Objective 3: Volunteering: Improving the Experience

- In respect of Proposals 22-29 (Pg.28) we support the need for a greater degree of recognition for the role of volunteer manager.
- Similarly, we share the view that volunteers should be supported to enhance their skills and to seek formal accreditation (Proposal 31, Pg.32).
- This process is however extremely costly and this cost must be absorbed by individual organisations. We feel that this is matter which must be addressed.
- Women's Aid fully supports Proposal 26 (Pg.29) in respect of encouraging significant regional, cultural and sporting events to involve and recognise volunteers.
- We further welcome Proposals 28 and 29 (Pg. 31) which stipulate encouraging family volunteering.
- We feel that encouraging the public sector to engage in the development of volunteering is a very positive step (Proposal 33, Pg.32).
- We would welcome further details in respect of Proposal 34 (P.32). In particular the specific criteria which will be employed by funders in determining the standard and quality of "volunteer involvement and management" and how these will be established codified and administered.

Chapter 7 – Objective 4: Volunteering: Supporting and Strengthening the Infrastructure

- In respect of Proposals 35 (Pg.34) in developing an integrated regional and local infrastructure to support volunteer involvement and delivery of the strategy, we are concerned that in making strategic linkages, the confidentiality and safety of the women and children we work with is protected.
- We welcome the proposal (36, Pg. 34) to review existing funding structures within DSD to create a comprehensive investment programme to deliver the strategy and underpin the future of volunteering in Northern

Ireland. We would however request further detail on the conditions and monitoring processes as these can often be a strain on resources.

Chapter 8 – Objective 5: Volunteering: Delivering the Strategy

- Women's Aid would seek greater clarity in respect of the composition of the monitoring group as specified in Proposal 37 (Pg. 35)
- In particular, what will be the criteria for the selection of member of the group? It is also essential that members are representative in respect of gender, diversity and of both urban and rural areas of Northern Ireland.
- We support the process of evaluation and consolidation as outlined on Proposals 38 and 39 (Pg.35)
- The voluntary sector is resource dependent both financially and in terms of personnel. The delivery of the strategy and ongoing engagement will require an investment of resources on the part of the Department and consideration given to the volume of paperwork and processes involved in implementation. (Proposal 40, Pg.36)
- We feel it is essential that all Government departments engage in the process of delivering on the strategy. As such we fully support the proposal to develop a champion for volunteering within Government (Proposal 41, Pg.36).
- In addition, Women's Aid welcomes the Proposal (42, Pg. 36) to encourage health trusts, local councils and education bodies to get involved and remain involved in delivering the strategy.

For further information about this response contact:

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