

Improving outcomes for children and young people affected by domestic abuse

We are Voice Against Violence – 8 young expert advisors who all have personal experience of domestic abuse and different services. We work with the Scottish Government and CoSLA to implement the National Domestic Abuse Delivery Plan that aims to improve outcomes for children and young people affected by domestic abuse in Scotland.

We have written this paper at the request of Alex Neil, Minister for Housing and Communities. Its purpose is to inform Cabinet of our findings with respect to gaps in provision for children affected by domestic abuse in Scotland - there are thousands of children who do not succeed, who live their lives in fear and in constant danger, who experience homelessness and bullying at school and who don't have a way to speak out or get help. **We ask Cabinet to take action to address these gaps:**



1. **Support Workers:** huge numbers of children and young people in Scotland do not have access to specialist support workers when they need one.
2. **CEDAR:** the highly evaluated CEDAR (Children Experiencing Domestic Abuse Recovery) groupwork programme and its roll out are under threat because funding is being cut back.
3. **Housing and Homelessness:** almost 50% of refuge accommodation in Scotland is still 'unsuitable' – families have to share bathrooms and kitchens. Families both in refuge and not in refuge face many barriers due to lack of communication between Housing and other agencies.
4. **Schools:** teacher training and lessons for pupils on domestic abuse is still very patchy.
5. **Specialist approaches in the CJS:** there is a need to roll out the good practice of Glasgow's excellent multi-agency approach (involving the Domestic Abuse Court, ASSIST, Police Task Force and many other agencies) to other areas of Scotland and to support children identified immediately.
6. **Agencies:** progress in multi-agency working (communication, risk assessment, listening to children) needs shared across all agencies and across Scotland to improve agencies' response to children and their mothers. Agencies, beginning with the police, should also work with statisticians to develop a national picture of numbers of children experiencing domestic abuse.
7. **Safe Contact:** children and their mums are still being put at risk from contact arrangements with the abuser - we need to find out whether practice has improved since the law changed.
8. **Participation:** involving children and young people in developing policy and services is vital, Voice Against Violence needs continued funding; participation of other young people needs expanded.

These gaps in provision are explained below from our unique perspective and expertise: we have conducted a year of fact-finding, visits and interviews with young survivors of domestic abuse, professionals on the ground, head of agencies and officials from local and national government.



“Domestic abuse can happen at any time. As soon as people know you are going through it you need support straight away. You feel isolated, you want help... who knows what will happen next... you need support while it can still make a difference”.

Support Workers: Setting up a fund for specialist support workers for children experiencing domestic abuse across Scotland (whether they live in refuges or the wider community) has been a great step forward. It's very positive that the fund will be continued until March 2012. Over 4000 children affected by domestic abuse were supported in a year as a result of the government fund and local authority contributions - two thirds were children under 12. Despite this, we are still a long way from the Delivery Plan's aim of ensuring every child that needs a worker has access to one.

Gaps in provision:

- less than a third of children accessing support through the fund are over 12 (only 4% young people supported were 16-19) – the current Domestic Abuse Campaign encourages 13-16 year olds to talk to someone so we need to ensure there is support available;
- there are waiting lists for outreach support in many areas or large caseloads which put pressure on workers who can't give enough time for the specialist approach;
- hard to reach children are those living in rural areas, traveling communities, BME and disabled children and young people;
- improved multi-agency approaches such as the Glasgow specialist court and GIRFEC pathfinder have resulted in large numbers of children being identified as experiencing domestic abuse by agencies. Specialist support is needed straight away for each child not just those that are 'high risk';
- Outreach support is essential for children in the community and secluded areas. Not everyone goes into refuges or can travel to meet workers.

Our message: Without access to a support worker – someone to talk to or open up to – it leaves you battling through life on your own with devastating consequences. If this early intervention approach is not taken then the costs to the child, society and government in the long term will be huge especially, in our experience, in relation to mental health services, homelessness services and the criminal justice system.



“We learned that we were not alone in a world that seemed out to get us but together a family fighting back against the pain of abuse and the long term abuse to our minds.”

CEDAR: The pilot of the CEDAR group-work programme for children and their mothers in Fife, Edinburgh and Forth Valley has been evaluated positively. It has been found to restore family relationships and enable mothers, children and young people to have a much more positive future outlook. CEDAR teaches children and mothers how to speak about problems, safety plan, be confident in their abilities, cope with feelings and bond as a family without the abuser. Many different professionals – e.g. teachers, police officers, NHS mental health workers - donate their time to become CEDAR co-facilitators and get free training which enables them to share experience and learning across their agencies.

Gaps in provision:

- We hear that the 3 pilot areas are struggling to continue the programme and that termination notices have been served to CEDAR staff – we ask the Cabinet to help address this urgently and also to work with CoSLA to see how CEDAR can be set up in other areas of Scotland. In the long term CEDAR will save money for many services including the police, NHS, social work and education.

Our message: If CEDAR is lost then agencies will lose the opportunity to gain experience in helping families affected by domestic abuse and hundreds of women and children will lose the chance to turn their lives around - you can't put a price on happiness.



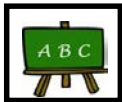
“I felt like I was intruded with no freedom, like I was under pressure constantly and I couldn’t study, I felt swarmed...[moving into a new style refuge..] I felt better; I had my own space, felt like a home and family, not like a facility. It made the experience easier.”

Housing and Homelessness: There has been little progress in ensuring that women and children affected by domestic abuse have somewhere safe and happy to stay, with notable exceptions such as the building of purpose-built refuges in Drumchapel and East Lothian and improvements in multi-agency working in some areas to better protect women and children in their own homes or their new homes.

Gaps in provision:

- We ask Cabinet to work with CoSLA to bring all refuges up to a 21st Century standard – no family should have to share bathrooms or kitchens. It feels unsafe and humiliating yet currently almost half of refuge spaces in Scotland are still shared;
- Children’s experience of homelessness due to domestic abuse can be less traumatic through improving communication between agencies and the council housing services; ensuring housing officers have an understanding of domestic abuse and how to respond appropriately as well as improving access to decent housing quickly;
- Support for people to stay in their own home safely without the abuser is an option we have explored (we have looked at sanctuary schemes and the use of exclusion orders) though it would not have been safe or appropriate for any of us. It is very complicated and difficult especially as regards to feeling and being safe from the abuser and accessing support. If Cabinet and local authorities are considering this approach (and families feel it can be a safe option), it needs to be done properly with a high level practical and emotional support - it needs to be safe and feel safe.

Our message: Children’s mental health and their life chances are hugely affected by staying in unsuitable accommodation across Scotland. Families take different paths to safe homes - all need dedicated support workers at every stage to improve their experience and recovery, alongside protection from the abuser.



“No one at school understood the danger for my family or the responsibilities I had at home. They thought I was skiving. I was bullied, in trouble for truancing - they presumed I was a problem-child, they didn’t understand problems with doing homework, not sleeping, being worried...”

Schools: There has been some progress in developing resources to teach pupils about domestic abuse such as the ‘Why Create A Drama’ play and DVD. There is also an online training resource for teachers in development. The current Domestic Abuse Campaign includes ‘Feel like you’re living in a Warzone?’ posters in each secondary school which signpost help – if we say to children ‘speak to a teacher’ then we need to make sure teachers can handle it and are trained.

Gaps in provision:

- Training for teachers about domestic abuse needs to be mandatory, pre and post qualification and for all teachers in a school not just one ‘child protection’ teacher;
- Pupils’ awareness – all age groups are affected and need to be aware of domestic abuse and how to access support – all age groups need to take part in stopping domestic abuse in the future.

Our message: A lot of children that are living with domestic abuse are not getting the right kind of support because teachers don’t recognise domestic abuse. Teachers and school mates understanding domestic abuse can really help ease the hardship and humiliation.



"I didn't get my say in court and I wanted to"

"Having been on the stand myself I must say it was very rewarding to do my bit"

Specialist approaches in the Criminal Justice System: The greatest achievement of the specialist domestic abuse criminal justice approaches in Glasgow (Court with ASSIST, Police Task Force, Multi-Agency meetings convened) has been the huge improvement in multi-agency working and intelligence gathering, resulting in better protection of women and children and targeting of perpetrators. Our two big concerns are (a) that thousands of children are being identified as experiencing domestic abuse but don't immediately get access to a specialist support service and (b) that many children don't get a say in the process (from the police incident through to court) - we feel most adults don't recognize that *some* children want the opportunity to give evidence if it can be done safely and with support.

Gaps in provision:

- Two more ASSIST children's support and advocacy workers could make a huge difference to children at risk in Glasgow. £70k each year would enable ASSIST to double its cases;
- The gaps in specialist provision in support workers need addressed in Glasgow as a whole (not just ASSIST) to support all children identified not just those at high risk or cited as witnesses;
- Areas outwith Glasgow need to use the good practice of the Domestic Abuse Court and ASSIST, the Police Task Force and multi agency risk assessment and planning (we realise there will be adaptations of the model to suit local areas);
- All Police forces should provide statistics about children (such as those collated in Glasgow and GIRFEC pathfinder areas) so that national Police statistics will include number of children involved in police incidents across Scotland. Other sources of information such as child protection statistics should be explored so that we can build a national picture of the huge number of children affected by domestic abuse in Scotland.

Our message: Whether or not children are witness to a reported incident they will have been affected by domestic abuse and know it is going on. They know a lot about what has been happening, need to talk about it, be kept informed and have the choice whether they give evidence. They need support and to see justice being done.



" It draws out the whole traumatic process if agencies don't communicate – it can make it mentally hard for children who are either not recognised or have to repeat their story"

Agencies: The four *Getting it right for every child* Domestic Abuse Pathfinders in Dumfries & Galloway, Edinburgh, Falkirk and Clydebank made progress with developing risk assessment tools, safety planning tools and approaches to improve the way agencies work together to help families, as have other areas. Better communication between agencies is the most important result of the pathfinding.

Gaps in provision:

- All agencies (not just some of them) need to be encouraged and helped to participate in the multi-agency approach, to share vital information so that they can work together effectively and to do it in a way that respects children's right to confidentiality;
- All agencies need to involve children in the process of making decisions about what is best for them and their families;
- All agencies need trained to respond to domestic abuse, there are improvements but it's still not core training for all
- Other areas of Scotland need to learn from the GIRFEC Domestic Abuse Pathfinder and Glasgow approach to improve local multiagency approaches.

Our message: Telling someone of your experience for the first time is bad enough, but if agencies don't share this information it then leads to you repeating yourself over and over which becomes a nightmare and eventually makes you crumble. Also if agencies don't communicate then children and their families are put under threat as information would be missed out. It does need to be done sensitively so we're not stigmatized or put in more danger. Good multi-agency approaches are essential for early intervention.



“If you can lift your hands to your child or partner you should lose your right to see your child”
“my support worker helped me to develop a positive relationship with my dad once I had had a long time to recover”

Safe Contact: There has not been any progress in ensuring that the Family Law (Scotland) Act 2006 is working: are abusers only awarded contact if it is safe for children and their mothers? Are children getting a say throughout the process?

Gaps in provision:

- Research is needed to find out if the law is working to keep children affected by domestic abuse safe, to find out if children's views are listened to and whether they are central to decision making;
- Children are in danger because of unsafe contact being awarded; we need to make sure that if and when children choose to have contact with the abuser it is done in a safe way – improving provision through contact centres is vital.

Our message: Children should have the right to choose whether and how to have contact and for some this will mean no contact. Children are not being given time and space to recover from trauma of abuse which should happen before contact is even considered. If safe contact is not organised or even offered, potential positive relationships with fathers for some children may not happen.



“Keep involving us – we know best what we want!”
“Voice Against Violence have still got a lot of work to do and enjoy being your critical friend”

Participation: The Delivery Plan has helped set up some amazing national participation projects in Scotland including Voice Against Violence, LGBT Youth's Voice's Unheard, 'Our rights, our lives' and 'Why Create a Drama'. It has also been the reason for many local participation approaches such as including children and young people in improving local specialist support services.

Gaps in provision:

- Participation of children and young people in policy and service development around domestic abuse is still very patchy – there should be a commitment from government and all agencies that participation is continued and built on beyond the Delivery Plan;
- Voice Against Violence funding is due to end June 2011, we want to continue our work and build on our relationship with Ministers & CoSLA and make sure that we really help children.

Our message: We know that without involving children and young people in policy and service development, those policies and services will not work for them. Children and young people are excellent allies, creative problem solvers and very effective 'critical friends'. We passionately believe in helping to make a difference and we know we can make a difference.

www.voiceagainstviolence.org.uk