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All Wales Domestic Abuse and Sexual  
Violence Helpline

**0808 80 10 800**



  
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**Welsh Women's Aid**  
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## Consultation on Raising the ambitions and educational attainment of children who are looked after in Wales

<b>Name:</b>	<i>Becky Jones (Policy Officer)</i>
<b>Organisation:</b>	<i>Welsh Women's Aid</i>
<b>Email address:</b>	<a href="mailto:BeckyJones@welshwomensaid.org.uk">BeckyJones@welshwomensaid.org.uk</a>
<b>Telephone number:</b>	<i>02920451551</i>
<b>Address:</b>	<i>Pendragon House, Caxton Place, Pentwyn, Cardiff CF23 8XE</i>
<b>These are the views of:</b>	<i>An organisation (Third Sector)</i>

Diverse Learners and Safeguarding Team  
Support for Learners Division  
Department for Education and Skills  
Welsh Government  
Cathays Park  
Cardiff  
CF10 3NQ

e-mail: [LACstrategy@wales.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:LACstrategy@wales.gsi.gov.uk)

**Deadline: 04.05.15**

**Pendragon House, Caxton Place | Pentwyn, Cardiff | CF23 8XE**  
**Tel: 02920 541551 | Fax: 02920 736128**  
**Email: [info@welshwomensaid.org.uk](mailto:info@welshwomensaid.org.uk) | Web: [www.welshwomensaid.org.uk](http://www.welshwomensaid.org.uk)**

**Registered Charity Number: 1140962**

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## **1 Introduction: About Welsh Women's Aid**

- 1.1 Welsh Women's Aid is the lead national organisation in Wales, providing the voice of local services and survivors to government as well as campaigning, influencing policy and practice, and innovating to end domestic abuse and violence against women across Wales and the UK. Welsh Women's Aid is a membership organisation for 27 independent, specialist services in Wales which provide a range of support, advocacy and prevention services for women, children and families affected by domestic abuse.
- 1.2 We also deliver essential national and local services and projects across Wales, including the All Wales Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Helpline – a 24 hour helpline for victims, concerned others and professionals; the Children Matter Project – to improve support for children and young people across Wales who are affected by domestic abuse; an Accredited Training Centre – Welsh Women's Aid is an Agored Cymru centre, developing and delivering training in domestic abuse accredited qualifications for member organisations and external agencies; and delivering services for women and children in North Wales (Wrexham and Colwyn Bay) by providing refuges, outreach and community advocacy and support for women and children affected by domestic abuse.
- 1.3 Despite progress that has been made in Wales, research studies continue to find alarming and persistently high levels of violence against women and girls:
  - In Wales in 2013/14, there were 6,325 prosecutions of violence against women and girls offences, with a conviction rate of 76.7%. Of these, 5,637 were cases of domestic abuse; 257 cases of rape, and 431 cases of sexual offences.
  - Welsh Women's Aid's members supported 9,337 women in 2013/14, with 2,263 women entering refuge;
  - The All Wales Domestic Abuse & Sexual Violence Helpline (managed by Welsh Women's Aid) supported 27,972 callers in 2013/14.
- 1.4 Our response to this consultation is informed by our 37 years' experience of responding to and preventing domestic abuse as a national membership organisation, ensuring the experiences of our direct and member services and survivors inform improvements in legislation, policy and practice

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2.0 Welsh Women's Aid view Chapter 3 as largely informative and helpful, but would like to ask for clarification on a number of points outlined below:

2.1 Section 3.3 Welsh Women's Aid notes that the Welsh Government provides early years programmes 'designed to provide strong support and guidance for families and their children who find themselves in difficult circumstances and facing great challenges'.

Welsh Women's Aid would like clarification on what these programmes include, and any outcomes.

2.2 Welsh Women's Aid believes it is important that domestic abuse and violence against women prevention and support services are recognised and utilised as a part of the wider early intervention methods provided by the Welsh Government.

2.3 Domestic abuse and other forms of violence against women can have a tremendous impact on a family, with the effects on parents and children posing a significant risk to well-being. This has been recognised in the All Wales Practice Guidance for safeguarding children and young people affected by domestic abuse:

*'The wide adverse effects of living with domestic abuse for children must be recognised as a child protection issue. The effects can be linked to poor educational achievement, social exclusion... Domestic abuse is not a one-off occurrence; it is frequent and persistent.'*<sup>1</sup>

2.4 Interventions such as refuge and other accommodation based services provided by Welsh Women's Aid members locally, contribute to many children being able to remain with their mothers, giving them the option to flee the abuse which was putting the child at risk.

2.5 All children in Wales who are affected by domestic abuse are considered children in need. Any referrals or concerns made to social services, surrounding a case involving domestic abuse, initiates a conversation, often leading to a child being placed on the Child Protection Register.

2.6 One recognised option to ensure a child is able to remain with their mother is for the woman to leave the home, or potentially take steps to remove the perpetrator of the abuse, therefore removing the high risk to the child. Domestic abuse services across Wales provide this opportunity to leave for many women and their children, allowing them a safe accommodation option away from the perpetrator. Last year in Wales, Welsh Women's Aid members supported 685 women in refuge who had a total of 493 children with them.<sup>2</sup> Of these children who entered refuge accommodation with their mothers last year, 245 of them were on the child protection register, which totals 50% of children in refuge.. This is potentially 245 children and young people who were removed from the risk of becoming looked after children – which highlights the significant benefit of such interventions.

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.awcpp.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/Domestic-Abuse-Protocol-Final-27-04-11-Pdf.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> Welsh Women's Aid annual membership data 2014-15 from 277 member services.

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2.7 Other preventative programmes undertaken include the S.T.A.R. (Safety Trust and Respect) suite of services provided by Welsh Women's Aid's Children Matter project, aiming to support children and young people who are affected by domestic abuse, ensuring they can access consistent high quality services and are given the tools to make good decisions and have happy and healthy relationships in the future.

2.8 Children Matter is a project managed by Welsh Women's Aid and delivered across Wales with dedicated Children and Young People Project Coordinators, each covering one of the four regions. The services are delivered in partnership with organisations across Wales, to deliver services to children and young people who are affected by domestic abuse.

It aims to support:

- Children and young people in Wales who are affected by domestic abuse to have access to consistent high quality support services
- Children and young people to be able to develop healthy relationships in their own lives and preventing abuse in future relationships.
- Services include 1-1 support, play sessions, S.T.A.R programmes and training in programme delivery, awareness and the effects of domestic abuse on children and young people.

2.9 Some statistics providing evidence of the success of STAR services:

Extracts of feedback from courses:

- 83% of the children understood what happened and why
- 66.6% of the children felt more comfortable discussing domestic abuse with someone else
- 83.3% of the children knew how to keep themselves safe
- 83.3% of the children talked to mum about what has happened
- 100% acknowledged that they were not the only one that has experienced domestic abuse at home
- 100% acknowledged that domestic abuse that happened at home was not their fault
- 100% knew who to talk to or where to go for help about domestic abuse.

STAR Group Work:

- When asked: " Do you know how to keep yourself safe if you feel scared and/or frightened due to domestic abuse?" 77% said yes
- 92% said they knew who to talk to/where to go to get help. This was in contrast to 36% before completion.

2.10 In 2002 nearly three quarters of children who were the subject of a child protection plan lived in households where domestic abuse occurs.<sup>3</sup> The effects of domestic abuse are not simple to address as issues can manifest in a multitude of ways for children, including absence from school and/or lower achievement at school, difficulty concentrating, injuries that could lead to withdrawal from school activities, difficulty in

<sup>3</sup> [Ibid](#), p.24.





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forming relationships with peers, and difficulties eating and sleeping.<sup>4</sup> There is a very serious need for the effects of domestic abuse on children and their primary cause to be addressed in order for any educational attainment to be increased.

2.11 It is also very important to consider the group most likely to be victims of domestic abuse, which is statistically young women and girls aged between 16 and 24 years<sup>5</sup>. Within this victim group 16 and 17 year olds still come under the remit of child protection – so specific and targeted support should be available to reflect this. Welsh Women's Aid believes that it is crucial that there are domestic abuse prevention programmes in schools that will support those children and young people who are victims of domestic abuse.

It is also vital to discuss the importance of educating children who are looked after on healthy relationships and equality. This focus could help to ensure vulnerability and need is not exploited as we have seen through recently uncovered sexual exploitation cases that have come to light in Rotherham, Oxford and many other areas, particularly in the case of young girls in care. This need to address gender and equality issues for even very young children was a central finding of the report by Professor Emma Renold in partnership with the Children's Commission for Wales 'Boys and Girls Speak Out'.<sup>6</sup>

3.0 Welsh Women's Aid views chapter 4 as largely informative and helpful, but asks for clarification on a number of points outlined below:

3.1 Section 4.12 discusses the opportunity to train key personnel and have a designated person who is an advocate for looked-after children throughout the teaching and governing bodies of a school. Welsh Women's Aid agrees strongly that this should be a priority and is vital to ensuring the safety and development of looked-after children.

3.2 Welsh Women's Aid would also like to reinforce the importance that all staff and governors are trained on issues around violence against women, including domestic abuse (as is intended under the National Training Framework that will come into force under the Violence against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (Wales) Act 2015. This will assist staff by enabling them to better understand the thoughts and feelings of looked-after children exposed to these types of abuse, to ensure they can access support in an appropriate way but to also be able to recognise children at risk and signpost them to support services. As outlined under the new Act, Welsh Women's Aid also believes there should also be one or more teachers and governors trained to a higher standard, who are equipped with the knowledge of what services are out there to support the children and of the appropriate care pathways available.

3.3 Welsh Women's Aid feels the training for key personnel should come from specialist services within a standardised national training framework. There is often little understanding within society in general regarding the complex nature of issues such as domestic abuse, which effect looked after children. It is therefore essential that teachers receive specialist training in the dynamics of abusive relationships, in addition to other forms of violence against women and girls (sexual violence, human slavery and

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<sup>4</sup> [Ibid](#), p.6.

<sup>5</sup> [Ibid](#), p.24.

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.childcomwales.org.uk/uploads/publications/411.pdf>

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exploitation, forced marriage, so-called 'honour' based violence, female genital mutilation (FGM), stalking and harassment, as well as domestic abuse). It could be more damaging for a teacher to attempt to tackle these complex issues in schools from an inappropriate perspective than not to cover them at all – so such training should be delivered by specialist third-sector agencies, who should be adequately funded to provide it.

3.4 We have had assurances from the Welsh Government that this is something that will also be covered by Donaldson's proposed new curriculum for Wales under the 'Health and Wellbeing' stream of the Successful Futures Report, and by the Violence against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (Wales) Act 2015 through the proposed National Training Framework, Whole Education Approach guidance and other relevant areas. It is important that these work streams are integrated to ensure maximum benefit. Section 4.29 discusses the need for the Welsh Government to strengthen the third sector in Wales in order to provide holistic engagement in education.

3.5 Welsh Women's Aid agrees that the knowledge and experience of the third sector is invaluable and needs to be strengthened in order to address the multitude of issues to support looked-after children.

3.6 At least 750,000 children witness domestic abuse every year (Department of Health, 2002), so the number of children affected by these issues in Wales is significant. The importance of training schools in recognising domestic abuse is therefore vital to ensuring children are able to access the services that will assist recovery and support, but it is also crucial to acknowledge the pool of knowledge and experience held by the third sector that can contribute to a holistic approach to well-being for children and young people.

3.7 Welsh Women's Aid's S.T.A.R. suite of services previously mentioned, is an example of third sector expertise working within the education sector to meet the needs of children effected by domestic abuse. The different programmes are specifically designed to reach different groups and ages of children and to have had a positive impact on the lives of children across Wales, supporting them to understand the dynamics of any abuse they have witnessed or suffered, and to give them the opportunity to talk about their experiences. The impact of these interventions are demonstrated by a number of quotes provided by teachers and young people who have taken part in the S.T.A.R suite of services:

*"Children were able to trust all members of staff and were able to talk freely about traumatic events that occurred whilst the programme was running, giving them the confidence to continue to participate".*

*"We talked about our feelings - I felt confused when I first came here, then I felt happy in the end" – Child*

*"I found STAR Club was really good, brilliant – it was helpful and the staff were really kind"*

*"I don't feel alone now, I didn't know these things happened to other children"*

*"STAR Club has helped to sort things out that were wrong – I will miss everyone"*

*"I have learned a lot about my own feelings and how to manage my angry feelings"*

*"I know how to keep myself safe and who to contact for help and have a Safety Plan"*

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4.0 Welsh Women's Aid thank you for the opportunity to contribute to this consultation. Any further questions regarding our response, please do not hesitate to get in touch using any of the contact details below

**Becky Jones (Policy Officer)**

Welsh Women's Aid

[BeckyJones@welshwomensaid.org.uk](mailto:BeckyJones@welshwomensaid.org.uk)

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