



Federation Northern Ireland

**Consultation response to
Northern Ireland Children and Young
People's Plan 2011-2014
Regional Sub Group on Children and Young
People with Emotional and Behavioural
Difficulties
Draft Action Plan
2011-2014**

Women's Aid Federation Northern Ireland
129 University Street
BELFAST BT7 1HP

Tel: 02890 249041

Fax: 02890 239296

General Email: info@womensaidni.org

Website: www.womensaidni.org

24 Hour Domestic Violence Helpline - 0800 917 1414

Email Support: 24hrsupport@dvhelpline.org

Text SUPPORT to 07797805839

Open to anyone affected by domestic violence

Contents

Section		Page
1	Introduction	3
2	Core work of Women's Aid	3
3	Women's Aid statistics (2010-2011)	4
4	Additional Women's Aid statistical data	4
5	Statistics: Domestic violence and violence against women	4
6	Domestic violence: Crime statistics	5
7	Children and domestic violence	5
8	Consultation response	7
9	Generic issues across all Sub Groups	7
10	Response to Regional Sub Group on Children and Young People with Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties	9
11	Recommendations/suggested actions	14
12	Concluding comments	16
13	Contact details	17

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 DOJ, 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

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

²Women's Aid Federation Northern Ireland

6.0 Domestic violence: Crime statistics (Source: PSNI Statistics 2011/12)

- Domestic Violence is a crime. PSNI statistics for 2011/12 indicate that there were more recorded crimes with a domestic motivation (10,387) than the combined total of all the following crimes (10,327) – all recorded sexual offences (1,836), shoplifting (6,201) and theft of a motor vehicle (2,290).
- PSNI Statistics for 11/12 indicate that they responded to a domestic incident every 21 minutes of every day of the year.
- The total of 10,387 crimes with a domestic motivation in 11/12 represents an average of approximately 1 domestic crime every 51 minutes in Northern Ireland.
- The number of all recorded offences of murder in Northern Ireland in 11/12 total 16. Those classed as having a domestic motivation total 3. Therefore, 19% of all murders in Northern Ireland in 11/12 had a domestic motivation.
- There were 553 rapes (including attempted Rapes) in Northern Ireland in the period 2011/12.

(Source: PSNI Statistics 2011/12)

- Official sources (NISOSMC) estimate that up to 80% of sex crimes are not reported.

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 August 2012 inclusive, 3971 domestic violence cases were discussed. In these MARAC cases 3792 of the victims were women. A total of 5471 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

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

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.

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 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.

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

8.0 Consultation response

- Women's Aid welcomes the establishment of the Regional Sub Groups and the subsequent publication of draft action plans for the integrated commissioning of supports and services for specific groups of children and young people throughout Northern Ireland. 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.
- Women's Aid welcomes the opportunity to comment on the initial priority areas identified by each Sub Group, on behalf of Women's Aid Federation Northern Ireland and the ten local Women's Aid groups. We understand that the draft action plans will contribute towards the implementation of the Northern Ireland Children and Young People's Plan 2011-2014. As part of this response process, a consultation process was facilitated with Women's Aid groups across Northern Ireland. The following consultation response reflects their collective views.
- This opportunity has come at a significant and strategic time for Women's Aid as it has recently launched 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 Sub Groups

- There are some issues Women's Aid would like to raise in this section which are generic and relevant to all Sub Groups consultation documents.
- Women's Aid is seriously concerned about the very obvious absence of domestic and sexual violence throughout all action plans, particularly under the high level outcome, Living in Safety and with Stability. Most action plans do not specifically mention domestic and sexual violence at all while those that do present merely a brief reference. We see this as a serious omission across all Sub Group draft action plans. Women's Aid wishes to highlight the fact that domestic and sexual violence are fundamental causes of ill health, inequality and blight the future for all groups of children and young people.

While we welcome the fact that the Children and Young People's Sub Group on domestic and sexual violence (accountable to both CYPSP and the Regional Strategic Group of Tackling Domestic and Sexual Violence and Abuse) will be producing an action plan, we still feel it is imperative that domestic and sexual violence must be addressed in the action plans of all groups within the Northern Ireland Children and Young People's Plan. Domestic and sexual violence can impact upon all areas of children's lives and therefore cuts across all six high level outcomes. "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 for all children.

- Women's Aid welcomes the references to other organisations, Sub Groups and partnerships each Sub Group intends to link in with. However, for many Sub Groups, in several outcomes, there is no indication of linking to any other group, organisation, partnership or strategy. Improving the lives of children and young people requires an integrated approach, as well as the combined skills, commitment and responsibilities of all government departments, criminal justice agencies, local domestic violence partnerships and relevant voluntary and statutory organisations.
- We would like to see more evidence of how each Sub Group will link strategically and operationally with a range of groups, organisations, partnerships and strategies including, the local Domestic Violence Partnerships and other multi agency groups such as Child Protection Panels, the Safeguarding Board, Childcare Partnerships, Police and Community Safety Partnerships etc. We would also like to see a strategic link to the Regional Strategic Group of Tackling Domestic and Sexual Violence and Abuse and in particular, the Children and Young People's Sub Group.
- Women's Aid would like to take this opportunity to emphasise the importance and value of the work of the Family Support Hubs which are referred to in several action plans. However, we strongly believe there is a fundamental need to ensure these structures are adequately resourced if they are to successfully address the huge areas of unmet need that currently exist.
- While we commend the actions stated in the plans, we feel that many of these are aspirational and not specific enough. We also question the existence of funding to drive forward these actions. Women's Aid strongly believes that adequate funding streams must be put in place to ensure the effective implementation of all Sub Group plans. While the key actions presented in the plans are to be commended, they must be strengthened by the existence of core long term funding.

10. Response to Regional Sub Group on Children and Young People with Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties

First and foremost Women's Aid would like to highlight that domestic and sexual violence is an issue that can be experienced by all children and young people. 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.

We strongly recommend the inclusion of domestic and sexual violence as one of the recognised possible causes of emotional and behavioural difficulties among children and young people. We would like to see this reflected throughout the document including in the introduction and in the qualitative and quantitative measures across the high level outcomes.

10.1 High level outcome

Healthy

We would like to see the inclusion of a quantitative indicator specifically linked to domestic and sexual violence. We have referenced various research studies throughout this consultation response which could be referenced as a quantitative indicator.

Research has shown that domestic and sexual 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 and sexual violence on children are wide ranging and will differ for each child and can be both emotional and physical and can impact upon their emotions and behaviours. A wealth of research has identified domestic and sexual 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 and sexual violence, have a responsibility to build upon this resilience.

On page 6, third bullet point, *recognising that there are particular difficulties with certain children and young people...* we recommend the inclusion of children and young people living in families where domestic and sexual violence is present. Research⁶ has shown that 1 in 4 women have experienced or currently experience domestic violence.

Actions presented under *What we will do* list are not followed through in the table (as is the presentation in the other Sub Group action plans). It appears that the development of an Infant Mental Health Strategy (which is welcomed) is a panacea.

⁶ McWilliams, M & McKiernan, J (1993) *Bringing it out in the Open*, HMSO:Belfast

Most specifically the children with particular difficulties detailed on page 6 are not directly referred to again.

Women's Aid believes the response to children and young people with emotional and behavioural difficulties needs to be wider than a new strategy and needs to recognise that these children suffer additional problems due to societal response to them and therefore the action plan needs to incorporate mechanisms for challenging attitudes.

Regarding the implementation milestone, *develop a range of robust indicator tools for infant mental health including attachment and resilience*, Women's Aid believes this is to be welcomed but should be informed by other pre-existing work. Scottish progress on this may be of value e.g.

Establishing a core set of national, sustainable mental health indicators for children and young people in Scotland: Final Report, Dr Jane Parkinson, Public Health Adviser, NHS Health Scotland: March 2012.

The importance of recognising the impact of adverse childhood experiences and specific actions to deal with neglect should be included.

While we welcome the desire to prioritise early intervention and infant mental health this needs to be two-fold, ensuring that those who have not benefited from actions and support arising from a focus on infant mental health are not under-resourced.

Women's Aid welcomes the development of links with other strategies and would like to see more specific details on this. We would particularly like to see a direct link with the Domestic and Sexual Violence and Abuse Strategic Group and in particular, the Children and Young People's Sub Group.

Women's Aid also questions the inclusion of % of children who are obese as a quantitative indicator without any reference to children who are underweight. The Children with Disabilities Sub Group action plan details the following indicator

% of Children with disabilities who are identified at age 8/9 as being obese or underweight.

We feel this should be added to the above action plan to ensure that it is more comprehensive and as a more general point to begin to link different action plans.

10.2 High level outcome

Enjoying, learning and achieving

Women's Aid welcomes the development of the Full Service Schools to enhance collaborative working at all levels. We are disappointed however, to note that this is the only action presented in the table that follows. We strongly believe this model

must be linked to the whole child approach represented in Our Children and Young People – Our Pledge and must ensure full involvement of parents and children in the development of services. It is also important that schools based in deprived areas and those which fall within Sure Start areas are prioritised as these children will have additional barriers throughout their lives which hinder the ability to meet their full potential.

We welcome the action listed on page 10, *to ensure the school ethos is focused on emotional nurturing through available universal programmes and ensuring intervention services are available when required in schools*. Unfortunately this is not followed through into implementation milestones. We therefore seek further clarification on this will be achieved.

We strongly endorse the need for early intervention services and would like to see a clear and strategic approach to this presented.

We would strongly recommend the inclusion of relationship education for all children and young people. As such we suggest the inclusion of a specific action relating to education opportunities which promote a greater understanding of rights within relationships and increased awareness of the differences between healthy and abusive relationships.

Such education would not only increase young people’s awareness of the nature of abusive relationships but would also increase their understanding of how and where to get help. Women’s Aid, in partnership with the Department of Education and the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, has been at the forefront of raising awareness of issues of safety, healthy relationships and rights within relationships, at both primary and post primary level, through Women’s Aid education resources such as “Helping Hands” and “Heading for Healthy Relationships” programmes. Women’s Aid would be more than willing to share its expertise and knowledge in this area.

10.3 High level outcome

Living with safety and with stability

UNICEF research released in 2006⁷, showing per capita incidence, indicates that there are up to 240,000 – 963,000 children across the UK exposed to domestic and sexual violence and approximately 32,000 children and young people living with domestic and sexual violence in Northern Ireland. NSPCC research⁸, launched in November 2011, estimated that 33,000 babies under 1 in England are living with a parent who reports domestic abuse. This research goes on to state that infants as young as one year old can experience trauma symptoms as a result of domestic and

⁷UNICEF (2006) Behind Closed Doors, the Impact of Domestic and sexual violence on Children. Body Shop International plc. West Sussex

⁸ Cuthbert, C, Rayns, G and Stanley, K (2011) All Babies Count. NSPCC

sexual violence. Statistics for MARACs (Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conferences) in Northern Ireland show that between January 2010 and August 2012 inclusive, 3971 domestic and sexual violence cases were discussed. In these MARAC cases 3792 of the victims were women. A total of 5471 children were recorded as part of these households. At 30 June 2012, 1,985 children were listed on the Child Protection Register in Northern Ireland⁹. We know from research that there also exists a direct link between domestic violence and child protection.

Given this wealth of research and the quantitative and qualitative indicators mentioned on this action plan, which clearly indicates that high numbers of children and young people are not living with safety and with stability, we are seriously concerned about the lack of proactive actions listed under this outcome.

While we welcome the inclusion of children and young people across all ages experiencing domestic and sexual violence as quantitative and qualitative information, we believe there needs to be a stronger reference to domestic and sexual violence throughout the whole document. We would like to see the inclusion of quantitative indicators specifically linked to domestic and sexual violence. These could include:

- Reference to the various research studies which have been referred to throughout this consultation response.
- The number of children in households where a parent has been referred to MARAC in the quantitative indicators.
- The number of children and young people identified by Family Support Hubs as experiencing domestic and sexual violence.

We welcome the development of links with the Family Support Hubs, to ensure that a child or young person, presenting with issues regarding domestic and sexual violence, can be identified and managed properly.

We believe a clear focus on early intervention is crucial. This has been recognised in the Munro Review of Child Protection¹⁰ which states *“Preventative services can do more to reduce abuse and neglect than reactive services”*.

Women’s Aid also believes there is also a need to support and protect mothers as well as supporting and safeguarding children. While we welcome the links to the Family Support Hubs, we also welcome the development of other links such as benchmarking against “Families Matter”, the Northern Ireland Family Support Strategy, produced by the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety. This places parents in a central position and emphasises the need to have available,

⁹ Publication of Children Order Child Protection and Referral Statistics for Northern Ireland (quarter ending 30 June) Department of Health and Social Services, August 2012

¹⁰ Munro E, (2011) The Munro Review of Child Protection, Department for Education, UK

universal services and specific supports for parents to enable them to provide the best possible care for their children.

We also would like to take this opportunity to question the representation / involvement of Women's Aid local groups within the Family Support Hubs. Women's Aid is not consistently represented across all Family Support Hubs and this should be as a matter of urgency.

We would also like to a clear and direct strategic link to the Domestic and Sexual Violence and Abuse Strategic Group and in particular, the Children and Young People's Sub Group.

10.4 High level outcome

Experiencing economic and environmental well being

Women's Aid recognizes that the qualitative information presented clearly shows the link between poverty and mental health issues. We are however somewhat disappointed that the subsequent actions focus upon "after" support rather than recognising a role in the reduction of poverty. We strongly believe this action plan needs to be linked to the Child Poverty Strategy March 2011 to establish mechanisms for identifying impacts of welfare reform and benefit uptake.

There are many factors which have been identified in research, which contribute to childhood poverty. It is the belief and experience of Women's Aid that these barriers are further exacerbated by the presence of domestic and sexual violence. Evidence, particularly from the United States of America, makes a clear link between domestic and sexual violence, poverty and welfare dependency. Women and their children are often forced to leave their homes and communities and to relocate their lives in order to better ensure their safety. Additionally, protracted legal proceedings, often associated with the ending of an abusive relationship, can be extremely costly. It is also the case that being subjected to sustained physical, emotional, psychological and/or sexual violence and abuse coupled with the process of systematic social isolation which is frequently a characteristic of domestic and sexual violence, often makes it impossible to maintain employment.

Financial abuse is also a factor in many cases of domestic and sexual violence. This can involve, amongst other acts of abuse, the perpetrator running up debt in the name of their partner, gambling and the theft or misappropriation of funds. Women who have experienced domestic and sexual violence have also reported instances of the perpetrator actively preventing them from accessing their income and/or savings.

We welcome the link to Family Support Hubs and the review of the existing 2 tier emotional well-being and mental health service provision across the region. Additionally we strongly believe there is a need to address supporting families who

experience domestic and sexual violence and to work directly with the family to improve economic and environmental well-being. We also support the need to support parents into work and the imperative to promote longer term outcomes through child based interventions which are designed to tackle the cyclical nature of child poverty.

10.5 High level outcome

Contributing positively to community and society

Given the importance of participation of children and young people as a key principle and right outlined in the UNCRC, and the quantitative and qualitative indicators presented in this document, it is somewhat disappointing to see what can be only be considered to be a lack of actions under this outcome. While we commend the actions to involve parents as a mechanism for increasing children's engagement, we strongly feel that there also needs to be specific actions for children and young people. We would therefore welcome clear specific actions in relation to how children and young people's participation in civic and political activities will be promoted and enhanced. We would also like to see the inclusion of other linkages. We would suggest linking in with the participation network to progress this, as we feel this section, as it stands has a narrow focus.

10.6 High level outcome

Living in a society which respects their rights

Women's Aid welcomes the focus on Family Hubs and CAMHS. We particularly welcome the link with CAMHS but feel that an evaluation of the outcomes for children and young people who have been referred to a Family Support Hub needs to be built in as these are still very new.

11. Recommendations/suggested actions

- 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 Regional Sub-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.
- While Women's Aid commends the work already undertaken to identify the priorities identified in each Sub Group action plan, we would welcome more detailed reference to domestic and sexual violence as serious issues impacting upon children and young people in Northern Ireland.

- We feel it is essential that there is a clearer reference to domestic and sexual violence throughout all Sub Group plans. This is particularly important in relation to the high level outcome *Living with Safety and with Stability*. However Women's Aid strongly believes domestic and sexual violence cut across all high level outcomes and would like to see this prioritised under other high level outcomes e.g. in relation to *Being Healthy*, there is a need to recognise the link between domestic violence and emotional and physical well-being, in relation to *Enjoying, Learning and Achieving*, there is a need for relationship education for all young people as a preventative approach to domestic and sexual violence. We would like to see both quantitative and qualitative indicators which focus upon domestic and sexual violence e.g. no of children in households where a parent has been referred to MARAC.
- 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 Sub 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. Improving the lives of children and young people is everybody's business and requires a holistic approach and every agency coming into contact with parents and children has a vital role to play.
- Women's Aid strongly believes the needs of all children and young people must be included in all Sub Group action plans. 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.
- 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 partners 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.

- 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.
- 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.
- 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.

12.0 Concluding comments

- Women's Aid appreciates the opportunity to respond to initial priorities identified by the Sub Groups, both individually and collectively.
- Women's Aid would like to reiterate our serious concern that there is little or no reference in the priorities identified by each Sub 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 Sub Group.
- 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 further clarification on how the Sub

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.

- Women's Aid strongly believes that adequate funding streams must be put in place to ensure the effective implementation of all Sub Group plans. While the key actions presented in the plans are to be commended, they must be strengthened by the existence of core long term funding. Difficulties are currently experienced across the children's sector in relation to sustainability of services for all children and young people. Sustainability for services has increasingly become a major priority for all Women's Aid groups. This has been particularly evident with the withdrawal of the Children's Fund (OFMDFM). Across Women's Aid sustaining the vital services delivered to children and young people in both refuge and community settings has become increasingly difficult.
- In conclusion, once again, Women's Aid appreciates the opportunity to comment on the action plans of the Sub Groups. We urge consideration of the points we have raised in the development of final action plans for each Sub Group. We welcome the opportunity to review action plans for each Sub Group once produced and we look forward to the roll we can play in supporting their implementation.

13.0 Contact details

For further information about this response please contact:

Annie Campbell
Director
Women's Aid Federation Northern Ireland
129 University Street
BELFAST
BT7 1HP
Tel: 028 9024 9041

annie.campbell@womensaidni.org

Website: www.womensaidni.org

24 Hour Domestic Violence Helpline - 0800 917 1414

Email Support: 24hrsupport@dvhelpline.org

Text SUPPORT to 07797805839

Open to anyone affected by domestic violence