



Unless enough time is given to young people to develop awareness... we could end up with adolescents who know lots of cold facts but are socially and emotionally bankrupt.

Teacher

Preventive work in schools

Women's Aid believes that the most positive way to reduce and eliminate domestic violence and its effects on children and young people is through preventive education work.

Domestic violence is frequently cited by young homeless people as the primary or secondary cause of their leaving home¹. Recent research carried out by the NSPCC and *Sugar* magazine (2005)² noted that, from their sample, one in five teenage girls have been hit by a boyfriend and that 43% of teenage girls think it is acceptable for a boyfriend to get aggressive.

Tackling Violence At Home (2005)³ identifies prevention as a key element for change. The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, in his introduction to the strategy, highlights the need for "preventing domestic violence happening in the first place through changing attitudes towards it, particularly among young people."

Women's Aid has developed comprehensive preventive education programmes to challenge such attitudes. *Helping Hands* is a programme aimed at children under 12 and *Heading for Healthy Relationships* for 12-18 years old. Both programmes have been piloted with children and young people in Women's Aid refuges, community settings and over 100 schools to date throughout Northern Ireland. All have been evaluated very positively.

While direct delivery of programmes by skilled Women's Aid facilitators is preferable, the organisation does not have the capacity to fully meet demand. In order to sustain programme delivery in schools and youth settings, Women's Aid has developed a training programme targeted at teachers, youth workers and other professionals who work directly with children and young people. The aim of the programme is to:

- ◆ Raise awareness of the impact of domestic violence on children and young people;
- ◆ Promote a practical approach to personal safety; and
- ◆ Introduce facilitators to strategies to prevent abuse of children and young people.

In addition, participants are provided with contact details of local Women's Aid groups in Northern Ireland and information on specialised services for children and young people. Participants are encouraged to make contact with their local Women's Aid group prior to starting programmes to ensure access to support and assistance.

1. www.nspcc.org.uk

2. *Sugar magazine*, May 2005

3. *Tackling Violence at Home, A strategy for addressing domestic violence and abuse in Northern Ireland*, Northern Ireland Office, 2005

women's aid

Federation Northern Ireland