



A response to

**Consultation on Strategic Plan 2013 -
2016**

Safeguarding Board Northern Ireland

19 July 2013

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Open to all women and men 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 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 our local Women's Aid groups and Women's Aid Federation. All local Women's Aid groups are 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 (2011-2012)

- 12 refuges with 300 bed spaces, playrooms and facilities.
- 831 women and 586 children sought refuge.
- 15 resource centres for women seeking information and support; group work and training.
- 3,663 women and 4,152 children accessed the Floating Support service, and a further 1,909 women accessed other Women's Aid outreach services, 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 all women and men affected by domestic violence, managed 43,949 calls.

4.0 Additional Women's Aid statistical data

- Since 1999, Women's Aid across Northern Ireland gave refuge to 15,545 women and 14,942 children and young people.
- During the last 17 years Women's Aid Federation Northern Ireland managed 326,809 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 Consultation response

- Women's Aid Federation Northern Ireland welcomes the publication of the *SBNI Strategic Plan 2013 - 2016*, and the opportunity to comment on it on behalf of our local groups.
- Women's Aid supports the broad aims contained within this document. In particular, we welcome the Board's adoption of the value that "children and young people's wishes, feelings and experiences should be at the centre of what we do" (p 3), and the primary aim to ensure that children grow up safely and securely (p 5).
- We welcome the inclusion of promoting and protecting children's rights in the strategy (p 5), and the explicit mention of protecting children from abuse and neglect. We would urge that these rights should extend to include a right to preventative education, to equip children with the knowledge about abuse and their right to live in a safe environment, and provide a safe space for supporting children. Preventative education, such as Women's Aid's Helping Hands programme, is a vital and practical means of realising the rights of children to be free from abuse and neglect.
- In relation to the obligations of agencies under Section 10 of the Safeguarding Board (Northern Ireland) Act 2011 (bullet pointed at pages 7~8), Women's Aid is concerned about service development being informed by the views of children *and families* (own emphasis added). In many cases, the abuse and neglect of children comes from within the family itself, therefore it may be inappropriate in such cases for families to input into how safeguarding service design is developed.
- We welcome the aim to promote the provision of early intervention services (p 9). However, while this is a commendable vision, the reality remains that sustainable services for children and young people are not currently in place across Northern Ireland. In addition, the current economic downturn and funding cuts threaten existing services for children and young people. Priority should be given to delivering the actions and objectives of the SBNI notwithstanding the current economic climate, as opposed to putting them on hold until they find money. While we appreciate that finding funds for preventative and long term outcome projects is very difficult at this time, we urge that the SBNI should consider Horizon Funding as an aim, not only to save money in the long term but also to ensure that the children and young people of today aren't left behind because funding was not a priority.

8.0 Contact details

For further information about this response please contact:

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