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18th September 2018

David Rowlands AM
Chair- Petitions Committee
National Assembly for Wales
Cardiff Bay
CF99 1NA

Dear David

Petition P-05-798 – Male domestic violence services

We are grateful to the Committee for allowing our charity to take over this petition. We are also grateful to Tom Embling who has now become a volunteer for our charity for agreeing to work with us on this important issue.

We have read the letter from the Leader of the House to the Committee dated 7th August 2018. We are grateful for her acknowledgement of our charity's role as a 'male advocacy organisation' in contributing to the development of a holistic strategy to counter VAWDASV

ABOUT US – Our charity has developed as a specialist DV support service for men over the past 18 months. We have initially focused on supporting men who face child contact difficulties as an aspect of the abuse they are suffering – helping more than 120 men to acquire Legal Aid to access the Family Court effectively.

WHAT WE'VE DONE – We have undertaken two consultation events with male victims in Carmarthen as part of the development of the Mid & West Wales VAWDASV strategy under the leadership of Rhian Bowen-Davies. We have also undertaken a wide ranging online consultation entitled 'Understanding Men' which received 728 responses from across the UK. Our referral forms completed by individuals accessing our support services across 10 locations in Wales from Carmarthen to Mold and Bangor to Newport enable individuals to identify whether they believe they

Registered charity number 1134723

are suffering domestic abuse. Currently more than 60% of our male service users identify as 'victims' in this way.

In partnership with Swansea Council and the People's Postcode Trust we have launched a drop-in service for male victims in the Council offices – which we are delighted to say has been supported by the Leader of the House indicating that she will attend the official launch.

We have – through these channels – identified the following elements that we believe are central to ensuring appropriate and effective support for male victims of abuse and which inform and underpin the principles of this petition.

A focus on protecting women may have a negative impact on support for men

There is an almost total lack of information and understanding of the needs and experiences of men as victims of domestic violence and abuse in Wales. The Violence against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (Wales) Act 2015 has – perhaps understandably – had the effect of focusing work on domestic violence towards the experience of women.

The National Strategy produced in November 2016 identifies several priority groups – including women serving prison sentences, BME women and others. It fails to acknowledge the specific needs of men and may have inadvertently contributed to the problems.

Regional VAWDASV strategies seem to have almost completely ignored the needs of male victims of DV despite evidence produced by those bodies that identify a significant need and a very low rate of support for men (see later section on N.Wales and Gwent data)

Lack of engagement with male victims to inform service provision

Welsh Government funded 2 major pieces of work on understanding the experience of survivors – an important first step.

In 2016 Welsh Women's Aid were commissioned to undertake a major piece of work to understand the experience of survivors – entitled 'Are you listening and am I being heard?' This engaged with 66 survivors in focus groups and individual interviews across Wales. Just one of the individuals engaged was male – and he only took part by way of interview.

In 2017 Welsh Government made available funding to a range of local organisations to facilitate engagement with survivors. In this work 60 survivors were engaged – none of whom was male.

Lack of appropriate support services for men proportionate to their needs

Our charity sought to engage with as many of the regional collaborations to produce VAWDASV strategies as required by the VAWDASV (Wales) Act 2015. Data about the prevalence and experience of male victims was sketchy and inconsistent

North Wales (2015/16 data)

9177 women (77%)– 2694 men (23%)

were identified as victims of DV by North Wales Police

2401 women (98.7%) – 32 men (1.3%)

were supported by services in the area

SOURCE – North Wales VAWDASV Strategy 2017–2022 – Early 1st draft – Rhiannon Edwards

Gwent (2015/16 data)

14,500 women (64%)– 8,000 men (36%)

recorded by Gwent Police as victims

2478 women (97.3%) – 69 men (2.7%)

were supported by services in the area

SOURCE – Gwent VAWDASV strategy Needs Assessment – Nov. 2017

This data demonstrates that male victims are a significant proportion of the total who have reported AND been recorded by the Police yet they represent a tiny proportion of those supported. This seems to highlight a colossal gap in provision which doesn't appear to have been focused on in the final regional strategies.

Services for male victims must be grounded in their experience and safely separated from services for women.

The National Strategy –Objective 6 – states '**Provide victims with equal access to holistic, appropriately resourced, high quality, needs led, strength based, gender responsive services across Wales'**

We warmly welcome the aspiration set out in this Objective – specifically

highlighting the importance of gender responsive services. We have engaged with Welsh Government officials, a number of Local Authorities and with Third Sector organisations who currently provide DV support services and who are grounded in the experience of women and are members of Welsh Women's Aid.

Data from Live Fear Free helpline – run by Welsh Women's Aid on behalf of Welsh Government shared with our charity at the Male Victims Workshop in Bridgend on 25th April showed that men were just 4% of the total calling the service

2014/15 – 234 male callers

2015/16 – 214 male callers

2016/17 – 216 male callers

This would seem to indicate that Welsh Women's Aid have not been successful in reaching men in proportionate numbers, and may indicate that services that attempt to provide a gender neutral approach are unlikely to be effective.

We respectfully suggest that 'Women's Aid' organisations are not best placed to be a credible representative provider of support for male victims. This is because of the gendered nature of Domestic Violence and Abuse which has been almost universally accepted by academics, organisations and service providers. We remain concerned that commissioning such organisations to provide support to men fails to take account of the needs and wishes of male survivors and has the unintended consequence of preventing services grounded in men's experience from developing. We are also concerned that allowing 'feminist' organisations to use public funds for work with male victims may represent an inappropriate use of public funds and also undermine their focus and credibility with female survivors who still represent the majority of those experiencing abuse.

Our 'Understanding Men' survey (n728) asked the question of male survivors *'How important is it that services for male victims should be grounded in the experience of men and separated from services primarily designed for women?'* This question was answered by 559 individuals.

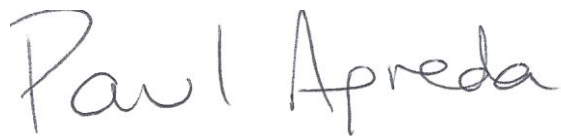
82.3% (n.460) stated that this was Essential or Very Important

11.8% (n.66) stated that they Don't Mind

5.9% (n.33) stated it was Not Important

We believe that the Petitions Committee can significantly contribute to ensuring that gender specific services are developed and funded for male victims that also recognise the value of the excellent work currently being undertaken by organisations who are members of Welsh Women's Aid or contribute to a feminist perspective of domestic violence and abuse when supporting, helping and advocating for the interests of female survivors. We would welcome their contribution to the debate on this Petition in terms of why some of them feel that they are best placed to also support male victims. We also wish to acknowledge the initiatives from Cardiff, Vale of Glamorgan and Bridgend to commission dedicated services for male victims of abuse.

We would be happy to work with the Committee and provide any further information Members require.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Paul Apreda". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Paul Apreda

National Manager

FNF Both Parents Matter