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a Thrais Rhywiol Cymru Gyfan

All Wales Domestic Abuse and Sexual
Violence Helpline

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Welsh Women's Aid
Rhoi Merched a Phlant yn Gyntaf
Putting Women & Children First

Revised Child Poverty Strategy for Wales

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These are the views of:	<i>An organisation (Third Sector)</i>

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Deadline: 29.01.15

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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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Summary of Recommendations

Welsh Women's Aid recommends:

1. Need for explicit connection being made in the strategy between child poverty, women's poverty and how this can be exacerbated by experiences of domestic abuse;
2. Prevention of violence against women and girls through the education system and the effect on improved attainment, achievement and aspirations, both when girls and young women are within the education system and after they have left education;
3. Recognition for the impacts of welfare reform and disproportionate effect on women and their children and the links to poverty;
4. Recognition of the disproportionate effect of poverty on single parents, who are most likely to be women;
5. Recommend use of STAR (Safety, Trust and Respect) suite of services, aiming to support children and young people who are affected by domestic abuse, ensuring they can access to consistent high quality services. It also enables children and young people to develop respectful relationships in their own lives, preventing abuse in future relationships and consequential links to poverty;
6. Increased access to the Flying Start Program for women fleeing domestic abuse in order to prevent increased likelihood of poverty;
7. Recognition for the effectiveness of accredited domestic abuse perpetrator programmes as suggested through the results of the Mirabal Research study, and the role of this in preventing poverty;
8. Recommend that domestic abuse specialist support services are identified as key partners in local and national collaborations to end child poverty;
9. Implement two further indicators specific to monitoring effectiveness of domestic abuse prevention: a) percentage of children accessing domestic abuse prevention services (i.e. STAR suite of services); and b) number of adults who have been referred to a domestic abuse prevention programme (with detail whether this be STAR services, an Accredited perpetrator Programme, Pattern Changing Programme, Freedom Programme amongst those available).

2. Response

2.1 Do you agree with our proposal to maintain our ambition to eradicate child poverty by 2020?

Welsh Women's Aid agrees and supports the Welsh Government's commitment to addressing the causes and consequences of child poverty by 2020.

2.2 Do you agree with our proposal to continue with our existing three strategic objectives for tackling child poverty?

Welsh Women's Aid agrees with the proposal to continue with the existing three strategic objectives. We would welcome the explicit connection being made in the strategy between child poverty, women's poverty and how this can be exacerbated by experiences of domestic abuse. As noted by the Women's Budget Group report 'Women's and children's poverty: making the links' managing poverty can

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'damage mothers' physical and mental health and well-being, particularly in instances of debt or domestic violence'.¹

2.3 Are the policies and programmes underpinning our strategic objectives the right ones?

2.3.1 Early Years, Education and Healthy Relationships

Welsh Women's Aid commends Welsh Government's commitment to preventing poverty by investing in early years programmes and policies, designed to encourage equality in attainment. However, the effect of domestic abuse and violence against women and girls and its links to poverty should be recognised and prioritised in the strategy. Poverty does not cause domestic abuse, however can exacerbate abuse that already exists, and increase a victim's financial vulnerability. It is therefore crucial to tackle violence against women and girls and encourage healthy relationships from a young age, as well as challenging what may already be happening within a young person's relationship if we are to successfully eradicate child poverty by 2020.

2.3.2 The coincidence of living with poverty and domestic abuse can significantly impact on a child's educational attainment, meaning those with low levels of attainment may be suffering for multiple intersecting disadvantage². This could include children being prevented from going to school, a child truanting from school to protect a parent or carer, arriving late to school (often exhausted) and a chaotic lifestyle which can mean that children attend school on an ad-hoc basis. Other effects may include:

- Developmental difficulties - babies may be slower in learning to crawl, walk, and talk and in being potty trained;
- Significantly more behavioural and emotional problems: externalised behaviours may include aggression and anti-social behaviour, including in class;
- Internalised behaviours are reflected in depression, anxiety and other trauma symptoms;
 - Below average school performance;
 - Higher rates of absences from school;
 - A lack of concentration, falling asleep in class, and becoming easily distracted and disruptive.

2.3.3 Domestic abuse can lead to significant disruption to a child's education. While support workers do all they can to minimise disruption to education, children living in refuges face additional barriers to education. It may take weeks or even months for a child who has been moved out of their area to gain a school space. This may also have an impact on future education and employment, which can lead to an

¹ Women's Budget Group report 'Women's and children's poverty: making the links' <http://www.wbg.org.uk/documents/WBGWomensandchildrenspoverty.pdf>

² Welsh Women's Aid briefing Dec 2013 'Links between Domestic Abuse, Poverty and Education'. Accessed at http://www.welshwomensaid.org.uk/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=495:wwa-briefing-on-links-between-domestic-abuse-poverty-a-education&catid=35:news&Itemid=168

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increased risk of poverty in the future, if an individual is unable to gain qualifications or a job³.

2.3.4 In refuges, some children may not be able to access the space or quiet to complete school work or may not have the 'head space' to be able to keep up with school work. Leaving home and moving to refuge is a huge change and has a significant impact on children. Data collected by Welsh Women's Aid showed that 34% of children in refuge had no access to schooling⁴.

2.3.5 It is also vital to tackle violence against women for young people who may be suffering personal abuse through their own relationships, with 16 to 24 year olds being twice as likely to be a victim as those aged 25 to 34⁵. Young people affected by violence and bullying are likely to have lower attendance rates, as well as reduced capabilities to engage in education and therefore to attain and progress, which are contributing factors to living in poverty. Within the Women's Budget Group report they explain 'One consequence of economic dependency may be to trap women in violent relationships, a point made at the meeting of the England Platform of UKCAP'⁶ For example, there is evidence to suggest the following⁷:

- The stereotyping of young women and girls as sexual objects and sexually available may negatively influence girls' achievements and opportunities through restricting their aspirations;
- Young BME women are subject to particular racialised and gendered stereotyping as hyper-sexual, which limits and restricts their aspirations;
- There are links between teenage pregnancy and non-consensual sex, which are based on gendered dynamics of pressure, coercion and expectation and may be reinforced by media representations of sex – ensuring good quality sex and healthy relationships education is available to young people is critical in terms of ensuring safety, preventing VAW, and increasing attainment.

2.3.6 Preventing violence against women and girls through the education system would therefore have the additional desirable effect of improving attainment, achievement and aspirations, both when girls and young women are within the education system and after they have left education. This in turn would enable more positive outcomes with regards health, well-being, access to employment and a move away from poverty in future.

2.3.7 Impacts of Welfare Reform

Welsh Women's Aid agrees with the Welsh Government's commitment to mitigating the effects of welfare reform and austerity on the most vulnerable within

³ Welsh Women's Aid briefing Dec 2013 'Links between Domestic Abuse, Poverty and Education'. Accessed at http://www.welshwomensaid.org.uk/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=495:wwa-briefing-on-links-between-domestic-abuse-poverty-a-education&catid=35:news&Itemid=168

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Office of National Statistics Report 'Focus on: Violent Crime and Sexual Offences, 2011/12' 7th February 2013. Pg 4 accessed through; http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/dcp171778_298904.pdf

⁶ Women's Budget Group report 'Women's and children's poverty: making the links' <http://www.wbg.org.uk/documents/WBGWomensandchildrenspoverty.pdf>

⁷ Violence Against Women Action Group Report 'Priorities for a Violence against Women (wales Bill)' <http://walesvawgroup.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/10/vaw-priorities-for-vaw-wales-bill.pdf>

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our society. Although the effect of these reforms cannot be measured fully at this stage of implementation, measures designed to mitigate the disproportionate effect on women and their children needs to be taken in to account.

- 2.3.8 There are a number of elements of welfare reform that will disproportionately effect women, including the changes to housing benefit: 54% of social housing tenants are women⁸ and 66% of those claiming housing benefit reside in social housing.
- 2.3.9 By default the under-occupation measures within housing benefit – the ‘spare room subsidy’ – will also have a greater effect on women as the most likely group to reside in social housing, meaning they could be deducted up to 25% of their benefit for occupying a home with multiple bedrooms. This is also significant for women who are victims of domestic abuse who have had their home altered through ‘target hardening’ to create a panic room for increased security.
- 2.3.10 The changes to Income Support (IS) will also have a disproportionate effect on women. Many women are eligible for IS on the grounds of being lone parents, with over 50% of all women in receipt of IS claiming on these grounds. As of 2012 a lone parent who’s youngest child is over the age of five will no longer be able to claim IS solely on the grounds of being a lone parent. As women are more likely to be lone parents (women representing 97% of all lone parent IS claimants) they will be financially impacted the most by this change.
- 2.3.11 UK figures show 96% of all claimants of IS with the youngest children being 5-6 years old were women, which is comparable to Wales. Almost all lone parents in this category will therefore be transferred onto job seekers benefits. It must be noted that the majority of individuals receiving IS were actually employed (57% of claimants in 2009) and as revealed through DWP assessment notes - this group in particular ‘tend to fair worse in terms of employment outcomes’.⁹
- 2.3.12 It is also important to note for those claiming IS or job seeking benefits that has been through a sustained period of recession and unemployment meaning that the availability of jobs for claimants is restricted. As the majority of the claimants will also be women, it is important to consider whether the labour market is adaptable to the needs of women entering it after extended periods of leave, which may be due to raising children, illness or relocation due to domestic abuse.
- 2.3.13 Poverty and the effects on domestic abuse**
Welsh Women’s Aid feels that within any strategy to tackle poverty the effect of domestic abuse and its link to poverty need to be addressed. Poverty can be an exacerbating factor within an abusive relationship, as well as a tool to control a

⁸ Stats for wales, WG 2012

⁹ Department for Work and Pensions. 2011. Removing Income Support eligibility for lone parents with a youngest child aged five or over: Equality Impact Assessment, March 2011. Accessed 19th September 2012.
<http://www.dwp.gov.uk/docs/eia-lone-parent-conditional-wr2011.pdf>

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victim or a result of leaving an abusive partner. This link is not prioritised in current strategies, yet is a vital factor.

2.3.14 Poverty and financial issues within a household are not a cause of abuse, but can exacerbate abuse and keep women trapped in violent relationships. The fear of coping alone, being unaware of welfare and benefits they are entitled too and not having enough money to pay for transport to support services are all reasons why women may continue to stay in abusive relationships. These issues therefore need to be addressed and prioritised within any tackling poverty strategies¹⁰.

2.3.15 Keeping women in poverty and controlling the financial state of the household is an acknowledged tool to controlling a relationship, ensuring the woman has no means to leave forms part of the coercive control adopted by perpetrators of domestic abuse, which significantly escalates the risk of harm for victims. This can have horrific consequences on women and their children. A recent Women's Aid Federation of England report into financial control showed a number of women getting in to huge amounts of debt, unable to feed and clothe their family adequately because of their partners control over finances¹¹.

2.3.16 The long term effects of financial control by perpetrators of domestic abuse can exacerbate a woman's state of poverty dramatically¹².

- a. It can impact her current employment status, i.e. through ill health, being forced to leave work by a partner or having to relocate for safety and unable to maintain employment;
- b. Impact on future employment i.e. through ill health, disability, interruptions in her career and homelessness;
- c. Having been left with debt;
- d. Lack of credit history;
- e. Costs associated with domestic abuse i.e. legal costs, legal protection proceedings, divorce, child care, moving costs and loss of possessions;
- f. Possibility of no recourse to public funds such as asylum seeking women.

2.3.17 Women who escape domestic abuse will therefore often continue to experience poverty, and those who did not suffer financially whilst in the abusive relationship could subsequently suffer. Due to this, a preventative approach to domestic abuse through investment in Respect accredited perpetrator programmes would be of benefit to the poverty agenda as confirmed recently through the Mirabal Research.¹³

2.3.18 Single parent families are at greater risk (on average) of poverty than two parent families and women are on average 28% worse off immediately after separation/divorce¹⁴. Changes to benefits and tax credits, as well as effect on

¹⁰ Women's Aid report 'Domestic Abuse and Financial Abuse; An overview. Page 18 Accessed at www.womensaid.org.uk/core/core_picker/download.asp?id=3607

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid, p20.

¹³ <https://www.dur.ac.uk/criva/projectmirabal/>

¹⁴ Ibid, p21.

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ability to work full time will also have an effect, heavily exacerbating poverty within households.

2.3.19 Children of survivors, by effect of the family finances, are also forced to live in poverty after leaving a domestic abuse situation. They are less likely to be in a position to afford to participate in after school activities, sport clubs and holidays. They are less likely to access computers and the internet, which could affect school work in comparison to other children. The basic extracurricular activities aimed at developing young people's experiences and skills may be non-existent, leaving them less developed and more isolated from their peers¹⁵.

2.3.20 Women are more likely to go without basic necessities in order to provide and enable their children to have more. Statistics on family poverty from the Fawcett Society and the UK Women's Budget Group have shown how the 2011 budget and impact of welfare reform has fallen more heavily on women than on men and has increased women's and single parent's poverty generally¹⁶.

2.3.21 The impact of domestic abuse on a woman and her family is heavily affected by poverty and financial exclusion. Any poverty strategy needs to focus on prevention of domestic abuse and other forms of violence against women and ensure women are able to live independently and support their families.

2.3.22 Programmes designed to mitigate poverty

In light of the evidence demonstrated in the previous section demonstrating the links between those within poverty who suffer domestic abuse, as well as the implications domestic abuse has on a child's educational development and over all well-being, Welsh Women's Aid would like to see a number of domestic abuse prevention services acknowledged and resourced in any anti-poverty strategy

2.3.23 The Children Matter team managed by Welsh Women's Aid have developed STAR (Safety, Trust and Respect) suite of services, aiming to support children and young people who are affected by domestic abuse, ensuring they can access to consistent high quality services. It also enables children and young people to develop respectful relationships in their own lives, preventing abuse in future relationships

2.3.24 The project works with partner organisations in the delivery of services, enabling access to consistent support across Wales and increasing awareness of domestic abuse and its impacts. STAR is now delivered in all 22 Local Authorities across Wales.

2.3.25 As discussed the consequences of domestic abuse are often devastating and long term, affecting the physical health and mental well-being of children, young people and their families. At the same time, its ripple effects compromise the social development of children in the household; the family as a unit; the communities in

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Fawcett Society 2008 see fawcettsociety.org.uk/index.asp?pageID=658

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which they live; school attainment and, society as a whole. The STAR services are offer a range of programmes that builds resilience and recovery, and would support poverty prevention initiatives in every area of Wales.

- 2.3.26 Recognition for the effectiveness of accredited community perpetrator programmes is also essential to prevention of domestic abuse related poverty. The recently published Mirabal research undertaken by the Durham and London Metropolitan Universities suggests domestic violence perpetrator programmes (DVPPs) could play an important role in the quest to end domestic violence.
- 2.3.27 The study found that before attending the programme a third of men made women do something sexual they did not want to do but none did so after taking part in the programme (30 per cent to zero). In the same way, cases of the men using a weapon against their partner reduced from 29 per cent to zero.¹⁷
- 2.3.28 Far fewer women reported being physically injured after the programme, with 61 per cent before compared to 2 per cent after. Over half of the women reported feeling 'very safe' after the programme, compared to less than one in ten before the programme (51 per cent compared to 8 per cent).
- 2.3.29 Welsh Women's Aid is encouraged by the number of strategies initiated by Welsh Government to tackling the root causes of poverty in Wales, but would like to discuss the effectiveness of the 'Flying Start' programme and some concerns that have been expressed by specialist services delivering support to women and children fleeing domestic abuse.
- 2.3.30 The Programme, where it operates, has positive outcomes and is effective in supporting many women who have suffered domestic abuse in accessing childcare whilst they seek support and training. The programme reduces the risk of financial exclusion and our members in geographic locations where service users are able to access Flying Start feel this is a very benefice.. it is worth noting that this scheme is only offered on a geographical basis and this causes many barriers in terms of access. For example, if a woman has previously accessed Flying Start before fleeing domestic abuse/moving home/entering refuge, her continued Flying Start support then depends solely on where she relocates to, and disregards her level of need (which is likely to be higher having left a partner), progress made with Flying Start support, or her situation.
- 2.3.31 During this consultation, we worked with member groups to gain their experience of Flying Start and the impact it has on the women and children they work with. A stark example of the barriers service user face in getting out of poverty, can be seen through Women's Aid RCT who report 'The biggest difficulty we have is that none of our refuges are situated in Flying Start areas so we are always struggling with accessing resources for families who are currently in refuge.' Women's Aid RCT also highlighted the difficulty families experience when they have previously been able to access Flying Start, but have all support withdrawn due to a change

¹⁷ <https://www.dur.ac.uk/criva/projectmirabal/>

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in address. The postcode lottery also has an impact on child care, which can be lost when moving from a Flying Start area to an area without the services.

2.3.32 Another aim of Flying Start is to increase access to the Health Visiting Service, which is crucial when reaching women suffering from violence against women. It is important to ensure all women, despite where they live, have regular visits from Health Visitors trained in spotting the signs of domestic abuse and are able to support women in need of services. Appointments with professionals such as health visitors may be the only time a woman is able to be alone and able to disclose or discuss anything she is going through and mitigate her risk of poverty. This valuable service should not be dependent on where you live.

2.3.33 Welsh Women's Aid would like to discuss adjustments to the programme with Welsh Government to ensure that those most in need of the service are able to access it.

2.4 Are you content with the collaborative approach we set out for tackling child poverty in Wales?

2.4.1 Welsh Women's Aid are pleased to see a collaborative approach taken to tackling child poverty, with acknowledgement for the role of the third sector as key stakeholders in supporting those effected by poverty as well as leading the prevention agenda.

2.4.2 Due to the intersectionality of poverty and domestic abuse, Welsh Women's Aid recommends that domestic abuse specialist support services are identified as key partners in local and national collaborations to end child poverty. As such, they should be essential partners when discussing programmes and opportunities for mitigating the effects of poverty at a local level.

2.4.3 Domestic abuse has a hugely detrimental effect of women and children and their risk to poverty, effecting their work or school attendance, development etc. It is therefore imperative that specialists in violence against women prevention and the preventative measures they have designed should be utilised.

2.5 Do you agree with the proposals we have set out under next steps?

2.5.1 Welsh Women's Aid agrees with the proposals outlined for next steps. Welsh Women's Aid does not believe that domestic abuse is caused by poverty, but acknowledges that it can be an exacerbating risk factor, as well as being used as a tool to maintain power. Therefore, mitigating the effects of poverty in Wales could also act to reduce domestic abuse incidences.

2.5.2 Welsh Women's Aid also agrees with the Welsh Government's commitment to increase the number of children benefitting from the Flying Start programme. As

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discussed earlier, the inconsistent access to this programme has been of concern, but this measure will go in some way to ensuring increased access.

2.6 Do you agree with the indicators we propose to use to measure progress?

2.6.1 Welsh Women's Aid agree with the indicators provided but would like to suggest two other indicators

1. Percentage of children accessing domestic abuse prevention services (I.e., STAR services)
2. Number of adults who have been referred to a domestic abuse prevention programme (detail whether this be STAR services, an Accredited Perpetrator Programme, Pattern Changing Programme, Freedom Programme amongst those available)

3. Further comments

No further comments

3.1 Welsh Women's Aid would like to thank you for the opportunity to contribute to this consultation. If you require any further clarification of the information contained in this response, or any other matter relating to violence against women, please do not hesitate to get in touch.

Becky Jones (Policy Officer)

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