



Cymorth i Ferched Cymru
Welsh Women's Aid



Deaf Community Engagement Project 2023-2025

Evaluation Report

Executive summary



Welsh Women's Aid (WWA) is the national charity in Wales working to end domestic abuse and all forms of violence against women. Since 1978, we have campaigned for and provided advice, support and training on policy and service improvements for survivors, families, and communities. Our membership of specialist organisations provides lifesaving services to survivors and a range of preventative services across Wales. We place the survivor at the centre of all that we do.

In 2019, Welsh Women's Aid embarked on some research which culminated in a [report](#) that we published with Disability Wales, which highlighted the compounded barriers faced by disabled survivors, and aligns with evidence from Deaf Hope and other organisations demonstrating the urgent need for tailored responses. One area of significant concern was the deaf community—a population of approximately 575,500 people in Wales who experience disproportionately high rates of abuse yet remained largely excluded from vital services.

The research and consultation that we undertook to understand the scale of the issue revealed systemic gaps that prevent deaf survivors from accessing safety and justice. These include:

- A lack of training for specialist Violence Against Women Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (VAWDASV) services which limited their knowledge and caused a lack of promotion of accessible support routes.
- Inadequate responses from statutory services, including failure to provide interpreters and misclassification of abuse cases.
- Low awareness within the deaf community about domestic abuse and sexual violence, compounded by limited accessible information.
- Gaps in British Sign Language (BSL) terminology and interpreter training, hindering effective communication and disclosure.

These barriers intersect with other forms of oppression, particularly for Black and Minoritised deaf women, who experience multiple disadvantages due to race, gender, and disability.

In 2022, in line with our commitment to inclusivity, WWA began to expand our work to address the barriers to accessing support faced by marginalised groups. With the financial support from a charitable trust, WWA engaged in a two-year programme to address these inequalities by progressing our work towards the following outcomes:

1. Deaf survivors and the wider deaf community have increased opportunities to shape the services they need and the resources that are developed to increase knowledge and understanding.
2. Improved understanding of the systemic barriers to offering support to the deaf community; the gaps in support; the current levels of understanding of needs and current resources available; and any increased financial impact on organisations of providing support.
3. Specialist services have improved knowledge about the approach, skills, and resources necessary to provide a competent response to deaf survivors, including effective support and advocacy.
4. Statutory services have improved knowledge about the approach, skills, and resources necessary to enable members of the deaf community to report incidences of violence and abuse and hold perpetrators to account.
5. Increased numbers of BSL interpreters hold knowledge of key VAWDASV issues and can use related BSL terminology to assist in communicating experiences at every stage of the reporting and/or support process.

By embedding intersectionality and working in partnership with specialist services, statutory services and interpreters, WWA aims to ensure that deaf women and girls in Wales have equal access to safety, justice, and support. This initiative represents a critical step toward dismantling systemic barriers and creating a truly inclusive response to VAWDASV. This report is an evaluation and illustration of the work that we have undertaken to date and also provides the basis for future development.

We would like to formally recognise and thank Wendy Callaghan for the passion, commitment and determination that she devoted to the early stages of this work and to improving services for deaf survivors in Wales. We also give thanks to our funder. While this organisation does not seek publicity, WWA acknowledges that this important work could not have happened without their helpful and ongoing support.



Sara Kirkpatrick
CEO, Welsh Women's Aid

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When we talk about deaf people we use 'Deaf' and 'deaf':

- Deaf people – Have a Deaf identity and consider themselves members of the Deaf community. They have a shared language, British Sign Language (BSL), and a shared culture and history.
- deaf people – Usually are not members of the Deaf community. They are probably not fluent in BSL but may know some signs or the alphabet. They may rely heavily on lipreading.

The following report uses the term 'd/Deaf' to encompass individuals with significant hearing loss ('deaf') and those who culturally identify as Deaf ('Deaf').

Community engagement

One of the most integral aspects of this project was to ensure that the Project Officer had extensive knowledge and lived-experience. We recruited within the d/Deaf community and were extremely fortunate to appoint a highly skilled individual who was embedded in their local d/Deaf community. Throughout 2024 and 2025, the Deaf Community Engagement Officer completed a mapping of d/Deaf community groups across Wales and visited several to introduce their role and raise awareness of the project. These sessions varied from informal introductions to more structured presentations, depending on the needs and readiness of each group. We were clear that we did not wish to replace the connections that could be made between the d/Deaf community and local specialist services but before that could happen, we needed to introduce the knowledge that specialist services were available and being made more accessible to d/Deaf survivors.

Early visits focused on building trust and providing an overview of different types of domestic abuse and sexual violence. Many attendees, particularly older d/Deaf individuals, had limited awareness of domestic abuse beyond physical violence. Once explained, there was a clear increase in understanding, especially around non-physical forms of abuse.

During one introduction session, a d/Deaf survivor gained more insight into her own situation and accepted information to keep for when she felt ready to address the abuse she had identified. In a later session with the same group, she disclosed her circumstances and was supported to access the national

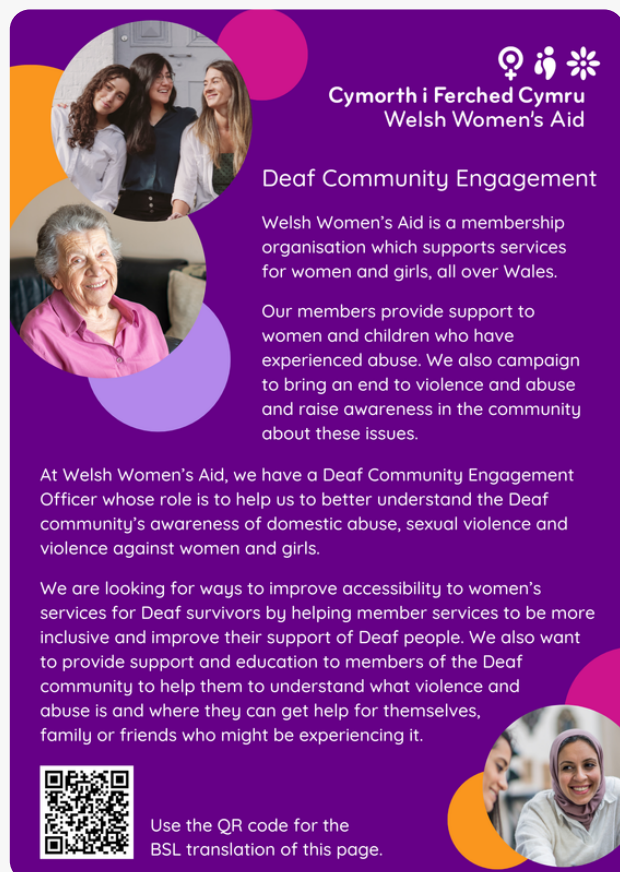
Live Fear Free Helpline via SignLive (now Convo). Another attendee shared concerns about a friend experiencing abuse and took information to pass on.

The more formal presentations were well received. Visual materials, including role-play videos, were particularly effective for d/Deaf audiences. These resources helped clarify key concepts such as coercive control and illustrated the many ways that VAWDASV can be perpetrated. Across groups, participants expressed appreciation for the information and a desire for further sessions to widen understanding and access to support.

Common themes that were identified in the groups were:

- A lack of awareness of Domestic Abuse being more than just physical.
- More work to explain the different forms of abuse was needed.
- How coercive control could be perpetrated against a d/Deaf person by using deafness to manipulate the survivor.

To accompany our visits, we also created flyers about the project which linked to BSL videos through a QR Code:



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Welsh Women's Aid**

Deaf Community Engagement

Welsh Women's Aid is a membership organisation which supports services for women and girls, all over Wales.

Our members provide support to women and children who have experienced abuse. We also campaign to bring an end to violence and abuse and raise awareness in the community about these issues.

At Welsh Women's Aid, we have a Deaf Community Engagement Officer whose role is to help us to better understand the Deaf community's awareness of domestic abuse, sexual violence and violence against women and girls.

We are looking for ways to improve accessibility to women's services for Deaf survivors by helping member services to be more inclusive and improve their support of Deaf people. We also want to provide support and education to members of the Deaf community to help them to understand what violence and abuse is and where they can get help for themselves, family or friends who might be experiencing it.

Use the QR code for the BSL translation of this page.



What are the different forms of violence and abuse?

Abuse is not just physical. It can take different forms which also include: emotional, financial (money), sexual, coercive control, sexual harassment, street sexual harassment, sexual exploitation, forced marriage, female genital mutilation and so-called honour-based violence.

It can happen anywhere, not just in the home.

You may have seen the word 'domestic abuse' this means relationship abuse. Some may say domestic as in home, but really it can happen anywhere, even on the internet (this is called digital/online abuse).

The abuser could be a current or previous partner, a family member or a carer. There are also other forms of abuse, where the abuser may be unknown to you.

Llinell Gymorth Byw Heb Ofn Live Fear Free Helpline
0808 80 10 800 CONVO
ffôn • fectst • sgwrsio byw • ebost
call • text • live chat • email

Text: 07860 077333
Email: info@livefearfreehelpline.wales
Webchat: <https://gov.wales/live-fear-free/contact-live-fear-free>
SignLive: Type in 'Live Fear Live Free'

Use the QR code for the BSL translation of this page.
If you'd like to find out more about this project or the work we do in general then please email:
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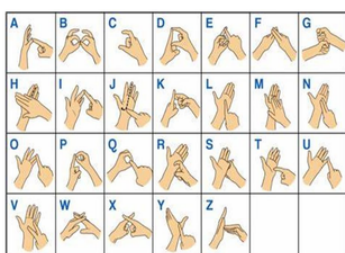
Welsh Women's Aid is a registered charity in England and Wales, No. 1140962 and a company limited by guarantee registered in England and Wales, No. 07483469.

British Sign Language (BSL) Interpreter training

The development and delivery of a half-day training entitled: “Understanding Domestic Abuse for British Sign Language Interpreters” was a vital part of our work. Interpreters are regularly present within d/Deaf communities and play a key role in reducing isolation by accompanying d/Deaf people to appointments such as GP visits, health consultations, and community events. Because of this, we felt it was essential that interpreters were equipped to recognise the signs of domestic abuse and sexual violence and to signpost individuals to specialist services when appropriate.

The training also ensured that interpreters were prepared for situations where they may be requested to support d/Deaf survivors directly, such as during police interviews or meetings with frontline services. This included familiarisation with relevant terminology, professional jargon, and the use of the BSL glossary on domestic abuse and violence developed by Heriot-Watt University.

British Sign Language (BSL)



Training slide example

In addition, the training highlighted that interpreters themselves can access support through the Live Fear Free Helpline, particularly when they have been involved in challenging or emotionally demanding meetings with d/Deaf survivors.

The aim of the training was to build a solid understanding of the nature and scope of domestic abuse and its impact on those who experience it, providing the delegates with the confidence and knowledge to deal with the issues in their work setting. The training had an accompanying toolkit for interpreters and when combined achieved the following learning objectives:

- Ability to define domestic abuse as sexual, physical, economic, mental/emotional abuse and list of examples of each.
- Appreciation and understanding of the impact of domestic abuse on those who experience it and how it affects their behaviour and choices.
- Understanding of the main issues of providing a sensitive and appropriate service to women, children and young people experiencing domestic abuse.

A total of 5 training sessions were delivered to 35 out of a registered 39 Wales-based BSL interpreters. Feedback comments included:



“The BSL glossary will be amazingly useful. Thinking about abuse in the context of the d/Deaf community was very helpful too.”

“Specifically talking about D/Deaf victims/ survivors as often training is generalised. Knowing what help is available, seeing the BSL signs for specific terminology and receiving a pack after the course.”

“it keeps my knowledge current and fresh and ensure, as an interpreter, I’m using the correct signs and terminology and aware of what to do in the event of a disclosure or concerns”

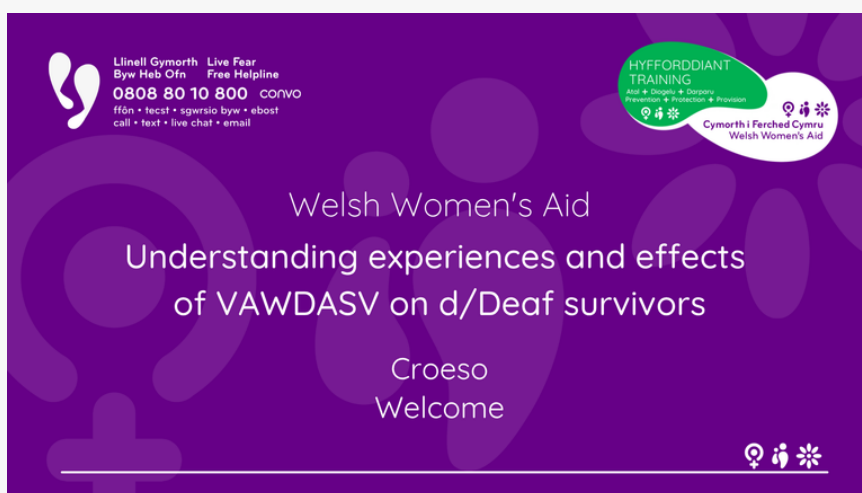
“Informative on terminology and process, how to sign post, that there’s helpline for me too!”

VAWDASV Specialist Services training

Information and feedback gathered from specialist services and d/Deaf survivors was used to inform the initial development of training and toolkits. An awareness training course for specialist services entitled: *“Experiences and*

effects of Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence” was subsequently developed. The course aims were for specialist services to have improved knowledge about the approach, skills, and resources necessary to provide a competent response to d/Deaf survivors, including effective support and advocacy. The learning objectives were to:

- Develop an understanding of deafness and d/Deaf culture.
- Appreciate and understand the impacts and barriers of VAWDASV for d/Deaf or hard of hearing survivors.
- Strengthen their understanding of the main issues of providing a sensitive and appropriate service to d/Deaf or hard of hearing survivors.



Training slide example

Across the lifetime of the project, a total of 59 specialist VAWDASV practitioners were trained. They represented at least nine organisations from across Wales.

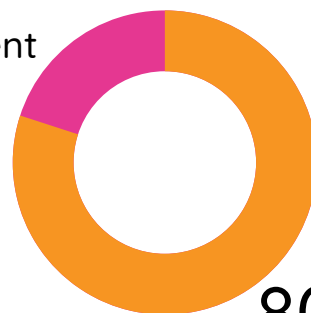
Participants completed a post-course survey designed to measure both their learning experience and overall impact of the training. The results were highly positive, with 80% participants rating the overall training experience as excellent and the remaining 20% rating it as good.



Prior to attending, the participants self-assessed their knowledge levels as good (20%), fair (60%), and poor (20%). Following the training, these ratings showed a marked improvement, with 20% describing their knowledge as excellent and 80% as good.

Below is a selection of qualitative feedback from the participants:

20%
Excellent



80%
Good



“Understanding how to make spaces accessible and friendly for deaf survivors to be able to engage and benefit from our service. It was helpful as well to know certain signs in sign language- for example abuse, etc.”
(Independent IDVA, November 2025)

“The training was fantastic- interesting and engaging and the trainer was very approachable. Thank you”

The feedback demonstrates a clear increase in participants’ confidence and understanding of the subject matter, highlighting the effectiveness and quality of training delivered.

Statutory services training

Again, information and feedback gathered from statutory services and d/Deaf survivors was used to inform the initial development of the training course: *“Understanding experiences and effects of VAWDASV on d/Deaf survivors”* which was tailored to this cohort. The course aims were for statutory services to have improved knowledge about the approach, skills, and resources necessary to provide a competent response to d/Deaf survivors, including effective support and advocacy. The learning objectives were to:

- Develop an understanding of deafness and d/Deaf culture.

- Appreciate and understand the impacts and barriers of VAWDASV for d/Deaf or hard of hearing survivors.
- Strengthen their understanding of the main issues of providing a sensitive and appropriate service to d/Deaf or hard of hearing survivors.

Experiences seeking support



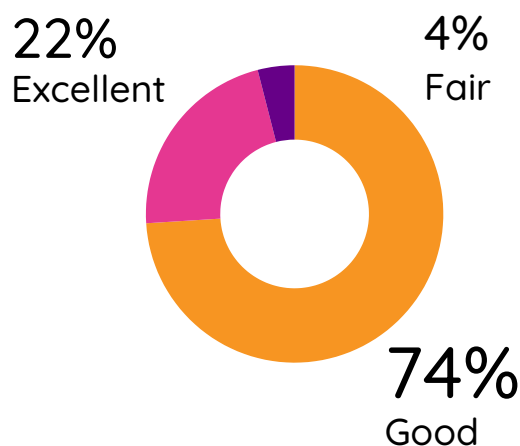
Training slide example

During the project a total of 90 practitioners were trained. They represented at least nine local authorities across Wales, practitioners from Health Boards, Police personnel and Housing Association staff.

Participants completed a post-course survey designed to measure both their learning experience and overall impact of the training. The results were highly positive, with 63% participants rating the overall training experience as excellent and the remaining 37% rating it as good.



Prior to attending, the participants self-assessed their knowledge levels as excellent (8%), good (17%), fair (29%), and poor (46%). Following the training, these ratings showed a marked improvement, with 22% describing their knowledge as excellent and 74% as good and the remaining 4% as fair.



One participant, who had initially rated session but fair afterwards, explained that their knowledge as excellent prior to the the training had increased their awareness of the depth of domestic abuse on the deaf community. They reflected that it had made them realise how limited their previous understanding had been, stating, "All of it made me think deeper about the impact of DA on the deaf community." (NHS participant, October 2025)

Below are examples of qualitative feedback of various aspects of the training:



"Really useful session, has opened my mind to things that I had not considered previous" – (Hywel Dda UHB learner, October 2025)

"Resources to help us out in community and making us think more from a deaf person's perspective" (Hywel Dda UHB learner, September 2025)

"A very well-presented course and I am a bit more confident now in how I can support victims and how to go about the practice to support adequately and appropriately" (Pennar Flying Start Hywel Dda Health Board – October 2025)

Feedback indicated a significant improvement in participants' confidence and understanding of domestic abuse within deaf communities, reflecting the high quality and effectiveness of the training delivered.

Our work with specialist VAWDASV services

During the project, we engaged with a range of specialist services to raise awareness of accessibility for d/Deaf survivors and to strengthen their understanding of how to provide inclusive support.

One of our early sessions was delivered to a national children's charity in September 2024. This session generated extensive discussion around accessibility, particularly the historic and inappropriate use of children as interpreters for d/Deaf parents. We emphasised correct procedures for arranging BSL interpreters and highlighted common barriers faced by d/Deaf people when accessing support services. We also highlighted how technology and basic BSL skills can help reduce these barriers and provided information about local BSL classes. For many of our engagement sessions, we would teach attendees the alphabet in BSL to get the group engaged in our work and start to think about potential barriers to communication.

Across multiple specialist services, we supported them to review the accessibility within their buildings and refuge settings. Discussions focused on how staff would respond if a d/Deaf survivor was referred, including whether they understood how to arrange BSL interpreters. We also raised awareness about communication barriers such as intercom-only entry systems, and the value of video-enabled alternatives where staff are able to sign or can access interpreting support.

A particularly strong partnership was developed with one service, which is now supporting five d/Deaf clients, including both BSL users and non-BSL users. One of their support workers has progressed from BSL Level 1 to Level 2, and the service is committed to ensuring d/Deaf survivors have access to staff who can sign or who understand how to book qualified interpreters. We also met to explore practical safety equipment for refuge settings, including video doorbells, as part of their accessibility funding applications. The change in this service was aided greatly by the support and resources provided by WWA.

We provided tailored support to an additional four specialist services, helping them apply the learning gained from training into their day-to-day practice. This included practical advice such as adapting communication methods, improving environments for people who lip-read, and considering how to make services feel more accessible from first contact onwards.

In mid-2025, we worked with another service to explore how they might

improve accessibility for d/Deaf survivors, including future opportunities for staff to learn BSL Level 1. However, challenges such as service pressures, limited funding, and recruitment and retention issues were common themes across all services. These barriers were also reflected in our wider membership survey in September 2025.

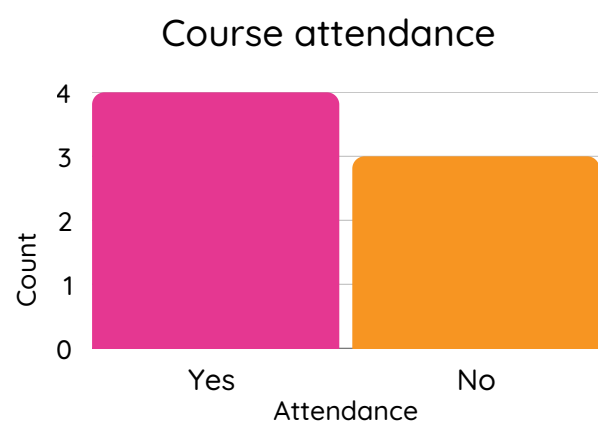
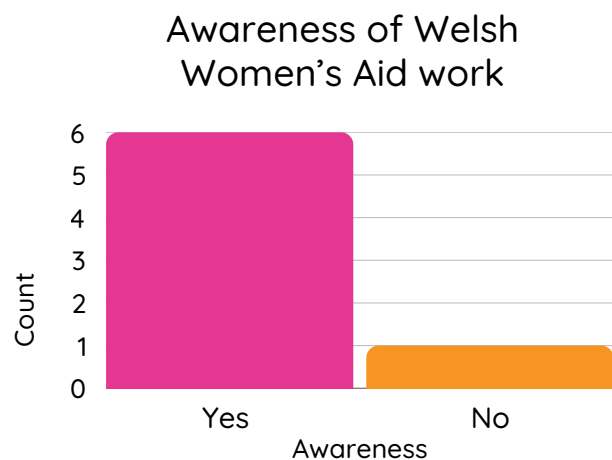
During the lifetime of the project, six services achieved the Welsh Women's Aid National Quality Service Standards (NQSS) accreditation, which includes specific criteria on accessibility. The d/Deaf Community Engagement Officer continues to maintain contact with services previously supported around this and remains available for ongoing guidance.

Some of Welsh Women's Aid's Member Services reported caseload pressures restricting their ability to attend training and so we incorporated d/Deaf voices and our project learning into an accessibility toolkit for specialist VAWDASV services. The toolkit was designed to assist initial conversations with survivors and provide useful hints and tips to improve communication, suggest technological aids and provide practical guidance as to how to arrange the correct interpretation services for a survivor.

To measure the impact of our work on specialist services we conducted a survey in 2025 across our membership. 33% of WWA member services completed the survey.

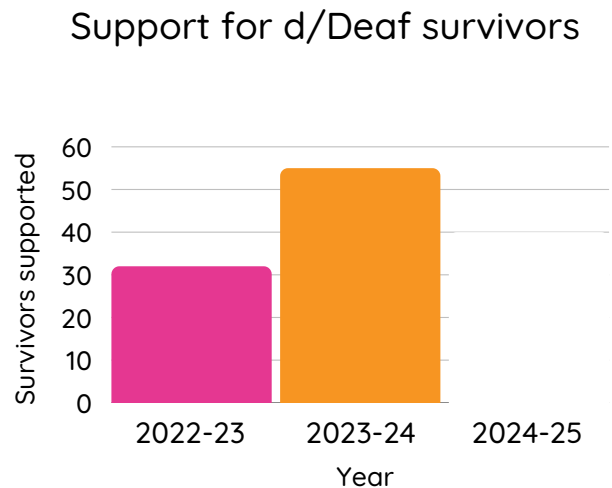
Of these, 86% of respondents were aware of Welsh Women's Aid's work with the d/Deaf Community since 2022. This indicates strong sector awareness, though we acknowledged that there was still room to improve our reach with the remaining organisations.

57% of organisations who completed the survey had staff attend the course 'Understanding the experiences and effects of VAWASV on deaf survivors'. On average, 3 staff members had attended per organisation.



Responses varied in format and detail, but consistent patterns emerged:

- Most services supported 1–7 survivors per year.
- Support was primarily community-based, with occasional accommodation support.



Services reported some positive improvements that they attributed to the impact of the training and support that they had received. These covered:

- Including d/Deaf awareness in induction training.
- Improved communication strategies.
- Use of sign language interpreters and BSL-trained staff.

They also identified some barriers:

- Lack of interpreter access.
- Communication challenges.
- Limited training availability or scheduling conflicts.

Services also told us that in the future they would benefit from:

- More training spaces and Train-the-Trainer (TTT) options. d/Deaf-friendly resources.
- Toolkits for service planning and inclusion.
- Databases of interpreters and funding guidance for accessibility tools.

Case studies from specialist services



“We currently have a deaf client open to us and staff have been able to access a support worker who translates by sign language. This has had positive outcomes for the client as the service has been fully explained, safety and support completed, criminal justice process explained. Client now fully understands the bail conditions with safe ways to report – online for 101 non-emergencies and registered for text 999 service.”

“My male client and my first Deaf client. I met with Geraint* (not his real name) back in August 2022 and he is the reason why I started learning BSL. Geraint started teaching me about the Deaf Community, and as BSL is his first language, he started teaching me words/phrases too. He is able to verbally communicate and we speak as well as sign. As we met quite frequently at the start, I tried to learn as much as I could, so I could sign things to help explain, I also learnt the BSL alphabet to spell things out. I went on maternity leave in March 2023, and this meant I didn't do any learning for a year. Once I returned, I really worked on learning as much as I could.

Now when I meet with Geraint, I am able to sign a lot with him and he has complimented me on how well I am signing and how much I have improved. I still see him about once a month as he is helping me with my BSL. I help him read his correspondence as, like a lot of other members of the Deaf Community, he struggles with reading and literacy.

Geraint gave me my sign name, which is “Staff” signed by using your index and middle finger in a V shape, to run along the top of your other arm (as in a staff badge on security). This is because we met with me as staff at the organisation I work for, and because of a connection to my surname. To be given a sign name in the Deaf Community is an honour and shows acceptance. A sign name can only be given by a member of the Deaf Community. I am proud of this as I feel this signifies the work I've put into being involved and inclusive of the Deaf Community.”



“J has engaged with support since September 2022. J was deemed a vulnerable adult, and the case was assessed as high risk. J shared having experienced coercive and controlling behaviour, and multiple sexual assaults within the relationship. The relationship had ended when support began and J was looking to take part in our group work and peer support sessions to gain more knowledge around DA, aid her managing her trauma symptoms and access peer support to alleviate her feelings of isolation.

The support worker initially supported J emotionally and then supported her within groups. J attended our Freedom programme and then went on to complete the domestic abuse recovery toolkit course. During support J would need to be in a setting that aided her mobility as she uses a wheelchair so the support worker ensured that sessions J took part in were either on the ground floor or had an accessible lift. During the recovery toolkit course the lift in the building we were using broke and could not be repaired and the support worker found an alternative space which was accessible.

Within a group setting J would be sat in a position where she can see everyone in the room especially the facilitator to ensure J could lip read and that everyone within the room would be made aware of this need being reminded if needed. J would also be placed in a position in the room that meant nobody could walk directly behind her as J would be unaware of someone moving around by sound and would feel vulnerable when she would have a shadow pass her. J also needed to have subtitles on the videos we shared within groups.”

Live Fear Free Helpline

The Live Fear Free Helpline is the national helpline for Wales that supports all survivors of all forms of VAWDASV. The helpline is delivered on behalf of Welsh Government by Welsh Women's Aid. At the start of the project, the Live Fear Free Helpline had a Video Relay Service (VRS) in place, but awareness of this service within the d/Deaf community was extremely limited. Through outreach activities, including presentations, information stalls, and direct engagement, we promoted the different ways d/Deaf individuals could contact the helpline, such as via SignLive (now Convo), text, email, and webchat. Awareness also increased through references to VRS in training sessions and during the live

-streamed campaign delivered in partnership with SignHealth.

Between January 2024 and August 2025, we monitored contacts from the d/Deaf community. During this period, the helpline received 26 contacts relating to d/Deaf or hard-of-hearing survivors. Of these, 12% identified as hard of hearing, with the remaining 78% identifying as d/Deaf. The contact types included:

- 11 contacts from survivors.
- 9 contacts from support services.
- 6 contacts from concerned others.

Methods of contact were varied, with 70% via voice call, 15% by text, 7.5% via webchat, and 7.5% via Video Relay.

Collaboration with Convo has strengthened referral pathways, ensuring that anyone in Wales contacting their service and who discloses domestic abuse or sexual violence is signposted appropriately to the Live Fear Free Helpline.

Our work with statutory services

Direct engagement with statutory services outside of the training was challenging within the project period; however, towards the end of the project we managed to develop the beginnings of positive progress with 2 local authorities, Welsh Government and 1 Police force. During communication with the Police the official we met with had some prior awareness of Welsh Women's Aid's work and expressed a strong interest in ongoing collaboration. During the discussion, it was suggested that meeting a d/Deaf survivor with lived experience of interacting with the police, particularly in situations involving a BSL interpreter, would be valuable in improving understanding and practice. Arrangements for such an opportunity are hoped to progress in 2026.

We also developed a positive working relationship with a d/Deaf PhD researcher in nursing within a University Health Board. Across several meetings, we contributed to the development of new guidance for training nurses, aimed at improving communication skills and awareness when working with d/Deaf patients. Our input included specific considerations for engaging with d/Deaf survivors, particularly ensuring nursing staff are aware that survivors can access the Live Fear Free Helpline through Video Relay and receive support and advice in BSL. This collaboration has supported the inclusion of d/Deaf-aware practices in future nursing education.

Project governance and steering group

To ensure the project remained focused on its outcomes and responsive to the needs of d/Deaf survivors, we established a Steering Group made up of representatives with lived experience of deafness and/or VAWDASV, as well as professionals working in relevant fields. The purpose of the group was to identify potential risks affecting delivery, support problem-solving, provide feedback on project progress, and review any adjustments made throughout the project.

The Steering Group also guided and reviewed project outputs, ensuring work aligned with contractual requirements and adhered to a trauma-informed, needs-led and strengths-based approach consistent with the Change That Lasts model. Quarterly meetings allowed the group to work collaboratively, reviewing documentation such as toolkits, sharing learning, monitoring activities, and contributing to both internal and external evaluation processes.

Membership included representatives from a range of organisations and roles, such as the British Deaf Association (BDA), SignHealth, Centre of Sign, Sight and Sound (COS), d/Deaf and Deaf blind survivors, a social worker, a clinical psychologist, and a Welsh Women's Aid member service.

The group was highly engaged and generous in sharing resources, insights, and updates. Members have also expressed a strong interest in continuing this collaborative work beyond the current project, particularly given the significant gap in Wales where no dedicated organisation for d/Deaf people currently exists. Welsh Women's Aid continues to support member services by providing tools, guidance, and resources to ensure d/Deaf survivors can access support in their preferred language.

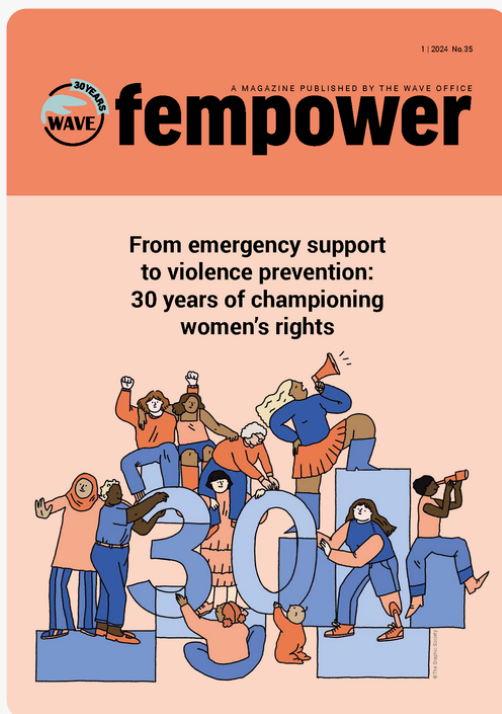
Additional engagement and influence

During the project, we developed additional opportunities to further our work.

WAVE Conference (2024)

In September–October 2024, Welsh Women's Aid was invited to deliver a three-day workshop at the WAVE (Women Against Violence in Europe) conference in Vienna. The workshop focused on raising awareness of the experiences of d/Deaf survivors. Delegates from across Europe reflected on the

differing national policies and legislation relating to accessibility for d/Deaf people, and the session encouraged them to consider how their own systems could better support d/Deaf survivors. For many attendees, it was the first time seeing BSL interpreters present on a conference stage, which significantly increased visibility and understanding of linguistic accessibility. As a result of speaking at the conference we were also invited to publish an article in Fempower magazine which was circulated across Europe. The article was called '[Can she hear your support?](#)'.



Routes to Power Network

We also began engaging with the Routes to Power network, which amplifies the voices of disabled women in policy and influencing spaces. The group brings together organisations working at the intersection of gender and disability and focuses on shared learning, collaboration, and advocacy to address systemic barriers. Through these meetings, we contributed lived-experience-informed perspectives on d/Deaf survivors' needs and gained insight into emerging policy opportunities. This relationship will be invaluable as we progress into the next phase of our project. Participation in this network also supported new connections, including with the Deaf Ethnic Women's Association (DEWA), which we intend to develop further.

Disabled People's Rights Plan Consultation

As part of our national influencing work, we ensured d/Deaf voices were included in Welsh Women's Aid's submission to the Welsh Government's Disabled People's Rights Plan consultation. The submission highlighted the additional barriers d/Deaf survivors face when accessing VAWDASV support and made recommendations to address these at a national level. We await publication of the Government's response and will monitor which suggestions are taken forward.

BSL (Wales) Bill

In September 2025, we participated in a focus group on the BSL (Wales) Bill alongside other members of the d/Deaf community. The group provided examples of lived experience, including challenges in accessing statutory services such as policing and healthcare. Our contribution highlighted both the professional and personal benefits of the Bill to survivors of VAWDASV, which aims to secure statutory access to BSL interpreters and preferred communication methods across government-run services.

Reflections

Across the duration of the project, several key reflections emerged that highlight both the progress made and the ongoing needs within services supporting d/Deaf survivors of VAWDASV.

Increased awareness but ongoing gaps

Outreach activities, training, and community engagement significantly improved awareness of VAWDASV within d/Deaf communities, as well as awareness of the Live Fear Free Helpline and accessible contact routes. However, baseline understanding, particularly around non-physical abuse and coercive control, remains low in many groups, especially among older d/Deaf individuals.

Strong partnerships are key

Collaboration with structures such as SignHealth, the Centre of Sign-Sight-Sound (COS), specialist services, and the Routes to Power network have been highly valuable. These partnerships have strengthened referral pathways, increased learning, and improved confidence among staff supporting d/Deaf survivors. The emerging relationship with the d/Deaf Ethnic Women's Association (DEWA) is another promising development.

Engagement with policy and national structures has impact

Input into the Disabled People's Rights Plan, participation in the BSL (Wales) Bill focus group, and collaboration with Welsh Government's Cohesive Communities team show that d/Deaf survivors' experiences are increasingly feeding into national policy. This work is helping shape a more consistent approach to accessibility across statutory services.

Lived experience is crucial

Where d/Deaf survivors engaged directly, such as through training, steering groups, or helpline use, the impact was significant. Their insights improved professionals' understanding and informed practical changes. There is a recognised need to create more structured opportunities for survivors to influence practice, including with statutory services.

Governance strengthened the project

The Steering Group played an essential role in ensuring a trauma-informed, needs-led, and strengths-based approach. Members contributed expertise, lived experience, and resources, ensuring the project remained grounded, accountable, and survivor-focused.

Accessibility requires systemic change

Across the project, it became clear that accessibility for d/Deaf survivors cannot rely solely on individual staff goodwill. Consistent communication pathways, accessible technologies (e.g., video doorbells), BSL-trained staff, and clear interpreter booking processes must be embedded structurally across all services.

Continued work is needed

Despite progress, Wales remains without a dedicated d/Deaf organisation, leaving a substantial gap in support infrastructure. This reinforces the importance of ongoing collaboration, capacity building, and developing accessible tools within member services to ensure d/Deaf survivors receive support in their preferred language.

Key takeaways for service providers

Inclusive practice across all service areas means ensuring that accessibility is considered within policies, induction training, assessments and everyday interactions with survivors.

Strengthen your understanding of d/Deaf culture, communication needs and barriers, recognising how these intersect with experiences of VAWDASV and the challenges survivors face when seeking support.

Use qualified BSL interpreters whenever required, avoiding reliance on family members or informal arrangements, and ensuring staff understand how to book interpreters efficiently.

Practical accessibility adjustments don't have to come at high financial cost – clear visual communication, appropriate lighting for lipreading, written alternatives when needed, and environments that support d/Deaf survivors' communication preferences make a big difference.

Access training for your team to guide improvements in practice, service design, communication methods and safety planning.

Build and maintain links with your local d/Deaf community groups and Deaf-led organisations, enabling ongoing dialogue, removing barriers, building trust

and a clearer awareness of what support is available.

Recognise and respond to additional challenges faced by d/Deaf survivors, including isolation, communication barriers, and previous negative experiences with statutory or support services.

Adopt trauma-informed and needs led approaches, ensuring responses are sensitive, survivor-centred, and adapted to meet individual communication needs.

Promote accessible information, including captioned videos, BSL content, easy read materials and clear signposting to helplines such as Live Fear Free.

Looking to the future

After further conversation with our funder, we were able to prove the need for the work to continue. Using our reflections and recommendations we have authored a refined set of outcomes to work to over the next 3 years (2026–2028). We are extremely grateful for this opportunity and are excited for the changes it will bring about.

The next phase of the project will focus on further strengthening accessibility and deepening engagement with d/Deaf communities across Wales. We will continue to develop and expand our programme of training, ensuring that all materials and resource packs are shaped by d/Deaf perspectives and produced in fully accessible formats.

Building on the relationships established to date, we will increase direct engagement between specialist services, d/Deaf individuals and community groups. This will include working alongside specialist services to build trust, share information, and support d/Deaf survivors to understand the full range of support available to them.

A central priority for the coming phase will be the creation of accessible resources. This includes developing BSL video content and Easy Read materials for the Welsh Women's Aid website, enabling d/Deaf people to access key information in their preferred communication style. In addition, BSL-led social media content will be embedded within our outreach to ensure that awareness-raising messages, campaigns, and helpline guidance are visible and accessible across multiple platforms.

We will also devote more time to understanding the systemic issues that d/Deaf survivors told us that they experience when trying to access statutory services. We will expand our knowledge of systems and the data that they capture, in order to improve their response and advocate for change.

The Steering Group will remain integral to shaping the project, providing expert insight, reviewing outputs, and ensuring that all work continues to follow a trauma-informed, needs-led approach. We will also strengthen collaboration with strategic partners and sector organisations to support a more cohesive response to the needs of d/Deaf survivors at a national level.

Finally, we will deliver all of this alongside establishing targeted focus groups to capture lived experience, identify emerging barriers, and ensure that the next stage of the project reflects the priorities and voices of d/Deaf communities throughout Wales.

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