



**See**



**Hear**



**Act**

Voices of children and young people  
who have lived with domestic violence

Produced by

*women's aid*

Federation Northern Ireland





women's aid

Federation Northern Ireland

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Translation service available.  
Open to all women and men affected by  
domestic & sexual violence.

# Preface

At Women's Aid, we recognise that whole families suffer from domestic violence and children and young people experience it in many ways. It can impact upon all areas of their lives, including, health, education, the development of relationships, recreation and social activities. The effects are wide ranging and will differ for each child/young person. The impact can be evident in both the immediate and longer term.

Women's Aid Northern Ireland has a long and successful history of meeting the needs of children and young people who experience violence in the home. We recognise that most often the best way to support children and young people is to support their mothers through the provision of a range of services, including refuge provision and support in the community. That said, we also recognise the need for more focused support for children and young people and we have a range of specialist support services and programmes, specifically designed to meet the needs of children and young people who have been affected by domestic violence.

At Women's Aid, we are committed to giving children and young people a voice and to creating safe opportunities for them to have their voices heard. Over the past year, we have worked collectively across our nine Women's Aid groups to gather a collection of children and young people's voices using the medium of art, focus groups, feedback questionnaires etc. We have facilitated focus groups with 111 children and young

people and we have worked on a one to one basis to gather artwork and capture the impact of service provision, using tools developed as part of our monitoring and evaluation framework.

We have been overwhelmed by the enthusiasm, with which children and young people have responded to this work and we are delighted to present this book of their voices. Every child and every young person we worked with wanted their voice to be heard and have given permission for their work to be shared. This highlights that when you give children and young people a safe space to share their voice they will, at their own pace, willingly step into it.

Children and young people's voices are presented in a range of artistic and creative mediums, including paintings, poems, comments and stories. The artwork is amazingly powerful and acts as a testament to their awareness and resilience. Art provides a great medium for children and young people to record their experiences, perceptions, feelings and to explore their support needs. All involved in this project have expressed their feelings and told their story in a safe, comfortable and unique way. We would like to take this opportunity to thank all the children and young people involved, and the skilled Women's Aid staff who initiated safe conversations and who do so every day.

Every picture, every poem, every story, every comment in this book represents the

voice of a child or young person who has experienced domestic violence. It presents their experiences and their voices, in their own words. These are their stories, fears and hopes they want us to hear.

This book of voices presents both lessons and challenges for all of us. It provides us with a unique and clear lens into children and young people's lives. It highlights the complexity of feelings and perceptions experienced by children and young people who live with domestic violence, including the torn loyalties they struggle with and the multitude of feelings including fear, anger, and confusion, that they experience every day.

This book tells us that children and young people are not passive bystanders but experience domestic violence with their whole being. They see it, hear it, feel it and fear it. It highlights the impact domestic violence has upon their physical and mental health and wellbeing and on other areas of their lives including school and relationships.

Most importantly this book highlights the need, not only to listen to children and young people but to act, with them and for

them, to make a difference. It presents children's experiences of support and highlights the positive impact support has upon them as individuals and also upon their families. It tells us that children and young people have inbuilt resilience and that all of us, as adults, can nurture and develop that resilience through effective and timely support interventions. Interventions come in many shapes and forms and sometimes even the smallest thing can make a difference. One thing we know is that good support begins with listening. This book shows us that children and young people have a voice... it is time that we adults start to listen.

We are extremely proud to present this book and we hope you find it both insightful and inspiring. We believe everyone should read this book **because everyone can do something to make a difference**. Recent research by UNICEF tells us that worldwide 1 in 4 children under the age of 5 live with a mother who has been a recent victim of partner violence<sup>1</sup>. After reading this book, we challenge you to consider what you can do for these children and young people, in your professional life and in your personal life, to make a difference?

## #SeeHearAct

### What will you do?



1. UNICEF (November 2017) Division of Data, Research and Policy. A Familiar Face, Violence in the Lives of Children and Adolescents: New York, USA



# Acknowledgements

There are so many people to thank who have helped make our vision for this book become a reality.

Firstly, we must thank every single child and young person who sat down, in our refuges and advice centres and shared their personal stories, journeys, feelings and hopes for the future so openly and honestly and who gave us permission to share their wonderful and powerful creations. The artwork in this book is a true credit to their courage and resilience.

Thanks to all the mothers who gave permission for their children's artwork to be used in this resource. It is never easy for a mother to hear about the impact of domestic violence on her child(ren) and often for mothers, seeing and hearing about these experiences through their children's art can be both difficult and painful. Therefore, we are truly grateful for their courage and willingness, not only to hear these stories but to allow us to share them with others.

We are extremely grateful to our children's services staff across our nine Women's Aid groups who have sat patiently beside each and every child involved in this project and who have supported them to share their stories and produce the wonderful creations contained in this book.

As one child said:

*"The playroom is a place I can reflect myself about school and other things and I can sit talking to (Leanne) until 5 o'clock when the playroom closes"*

These workers truly are champions for children and the feedback from children and young people presented in this book clearly highlights the important role they play in their lives. They are the super heroes of Women's Aid!

We wish to thank our partners, Allstate and Bank of Ireland UK who have proudly supported this project and who have worked tirelessly with us to help turn our vision for this book into a reality. Additionally we would like to thank Safeguarding Board for Northern Ireland (SBNI) for their support. Finally we wish to thank Children in Need who have funded the WAFNI Regional Children and Young People's Services Project which has included the collective work across Women's Aid to bring this book together and publish it.

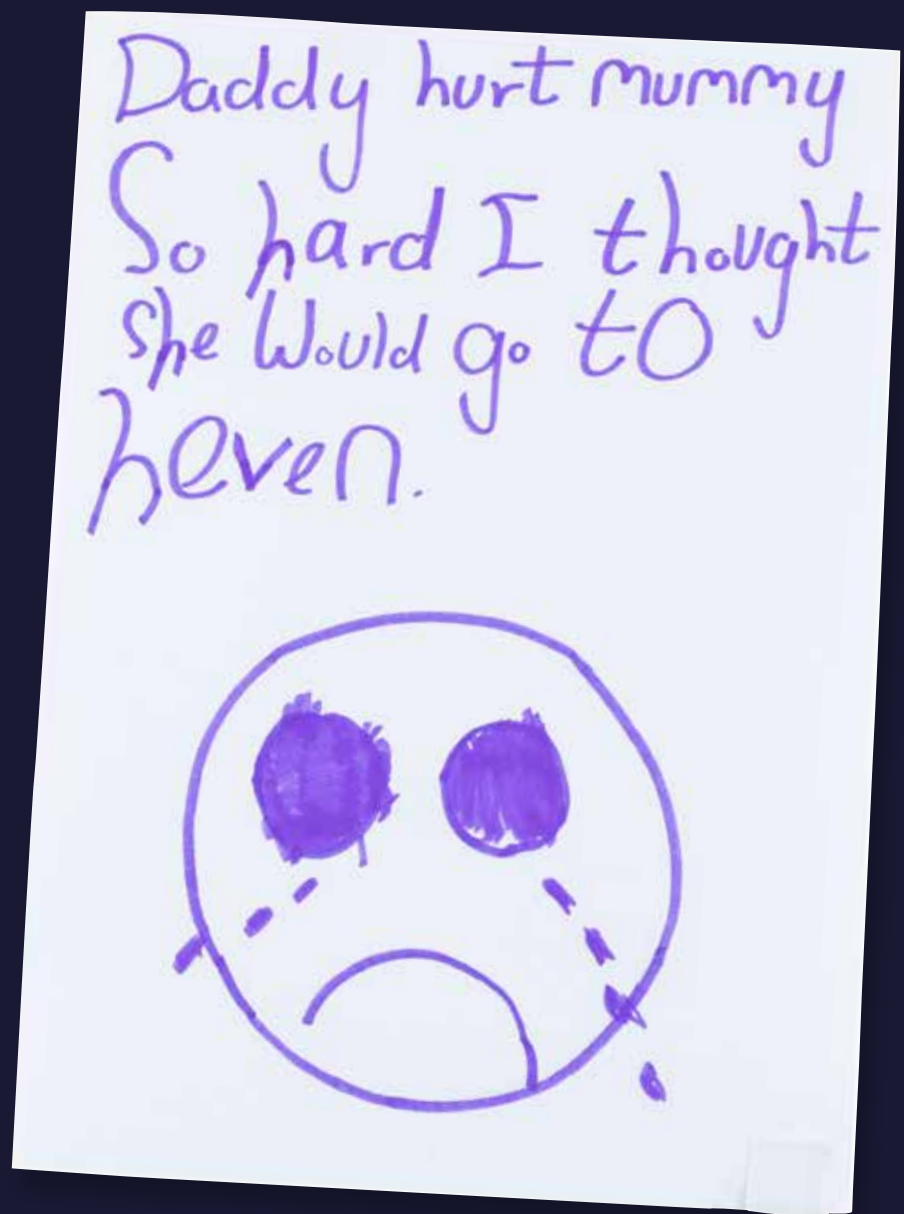
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# Chapter 1

## Living with domestic violence



Girl aged 8

It is important to remember that whole families suffer from domestic violence. UNICEF research released in 2006<sup>2</sup>, showing per capita incidence, indicates that there are up to 240,000 – 963,000 children across the UK exposed to domestic violence and approximately 32,000 children and young people living with domestic violence in Northern Ireland. A study by Hughes (1992)<sup>3</sup> of families who had experienced domestic violence, showed that 90% of children were in the same or next room when the violence was occurring. The Hidden Victims Study<sup>4</sup> 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 Study also showed that more than a quarter (27%) of the children involved had been hit or physically abused by the violent partner. Safe Lives (previously CAADA) research<sup>5</sup>

drawing upon 877 cases of children exposed to domestic violence revealed that 1/4 children living with high risk DV were under 3 years old. It highlighted that children suffer serious multiple physical and mental health consequences:

- 52% had behavioural problems
- 52% had problems with social development and relationships
- 39% had difficulties in school
- 60% felt responsible for the negative events

**Worryingly only 56% of these children knew how to keep themselves safe.**

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 and can be prevalent in the immediate and longer term.

2. UNICEF (2006) Behind Closed Doors, the Impact of Domestic Violence on Children. Body Shop International plc. West Sussex.
3. Holder, R et al (1994) Suffering in Silence? Children and Young People who witness Domestic Violence, Hammersmith and Fulham, Domestic Violence Forum: London.
4. National Children's Homes, Action for Children (1994), The Hidden Victims, Children and Domestic Violence, NHC: London.

5. CAADA (February 2014) In Plain Sight: Effective help for children exposed to domestic abuse, CAADA 2nd National Policy Report.

I couldn't  
stick up for  
myself

Boy aged 11

The following chapter provides us with a unique insight into children and young people's awareness of domestic violence and the impact it has upon them. The voices presented in this chapter show us that children and young people are not passive bystanders but they experience domestic violence with their whole being. They see it, hear it, feel it and fear it. This chapter shows us that children and young people have different experiences and interpretations of violence in the home.

As a result they will all respond in their own unique way and there truly is no set pattern of behaviour, response or impact in cases where children and young people have been exposed to violence in the home. This chapter highlights the complexity of feelings children and young people have about the violence they have been exposed to and in particular, highlights the torn loyalties and sense of loss they will often experience.

I couldn't do  
anything to  
help mum

Girl aged 8



I Love my daddy  
but he is like  
him hitting  
my mummy.

I was tensed  
up and knotted  
inside

Girl aged 9

I couldn't talk  
about my  
feelings

Boy aged 11

I was  
sad and  
frightened

Girl aged 6

Daddy locked us in the  
cupboard when he hurt  
mummy



I didn't like  
to talk or tell  
anyone

Boy aged 13

## A Poem

There is a man, he's not very nice.  
He hits his wife and child.  
She does not like it when he hits her.  
He will never stop until he wants to.

She goes somewhere she cannot get hit.  
It is called **Women's Aid**.  
She got a lovely house.  
She was not scared anymore.

She lived happily ever after

From a girl

## Control

I scream, I cry, I do everything I can to try and hide  
I'm damaged, I'm broken, I'm seconds from caving in  
Everywhere I go, everything I do, I fear failure is  
inevitable

The words once yelled at me, telling me how worthless  
I am, echo through my mind.

Trying to ignore them, trying to fight them, exhausting  
as it is, has to be done.

I won't let him beat me

I won't let anyone beat me

I am in control of my life.

Nobody else.

Dear Santa

I feel very depressed. I have very little energy and I feel sad. I take my anger out on my mum and sometimes my friends. I can't cope with all the revision for the Christmas tests. I keep reliving the past and things that daddy has done and said. Could you please help me through the Christmas tests.

I keep reliving the past and the things daddy has done and said. Could you please help me get through the Christmas exams and get good marks (C+ and over) and can you help me to cope better with the things in my head.

I would like to be normal and not have things done to me and my family in the past and I would also not want to have a scary daddy. I would like him to leave me alone.  
from a girl (age 11)



### My Reflection

My fists ball up in rage as I look at my reflection in the mirror.

I don't see myself staring back... I see him. Him.

The man I have watched drag me down, along with the people I love.

The small similarities on our faces make me hate the sight of my own reflection.

And yet...

I am not him

I know that I am not him

I will never be him

I will make sure of that

Fear runs through me, scared I will someday turn out like him

But no.

I will work my entire life to become who I want to be.

I will have my own family. I will love & respect them, something he has never done.

He is not me. I am not him.

I didn't feel safe.  
I was scared at home and  
was constantly getting up  
to make sure the doors were  
locked at night. I was always  
worried about my  
mam's safety

Boy aged 14

It was  
really bad

Boy aged 7

I blamed myself for  
what was going on and  
always felt I was going  
to be in trouble

Boy aged 12

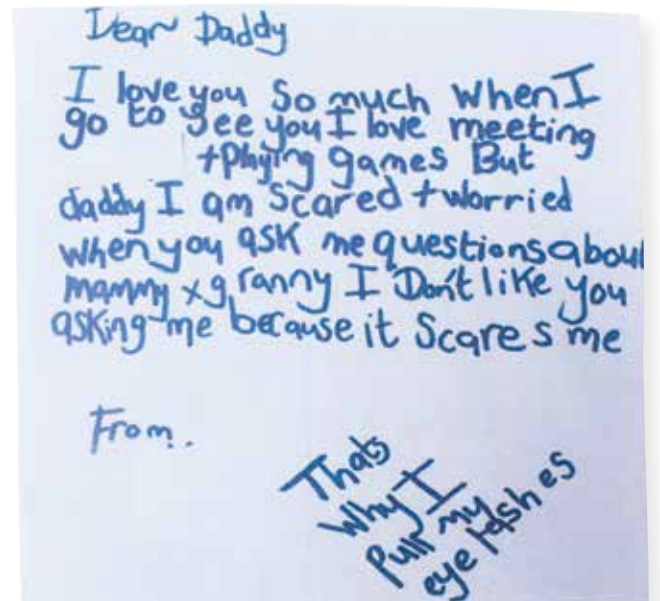
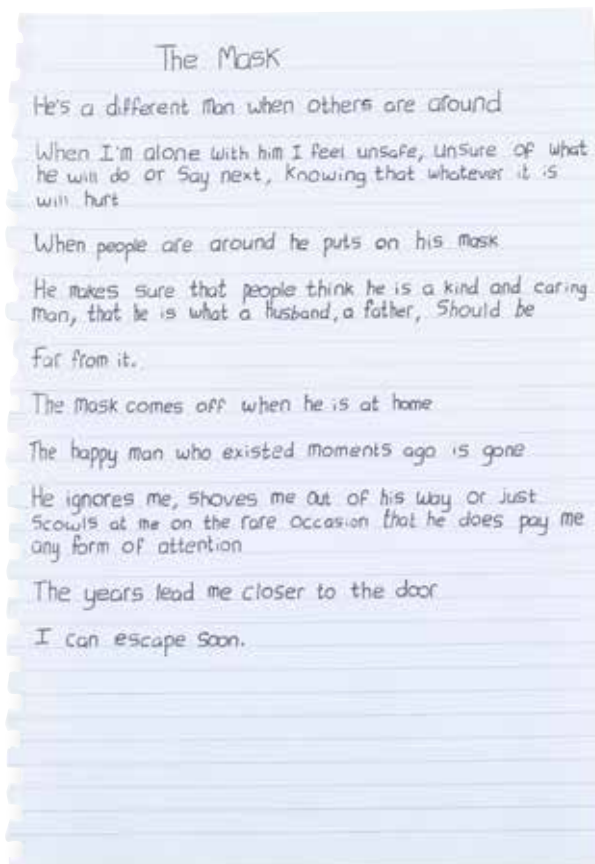


I was worried  
all the time

Boy aged 10

I was scared  
it would get  
really bad

Boy aged 12



# Chapter 2

## Journeys

One day I had an extreme day and we had to go to a refuge in Belfast with an lot of new people and it is a bit scary because it is all different type of people and but I got used to it and it is very nice calm and nice people they are and every body is nice in here and staff are very nice and help you but at first I was scared and I got that people wasn't nice like when I let us play with the children and when I make to us and but it wasn't it is very nice and it is lovely and they all help you out and if you need any thing they will give you every thing you need like if you need any food they will give you it because they are very nice people and lovely they are the kindest people I have ever seen.

And they do help you because they got me in to school very quick and it is very close it is at the bottom of the street and I can just walk there and they are giving very body to get houses for us and they are giving body to get every body houses because they are very lovely and kind they will do any thing for you because that lovely and they will give you any thing because they are lovely no body should ever be poor to them because they are so lovely us people they are lovely you can never so no to do any thing for you they will just do it for you.



By a girl  
By Age 9

All children and young people who come to Women's Aid have their own unique journey that has brought them to this point.

Each journey will be different in terms of events, reactions, circumstances and experiences. For many, this journey will have been painful and sometimes traumatic, it will have had both ups and downs. All journeys will carry a sense of loss, loss for what has been left behind, this can be belongings, friendships, homes, pets, school and routines. For many children and young people the future will be unclear and this point of their journey will be a time of confusion, uncertainty and fear of the unknown.

In the chapter that follows, children and young people tell us about the journeys that have brought them to Women's Aid. Women and children often arrive at Women's Aid in crisis, this can be during the day or at night. They may have few belongings and will often be in a state of fear and confusion. Arrival at refuge can be a daunting experience for children and young people. They have left behind their home and everything familiar to arrive at a strange place, filled with lots of families and new people.

In this chapter, children and young people talk about their feelings upon arrival at Women's Aid and how these feelings changed over time. They share their observations and openly talk about the challenges and feelings experienced along the way.

What is evident is the "light at the end of the tunnel" that so many refer to. However, as one young person states "some tunnels are just longer than others".







# Leaving

When dad hits mum, I get in a fright  
It's bad, it's wrong, I know it's not right  
Mummy starts crying, it makes me feel  
Sad.  
I look at my daddy and I get very mad.

My mummy is small and very weak.

Daddy says he hits her because she  
gives cheek.

Mummy is nice and I love her so.

When we left for refuge, I knew we had to go.

From a girl



## The Tunnel

Inside of a dark room I don't hear  
anything aside the sound of my  
own thoughts

"Why is he doing this?"

What did I do to deserve this?

Will it ever end?"

I can't find answers to any of these questions

I close my eyes, desperately hoping that when I open them  
again, I'll see light

I refuse to let this beat me!

I've been through too much to quit now!

There will always be light  
at the end of the tunnel

Some tunnels are just longer  
than others.

# Chapter 3

## Refuge Life

When I first came to the refuge the rooms were big. We was grateful for the room there was two sets of bunk beds and a TV and they made you feel like you was at home.

Girl aged 15

Women's Aid provides age appropriate, specialised services and support for children and young people who experience domestic violence. Needs are responded to at all points of service delivery, including refuge and in the community.

Women's Aid provides safe, emergency accommodation for women and children experiencing domestic violence. Every year hundreds of mothers and children are accommodated in our refuge accommodation across Northern Ireland. Since 1999 (until 2017) Women's Aid across Northern Ireland has accommodated 18,012 children and young people in refuges.

Families can arrive at the refuge in a state of crisis with little or no belongings. As the previous chapter shows, all children and young people's journeys to refuge are different and many will grieve for what they have left behind. For children and young people this can be a huge transition and they will experience a range of feelings and emotions including loss, uncertainty and fear.

Women's Aid Staff, and in particular Children's and Young People's Services Staff work closely with families to make this transition as smooth as possible. Women's Aid provides a range of services, which encourage and support mothers to put in place safe and stable routines. This can involve registering with a local GP or dentist. Children and young people are encouraged to participate fully in education. This can involve liaising with schools and providing homework support. Children are enrolled in local schools as soon as

possible if necessary and every effort is made to help families to integrate into refuge life and into the local community.

Children and young people are encouraged to participate in activities and opportunities, which are tailored to their needs and refuge is a safe and secure environment for children and young people to relax, have fun and get the support they need. The playroom is a very important place in the refuge. All playrooms are equipped for all ages and stages of development. Children and young people living in refuge are given the opportunity to use the playroom, either with their mother or with a qualified member of staff. The play room is child led and provides a varied programme of activities to ensure all children and young people's development needs are met. Outdoor play areas are available at both refuges and resource centres.

All children and young people come to refuge with different experiences and needs and we treat every single one as a unique individual who needs tailored support. Needs are assessed on an individual basis and support services are put in place to address these.

The length of stay at refuge can vary, depending upon support needs and housing options. It doesn't take long for children to settle into refuge life and with the help and support from qualified staff, they can enjoy their time here and when it is time for them to leave, they usually leave with happy memories and positives experiences of the "big happy house."

They let you  
talk about your  
feelings

Girl aged 10



Everything is  
confidential

Boy aged 9

They let you  
tell your story  
and they listen  
to your story

Boy aged 8





They help  
you with your  
problems

Girl aged 14

Women's Aid  
helps you to control  
your emotions  
like when you  
feel angry

Boy aged 13

I tell people I  
live in a hotel

Boy aged 9



When I first came to my new home  
I felt worried because I did not  
know this place but when I met all my  
new friends I felt safe. When I was  
here for some time but now I am  
happy and life much better





They let you  
talk about your  
feelings

Girl aged 10

The workers  
helped me to  
settle in

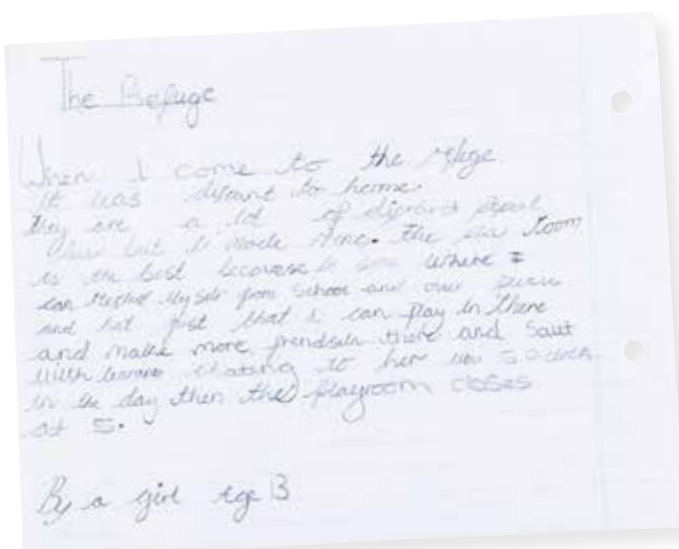
Boy aged 6

They look  
after the children  
and the  
women too

Boy aged 8

We can all  
learn from  
each other

Boy aged 7



We learn how  
to play nice and  
not be mean

Girl aged 6

# REFUGE

R - Rooms with no tv

E - Everyone is just the same as me

F - Families just like ours.

U - Ugly bruises that will leave scars.

G - Glad we left home, in refuge now.

E - Excited about our new home in a new town

You get to  
make new  
friends

Girl aged 5

Women's Aid  
has helped me to say  
how I feel about what  
is happening and I  
can now say exactly  
what I want

Boy aged 8

I love coming  
to stay in the big  
happy house

Girl aged 8

You see  
that you're  
not alone

Boy aged 9





# Chapter 4

## Group work and individual support

It helps you to realise that there are other children and young people in similar situations

Boy aged 12

I have learned  
how to have  
respect

Girl aged 11

Women's Aid uses a variety of approaches, resources and materials to work with children and young people to provide support and build resilience. This will include both group work and individual support. Individual support is provided both in refuges and in the community. Many children who access support are identified through Women's Aid floating support / outreach service. There are also children whose mothers have moved on from refuge and are now living in the community. All these children and young people who experience domestic violence can avail of individual and group support.

Individual work is undertaken with children of all ages. This work is carried out by specially trained staff and can include a tailored programme which is child led, using free expression, through art, play and other creative means to unravel complex feelings. It can also include in-depth work focused around a particular issue, to meet specific needs, particularly in relation to adjustment, emotions and/or behaviours.

Qualified and trained Women's Aid staff provide specialist group work programmes for children and young people in a variety of settings, including refuge and resource centres. Programmes are facilitated by two experienced and trained members of staff and are tailored to meet the needs of groups. Programmes focus upon the development of self-esteem and confidence building and promote the development of a shared language around safety. Programmes vary across our Women's Aid groups and all seek to encourage children to explore and express their feelings regarding domestic violence, as well as developing personal safety plans for the future. Some programmes are specifically designed for teenagers and concentrate on raising awareness of the differences between healthy and abusive relationships.

While developed primarily for schools, our well known "Helping Hands" children's programme is also used with groups of young people and on a one to one basis, in refuges and centres across Northern Ireland.



I have learned  
that I am special in a  
way and I can share  
with others

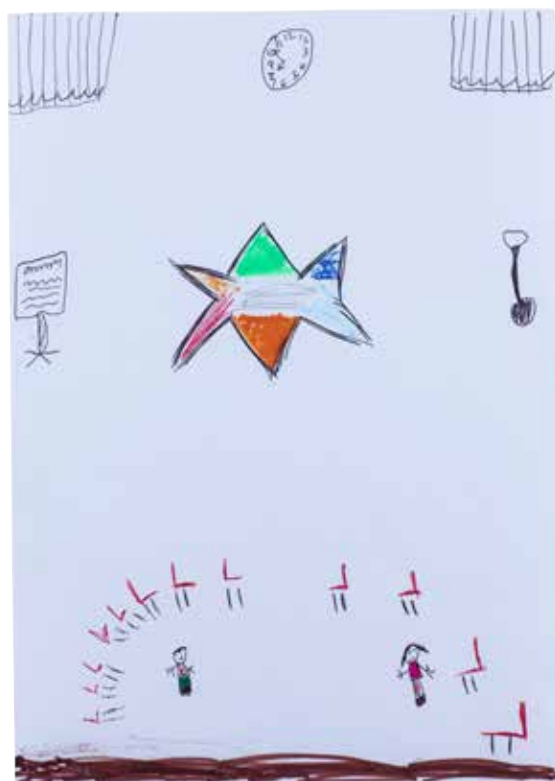
Girl aged 6

This programme aims to:

- Develop children's levels of self-esteem and confidence.
- Enable children to explore and express feelings.
- Inform children of the right to feel safe at all times.
- Increase children's ability in safety planning.
- Empower children to identify their own personal support network.
- Explore how choice of behaviour can affect the feelings of others.
- Identify healthy ways to manage conflict.

All group work programmes are evaluated with children and young people and the feedback is always extremely positive, highlighting how enjoyable and supportive this process has been for all children and young people.

The following chapter presents children and young people's thoughts on individual and group work and how it has helped them.

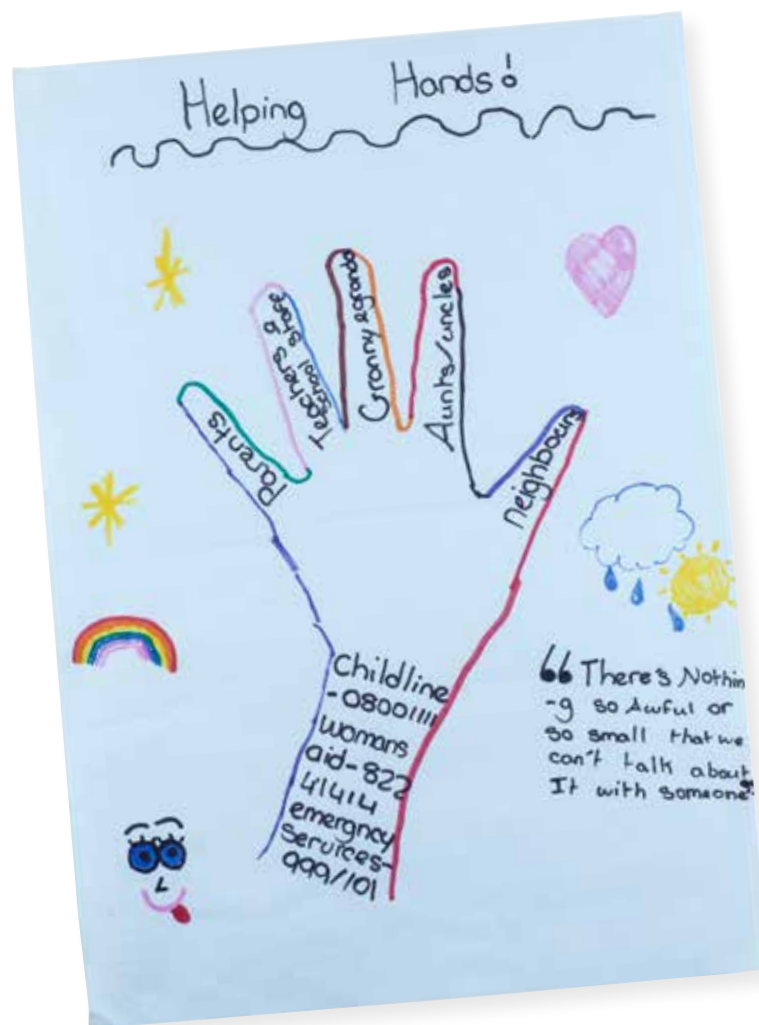


I enjoy  
getting help  
with my  
homework

Boy aged 13

I learned  
how to keep  
myself safe

Girl aged 11



I love coming to homework club to see all the exciting things we are doing. I love the art. The staff are very friendly. I never want to leave

Girl aged 9

Before the group I did not have confidence in myself...now I do

Boy aged 13

I loved making new friends

Boy aged 13



I love the  
days out

Girl aged 8

I like the  
food and  
snacks

Girl aged 7

It is fun  
and you learn  
a lot

Girl aged 8

I like the  
pancakes with  
Nutella

Boy aged 6

I love going to  
homework club to  
see my friends and  
all the workers

Boy aged 11





I like the art,  
painting on the  
masks and then  
sticking stickers  
on them

Girl aged 7

It feels like  
a second  
family here

Boy aged 12



I love Homework club,  
the staff are really nice. They  
are always there to help with  
homework and also with any  
problems I might have at home  
or school. I would come to  
homework club every day

Girl aged 12

# Chapter 5

## Changes in me and my family

I used to blame myself for daddy being bad. Women's Aid have made me understand that it was not my fault. I feel better now.

Boy aged 10





It is our fundamental belief that if children and young people get the support they need at the time they need it, then the negative impacts of domestic violence can be reduced over time.

Our experience of working with children and young people for over forty years shows us the positive impact timely support can have upon children, young people and their families. 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 and further develop this resilience.

**“.... it appears plausible that children can recover from the impact of parental conflict and separation, provided that the violence is eliminated and proper supports and opportunities for recovery are provided”<sup>6</sup>**

At Women's Aid, we are completely committed to meeting the needs of children and young people at all points of service delivery. We see, on a daily basis, the huge

changes this support can bring about in children and young people's emotional and physical well-being.

Simply listening to children and young people and accepting them, their stories, their experiences, their reactions and their feelings without judgement is, in itself, the beginning of a powerful healing process. By giving children and young people a safe space to explore their emotions and access support, we are helping to build resilience and develop self-esteem. By having conversations about safety planning and healthy relationships we are helping them to think about their rights and we are providing them with tools to promote personal safety in the future.

The following chapter presents children and young people's perceptions about changes they have observed in themselves and in their family situation before and after Women's Aid support provision.

6. Jaffe et al (1990) Children of Battered Women, Sage Publications: London.







I am not as shy anymore.  
I can talk better about how I  
feel now. I have learned a lot of  
new words to do with my  
feelings and emotions

Boy aged 11



Before I went to Women's Aid I was very sad and angry. Women's Aid helped all my problems go away

Boy aged 8







I feel safe at Women's Aid. They listen to me and we have fun together

Girl aged 6





Before	After
Bad moods fights not getting along annoyed scared	Less fall outs everyone getting along A lot more peaceful about the house

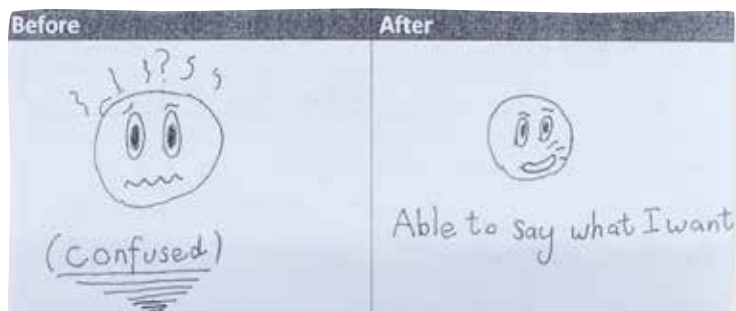
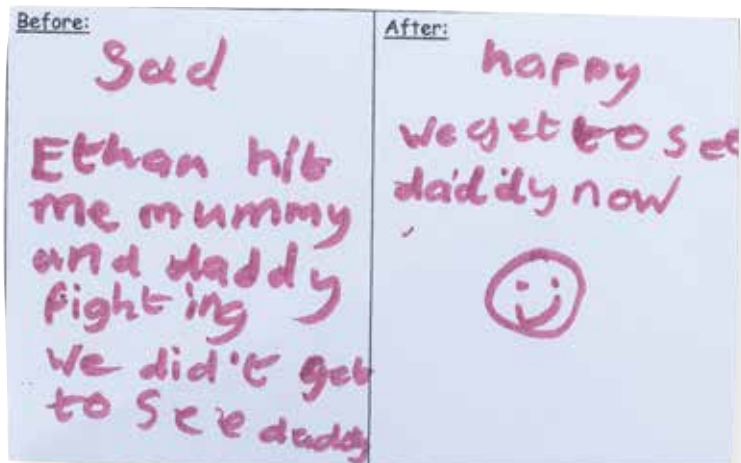
Before	After
 <p>thinking about mummy - if she was O.K.</p>	 <p>talk to someone about your worries I should feel safe all the time</p>

Before	After
There were arguments between Mum + Dad I felt down about the situation I was feeling confused	I get along with everyone and happy with my life in general. I feel better within myself. I found it helpful getting another person's opinion.

Before:	After:
was scared to have contact with dad lonely confused Unhappy Pressured from family on dad's side	Know to talk to someone if anything's wrong More confident and happy No more pressure or big worries

Before	After
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sad-crying</li> <li>• not going to bed</li> <li>• daddy questions</li> <li>• mummy + daddy fighting</li> <li>• Pulling out my eye lashes</li> <li>• Scared</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• so happy</li> <li>• going to bed</li> <li>• not pulling out my eye lashes</li> <li>• I like seeing daddy</li> <li>• me, mummy and [redacted] are HAPPY</li> <li>• I am great</li> </ul>

Before:	After:
DV is relationship Rape court case Mum sick Family issues Scared to talk Drugs Drinking Keeping everything a secret	I know how to keep myself safe in my relationship I got a lot of help through hard times at home, with me drinking and taking drugs. I am a lot more open with my parents about everything I do I can enjoy life a lot better now and I know that not everything is my fault



22/11/17 Group

Womens aid

P.S thank you W.A

My fav was the ~~first~~  
friends and family talk

When we had a talk  
about our family and  
friends and it helped  
me with my ~~relationship~~  
with my mum my and  
now we do not get  
in as many fights  
that we used to.



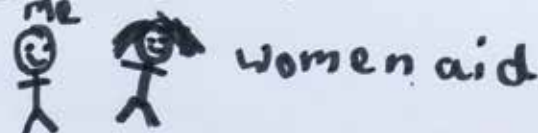
I Was talking to  
Gillien about my  
family and it helped  
a lot

Life was like before



Fighting

Life is like now



women aid

# Chapter 6

## Women's Aid Super Heroes

When we leave this refuge, we won't forget about how much they helped us and how good the staff is to you. It's such a nice place to be in and a safe environment to be in. This place is so unforgettable. I don't think you can go to a safer place.

Girl aged 15

Thanks for  
your time...I will  
miss you

Girl aged 13

At Women's Aid, all our work with children and young people is carried out by qualified, trained and experienced staff and volunteers, with specialised skills and knowledge relating to the impact of domestic violence on children and young people. We are fortunate to have a wonderful network of Children and Young People's Services Staff across Northern Ireland whose role is specifically focused on meeting the needs of children and young people who use our services.

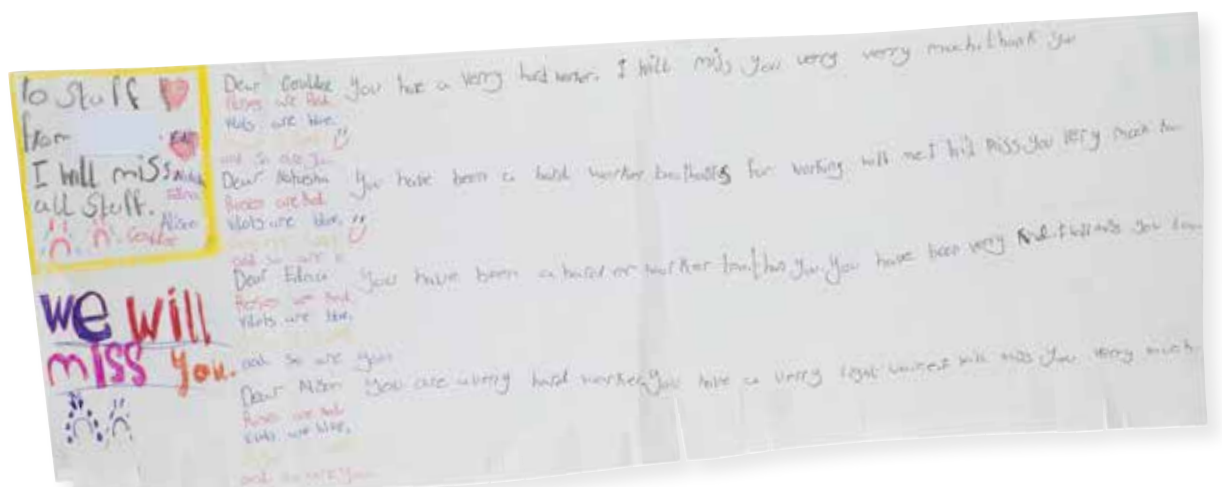
All staff who work with children and young people are completely committed to making a difference. They work tirelessly to understand and meet the needs of every individual child and young person who comes through the door.

Children and Young People's Services Staff work hard to deliver a programme

of age appropriate, fun activities. Children and young people are actively engaged in planning and Women's Aid is completely committed to promoting their participation in accordance with their age and maturity. We believe all children and young people have equal rights to participation and we are committed to implementing this through the Women's Aid participation strategy **Children and Young People at the Heart.**

All children need trusting adults who they feel safe with and who they can talk to. As Professional Educator, Rita Person says:

**"Every child deserves a champion – an adult who will never give up on them...who understands the power of connection and insists that they become the best they can possibly be"**





They listen  
to what you say  
and try their best  
to help you

Girl aged 7

Over time, Children and Young People's Services Staff develop trusting support relationships with children and young people and during their time in Women's Aid, these staff become their champions.

The following chapter presents children and young people's impressions of Women's Aid staff and highlights the importance of the role of Children and Young People's Services Staff in Women's Aid. They are clearly the super heroes for children and young people.



I like to see  
Therese

Girl aged 8

You helped me  
really well with my  
everyday problems

Boy aged 13





Thank you for  
helping me so  
much over the past  
4 years

Girl aged 15

Everyone  
should go here,  
it's great

Boy aged 13



I will miss you  
coming to my  
house

Girl aged 5

I really enjoyed  
coming to see you  
every Tuesday

Boy aged 6

You should  
go here  
because it's a  
nice place

Boy aged 9

I didn't  
want to leave.  
A big, big  
thank you

Girl aged 9

You have  
been really  
great  
teaching  
me

Boy aged 8



You're my friend.  
I love you.  
You're great

Girl aged 8



Woman's Aid is a wonderful  
and safe place for children  
and adults.



Emer xx

# Chapter 7

## **Our messages to other children**

Please don't be as shy as a mouse and very scared, because I came here like that and I shouldn't have been because this is a fab group

Girl aged 9



The pain  
will always  
end at some  
point

Boy aged 17

Things will  
get easier

Boy aged 17

Girl aged 9

If you don't  
feel safe, talk  
to someone

Children and young people who use our services are often keen to share their experiences, hopes and advice with other children and young people who are going through similar situations. They want to make a difference for other children and young people. One example of how they do this is by writing letters to new children and young people who are coming into the service.

On these letters they often talk about their initial impressions of Women's Aid and how they felt that very first time they put their foot across the door. This is a very safe way of providing peer support and these can be very powerful messages for to other children and young people to hear because they come from another child or young person who, to a certain extent understands what they are going through.

The following chapter presents children and young people's messages and advice to other children and young people. These messages have been gathered through focus groups and chain letters.

The messages are very powerful and show us that children and young people have resilience and with support can and do recover from the often-devastating impact of domestic violence. It is useful to use these messages in our support work with children and young people as they show there is light at the end of the tunnel.

There are lessons for all of us in these messages and they highlight the importance of promoting children's rights and developing confidence and self esteem in everything we do.

You have rights,  
we all do! Stand  
up for them!

Boy aged 8

When you  
are ready it is  
good to talk  
to someone



Boy aged 17

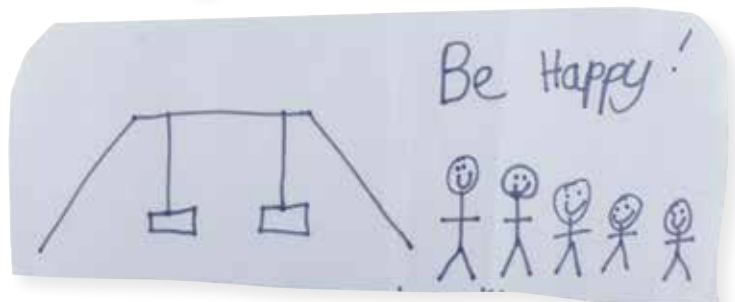


You are NOT your parents and there is nothing to say you will turn out like them

Boy aged 17

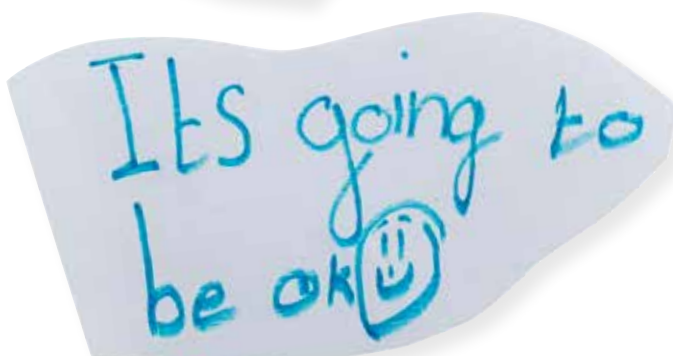
It's hard to see it, but things will get better

Boy aged 13



Look after yourself and stay calm!

Girl aged 7



## Chain letter support

Help us help other children and young people!

Dear friend...

I am a 9 year old girl.

I came hear as shy as mouse  
and very scared.

Please don't be as shy as a mouse and very  
scared, because I came hear like that and  
I shouldn't have been because this is a fab  
group and you will have the best experience  
hear and meet lots of friends, and eat lots  
of treats. X O

Women's Aid Northern Ireland, Evaluation tools



## Chain letter support

Help us help other children and young people!

Dear friend... I am a girl and  
I am nine years old. I was  
Scared but think you might be as well.  
I have went throu the same thing as  
you and I feel that you will see  
a differents after even the first  
week and we de afraid drama.  
I feel as if it will help you under-  
stand what hapend and why it hapend  
for me it helped me under-stand that my  
mum and Dad wein t made for each other.



Women's Aid Northern Ireland, Evaluation tools



## Chain letter support

Help us help other children and young people!

Dear friend...

I am 8 year old.  
you are going to like transformers.  
you do art you design your Strike boards  
and monsters and food.  
It is amazing.  
It will help you alot.  
you will make other friends.  
I am a girl.



Women's Aid Northern Ireland. Evaluation tool



A stress ball  
helps, believe  
me, it does

Girl aged 9

You are brilliant!  
Just as you are...

Girl aged 15

## Chain letter support

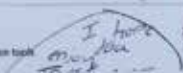
Help us help other children and young people!

Dear friend...

I am a 13 year old girl. I am writing  
to say when you come to transformers  
you might feel a little nervous. But don't  
worry you won't feel worried or nervous  
for long because the teachers are so nice  
and encouraging you meet people that  
have went through the same thing as you.  
and it's confidential. People in your group  
don't go around saying about any one in the  
group. It's a good group to go to if  
you feel like you need help and support.  
It is really fun you get stickers and you  
don't do work the whole time you can  
do art aswell and sometimes games.  
It's a good way to know that you are  
not alone when your sad or in  
a bad situation. And when you  
can get help by the teachers if  
you need to. Or if you need to talk  
to them they will be more than happy to  
listen to you.



Women's Aid Northern Ireland. Evaluation tool



## Chain letter support

Help us help other children and young people!

Dear friend...

I am Sandeep you see a dfrines  
I am writing to tell you how  
amazing transformers  
It is amazing  
It will help you alot  
the food is fab

We do amazing art.  
you get to meet other girls and boys  
you will experience loads of  
new and fun things and things  
there is nothing  
to worry about



Women's Aid Northern Ireland. Evaluation tool





## Chain letter support

Help us help other children and young people!

Dear friend... I'm a 11 year old boy  
When I first came here I felt very shy but  
now I'm not shy. After transgones you will  
feel so much better. It is really good and you  
get lots of snacks and you get to play games. You  
can do it and there is drama. you don't have  
to share for your work if you don't want to.

xx beanie xx

Women's Aid Northern Ireland, Evaluation tool






# Chapter 8

## Our messages to adults

Everyone can  
do something to  
**#SeeHearAct**

Girl aged 9





We need  
adults we  
can trust

Boy aged 9

Women's Aid in Northern Ireland is committed to the participation of children and young people in all elements of service and delivery and aims to harness all opportunities, to not only hear their voices, but to advocate on their behalf, based upon what they are telling us.

As such, we are committed, not only to hearing directly from children and young people currently engaged in our services but to ensuring we capture these voices in all our lobbying and advocacy work to champion the needs of children and young people affected by domestic violence.

Over the past year we have consulted with 111 children and young people in focus groups. We have asked them specifically, what can adults do to make a difference for children and young people who are affected by domestic violence.

Children and young people were very clear about what needs to be done to improve the lives of children and young people affected by domestic violence. They truly believe that everyone can do something... even if that

something does not seem hugely significant at the time. **Sometimes even the smallest thing can make a difference.**

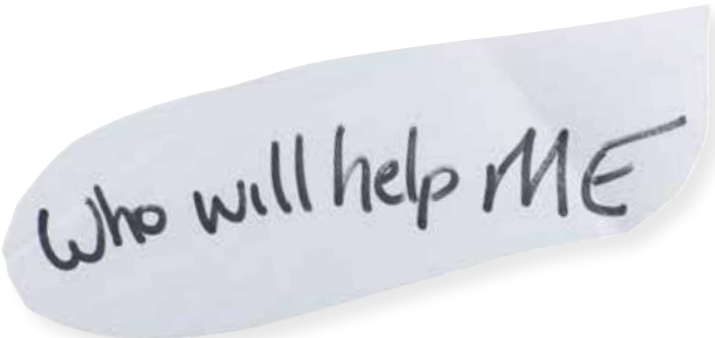
Children and young people talked about the importance of having safe spaces where they can access support. They talked repeatedly about having adults who they can trust and talk to. Their advice can be summarised by the following headlines:

1. **Adults need to be more aware about what goes on in children and young people's homes.**
2. **Children and young people who are struggling with violence in the home need help at the earliest point.**
3. **Education should focus upon developing everyone to their full potential. There should also be relationship education in schools.**
4. **There should be more help in schools for children and young people who are struggling to cope because of things at home.**
5. **Children and young people should be taught how to use the Internet in a safe way.**



Help children  
in need

Boy aged 11



Who will help ME

Understand  
that we are  
suffering too

Boy aged 17

Hear our  
voices

Girl aged 8

Listen to the kids

6. Bullying needs to be addressed as a priority.
7. We need to make it easier for children to talk about things that are impacting upon their safety and stability.
8. There is a need to listen to all children and young people, not just those who are involved in school councils and youth groups.
9. Children and young people's voices need to be heard in court proceedings where there is domestic violence.
10. There needs to be more understanding among children and young people about their rights. There needs to be more of a focus among adults on putting children's rights into action.

The following chapter presents their advice to all adults working with children and young people on a regular basis. We urge you all to listen to these messages. We challenge you, after reading this book, to consider what can you do, in your professional life and in your personal life, to make a difference for these children?

## #SeeHearAct

What will you do?

you should encourage  
the ones that  
are scared everywhere.

The government should  
talk to the children  
in need.

And the children  
in need should  
listen.

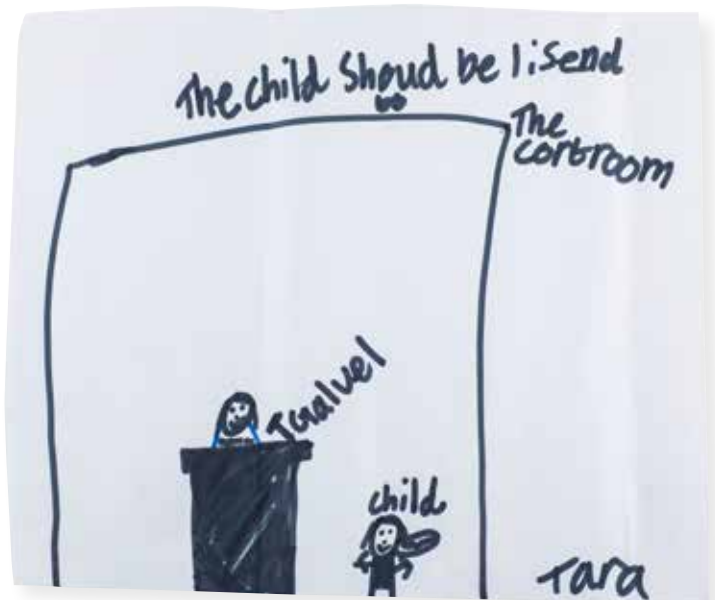
you should  
feel safe in  
morning noon  
and night.

Help  
families who  
are in crisis

Girl aged 10

Hear our  
voices in the  
courtroom

Boy aged 11



Thanks for  
listening

Keep  
us safe at  
home

Girl aged 10

Our ideas  
can help  
you

Make sure we  
have counsellors  
to talk to when  
we need it

Girl aged 13

Stop bullying  
and keep  
us safe

Boy aged 10

The courts listen to mummies  
and children.  
The children should be safe!



Don't put pressure on us to talk about things

Girl aged 15

Let us open up when we are ready

Boy aged 17

Treat us as equals, try not to be condescending or talk down to us

Boy aged 16



Don't underestimate what we know

Girl aged 14



## Young people's thoughts on why children who have experienced domestic violence need support:

"Because it's not just adults that go through it, children suffer as well."

"Young people need support, they need someone to help them through it as well...someone who knows the issues and understands their experiences."

"It's good to have a safe place to share."

"Sometimes our mums are so busy trying to cope with their own worries, it's difficult for them to support us."

"It's good to have someone outside the family to support us, someone who isn't involved to talk to."

"No one judges you in Women's Aid."

"Sometimes we don't want to worry our mums. We hold it in and try and protect them because they have enough on their plate and that's not good either."

"It's a relief for us to see our mums getting the support they need...it takes the burden of us and our mums are then happier and it helps with our relationship."

"It gives you tools for the future, like how to keep yourself safe and builds your confidence."

"It breaks down the stigma about mental health and domestic abuse."

"We know we are all here for each other and we support each other."

Care for my  
family futures

relationship  
education  
in schools



To have a voice and not  
be told what to do  
all the time

A child should  
have a right now  
how to go to.

you should not  
feel like you  
are not allowed  
to talk

you should let kids  
speak their mind.

We need  
support, individual  
and group support.  
Group support is not  
for everyone

Tell us who  
we can go to for  
when we need  
support

Girl aged 12

Boy aged 12





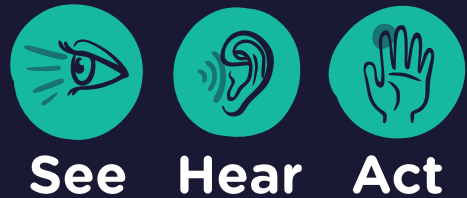
**See**



**Hear**



**Act**



**See Hear Act**



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**email Support:** [24hrsupport@dvhelpline.org](mailto:24hrsupport@dvhelpline.org)  
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