



Federation Northern Ireland

Consultation response to

Northern Outcomes Group Consultation Document

Priorities to inform the action plan for the Northern Area

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Open to anyone affected by domestic violence

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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.

Throughout this consultation response, the term "Women's Aid" is used to reflect the overall Women's Aid movement in Northern Ireland, which is made up of ten local Women's Aid groups and Women's Aid Federation. The ten local Women's Aid groups are all members of Women's Aid Federation Northern Ireland. Each Women's Aid group offers a range of specialist services to women, children and young people who have experienced domestic violence.

3.0 Women's Aid statistics (2010-2011)

- 12 refuges with 300 bed spaces, playrooms and facilities.
- 1,058 women and 754 children sought refuge.

- 15 resource centres for women seeking information and support; group work and training.
- 3,450 women and 3,739 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.
- The 24 Hour Domestic Violence Helpline, open to anyone affected by domestic violence, managed 38,296 calls.

4.0 Additional Women’s Aid statistical data

- Since 1999, Women’s Aid across Northern Ireland gave refuge to 14,714 women and 14,356 children and young people.
- During the last 16 years Women’s Aid Federation Northern Ireland managed 282,860 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.¹
- Over 30% of all domestic violence starts during pregnancy.²

6.0 Domestic violence: Crime statistics (Source: PSNI Statistics 2010/11)

- Domestic violence is a crime. PSNI statistics for 2010/11 indicate there were more recorded crimes with a domestic motivation (9,546) than the combined total of all the following crimes (9,471). These include all recorded sexual offences (2,120), robbery (622), armed robbery (562), hijacking (122), theft or unauthorised taking of a motor vehicle (2719), arson (1884) dangerous driving (699), handling stolen goods (194) and offences under anti-terrorism legislation (19).

¹Findings from the PSNI Crime Statistics Report 2010/11 N.B. “Adult” defined as aged 18 and over

²Women’s Aid Federation Northern Ireland

- PSNI Statistics for 2010/11 indicate they responded to a domestic incident every 23 minutes of every day of the year.
- The total of 9,546 crimes with a domestic motivation in 2010/11 represents an average of approximately 1 domestic crime every 60 minutes in Northern Ireland.
- The number of all recorded offences of murder in Northern Ireland in 2010/11 total 20. Those classed as having a domestic motivation total 7. Therefore, 35% of all murders in Northern Ireland in 2010/11 had a domestic motivation.
- There were 550 rapes (including attempted Rapes) in Northern Ireland in the period 2010/11.
- 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.

7.0 Children and domestic violence

- 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. Statistics for MARACs (Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conferences) in Northern Ireland show that between January 2010 and January 2012 inclusive, 2990 domestic violence cases were discussed. In these MARAC cases 2868 of the victims were women. A total of 4187 children were recorded as part of these households.
- Children and young people will experience domestic violence in many ways and every experience will be different. A study by Hughes (1992³) of families, who had experienced domestic violence, showed that 90% of children were in the same or next room when the violence was occurring. Studies by Leighton (1989)⁴ showed that 68% of children from families where there was a history of domestic violence were witnesses. The Hidden Victims Study⁵ of 108 mothers attending NCH family centres who had experienced domestic violence showed that 90% of children were aware of the violence, 75% had witnessed violence, 10% had witnessed sexual violence, 99% of children had seen their mothers crying or upset as a result of the violence and more than half of the women (52%) said their children had seen the resulting injuries. The Hidden Victims Study also showed that more than a quarter (27%) of the children involved had been hit or physically abused by the violent partner.

³Holder, R et al (1994) *Suffering in Silence? Children and Young People who witness Domestic Violence*, Hammersmith and Fulham, Domestic Violence Forum: London.

⁴ Ibid

⁵National Children's Homes, Action for Children (1994), *The Hidden Victims, Children and Domestic Violence*, NHC: London.

- Domestic violence has adverse effects on children and young people and can be traumatic. It can impact upon all areas of life, including, health, education, the development of relationships, recreation and social activities. The effects of domestic violence on children are wide ranging and will differ for each child. A wealth of research has identified domestic violence as an underlying theme behind social issues such as, school dropout and exclusion, youth homelessness and young people engaging in risk taking behaviour. Children and young people have varying levels of resilience and all agencies that come into contact with children and young people who experience domestic violence, have a responsibility to build upon this resilience.
- Women’s Aid has a long and successful history of working with children and young people who experience domestic violence. As the lead agency addressing domestic violence in Northern Ireland, Women’s Aid wishes to draw attention to its recent progressive developments for children and young people who are affected by domestic violence as follows:
 - The forthcoming publication and launch of “Our Place – Safe Space” a five year strategy, developed by Women’s Aid for children and young people who are affected by domestic violence. This strategy is accompanied by a directory of Women’s Aid Services for Children and Young People who are (or may be at risk of) experiencing domestic violence. It is also monitored by a robust and comprehensive performance measurement framework to measure progress against strategic areas, aims and objectives.
 - The development and delivery by Women’s Aid, of “Developing Social Guardians” training to teachers and other professionals across Northern Ireland as part of an innovative pilot project delivered in partnership with the Department of Education.
 - The extensive review and subsequent reprint of preventative education packages including, “Helping Hands” and “Heading for Healthy Relationships”.
 - Women’s Aid’s innovative approach to preventative education work utilising the above education packages is recognised and included in the Tackling Violence at Home action plan.

8.0 Consultation response

- 8.1 Women’s Aid welcomes the establishment of the five Outcomes Groups and the subsequent publication of priorities identified to inform the actions plans for each outcome group. Women’s Aid groups across Northern Ireland are currently represented at various levels of planning for children and young people, including, Outcomes Groups, Locality

Planning Groups and Family Support Hubs and on the C&YP Strategic Partnership.

- 8.1 Women's Aid welcomes the opportunity to comment on the priorities identified by each outcomes group, on behalf of Women's Aid Federation Northern Ireland and the ten local Women's Aid groups. As part of this response process, a consultation session was facilitated with Women's Aid groups across Northern Ireland. The following consultation response reflects their collective views.
- 8.2 This opportunity has come at a significant and strategic time for Women's Aid as it is about to launch a five year strategy for children and young people (2012-2017) "Our Place - Safe Space". This strategy has been developed by Women's Aid, to demonstrate a strategic and innovative vision for children and young people who experience (or may be at risk of experiencing) domestic violence. The strategy presents a new approach for Women's Aid across Northern Ireland. It represents a move to the creation of a single regional children and young people's strategy, to drive forward service provision and development over a five year period. It is based upon a "think regionally, act locally" model and sets out the regional priorities for the period, providing a standardised framework for Women's Aid, to respond to the strategic priorities identified, on a local and regional level.

9.0 Generic issues across all Outcomes Groups

- 9.1 There are some issues Women's Aid would like to raise in this section which are generic and relevant to all Outcomes Groups consultation documents. Issues which are specific to the Northern Outcomes group will be explored further and presented in section 11.
- 9.2 Women's Aid would like to express some concerns regarding the different approaches adopted by each group in relation to the presentation of consultation documents and consultation approach. Each document, while following a generic layout, differs significantly in the presentation of priorities and also in the format of consultation response required. Women's Aid would recommend a more standardised approach with each set of priorities identified and benchmarked across all six high level outcomes identified in the Northern Ireland Children's Strategy. We would also recommend a standardised consultation response format for all Outcomes Groups. This would facilitate a more streamlined and manageable consultation process, especially for regional organisations such as Women's Aid.
- 9.1 Women's Aid is seriously concerned about the very obvious absence of domestic and sexual violence throughout all consultation documents.

While we welcome the inclusion of domestic violence as a priority for some Outcomes Groups under the high level outcome *Living in Safety and with Stability*, we feel this is by no means adequate. Some Outcomes Groups do not specifically mention domestic violence at all while others present merely a brief reference. Sexual violence is not referred to in any priorities identified across all five Outcomes Groups.

- 9.2 We believe, given the seriousness of domestic and sexual violence as key issues impacting upon children and young people across Northern Ireland, they should be prioritised as core themes throughout each Outcomes Group action plan. We see this as a serious omission in the five sets of priorities identified.
- 9.3 Women’s Aid wishes to highlight the fact that domestic and sexual violence are both serious issues impacting upon all areas of children’s lives and therefore cut across all six high level outcomes presented in the overall NI Children and Young People’s strategy.
- 9.4 “Our Place - Safe Space” Women’s Aid’s five year children and young people’s strategy and the accompanying performance measurement system highlights how domestic violence and the services provided by Women’s Aid stretch across all six high level outcomes. This is highlighted in the tables provided.
- 9.5 We would recommend that the plans of all Outcomes groups include support for these areas of work that Women’s Aid undertakes for children & young people in local areas.

Healthy

- **Women's Aid:**
- Provides positive support interventions for children and young people which have the potential to have a positive impact upon the physical health and emotional well being of children and young people who are victims of domestic and sexual violence.

Enjoying, learning and achieving

- **Women's Aid:**
- Encourages positive learning for children and young people in all aspects of service delivery.
- Provides positive interventions to enable children and young people to participate fully in education.
- Supports mothers to enrol children in local schools as a priority, to ensure continuity, routine and ongoing education provision.
- Provides successful education programmes in both primary and post primary schools including "Helping Hands" and "Heading for Healthy Relationships" to promote self esteem, healthy relationships and awareness of rights.
- Provides a rolling programme of fun play and recreational activities, events and celebrations.

Experiencing economic and environmental well being

- **Women's Aid:**
- Provides practical support to mothers who have experienced domestic violence, to improve their economic and environmental well being. This may include, housing support, advice relating to benefits etc.
- Provides a range of programmes for mothers such as "Journey to Freedom" and "You and Me, Mum", to develop confidence and self esteem and to contribute to emotional well being.
- Creates a positive family environment for women, children and young people.

Contributing positively to community and society

- **Women's Aid:**
- Encourages children and young people to participate creatively in service development and delivery through youth forums and models of consultation.
- Actively works in partnership with a range of agencies to ensure the voices of children and young people are heard.
- Promotes positive social change and improved outcomes for children and young people who experience domestic and sexual violence.
- Provides training and peer educational opportunities for young people to enable them to contribute positively to society.

Living in safety and with stability

- **Women's Aid:**
- Provides safe accommodation for women, children and young people who experience domestic and sexual violence.
- Provides Floating Support/outreach services to women, children and young people in the community.
- Provides role of Women's Safety Workers to support partners and ex partners and their children of men attending PBNI, IDAP perpetrator programmes.
- Provides support through MARAC (Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference) for high risk victims of domestic violence including women children and young people.
- Encourages children and young people to engage in safety planning through protective behaviours programmes.
- Works directly with mothers, children and young people to support them in creating a safe environment.
- Promotes safe messages in schools and communities through education packages such as "Helping Hands" and "Heading for Healthy Relationships"

Living in a society which respects their rights

- **Women's Aid** is fully committed to this outcome, as a recurring theme, which stretches across all areas of work including, support provision, group work, partnership working and prevention work in schools and communities. Women's Aid is also committed to acting as an advocate for children's rights.

9.6 Women's Aid would also welcome clarification in relation to how the Outcomes Groups will link strategically and operationally with the local Domestic Violence Partnerships and other multi agency groups such as Child Protection Panels, the Safeguarding Board, Police and Community Safety Partnerships etc.

9.7 We note that at the Children & Young People's Strategic Partnership Board meeting of 21 March 2012, a decision was taken to formally link the C&YPSP Board with the combined Domestic Violence and Sexual Abuse strategies through the Children and Young People's sub group. We strongly believe this link must be established and the work of the C&YP sub-group locked into the children's planning process. If this does not happen there is a risk that the domestic and sexual abuse of children will not feature as the critical issues they are in both the regional strategic planning and local outcomes of the NI Children & Young People's plan.

10.0 Recommendations/suggested actions

- 10.1 Women's Aid would like to take this opportunity to present general suggestions and recommendations in relation to the development and implementation of all five Outcomes Groups action plans. We would also like to take this opportunity to highlight best practice which is currently in place and that we are aware of.
- 10.2 Women's Aid recommends the introduction and implementation of routine enquiry in relation to domestic and sexual violence as core practice for all health professionals, including midwives, health visitors, GPs etc. This is not currently in place for all health care professions and is only practised in some Health and Social Care Trusts. Where this has been in practice, it has proved to be extremely successful and has presented a lifeline for women who are experiencing domestic and sexual violence. We believe routine enquiry can help a woman to take the first step towards getting vital support.
- 10.3 Women's Aid strongly recommends a robust interagency approach in all areas of children and young people's services planning and delivery. In relation to the five Outcomes Groups, we believe it is vital to develop formal links and effective communication and information sharing with local Domestic Violence Partnerships, Local Child Protection Panels, Police and Community Safety Partnerships, the Safeguarding Board and the combined Domestic Violence and Sexual Abuse strategies through the Children and Young People's sub group. We believe domestic violence requires a holistic approach and every agency coming into contact with women and children has a vital role to play.
- 10.4 Women's Aid strongly believes the needs of all children and young people must be included in all Outcomes Groups priorities to be addressed. This includes the needs of BME children and the needs of children whose mothers have no recourse to public funds. These women are not eligible for benefits, such as housing benefit whilst in refuge, and prohibited from employment. As such, non-UK national victims of domestic and sexual violence are essentially trapped, faced with an impossible and inhumane choice between destitution and a life of violence and abuse. In these cases, women and children who have experienced domestic and sexual violence are left financially dependent for their survival on their abusers. Women's Aid is committed to providing support, emergency accommodation and assistance for all women and children who are victims of domestic violence. We believe all women and children experiencing domestic violence should have access to safety and support services. We call for a robust inter agency approach to addressing this issue to ensure these extremely vulnerable women and children are afforded the vital support they need.

- 10.5 Women's Aid welcomes the inclusion of poverty as an indicator of concern in The Western Outcomes Group priorities. We believe that the situations resulting from domestic violence can subject women and children to poverty. We are deeply concerned that women, who have experienced domestic violence, are reporting significant difficulties in accessing entitlements in Northern Ireland. Women accessing our services often have no money or income and can be denied access to their own money by violent partners. Without financial and practical help to rebuild their lives and the lives of their children, they are left destitute at a very vulnerable time. We recommend the inclusion of a robust approach to monitoring the impact of welfare reform and the introduction of universal credit on women and children experiencing domestic violence across all Outcomes Groups priorities and plans.
- 10.6 Women's Aid wishes to highlight an innovative model of service delivery currently in place in both Belfast and South Eastern Trusts. This model involves Women's Aid Workers working directly with Gateway teams and presents a proactive, interagency approach to tackling domestic violence, based upon early intervention and prevention. The model is based upon an understanding of the need for effective partnership working at all levels of need and is based upon a foundation of close collaborative working to achieve positive outcomes. The implementation of this model across the two Trust areas will provide an innovative, proactive and preventative early response to families, based upon a wealth of expertise from all partner agencies involved. Women's Aid is delighted to commend this as a model of best practice and would welcome a regional roll out of this approach across all Trust areas.
- 10.7 Women's Aid also wishes to highlight and commend a joint partnership between Women's Aid and PSNI Public Protection Units. The role of the PSNI Support Workers in four police divisions has proved to be extremely successful. An independently commissioned external evaluation highlighted a range of positive outcomes for families experiencing domestic violence as a direct result of this model. Again, Women's Aid would welcome the roll out of this model across Northern Ireland in all police divisions and Trust areas.
- 10.8 Key learning from these and other collaborative working partnerships such as MARAC (Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference) IDAP (Integrated Domestic Abuse Programme) and local Health Trust Domestic Violence Partnerships needs to be harnessed and embedded in all planning processes regarding families who are at risk of or currently experiencing domestic violence.
- 10.9 Women's Aid would like to see a more standardised approach to recording and monitoring domestic and sexual violence across all agencies to enable effective data collection which will present a more

accurate picture of the true scale of the problem. We know from experience that statistics currently available from PSNI and other agencies represent only the tip of the ice berg.

11.0 Issues specific to the Northern Outcomes Group

- 11.1 We have concerns that the priorities identified do not address all six high level outcomes as identified in the Northern Ireland Children’s Strategy. As the overarching strategy for all children and young in Northern Ireland, we believe all effective planning should be tailored to these outcomes and benchmarked against them on an ongoing basis. We would have found it useful for all Outcomes Groups to follow a standardised presentation of initial priorities under each high level outcome.
- 11.2 In addition to the general points already raised in relation to all Outcomes Groups consultation documents, Women’s Aid would like to also take the opportunity to raise some points, which are specific to the priorities identified by the Northern Outcomes Group in their consultation document.
- 11.3 While we welcome and commend many of the priorities identified by the group, we are seriously concerned about the absolute absence of domestic and sexual violence in the priorities presented. Given statistics and research which highlight the extent and serious nature of these issues for children and young people in Northern Ireland (see section 7.0) we consider this a serious omission.
- 11.4 We commend the identification of a need for greater availability of early intervention family support services for children, young people and their families, particularly in relation to mental and emotional well being. We would however welcome specific reference to domestic and sexual violence in the priorities identified. There are examples of good practice already in place in other Trust areas in relation to early intervention and prevention of domestic and sexual violence and child protection. This is explored further in section 11.

12.0 Concluding comments

- 12.1 Women’s Aid appreciates the opportunity to respond to initial priorities identified by the five Outcomes Groups, both individually and collectively. We urge consideration of the points we have raised in the development of action plans for each Outcomes Group. We welcome the opportunity to review action plans for each Outcomes Group once produced.

- 12.2 Women's Aid would like to reiterate our serious concern that there is little or no reference in the priorities identified by each Outcome Group to children and young people affected by domestic and sexual violence. There is no reference to sexual violence at all. We feel this is a serious omission which we would like to see rectified in the production of the finalised action plans for each Outcomes Group.
- 12.3 Women's Aid believes in the need for an integrated and holistic approach to meeting the needs of all children and young people affected by domestic and sexual violence. We therefore seek clarification on how the Outcomes groups will link into the local Domestic Violence Partnerships, Police and Community Safety Partnerships, Child Protection panels and to the combined Domestic Violence and Sexual Abuse strategies through the Children and Young People's sub group.
- 12.4 We would recommend that the plans of all Outcomes groups include support for the vital services provided by Women's Aid for children & young people in local areas, and that stretch across all the high level outcomes as outlined in the tables on page 9. Much of this work is funded in an ad-hoc manner and needs to be secured before further developments are planned.

13.0 Contact details

For further information about this response please contact:

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