

# women's aid

Federation Northern Ireland

*Working to end domestic violence*

## Our Place – Safe Space

A strategy for children and young people

(2012 – 2017)



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**Our Place – Safe Space**  
**A strategy for children and young people (2012 – 2017)**

**Women's Aid Federation Northern Ireland 2012**

## Foreword by Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People

As Commissioner for Children and Young People, it is my job to promote and safeguard the rights and best interests of children and young people. All my work is based on the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), which sets out the minimum standards for children's rights and protections across all areas of their lives.

The preamble to the UNCRC states that 'the child, for the full and harmonious development of his or her potential, should grow up in a family environment, in an atmosphere of happiness, love and understanding'. However, while many children in Northern Ireland enjoy a safe and nurturing environment, we know that for too many others life at home can be a horror of neglect, abuse and violence, including domestic violence. The extent and nature of the impact of domestic violence on children and young people has not always been acknowledged or documented. Too often, their voices have not been heard and their needs have not been recognised.

The UNCRC is very clear about the obligation placed on government to take all necessary measures to protect children and young people from *all* forms of abuse and violence. The Convention notes that this includes taking preventative action to protect children and ensuring support is provided for those affected. Indeed, in its most recent examination of the UK, the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child highlighted that further progress was required to ensure that professionals working with children, such as teachers, social workers, medical professionals, members of the police and the judiciary, respond appropriately to domestic violence when it affects children.

Further to this, a child rights approach reminds us that the obligation to protect children from harm must take account of other rights, such as their right to have a say in matters affecting them and to have their best interests reflected in decision-making. Therefore, we need to do more than simply consider children affected by, or at risk of, domestic violence as silent victims. We must make sure that they are listened to, that their needs are at the

centre of decisions that can impact so significantly on their lives and that our laws, policies and services are shaped by their views and experiences.

We all have a responsibility to safeguard children and young people and I acknowledge the vital contribution made by Women's Aid across Northern Ireland in their tireless work for so many years.

This strategy is a vital step forward in addressing this issue head on. It sets out clear strategic priorities for children and young people in the areas of protection, prevention and support. It highlights the need for collaborative working and for listening to and involving children and young people in the development and delivery of services.

As Children's Commissioner, I am delighted to support this Women's Aid Children & Young People's strategy. Domestic violence is unacceptable. It is a violation of children's rights and should have no place in their lives. I truly believe that with the right policies, adequate funding and a relentless commitment to children and young people's best interests, we can work together to create positive change. We can go forward collectively, with a shared commitment to creating a **safe space** for all children and young people in Northern Ireland.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Patricia Lewsley-Mooney". The signature is written in a cursive style.

Patricia Lewsley-Mooney  
Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People

## Consultation

This strategy has been developed by Women's Aid Federation Northern Ireland using an open and inclusive process of consultation across Women's Aid in Northern Ireland with input from experts in the field.

It has been developed over the period of one year and during this time a comprehensive consultation approach was developed and implemented, including:

- delivery of consultation and planning sessions with all Women's Aid groups across Northern Ireland, to identify perceived strategic priorities
- consultation sessions with Senior Managers across Women's Aid
- delivery of a consultation and planning session with staff in Women's Aid Federation Northern Ireland, including staff from the regional 24 Hour Domestic Violence Helpline to identify strategic priorities
- planning and project management sessions with the Director and Finance and Training Manager of Women's Aid Federation Northern Ireland, and
- design and delivery of participative youth consultation events with established youth participation groups in the following Women's Aid groups:
  - Antrim, Ballymena, Carrickfergus, Larne & Newtownabbey Women's Aid
  - Causeway Women's Aid
  - Belfast and Lisburn Women's Aidto ensure children and young people's voices are integral to the development and delivery of the strategy.

Thanks is extended to all those who participated in the consultation process. Their feedback and input has been central to the development of this strategy.

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Supporting documentation:

Women's Aid Federation Northern Ireland (2012) ***"Our Place – Safe Space"*** Directory of children and young people's services in Northern Ireland

# Section One

## Introduction and background



## 1.1 Introduction to the strategy

This strategy has been developed by Women's Aid Federation Northern Ireland to demonstrate a strategic and innovative vision for children and young people who experience (or may be at risk of experiencing) domestic and sexual violence.

This strategy presents a new approach for Women's Aid across Northern Ireland. It represents a move to the creation of a single regional children and young people's strategy, to drive forward service provision and development over a five year period (2012 – 2017). It is based upon a "think regionally, act locally" model and sets out the regional priorities for the period, providing a standardised framework for Women's Aid Federation Northern Ireland and each Women's Aid group, to respond to the strategic priorities identified, on a local and regional level.

## 1.2 Overview of Women's Aid in Northern Ireland

Women's Aid is the lead voluntary organisation challenging and addressing domestic violence in Northern Ireland. Women's Aid provides refuge and a range of emotional and practical support services, including outreach and aftercare to women and children suffering from domestic violence. The core work of Women's Aid in Northern Ireland, including Women's Aid Federation Northern Ireland and the 10 local groups is to:

- provide refuge accommodation to women and their children suffering mental, physical, financial or sexual abuse within the home
- run the 24 Hour Domestic Violence Helpline
- provide a range of support services to enable women who are leaving a violent situation to rebuild their lives and the lives of their children
- provide a range of support services to children and young people who have experienced domestic and sexual violence
- run preventative education programmes in schools and other settings
- educate and inform the public, media, police, courts, social services and other agencies of the impact and effects of domestic violence
- advise and support all relevant agencies in the development of domestic violence policies, protocols and service delivery, and
- work in partnership with all relevant agencies to ensure a joined up approach to domestic violence.

Every day across Northern Ireland, another five women and children come to stay in refuge because they are not safe in their own homes. In the year 2010 – 2011, Women's Aid across Northern Ireland provided refuge to 1,058 women and 754 children. The floating support/outreach service supported 3,450 women and 3,739 children and the 24 Hour Domestic Violence Helpline managed 38,296 calls. These figures are increasing on a yearly basis as the organisation reaches out to families experiencing domestic violence across Northern Ireland.



There are currently 10 local Women’s Aid groups across Northern Ireland, who are members of and affiliated to Women’s Aid Federation Northern Ireland. For contact details of local Women’s Aid groups see page 36 and 37.

### 1.3 Women’s Aid Federation Northern Ireland

Women’s Aid Federation Northern Ireland exists to challenge attitudes and beliefs, which perpetuate domestic violence. Women’s Aid Federation Northern Ireland was established in 1978, with a regional responsibility for the development of new and existing Women’s Aid groups. Since then, the role of the Federation has developed to include policy development and review, training provision, lobbying and liaison with a wide range of statutory and voluntary bodies. The 24 Hour Domestic Violence Helpline is also managed by the Federation. Women’s Aid Federation Northern Ireland’s vision for the 21<sup>st</sup> century is the elimination of domestic violence.

Throughout this strategy the term “Women’s Aid” is used to reflect the overall Women’s Aid movement in Northern Ireland which is made up of ten local Women’s Aid groups and the Women’s Aid Federation. The ten local Women’s Aid groups are all members of Women’s Aid Federation Northern Ireland. The ten Women’s Aid groups offer a range of specialist services to women, children and young people who have experienced domestic violence.

### 1.4 Children, young people and domestic violence

Children have often been referred to as the hidden or forgotten victims of domestic violence. In recent years however, recognition that children and young people are impacted upon by domestic violence has spread, and policy and practice has begun to develop accordingly. Research shows that approximately one in four women in Northern Ireland have experienced or currently experience violence in the home.<sup>1</sup>

*It is important to remember that whole families suffer from domestic violence. For every woman experiencing violence in the home there will usually be children who are also suffering. The experiences of these children are often overlooked.<sup>2</sup>*

UNICEF research released in 2006<sup>3</sup>, showing per capita incidence, indicates that there are up to 240,000 – 963,000 children across the UK exposed to domestic violence and approximately 32,000 children and young people living with domestic violence in Northern Ireland. NSPCC research<sup>4</sup>, launched in November 2011, estimated that 33,000 babies under 1 in England are living with a parent who reports domestic abuse. This research goes on to state that infants as young as one year old can experience trauma symptoms as a result of domestic violence. These include eating problems, sleep disturbance, lack of normal

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<sup>1</sup> McWilliams, M & McKiernan, J (1993) Bringing it out in the Open, HMSO: Belfast

<sup>2</sup> McNamee, S (1998) Caught in the Middle, Children’s experiences of Domestic Violence. NIWAF: Belfast

<sup>3</sup> UNICEF (2006) Behind Closed Doors, the Impact of Domestic Violence on Children. Body Shop International plc. West Sussex

<sup>4</sup> Cuthbert, C, Rayns, G and Stanley, K (2011) All Babies Count. NSPCC

responsiveness to adults, mood disturbances and problems interacting with peers and other adults.

Since 1999, Women's Aid across Northern Ireland has provided refuge to 14,714 women and 14,356 children and young people. During the last 16 years Women's Aid Federation Northern Ireland managed 282,860 calls to the 24 Hour Domestic Violence Helpline. Statistics for MARACs (Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conferences) in Northern Ireland show that between January 2010 and March 2012 inclusive, 3263 domestic violence cases were discussed. In these MARAC cases 3130 of the victims were women. A total of 4530 children were recorded as part of these households.

Children and young people will experience domestic violence in many ways and every experience will be different. A study by Hughes (1992)<sup>5</sup> of families, who had experienced domestic violence, showed that 90% of children were in the same or next room when the violence was occurring. Studies by Leighton (1989)<sup>6</sup> showed that 68% of children from families where there was a history of domestic violence were witnesses. The Hidden Victims Study<sup>7</sup> of 108 mothers attending NCH family centres who had experienced domestic violence showed that 90% of children were aware of the violence, 75% had witnessed violence, 10% had witnessed sexual violence, 99% of children had seen their mothers crying or upset as a result of the violence and more than half of the women (52%) said their children had seen the resulting injuries. The Hidden Victims Study also showed that more than a quarter (27%) of the children involved had been hit or physically abused by the violent partner.

Domestic violence has adverse effects on children and young people and can be traumatic. It can impact upon all areas of life, including, health, education, the development of relationships, recreation and social activities. The effects of domestic violence on children are wide ranging and will differ for each child (see figure 1, Effects of domestic violence on children and young people). A wealth of research has identified domestic violence as an underlying theme behind social issues such as, school dropout and exclusion, youth homelessness and young people engaging in risk taking behaviour. Children and young people have varying levels of resilience and all agencies that come into contact with children and young people who experience domestic violence, have a responsibility to build upon this resilience.

*"... it appears plausible that children can recover from the impact of parental conflict and separation, provided that the violence is eliminated and proper supports and opportunities for recovery are provided"<sup>8</sup>*

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<sup>5</sup>Holder, R et al (1994) *Suffering in Silence? Children and Young People who witness Domestic Violence*, Hammersmith and Fulham, Domestic Violence Forum: London.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid

<sup>7</sup>National Children's Homes, Action for Children (1994), *The Hidden Victims, Children and Domestic Violence*, NHC: London.

<sup>8</sup>Jaffe et al (1990) *Children of Battered Women*, Sage Publications: London.

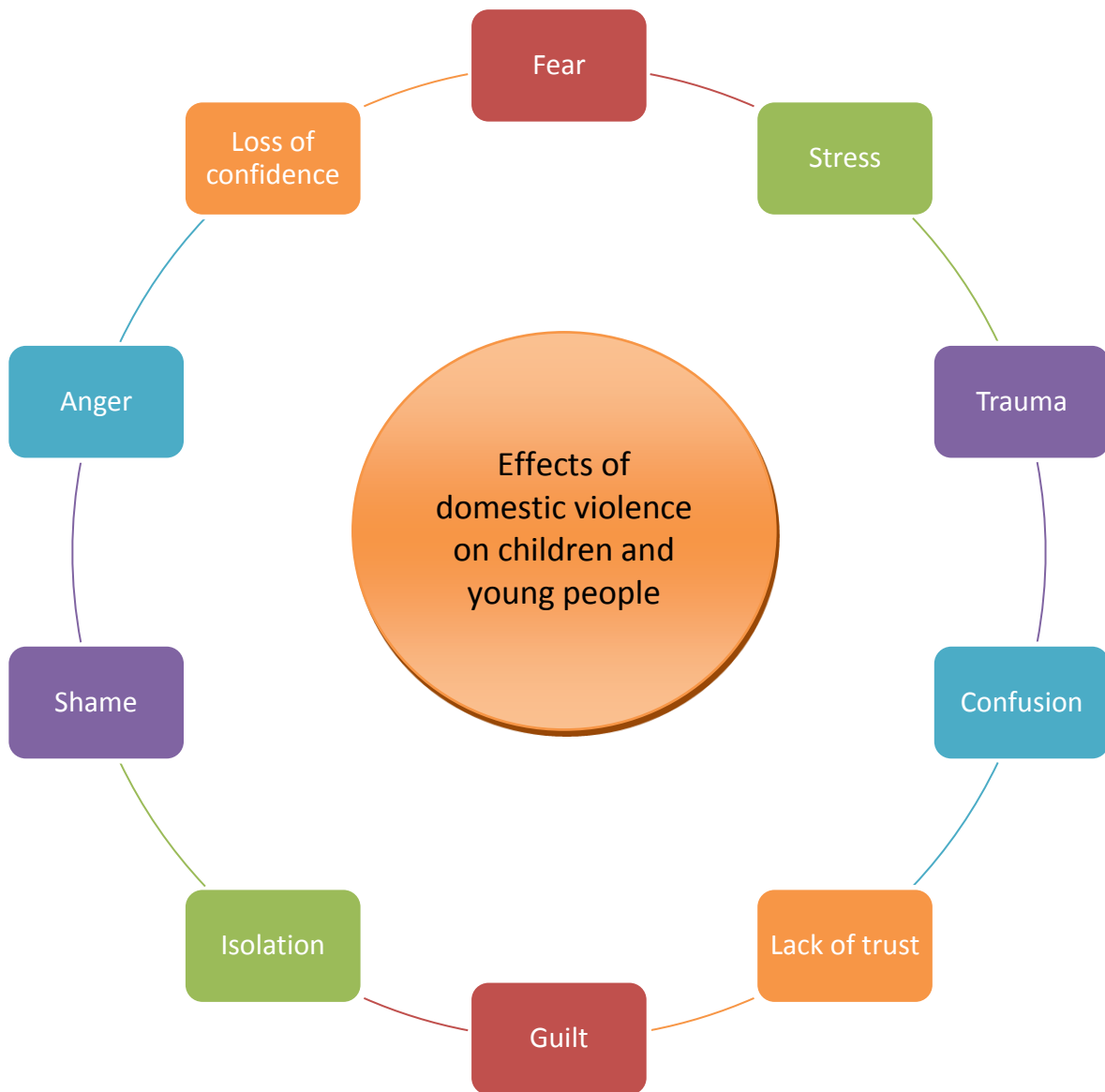


Figure 1  
Effects of domestic violence on children and young people

### 1.5 Meeting the needs of children and young people

Women’s Aid in Northern Ireland has a long and successful history of meeting the needs of children and young people who experience domestic violence. Women’s Aid recognises that often the best way to support children and young people who experience domestic violence is to support their mothers through the provision of a range of services, including refuge provision and support in the community. Over the years, service provision for children and young people has developed and expanded. Women’s Aid in Northern Ireland recognises the impact domestic violence can have upon all aspects of children’s lives and in particular how it can impact upon education.

*Sometimes worries about things at home stop boys and girls being able to learn things in school.*

Department of Education (2009) *Every School a Good School- The Way forward for Special Educational Needs and Inclusion*

Prevention work in schools has also developed and Women's Aid, in partnership with the Department of Education and the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, has been at the forefront of raising awareness of issues of safety, healthy relationships and rights within relationships, at both primary and post primary level, through Women's Aid education resources such as "Helping Hands" and "Heading for Healthy Relationships" programmes.

**"Helping Hands"** is a preventative programme for primary school aged children at key stage two and three. This programme aims to:

- develop children's levels of self esteem and confidence
- enable children to explore and express feelings
- inform children of the right to feel safe at all times
- increase children's ability in safety planning
- empower children to identify their own personal support network
- explore how choice of behaviour can affect the feelings of others, and
- identify healthy ways to manage conflict.

**"Heading for Healthy Relationships"** is a preventative programme for post primary schools which enables young people to explore the differences between healthy, unhealthy and abusive relationships. It encourages young people to gain a greater understanding of rights within a relationship and to fully comprehend the issues of equality and respect.

Women's Aid provides age appropriate, specialised services and support for children and young people who experience (or are at risk of experiencing) domestic violence. Needs are responded to at all points of service delivery, including refuge and in the community. Group work, with children and young people is a valuable element of support and a range of programmes has been developed to meet the needs of children and young people. A full overview of service provision is reflected in the Women's Aid model for working with children and young people (figure 2) and is also provided in the Women's Aid Directory of Services for Children and Young People which is available to complement this strategy.



Figure 2  
Women's Aid model for working with children and young people

*Young people's views on why children and young people who experience domestic violence need Women's Aid:*

*Because young people experience it too!*

*Stops us from being powerless*

*Gives us a voice*

*Helps you to understand it's not your fault*

*Helps you to understand you are not alone, it's not just your family*

*Gives us somewhere to go, somewhere I can be myself*

*To feel safe*

*Need someone to talk to, to have someone to trust*

*To be understood*

*To help me escape the situation*

*To help me get through it*

*Help find a solution for a better future*

*To make friends with others who have been through it*

*Help realise it is wrong*

*To improve self-esteem and self-identity*

*Get a sense of belonging*

*Confidence and opportunities*

*To open up and share feelings*

*A selection of responses from youth consultation*

*(Young people age 12-21)*

## 1.6 Internal strategic drivers

While work with children and young people has developed significantly and at a progressive rate over the last two decades, it is important to note that this work has been developed and delivered in the absence of core funding.

Women's Aid across Northern Ireland has sustained and developed service delivery, within a myriad of funding arrangements, the majority of which have been short term. As the external funding climate is becoming more complex and the drive for efficiency cuts has become apparent, sustainability for services has increasingly become a major priority for all Women's Aid groups.

The internal drivers for the development of “Our Place-Safe Space” are as follows:



Figure 3  
Internal strategic drivers

## 1.7 External strategic drivers

The external environment has changed significantly for children and young people over the last two decades and has presented a sea change at both government and community level in relation to strategy, policy and provision. This sea change brings with it both threats and opportunities and presents both an exciting and challenging backdrop to develop and deliver “Our Place-Safe Space” against. It will complement a range of other relevant strategies, which have been issued or are currently being developed. These include, among others:

- *Our Children and Young People - Our Pledge*, Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister, 2006 – 2016
- *Tackling Violence at Home-A Strategy for Addressing Domestic Violence and Abuse in Northern Ireland*, 2005.
- *Families Matter-Supporting Families in Northern Ireland*, Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, 2009

- *Every School a Good School-The Way Forward for Special Educational Needs and Inclusion*, Department of Education 2009.
- *Early Years (0-6) strategy*, Department of Education 2010.
- *Children and Young People’s Action Plan, 2011-2013*, Department of Agriculture and Rural Development 2011
- *Tackling Sexual Violence and Abuse-A Regional Strategy 2008-2013*, Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety 2008.
- *Supporting People, Changing Lives-Supporting People Strategy 2005-2010*, Northern Ireland Housing Executive 2005 (under review).
- *Improving Children’s Life Chances-The Child Poverty Strategy*, Northern Ireland Executive 2011.
- *Building Safer, Shared and Confident Communities*, Community Safety Strategy, Department of Justice (to be published).
- *Northern Ireland Children and Young People’s Plan-Children and Young People’s Strategic Partnership 2011- 2014* (consultation ongoing)

In relation to domestic violence, the Inter-Ministerial Group on Domestic and Sexual Violence, through its strategy for addressing domestic violence and abuse, “Tackling Violence at Home”<sup>9</sup> sends out a clear message from government that domestic violence is a crime and is not acceptable in any circumstances. The document sets out a strategic approach to tackling domestic violence over a five year period in the three key areas of:

1. Prevention
2. Protection and justice
3. Support

The strategy recommends a multi-agency approach to tackling domestic violence. The development of “Our Place-Safe Space” is central to the vision set out within the government strategy. With a clear focus upon improving outcomes for children and young people in all three areas identified, as well as a commitment to collaborative partnership working, “Our Place-Safe Space” has the potential to be instrumental in meeting the objectives outlined in the government strategy.

The changing landscape for children and young people at both community and government level brings with it an increasing focus on four key themes which present the external drivers for development of the Women’s Aid “Our Place-Safe Space” strategy.

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<sup>9</sup> Northern Ireland Office (2005) *Tackling Violence at Home - A Strategy for Addressing Domestic Violence and Abuse in Northern Ireland*, 2005.



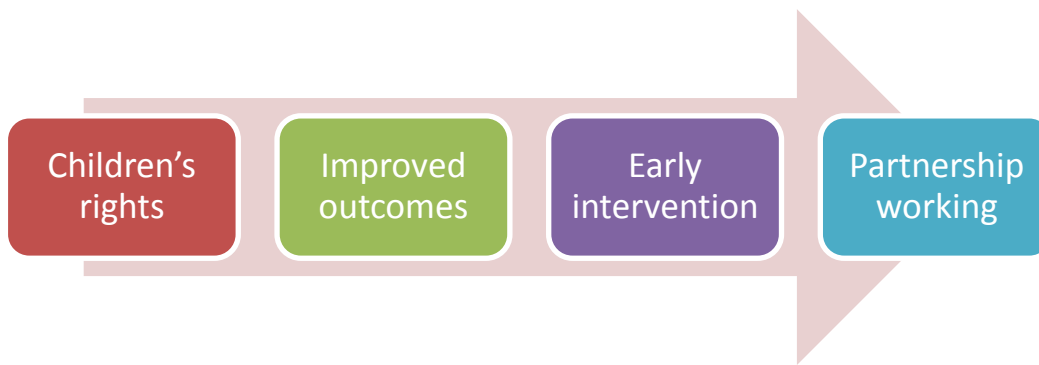


Figure 4  
External strategic drivers

Women’s Aid across Northern Ireland, through the delivery of this strategy, will provide a range of innovative services, based upon the needs of children and young people and benchmarked against developments in the external environment. In particular, this strategy pays particular attention to the strategic drivers illustrated above.

### 1.7.1 Children’s rights

“Our Place-Safe Space” strategy fully endorses all rights as contained in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and has been developed upon this foundation, giving full attention to the areas of protection, provision and participation. It deals with the child-specific needs and rights in relation to domestic violence and the promotion of healthy, non abusive relationships. These include:

**Relevant articles from the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child**

- Article 2-Non discrimination
- Article 3-Best interests of the child
- Article 6-Right to life
- Article 9-Right to family life
- Article 12-Right to be heard
- Article 13-Right to information and freedom of expression
- Article 18-Parental responsibility
- Article 19-Protection from abuse and neglect
- Article 20-Protection for children deprived of a family environment
- Article 23-Rights of children with a disability
- Articles 28 & 29-Right to education
- Article 31-Right to play
- Article 37-Protection from cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment
- Article 39-Help and support for children who have been neglected or abused

All services are developed, on an ongoing basis, in the best interests of the child. Women’s Aid across Northern Ireland acknowledges that every child has fundamental human rights, including the right to a life free from violence, and to express their opinions and to have those opinions heard and acted upon, when appropriate. Such rights are enshrined in the vision and strategic aims of “Our Place-Safe Space”.

### 1.7.2 Improved outcomes

A significant development for children and young people in Northern Ireland over the past decade has been the production of the Northern Ireland Children’s Strategy “Our Children and Young People-Our Pledge”(2006 - 2016). Produced by the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister, after a period of consultation with key statutory and voluntary agencies, this government strategy presents a pledge to children over a ten year period to deliver on a shared vision:

*“All children and young people living in Northern Ireland will thrive and look forward with confidence to the future.”*

The government strategy presents a framework of 6 high level outcomes for children and young people as follows:



Figure 5  
High level outcomes

Such outcomes are embedded within other key developments seeking to address the needs of children and young people in Northern Ireland such as, the Regional Children and Young People's Plan and the Northern Ireland Family Support Plan, "Families Matter". This outcomes framework presents a challenge to all organisations working at community level, to ensure the provision of effective services, benchmarked against these outcomes, for all children and young people. Women's Aid across Northern Ireland recognises the role it has to play in ensuring the outcomes of the long term strategy "Our Children and Young People - Our Pledge" are achieved in the work it does with families on a daily basis. Women's Aid is committed to contributing to these high level outcomes, including in the following ways:

### Healthy

- Provide positive support interventions for children and young people which has the potential to have a positive impact upon the physical health and emotional well being of children and young people who are victims of domestic and sexual violence.

### Enjoying, learning and achieving

- Encourage positive learning for children and young people in all aspects of service delivery.
- Provide positive interventions to enable children and young people to participate fully in education.
- Support mothers, to ensure continuity and routine for children and young people and to prioritise education.
- Provide successful education programmes in both primary and post primary schools including "Helping Hands" and "Heading for Healthy Relationships" to promote self esteem, healthy relationships and awareness of rights.
- Provide a rolling programme of fun play and recreational activities, events and celebrations.

### Experiencing economic and environmental well being

- Provide practical support to mothers who have experienced domestic violence, to improve their economic and environmental well being. This may include, housing support, advice relating to benefits etc
- Provide a range of programmes for mothers such as "Journey to Freedom" and "You and Me, Mum", to develop confidence and self esteem and to contribute to emotional well being.
- Creation of a positive family environment for women, children and young people.

### Contributing positively to community and society

- Encourage children and young people to participate creatively in service development and delivery through youth forums and models of consultation.
- Actively work in partnership with a range of agencies to ensure the voices of children and young people are heard.
- Promote positive social change and improved outcomes for children and young people who experience domestic and sexual violence.
- Provide training and peer educational opportunities for young people to enable them to contribute positively to society.

### Living in safety and with stability

- Provide safe accommodation for women, children and young people who experience domestic and sexual violence.
- Provide Floating Support/outreach services to women, children and young people in the community.
- Provide role of Women's Safety Workers to support partners and ex-partners and their children of men attending PBNI, IDAP perpetrator programmes.
- Provide support through MARAC (Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference) for high risk victims of domestic violence including women, children and young people.
- Encourage children and young people to engage in safety planning through protective behaviours programmes.
- Work directly with mothers, children and young people to support them in creating a safe environment.
- Promote safe messages in schools and communities through education packages such as "Helping Hands" and "Heading for Healthy Relationships".

### Living in a society which respects their rights

- Women's Aid is fully committed to this outcome, as a recurring theme, which stretches across all areas of work including, support provision, group work, partnership working and prevention work in schools and communities. Women's Aid is also committed to acting as an advocate for children's rights.

#### 1.7.3 Early Intervention

Women's Aid across Northern Ireland recognises the need for early intervention with families, if children and young people are to be supported effectively, safeguarded from harm and provided with a range of opportunities to help them reach their full potential.

Increasing statistics for children entering the care system present both concerns and challenges for all professionals working with children who may be at risk. Cafcass (Children

and Family Court Advisory and Support Service) figures show between April 2011 and January 2012, 8,403 new care applications were received. This figure is 12.4% higher than the same period in the previous year. Applications received between May 2011 to January 2012 were the highest ever recorded by Cafcass for these months. January 2012 saw the highest ever number of care applications recorded in an individual month, with 903 applications.<sup>10</sup> Such increasing figures highlight the need for earlier intervention with families where risk has been identified. The importance of early intervention has also been recognised in the Munro Review of Child Protection<sup>11</sup> which states “Preventative services can do more to reduce abuse and neglect than reactive services”.

This strategy presents a focus on early intervention, by providing a range of support services to families at the earliest opportunity at all levels of need and by providing effective preventative education programmes at both primary and post primary levels to promote safety and support. This strategy is benchmarked against “Families Matter” the Northern Ireland Family Support Strategy, produced by the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety. Women’s Aid services for children and young people are also based upon the Family Support Model, initially developed by Pauline Hardiker<sup>12</sup>. This model has been endorsed by Women’s Aid and the Directory of Children & Young People’s Services, produced to accompany this strategy, clearly maps service provision and intervention at each level of risk.

#### 1.7.4 Partnership working

Women’s Aid across Northern Ireland recognises, in order to achieve its vision of eliminating domestic violence, a commitment to a shared process across all relevant departments and agencies, is required. The elimination of domestic violence requires an integrated approach, as well as the combined skills, commitment and responsibilities of all government departments, criminal justice agencies, local domestic violence partnerships and relevant voluntary and statutory organisations. Women’s Aid is committed to working in partnership and has, over the past years, built up an extensive network of collaborative and strategic partnerships with agencies. This has included representation on the Regional Strategic Group of the Tackling Violence at Home Strategy. The importance and value Women’s Aid places on partnership working is recognised as both a fundamental principle and strategic theme throughout this strategy.

*“Partnership working is vital to promote communication between agencies, to increase knowledge and understanding of services Women’s Aid provides and to provide a holistic approach to supporting women and identifying the needs of children and young people”. Comment from a Women’s Aid group*

<sup>10</sup> Information source <http://www.cafcass.gov.uk/news.aspx>

<sup>11</sup> Munro E, (2011) The Munro Review of Child Protection, Department for Education, UK

<sup>12</sup> Hardiker, Exton & Barker (1991) Policies and Practices in Preventative Childcare

# Section Two

## The strategy



## 2.1 Vision

Women's Aid has a vision for children and young people:

*"Our Place-Safe Space"- a future where all children and young people are safe and protected from domestic and sexual violence; where they have self-belief, respect for themselves and others and where their fundamental human rights are met.*

Young people's vision for children and young people who experience domestic violence:

*To have a safe space/safe place.  
To be happy and to have adults we can trust.  
To feel less isolated and to have somewhere to go and someone to talk to.  
To be clearer about what abuse is and to have information more ready for us.  
For stigma to be removed.*

*A selection of responses from youth consultation  
(ages 12 – 21)*

## 2.2 Fundamental principles and values

This strategy is based upon five fundamental principles:

1. Domestic violence impacts negatively on children and young people as victims and witnesses.
2. Children and young people have a right to safety and support services, which enable them to thrive and reach their full potential.
3. By supporting mothers who have experienced domestic violence, children and young people are also supported.
4. Children and young people have in built resilience, and with appropriate support and early intervention, this resilience can be nurtured and developed.
5. Partnership working with other agencies is essential to ensure children and young people's voices are heard and support is available.

**Women's Aid values for working with children and young people**



Figure 6  
Women's Aid values wheel



## 2.3 Strategic themes, aims and objectives

This strategy has six key strategic themes. These are all inter-linked and inter-dependent. The strategy is based upon a holistic approach to all six themes and will only work if attention is paid to each. The first strategic theme (centre) focuses upon sustainability and capacity building and is core to the realisation of all other strategic themes. Without the presence of core funding and a regional support and capacity building framework, the aims and objectives listed under each strategic theme will not be delivered.



Figure 7  
Strategic themes

## Strategic theme 1

### Sustainability and capacity building

#### Strategic aim

Creation of a regional capacity building framework, to promote strategic development and sustainability of services for children and young people.

#### Strategic objectives

- Sustain, develop and build capacity to ensure all children and young people in Northern Ireland have access to Women's Aid services, both in refuge and community settings.
- Secure equitable funding for all Women's Aid children and young people's services across Northern Ireland.
- Roll out a comprehensive training programme, based upon identified needs in relation to working with children and young people for all Women's Aid staff and volunteers in Northern Ireland, including:
  - Keeping Safe and Child Protection
  - Understanding Domestic Violence (Level 3 Open College Network)
  - Developing Social Guardians (Helping Hands)
  - Developing Social Guardians (Heading for Healthy Relationships).
- Recruit a regional "Children and Young Person's Regional Co-ordinator" to support work at both local and regional levels and to drive the strategy forward at a regional level.
- Maintain, develop and review a quality assurance framework for all aspects of policy, procedure and training.
- Conduct regular reviews of the strategy document and ensure it is embedded as a living document in Women's Aid local and regional strategies and structures.

## Strategic theme 2

### Safety and support

#### Strategic aim

Provision of a range of age appropriate, needs focused, accessible services in both refuge and community settings, to promote safety and support for children and young people who are ( or may be at risk of ) experiencing domestic violence.

#### Strategic objectives

- Sustain and develop existing safety and support services for children and young people in refuge, centres and schools across Northern Ireland including play facilities, crèche provision, information resources and group work programmes.
- Review and develop services and resources, to ensure the needs of children and young people from all backgrounds and cultures are met, to ensure equality of access and positive response.
- Continue to develop an effective service for children and young people in refuge, centre and community including group work (Helping Hands and Heading for Healthy Relationships), aftercare and one to one support.
- Work in partnership with Health and Social Care Trusts to develop effective joint protocols in relation to safety and support work for children and young people who are at risk.
- Conduct a comprehensive review of the needs of teenage children and develop services and facilities to specifically meet these needs in both refuge and community settings.
- Develop a range of creative and innovative information resources and communication tools for children and young people, in refuge and community settings, utilising modern technology in a safe and appropriate way.
- Develop a regional children and young people's website.
- Continue to support and work in partnership with mothers, individually and through group work programmes, such as "You and Me, Mum" and "Journey to Freedom" to assess children's safety and support needs, build positive family relationships and provide support.

## Strategic theme 3

### Participation and consultation

#### Strategic aim

Engagement of children and young people in meaningful participation and consultative approaches, to ensure their voices and experiences are heard and considered, in all aspects of service development and delivery.

#### Strategic objectives

- Develop a participation strategy to ensure active participation of children and young people, in service development and delivery, is embedded as a theme throughout Women's Aid across Northern Ireland.
- Provide opportunities for children and young people, to develop skills and knowledge through training and support, information and involvement in decision making.
- Establish youth fora in local Women's Aid groups, to ensure the needs and opinions of children and young people are heard and taken into account in all aspects of service development and delivery.
- Develop, in partnership with young people, a range of information processes and tools, to "reach out" to children and young people, utilising modern technology in a safe and appropriate way.
- Support and equip young people, to participate in a regional programme of youth participation events, such as, concerts, youth conferences, lobbying activities, fundraising, road shows etc.
- Seek celebrity endorsement for youth activities.
- Design and deliver regular consultation processes with children and young people as an ongoing process, to ensure their voices and experiences are captured and taken into account in all aspects of service development and delivery.

## Strategic theme 4

### Education for prevention

#### Strategic aim

Creation of a strategic capacity building model for preventative education, to ensure maximum impact in primary and post primary schools and community settings across Northern Ireland.

#### Strategic objectives

- Deliver “Developing Social Guardians” training to teachers in primary and post primary schools across Northern Ireland to:
  - Assist teachers to deliver the Personal Development and Mutual Understanding aspect of the Northern Ireland Curriculum.
  - Increase teachers’ understanding, of the context and impact of domestic violence on the lives of children and families.
  - Enable teachers to deliver “Helping Hands” and “Heading for Healthy Relationships” programmes linked to the Northern Ireland Curriculum.
  - Assist teachers to develop preventative and early intervention strategies in relation to all children who do not feel safe, specifically children affected by domestic violence.
  - Create a shared language and tools for teachers and pupils to discuss feelings, safety and to promote healthy relationships.
- Continue to work in partnership with the Department of Education to develop an effective preventative curriculum, including the provision of Women’s Aid preventative education resources “Helping Hands” and “Heading for Healthy Relationships”, in primary and post primary schools.
- Continue to work directly with children and young people, in education and community settings, to increase awareness of healthy, unhealthy and abusive relationships.
- Continue to develop creative education and information tools for children and young people, utilising modern technology in safe and appropriate ways.
- Develop and deliver an accredited peer education programme focusing on healthy relationships, to increase skills and knowledge of teenagers and to enable them to become peer educators in youth and community settings.

## Strategic theme 5

### Partnerships for change

#### Strategic aim

Engage in effective and meaningful partnerships, to ensure the rights and needs of children and young people who are affected by domestic violence are prioritised and addressed.

#### Strategic objectives

- Continue to participate and engage in the Tackling Violence at Home, Children and Young People's Sub Group.
- Establish and maintain a round table of key children and young people's voluntary agencies to drive forward a coordinated strategic response to effective service development and delivery for children and young people who are (or may be at risk of) experiencing domestic violence.
- Profile changes in the external landscape at regional, national and global levels to ensure ongoing benchmarking of service design and development against government initiatives, policies, strategies and legislation.
- Develop a regional lobbying strategy, identifying opportunities to promote the rights of children and young people who are affected by domestic violence and to ensure their needs are met.
- Respond to emerging government consultations, relating to support and protection issues for children and young people.
- Ensure effective communication of key messages regarding children, young people and domestic violence to a wide external audience, through advertising campaigns, conferences etc.
- Lobby for the commission and completion of effective Northern Ireland based research into the experiences and needs of children, young people and domestic violence.
- Establish an internal Women's Aid Strategic Steering Group for children and young people to monitor strategy implementation.

## Strategic theme 6

### Measuring impact

#### Strategic aim

Develop and utilise a regional evaluation framework to capture the social impact of services upon children and young people.

#### Strategic objectives

- Design and implement a standardised regional template for collation of statistics in relation to all service provision for children and young people.
- Design and implement a standardised framework for evaluation and performance measurement, based upon the high level outcomes included in “Our Children and Young People - Our Pledge” the government’s 10 year strategy for children and young people in Northern Ireland.
- Develop standardised regional approaches to evaluation and consultation, to measure the social impact of services upon children and young people.
- Ensure approaches are creative, participative and effective in capturing children and young people’s experiences and voices.
- Continue to engage mothers in ongoing evaluation and assessment of children and young people’s progress and development.
- Initiate an external independent evaluation on the success of implementing this strategy subsequent to the five year timescale.
- Ensure all evaluation information is collated, analysed and shared with all stakeholders to demonstrate social impact and to provide feedback for future direction.

# Section Three

## Conclusion





### 3.1 Driving the strategy forward

The diagram below presents a working model for driving the strategy forward over a five year period.

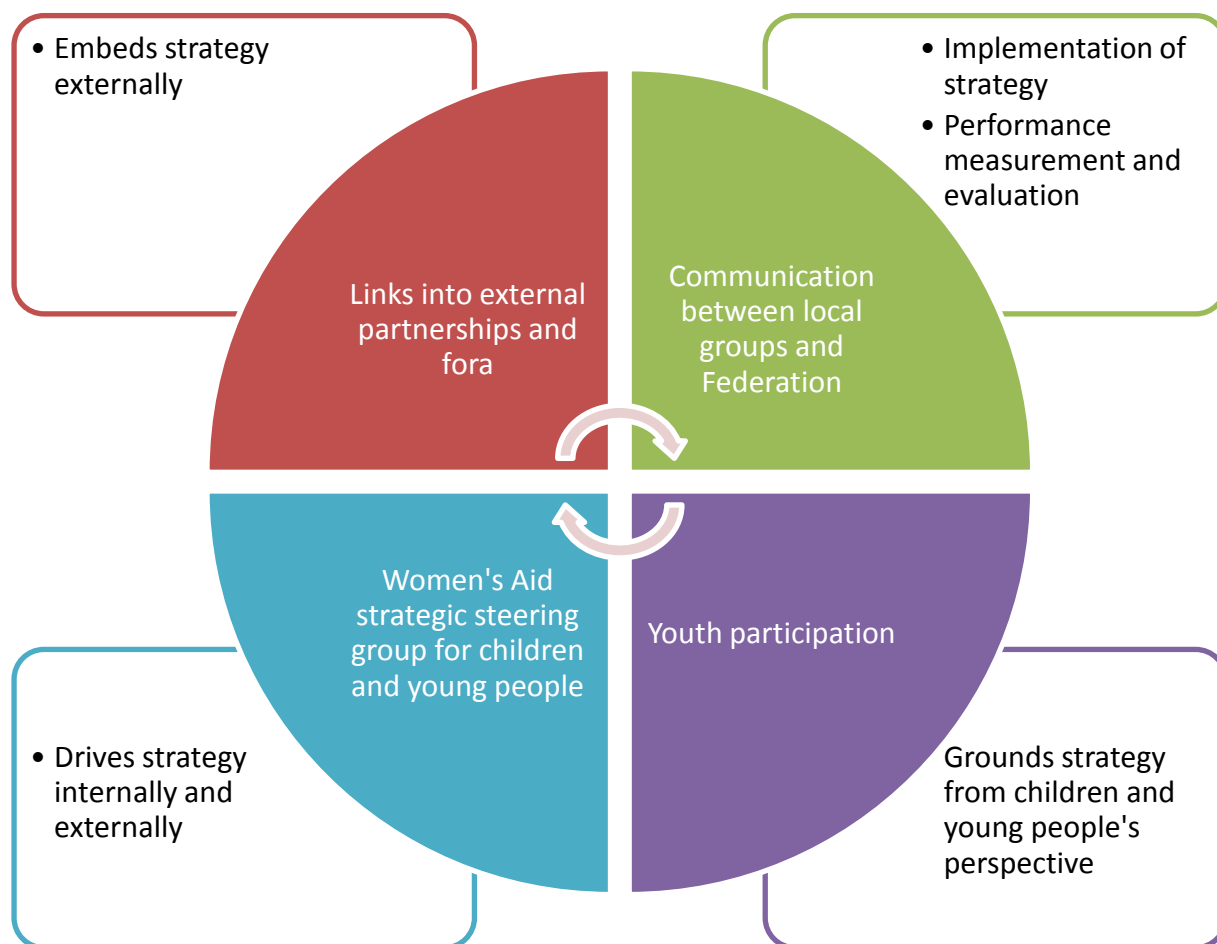


Figure 8, model for driving strategy

#### 1. Youth participation

Participation of children and young people, across Women's Aid in Northern Ireland will be crucial for steering the strategy, ensuring it is continuously assessed against, and based upon the needs of children and young people.

#### 2. Women's Aid strategic steering group for children and young people

An internal strategic steering group will be established to:

- drive the strategy forward
- communicate and share information
- keep abreast of external developments
- cascade relevant information throughout organisation, and
- promote best practice in service development and delivery.

### **3. Links to external partnerships and fora**

A regional lobbying strategy will identify external partnerships for representation. Women's Aid will identify key individuals to participate in these structures, to ensure the voices of children and young people who experience domestic violence are heard and taken on board.

Women's Aid will seek to establish and maintain a round table of key children and young people's voluntary agencies to drive forward a coordinated strategic response to effective service development and delivery for children and young people who are (or may be at risk of) experiencing domestic violence.

### **4. Communication between local groups and Federation**

All strategic progress will be monitored by Federation and Senior Managers across Women's Aid.

## **3.2 Conclusion**

This strategy sets out the strategic intention of Women's Aid in Northern Ireland for developing and delivering services to children and young people. The strategy represents an innovative approach to this area of work, and clearly outlines direction over a five year period. Women's Aid in Northern Ireland looks forward to harnessing the opportunities presented by the strategy, for improving services, based upon the needs of children and young people and best practice standards. The strategy presents the organisation with both a challenge and an opportunity, to be the best that it can be for children and young people, and to ensure their needs are paramount, in all areas of service development and delivery. It is however important to note, without the presence of core funding and a regional support and capacity building framework, the aims and objectives listed under each strategic theme will not be delivered.

The strategy provides opportunities to increase awareness of the effects of domestic violence on children and young people at all levels and to ensure their voices are heard. Women's Aid in Northern Ireland believes that meeting the needs of children and young people who are affected by domestic violence is a shared responsibility across society. Women's Aid in Northern Ireland welcomes the opportunity to work in partnership with all

agencies, to ensure the needs of all children and young people, who experience or are at risk of experiencing domestic violence, are met.

The delivery of the strategy will be closely monitored by utilising the performance management and evaluation framework outlined under strategic theme six, *Measuring Impact*. Women's Aid in Northern Ireland is confident that these monitoring mechanisms will ensure that strategic progress will be continuously assessed and benchmarked.

The delivery of this strategy across Northern Ireland has the potential to create positive social change for families on a daily basis. It will also create opportunities to drive forward and to create real social and strategic change, at a policy and legislative level and to achieve the ultimate outcome of a safe space for all children and young people.

### **What young people say they like about Women's Aid**

*Friends and company*

*It makes me happy*

*The food and treats, trips*

*Somewhere I can be myself- There is a great atmosphere with no pressure*

*Challenges me- Builds my confidence*

*Safe space- Acceptance*

*Can meet others who have been through similar experiences*

*Because it is fun but also can be serious when it needs to be*

*It raises awareness that domestic violence is wrong!*

*We can make a positive contribution, better our community*

*Feel that our voices are heard and acted upon!*

*Opportunities to meet people from different backgrounds cross community*

*It will have a lasting effect on me, I will be able to help others in the future*

A selection of responses from youth consultation (Age 12-21)

### 3.3 Women's Aid: local groups contact details

There are 10 local Women's Aid groups throughout Northern Ireland. These groups are autonomous and are affiliated to Women's Aid Federation Northern Ireland. Local Women's Aid groups can be contacted directly or through the 24 Hour Domestic Violence Helpline.

**24 Hour Domestic Violence Helpline 0800 917 1414**

Open to anyone affected by domestic violence

#### **Women's Aid in Antrim, Ballymena, Carrickfergus, Larne & Newtownabbey**

Naomi Centre, 2 Cullybackey Road

Ballymena BT43 5DF

T: 028 2563 2136

E: [womensaidareaoffice@btconnect.com](mailto:womensaidareaoffice@btconnect.com)

W: [www.womens-aid.org.uk](http://www.womens-aid.org.uk)

#### **Belfast & Lisburn Women's Aid**

30 Adelaide Park

Belfast BT9 6FY

T: 028 9066 6049

E: [admin@belfastwomensaid.org.uk](mailto:admin@belfastwomensaid.org.uk)

W: [www.belfastwomensaid.org.uk](http://www.belfastwomensaid.org.uk)

#### **Causeway Women's Aid**

23 Abbey Street

Coleraine BT52 1DU

T: 028 7035 6573

E: [womensaidcoleraine@btinternet.com](mailto:womensaidcoleraine@btinternet.com)

#### **Cookstown & Dungannon Women's Aid**

27 Old Coagh Road

Cookstown BT80 8QG

T: 028 8676 9300

E: [womensaidcookstown@hotmail.com](mailto:womensaidcookstown@hotmail.com)

W: [www.cookstownwomensaid.org.uk](http://www.cookstownwomensaid.org.uk)

#### **Craigavon & Banbridge Women's Aid**

Office 1, Floor 1, Legahory Centre, Brownlow, Craigavon BT65 5BE

T: 028 3834 3256

E: [info@craigavonbanbridgewomensaid.org.uk](mailto:info@craigavonbanbridgewomensaid.org.uk)

W: [craigavonandbanbridgewomensaid.co.uk](http://craigavonandbanbridgewomensaid.co.uk)

**Fermanagh Women's Aid**

27a High Street  
Enniskillen BT74 7DQ  
T: 028 6632 8898 F: 028 6632 8859  
E: [womensaidfermanagh@btopenworld.com](mailto:womensaidfermanagh@btopenworld.com)

**Foyle Women's Aid**

Pathways, 24 Pump Street  
L'Derry BT48 6JG  
T: 028 7128 0060 F: 028 7128 0061  
E: [admin@foylewomensaid.org](mailto:admin@foylewomensaid.org)  
W: [www.foylewomensaid.org](http://www.foylewomensaid.org)

**Women's Aid Newry, Mourne, South Down and South Armagh**

7 Downshire Place, Belfast Road  
Newry BT34 1DZ  
T: 028 3025 0765 F: 028 3026 9606  
E: [newrywomensaid@btconnect.com](mailto:newrywomensaid@btconnect.com)  
W: [www.womensaidnewry.co.uk](http://www.womensaidnewry.co.uk)

**North Down & Ards Women's Aid**

18 Bingham Street  
Bangor BT20 5DW  
T: 028 9127 3196 F: 028 9145 5245  
E: [ndawomensaid@hotmail.com](mailto:ndawomensaid@hotmail.com)  
W: [www.ndawa.org](http://www.ndawa.org)

**Omagh Women's Aid**

27 Market Street  
Omagh BT78 1EL  
T: 028 8224 1414 F: 028 8224 1414  
E: [info@omaghwomensaid.org](mailto:info@omaghwomensaid.org)

**Women's Aid Federation Northern Ireland**

129 University Street, Belfast, BT7 1HP  
T: 028 9024 9041  
F: 028 9023 9246  
E: [info@womensaid.org](mailto:info@womensaid.org)  
W: [www.womensaidni.org](http://www.womensaidni.org)

**24 Hour Domestic Violence Helpline 0800 917 1414**

Open to anyone affected by domestic violence