

## A briefing from NSPCC Cymru/ Wales and Welsh Women's Aid:

### **'How do we ensure all child victims have access to specialist Violence against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (VAWDASV) support services in Wales?'**

When there is domestic abuse in the home, children are not just witnesses, they are victims. (Katz, 2015), (Callaghan, 2015). Domestic abuse creates a distressing, stressful and harmful environment and the long-term consequences of this trauma can stretch into adulthood and can affect children in different ways. Research shows that 1 in 5 children experience parental domestic abuse and the prevalence appears to have increased during lockdown<sup>i</sup>.

In September Welsh Women's Aid and NSPCC Cymru/Wales came together to host a virtual round table asking leading professionals and charities in Wales *'How can we ensure all child victims have access to specialist violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence (VAWDASV) support?'* and to once again highlight the need for increased action to ensure that VAWDASV services for children and young people are sufficiently provided throughout Wales.

This briefing considers the key issues highlighted by the round table participants and the recommendations are:

#### **Recommendations**

1. Welsh Government and Regional VAWDASV Partnerships to prioritise specialist services for children and young people in every part of Wales.
2. Welsh Government to prioritise sustainable funding of specialist VAWDASV services, including children and young people services.
3. A prioritisation of training to support professionals working with children to recognise the signs of violence and abuse, respond in a trauma informed way and know the referral routes for their local area.

#### **Policy Context**

Wales has made a clear policy commitment to improving outcomes for children and young people. The UNCRC is embedded in Welsh legislation through the Right of Children and Young Persons (Wales) Measure 2011. Article 19 of the UNCRC states that Governments must do all they can to ensure that children are protected from all forms of violence and abuse and Article 39 that children who have experienced neglect, abuse, exploitation, torture must receive special support to help them recover.

The Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (Wales) Act 2015 (VAWDASV Act) aims to improve arrangements to prevent, protect and support victims of violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence, including children and young people.

Despite this, **we continue to see a dearth of services to meet the needs of child victims of VAWDASV**. Services for children and young people are patchy and underfunded, resulting in a post-code lottery of available support.

At a UK level, the Domestic Abuse Bill is completing its passage through Westminster and the provisions of that should help underpin a victim-centred response to domestic abuse. In advance of that, the Welsh Government has the opportunity to continue to lead the way in demonstrating an effective child rights response to young victims of domestic abuse.

### **Recommendation 1: A prioritisation of specialist services for children and young people**

The VAWDASV Act, places a duty on public bodies to improve arrangements for the prevention of violence and abuse and to provide support to survivors, including children and young people. Welsh Government's current National Strategy<sup>ii</sup> working to fulfil the purposes of the Act includes a number of key areas relating to children and young people, including Objective 6: *Provide survivors with equal access to appropriately resourced, high quality, needs led, strength based, gender responsive services across Wales*. The commissioning guidance attached to the strategy also states: *'The commissioned services should ensure victims and survivors – whether adults or children – receive the protection and support they need'*<sup>iii</sup>.

Despite this, **services for child victims have largely been ignored and the voices of children and young people remain lost**. A review of the local VAWDASV strategies for 2016-21 by NSPCC Cymru/ Wales noted that **only three of the eight strategies recognised children as victims of domestic abuse and only one strategy described their support services for child victims**. Additionally, no children were consulted in the development of these strategies and none of the strategies specifically prioritised developing or establishing support services for children. **To realise the policy intent of the VAWDASV Act, we call on Welsh Government and Regional VAWDASV Partnerships to prioritise specialist services for children and young people, through both accommodation and community based support.**

### **Recommendation 2: A prioritisation of sustainable funding for specialist services, including children and young people services**

A key building block to ensure support for all VAWDASV victims in Wales are appropriately resourced, high quality specialist services. Welsh Government committed to finding a sustainable funding model for specialist VAWDASV services in 2016. However, Welsh Women's Aid's mapping of services, in 2019, for children confirms the urgent need for better funding and resources to meet need<sup>iv</sup>. It found the provision of services for children and young people in Wales is **'limited, patchy and hugely varied due in large part to unsustainable, inconsistent and in some cases total non-existence of funding towards specialist dedicated services for children and young people'**. The lack of public commitment is demonstrated by the fact that **only one third of the £1,591,942 funding** for specialist children and young people's services came from statutory sources. Most specialist services for children and young people rely on funding from trusts and foundations<sup>v</sup>.

During 2018/19 **4,263 children and young people were known to access some form of specialist VAWDASV service in Wales, this is compared to the estimated 18,487 children and young people who experience abuse in a year**. Welsh Women's Aid therefore estimated that **77% of children and young people impacted by abuse had no specialist support'**<sup>vi</sup>. Their mapping found that specialist services are offering a lot on limited staff and resources, but because of the shortfall, some children and young people are still waiting up to 12 months for support. In addition, every service Welsh Women's Aid spoke to name a lack of funding as a risk to their children and young people provision.

We fully support the Senedd's Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee's recommendation that Welsh Government should agree a sustainable funding model for the VAWDASV sector before the end of this Senedd term<sup>vii</sup>.

### **Recommendation 3: A prioritisation of training for professionals working with children and young people**

A commitment to early intervention and prevention must include a programme of training for all professionals who work with children and young people. **Training of public sector workers who engage with children and young people must be a priority.** Training should ensure the rights of the child and the child's voice is considered and professionals understand the effects living with coercive control can have on a child and non-abusive parent 'engaging' with services. This must be an integral part of the Welsh Government National Training Framework.

In addition to public sector workers, consideration should be given to how private childcare settings can be supported to spot the signs of abuse in children; particularly given very young children are at increased risk of violence and abuse in the home and private nurse or childminders might be their only contact with other adults.

#### **To discuss further please contact:**

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<sup>i</sup> <https://learning.nspcc.org.uk/research-resources/pre-2013/child-abuse-neglect-uk-today> and <https://learning.nspcc.org.uk/news/2020/june/protecting-children-from-domestic-abuse-during-coronavirus>

<sup>ii</sup> National Strategy on Violence against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence – 2016 – 2021 (2016) Welsh Government

<sup>iii</sup> Violence against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (VAWDASV): Guidance for the commissioning of VAWDASV Services in Wales (2019) Welsh Government

<sup>iv</sup> Welsh Women's Aid, Children Matter <https://www.welshwomensaid.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/Children-and-Young-People-participation-report-FINAL.pdf> 2019

<sup>v</sup> Ibid

<sup>vi</sup> Ibid

<sup>vii</sup> Into Sharp Relief: inequality and the pandemic (2020) Welsh Parliament's Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee