



Federation Northern Ireland

The Department for Social Development

A Response to: Northern Ireland Supporting People Guidance

March 2011

Women's Aid Federation Northern Ireland

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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 for Social Development's consultation on the Northern Ireland Supporting People Guidance 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 Women's Aid notes that the Supporting People programme became operational from April 2003.

8.2 Since that time, Women's Aid with the vital assistance of Supporting People funding, has provided refuge to 7,644 women

and 6,589 children who were being subjected to systematic violence and abuse in their own homes, across Northern Ireland.

- 8.3 It is of note that of the overall estimated cost to the economy of Northern Ireland, resulting from domestic violence, ¹£180 million approximately, the provision and financial support of Women's Aid services represents just ²3.7% of this cost.
- 8.4 Point 1.6 of the consultation document states that the Supporting People programme has a Public Service Agreement (PSA) target of assisting 12,000 people and that currently the programme assists approximately 23,000 people.
- 8.5 These figures clearly evidence manifest need and Women's Aid would contend that, particularly in light of the current socio-economic environment, they are unlikely to diminish.
- 8.6 Further, the figure of 23,000 people currently being assisted, by the Programme equates to approximately 1.28% of the population of Northern Ireland (Based on a 2008 assessment of population size, 1.759 million).
- 8.7 Women's Aid would suggest that in light of changes in population size and demography and figures which indicate that the programme is currently almost doubling the reach of its PSA target, that the time is appropriate to re-assess that target.
- 8.8 In respect of point 1.7, of the document, we agree with the contention that it is important that existing and new services are being developed to meet local need, identified through local strategic planning.
- 8.9 Similarly, we support the view that services must be planned and designed taking full account of the experience and needs of service users.
- 8.10 It is in this context however, that Women's Aid remains deeply concerned that there is a fundamental lack of partnership and consultation with the voluntary sector which significantly impacts the ability to assess local need and to place important issues such as domestic violence, at the heart of policy making.

¹ Walby, S (2004) "**The Cost of Domestic Violence**," University of Leeds

² Women's Aid Federation NI (2011) "**Women's Aid Federation NI Commentary on the Comprehensive Spending Review**" Total cost of WA Services: £6,663,991.89

- 8.11 It is our contention that as a direct result, gaps in service provision have already emerged, including a lack of funding in some areas for our vital and frequently oversubscribed floating support service, which enables women who have experienced domestic violence to be supported whilst remaining in their own homes and communities.
- 8.12 Consequently, in our opinion, it is a serious omission that our organisation is not involved in the commissioning process, which directly impacts referrals to our services and is central to the overall planning process. We would request that steps are taken to redress this, as a matter of urgency.
- 8.13 Women's Aid would also argue that the planning of services should be carried out not only in the context of relevant homelessness, housing and social care strategies but also with cognisance of the safeguarding agenda in Northern Ireland both in respect of children and young people and vulnerable adults.
- 8.14 It is of note that the importance of safeguarding is acknowledged in the context of the NIHE Supporting People Quality Assessment Framework Core Service Objectives (Standard, C1.3.2, Pg.16)
- 8.15 Given the importance placed upon reflecting issues and themes that are, "corporate issues for the Department of Social Development, the Northern Ireland Housing Executive and all those involved in commissioning service," Women's Aid would continue to strongly assert that domestic violence must remain a Departmental priority.

9.0 Legislative Context

- 9.1 Women's Aid accepts the legislative context as outlined in point 2.0 of the consultation document.

10.0 Housing Related Support

- 10.1 In respect of point 3.0, "Housing Related Support" and in light of our comments in points 8.13 and 8.14, we would strongly recommend the inclusion of the term, "Women *and children* at risk of domestic violence."
- 10.2 We would suggest that point 3.3 (bullet point 5) should read, "emotional resilience".
- 10.3 Women's Aid supports CRISPP (Committee Representing Independent Supporting People Providers) in their contention that

the focus of the prevention of homelessness, contained in point 3.5, is too restrictive and does not take into consideration circumstances where a Supporting People funded service can prevent an individual from entering institutional care (as acknowledged in 3.7)

- 10.4 We would strongly recommend that point 3.7 should include domestic violence in the list of vulnerabilities outlined.

11.0 Eligible Housing Support Services

- 11.1 With regard to the Commissioning Body, discussed in point 4.2 of the consultation document, we return to the concerns outlined in point 8.12 of our response.
- 11.2 Specifically, that we are deeply troubled by the absence of voluntary sector organisations on this body. It is essential, in our view that organisations such as Women's Aid are in a position to contribute to the identification, assessment and agreement of priorities going forward.
- 11.3 We agree with CRISPP that point 4.4 should read, "In all cases, but particularly where **both** support and care is being delivered."
- 11.4 Women's Aid has no broad objections to the principles for housing support as outlined in point 4.4.
- 11.5 We would however, recommend that the first stated principle should read as follows, "is provided to a service recipient who has vulnerabilities **or is an adult at risk of harm**, which render them in need of support services."
- 11.6 Our organisation does however have fundamental objections to the decision stated in point 4.7, that "services such as crèche facilities, educational services or individual/group support to help children recovering from trauma are not eligible for Supporting People Grant".
- 11.7 We strongly dispute this position and view it as a serious error. We are of the opinion that women must be helped with their children in a supportive and protected environment. This is also essential if women are to meet other stated priorities in the document, in respect of their personal development and learning new life skills.
- 11.8 Our organisation is also concerned that point 4.7 makes no mention of an assessment of the level of risk, nor does it include vulnerable adults.

- 11.9 In the context of the examples given of, “assisting with the security of the dwelling required because of the needs of the service user,” we would recommend that the first bullet point should read, “accommodation for women **and children** who have experienced **and/or are at risk of domestic violence.**”
- 11.10 We would also suggest that the term **service user** is sufficient and would be more appropriate than the use of “him or her” in the context of, “Advising or assisting the service user to enable him or her to move on to accommodation where less intensive support is required.
- 11.11 We would further recommend that the maintaining of emergency alarm and call systems in accommodation designed or adapted for and occupied by the elderly, sick or disabled people, should be extended to include the vulnerable and those at risk and would cite the example of the Sanctuary Scheme.
- 11.12 Women’s Aid would also contend that costs should include assisting with general security needs and any issues arising.
- 11.13 Similarly funding should be extended to cover responding to emergency alarm calls in supported accommodation designed or adapted for those at risk. This is particularly important in the context of moving on from refuge and of Women’s Aid’s Floating Support service.

12.0 Associated Support/Overhead Costs

- 12.1 Women’s Aid would strongly contend that the management and administrative costs associated with the delivery of the Supporting People Grant should be attached to all eligible costs.
- 12.2 In this context, we would cite the personnel intensive work involved in fulfilling the Supporting People monitoring and reporting requirements, including the Quality and Assessment Framework (QAF) and the Spotnet database.
- 12.3 In addition, we agree with CRISPP, that this section would benefit from more examples of eligible costs.

13.0 Ineligible Housing Support Services

- 13.1 As previously discussed, Women’s Aid is fundamentally of the view that there is a pressing need for the provision and funding of children’s services provided in a safe and supportive environment.

- 13.2 As such, we are enormously disappointed at the exclusion of “childcare” which should be defined as “child services”.
- 13.3 The vast majority of children residing in our refuges are considered to be at risk and we would refer to our comments in point 8.14 of this response which highlight the safeguarding obligations outlined in the NIHE Supporting People Quality Assessment Framework, Core Service Objectives.

14.0 Excepted Accommodation

- 14.1 Women’s Aid is extremely disappointed to note the stated ineligibility of migrant workers who have no recourse to public funds.
- 14.2 In these cases women who have experienced domestic and sexual violence are left financially dependent for their survival on their abusers.
- 14.3 More women with no recourse to public funds escaping domestic violence will face homelessness, sleeping rough, hardship and complete poverty. They are also at risk of losing their children as they have no means to support them. At worse women may be murdered if they are left with no choice but to stay in an abusive relationship.
- 14.4 Women’s Aid is willing and committed to providing support, emergency accommodation and assistance for all women and children who are victims of domestic violence however they are severely limited in their capacity to do so due to this stipulation in respect of the Supporting People Grant.
- 14.5 Our organisation supports CRISPP in their contention that primary and secondary legislation does not state that the payment of Special Needs Management Allowance (SNMA), is time bound. Legacy SNMA should continue to be paid while the care homes the allowance supports continue to remain strategically relevant to the provision of the important services they provide to vulnerable people.

15.0 Accreditation

- 15.1 In respect of point 7.2, Women’s Aid is of the opinion that Housing Associations providing direct support should be required to engage fully in the accreditation process.

- 15.2 In agreeing that new providers should be accredited, we are concerned by the proposed two tier accreditation approach and that feel that “Accreditation Lite” may represent a much less rigorous system.
- 15.3 Further, we would seek clarification as to the definition of a “sole trader” and a “specialist organisation”, as outlined in point 7.3.
- 15.4 We would seek clarification in respect of the timeline for the standards outlined in point 7.5. In particular, at what stage will concerns about a provider give rise to a review process and what will be involved in that review?

16.0 Housing Association’s Passporting to Supported People Funding

- 16.1 We join with CRISPP in suggesting that this section needs to refer to DSD’s own grading system, to reduce the potential for ambiguity and to use the correct terminology.
- 16.2 Women’s Aid also shares their concern that whilst the section discusses what will happen if an association does not meet the regulatory standards set by DSD i.e. that Supporting People Grant may be withdrawn from the association, it does not refer to the potential impact on the existing service user and how the services should be provided if this were to happen.
- 16.3 We are of the similar view that this is a serious issue and has the potential to adversely affect how vulnerable people live independently within our society.

17.0 Reserves

- 17.1 In the context of point 9.7. Women’s Aid would strongly contend that the decision to recover any unspent monies should be open to discussion and to the presentation of a case for the retention and use of these funds. Additionally, the decision should be in looked at in proportion to the overall size of the contract.
- 17.2 It is our opinion that one year auditing is not appropriate for the continuation of projects. The duration for sustainability needs to be longer to take into consideration matters such as short-term staffing issues. To this end, we would suggest a 3 year overview.

Additional Issues:

18.0 The Change from “Funding” to “Grant”

- 18.1 We note the decision, as illustrated in point 3.2., to change from Supporting People *funding* to Supporting People *grant*.
- 18.2 Our organisation is concerned that this decision represents micro-management and is also likely to stifle creativity.
- 18.3 Similarly, it may serve to encourage frivolous spending, particularly at the end of the financial year or grant period.
- 18.4 The ability to recoup, afforded by grant status is also likely to lead to difficulties for organisations such as Women's Aid, particularly in the context of managing personnel issues such as staff sickness and protracted recruitment processes, which may extend beyond the duration of the grant.

19.0 Training

- 19.1 Women's Aid would suggest that there is a fundamental need for training for all Northern Ireland Housing Executive staff both in the completion of DASH forms and in domestic violence awareness training, which is essential both in the context of risk assessment and for appropriate signposting and referral.

20.0 Appendices

- 20.1 In respect of Appendix 4, the stated ineligibility of the Ad Hoc provision of advice and support, without a support plan, serves to exclude the service provided by our staff to those women who may "drop in" to our services with a view to assessing their suitability for their own particular needs.
- 20.2 The ineligibility of shopping for service users, fails to consider that this may be a necessary function in cases of high risk victims and those with special needs.
- 20.3 Women's Aid would contend that the failure to pay for the cost of social events is in direct opposition to the stated wish to encourage social interaction.
- 20.4 We are further of the opinion that the decision not to permit the refurbishment of office equipment is not cost effective nor does it represent efficient practice.
- 20.5 Appendix five should be updated to include the recognition that Northern Ireland now has a charity commission.

For further information about this response please contact:

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