

Northern Ireland Women's Aid Federation

If it were between countries, we'd call it war. If it were a disease we'd call it an epidemic. If it were an oil spill we'd call it a disaster. But it is happening to women, and it is just an everyday affair. It is violence against women.

Michael Kaufman,
White Ribbon Campaign, Canada.



Director's Review

Welcome to the Northern Ireland Women's Aid Federation (NIWAF) Annual Report 2003-2004.

Last August I started as Director of NIWAF when Angela Courtney retired. Angela gave many years of service to Women's Aid in both a paid and voluntary capacity. Her enormous contribution is recognised both locally and nationally and we all wish her well.

A major theme of our work this year has been the development of a UK wide government strategy on domestic violence. *Tackling Violence at Home* is the Northern Ireland element of that strategy.

There is an international framework within which this strategy can be placed. The UK government is a signatory to the United Nation's Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). Within this convention it is stated that "violence against women is a manifestation of historically unequal power relationships between men and women which have led to domination and discrimination against women by men". NIWAF is concerned that this universal context has not been acknowledged in *Tackling Violence at Home*.

Fundamental to any understanding of domestic violence must be its gendered nature. It is essential to recognise that in every class, creed and culture in the world domestic violence is overwhelmingly perpetrated by men against women. NIWAF believes that if the definition underpinning *Tackling Violence at Home* does not reflect this reality then strategic responses will fail.

In our submissions to government, NIWAF has emphasised the need for the strategy to set clear targets in four key areas:

▶ Providing safe choices for women and children experiencing domestic violence by developing and increasing early and effective intervention systems.

▶ Holding individual perpetrators accountable for their behaviour and strengthening police and court responses.

▶ Confronting any social tolerance of domestic violence through public education campaigns and challenging inaction by individuals and organisations.

▶ Educating children and young people by developing the necessary skills and knowledge for building relationships based on respect and mutual understanding.

Tackling Violence at Home recognises and reaffirms that domestic violence is a major public threat; that it is one of the most serious of our social problems and must be the subject of state intervention. NIWAF welcomes this.

Tackling Violence at Home has the potential to make a fundamental shift in how, as a society, we respond to domestic violence. It will build on an enormous amount of good practice already in place in Northern Ireland. If properly resourced, *Tackling Violence at Home* will achieve a great deal – it is crucial that this strategy receives adequate financial commitment.

Full implementation will require ambition and bravery as well as realism. The strategy will be a test for many organisations in Northern Ireland. Every system – statutory, voluntary, community, or private - will need to be flexible, coordinated and responsive to women and children experiencing domestic violence. NIWAF knows that this is possible. By our collective actions we can make the safety and protection of women and children a reality, and move closer to the ultimate goal of totally eliminating domestic violence.

Hilary Sidwell



Did you know?

- ▶ Women's Aid now delivers training to Community Beat officers in the PSNI. The domestic violence workshops have been very well received by the 150 officers who attended last year. The plan is to make this a feature of training for all new members of Community Beat teams.
- ▶ Last year, NIWAF delivered a range of 27 training programmes to over 2,500 people in 920 hours.
- ▶ Volunteers make up over 50% of workers in Women's Aid. Last year, Support Services recruited and trained 92 volunteers. There were 8 information sessions to publicise, promote and encourage volunteering with Women's Aid.
- ▶ NIWAF information service includes a reference library containing over 1,000 books and research articles. You can now browse the library catalogue online to ensure your book is in stock. Last year there were 500 information requests, 59 library appointments and NIWAF's website reached 500,000 hits.
- ▶ Many local Women's Aid groups now run floating support services funded by Supporting People. The aim of floating support is to help women experiencing domestic violence to remain safely at home.

What the Helpline did this year



It started in 1995 and now the Women's Aid Helpline is nearly 10 years old! The 24 Hour Helpline is there to provide safe, confidential and anonymous support to women who have experienced or are experiencing domestic violence. It offers the support of trained and skilled workers and volunteers who understand the gendered analysis of violence. Every worker, both paid and unpaid, seeks to empower women to make their own choices about their lives and will outline all the options and support available.

We know that the busiest times on the Helpline are overnight, at bank holidays and during the school holidays. When other people are planning family events, weekend breaks and holidays at Christmas, Easter and in July, the Helpline team of staff and volunteers are making sure the phone will be answered every hour of every day. This feature makes the Women's Aid Helpline crucial for the safety of women especially at times when many other services are closed.

The key to the success of the Women's Aid Helpline is that it offers a safe and anonymous service to every woman based on the kind of help or support she wants, at the moment she makes the call. The Helpline welcomes calls from friends and family who are concerned about the safety of women in their families; and it provides a service to other organisations in the voluntary and statutory sector to ensure that women get the best support possible from every key agency.

On a daily basis the Helpline refers women and children to Women's Aid refuges and floating support services across Northern Ireland. The Helpline provides the link between women and the support they need – it always has the most up to date information on bed spaces and all the other Women's Aid services.

"they listen without getting fed up, everyone else thinks I should leave but it's not as simple as that"

▶ The Helpline handled 19,472 calls this year - an 11% increase on last year. A fifth (20%) of the women found out about the Helpline from friends and family while a massive 54% found out about our service from statutory agencies including the NIHE, PSNI, social services and health care professionals. The majority (70%) of women calling are aged 21 – 40 while a small number (4%) are aged 18 – 21.

▶ The Helpline successfully referred 196 women and 185 children to Women's Aid refuges in Northern Ireland.

▶ From April 2003 to March 2004 there were 4,240 hours volunteered on the 24 Hour Helpline.

▶ The helpline continues to operate a text phone and language line facility ensuring that women who are deaf and from minority ethnic communities have equal access to the service.

▶ During the year, the Helpline supported Welsh Women's Aid in the establishment of their new domestic violence helpline.

"it's a lifeline"

"what I liked most was not having to give my name or tell them where I was calling from – that made me feel safer"

"they made me realise it wasn't my fault"

New Regional Support Services Team in Cookstown

Opening new offices in Cookstown for the Regional Support Services Team was a major development last year. This new NIWAF team supported local Women's Aid groups in the challenge of quality assurance in service provision and management. The team helped focus and shape local Women's Aid capacity to review and revisit areas of policy, procedure and practice. Some key tasks last year were identifying and auditing priorities; developing group action plans; and supporting working groups.

The Cookstown base gives Women's Aid a great central meeting place and has increased our networking activity. It has improved access for local groups to training events and working parties. The team promotes collaborative working throughout Northern Ireland and is helping to develop effective, equitable and efficient services for women, children and young people affected by domestic violence.

24-hour Domestic Violence Helpline

Language line and minicom available
You do not need to leave home to get help

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NIWAF's audited accounts are on the website and a
hardcopy is available on request.

WHEN HOME IS WHERE THE HURT IS

Women's Aid in Northern Ireland

Every day, Women's Aid refuges and resource centres in Northern Ireland support women and children to overcome barriers. Here is a snapshot of what happened last year:

GENERAL SUPPORT SERVICES

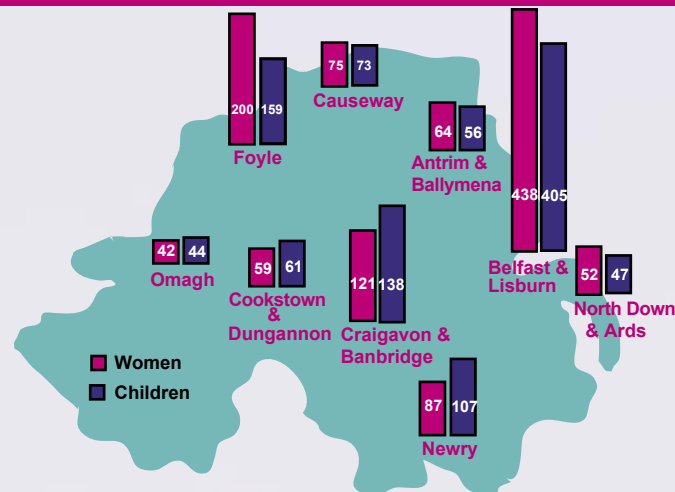
The big news for **Fermanagh Women's Aid** was reopening their refuge in March 2004. Aftercare is crucial for families. The **Cookstown & Dungannon Women's Aid** Children's Project ensures that young people are not overlooked – the whole family is offered support. **Foyle Women's Aid** opened a new office in Strabane to increase services for women in rural areas. **Newry Women's Aid** refurbished their centre which now has purpose built training and therapeutic support rooms for group work - all enhanced by new disabled access.

Brand new to **Craigavon & Banbridge Women's Aid** is an art therapy course and work in the courts in partnership with Craigavon Court. Satellite drop-in services are now in Banbridge and Armagh in partnership with CAB and PSNI. With funding from The Children's Fund, **Causeway Women's Aid** started "Domestic Violence and Children" – a prevention project which uses strong links with social services, health visitors and other children's services. A highlight of the year was linking with Corrymeela in Ballycastle to run group work with children in a safe setting.

TRAINING & EDUCATION

Cookstown & Dungannon Women's Aid maintained its high profile with educational and personal development courses - "My Life, My Choices", CLAIT Plus, Tiffany Glass, Personal Presentation and Sign Language. **Omagh Women's Aid** ran a range of courses culminating in a weekend in Westport for ten women. They delivered Helping Hands to 90 children locally and facilitated young people on the Princes Trust programme to explore issues around healthy relationships.

Foyle Women's Aid had 75 participants on a range of courses, some leading to further training and accredited programmes. **Newry Women's Aid** Stepping Stones programme saw a total of 108 women successfully gain over 210 accredited qualifications. **North Down & Ards Women's Aid** carried on its education work with 'Helping Hands' in local primary schools using a new chat show style format. **Causeway Women's Aid** helped women onto the Coleraine Enterprise Agency ECDL course. In-house training included confidence building, essential English and maths and the new Job Search programme which carries an OCN qualification.



Numbers of women and children accommodated in refuges 2003-2004

INTERAGENCY CO-OPERATION

Belfast & Lisburn Women's Aid seconded a worker to the Non-violence Relationship Programme to provide support to the women partners; she works alongside social services and the PBNI. **South and East Belfast Interagency Forum** celebrated its 10th anniversary in the City Hall and with a number of local events. **Omagh Women's Aid** ran sessions with local midwives and the District Policing Partnership. They took part in the Tackling Violence at Home consultations and worked with the local Child Protection Panel to safeguard children. The new PSNI policy on domestic violence was a major event for **Foyle Women's Aid** and was followed by the opening of a domestic violence unit in the Foyle DCU. A similar model of good practice with the PSNI in Strabane will be developed. The Foyle Advice & Information Project completed the largest domestic violence research in Northern Ireland and published *Personal, Organisational and Political* - the basis of a two year plan.

OTHER EVENTS

To celebrate 16 days of Action against Violence against Women, **Women's Aid in Antrim** held coffee mornings and public meetings and a conference entitled "Women's Position in Society in the 21st Century" to celebrate International Women's Day. **Foyle Inter Agency Project** used Don't Say a Word - a play written and performed by Patricia Byrne as a training tool on domestic violence.

Fermanagh Women's Aid held several high profile fundraising events - a conference with Ted Bowman - "Shattered Dreams, Hope and Resiliency", a cookery demonstration with celebrity chef Neven Maguire and the whole Women's Aid team ran the Dublin mini-marathon.

The Statistics

Women's Aid in Northern Ireland is undergoing a change in how it collects statistics - implementing an online data recording system (Client Link) to improve the accuracy and retrieval of valuable information. So, what follows under reflects the true numbers of women and children using services last year - not all Women's Aid groups had complete data.

- ▶ 1,138 women & 1,090 children stayed in refuges
- ▶ There were 17,120 calls for information, advice & support.
- ▶ 1,338 women used floating support.
- ▶ 200 women from minority communities used services.
- ▶ 1,755 children used Women's Aid services directly.
- ▶ There were 1,026 drop-in sessions.
- ▶ There were 4,406 one to one sessions.
- ▶ There were 398 court accompaniments.
- ▶ There were 1,550 home visits.
- ▶ There were 364 internal training sessions with 1,338 participants.
- ▶ There were 144 external training sessions with 1,777 participants.

NIWAF Team Work - Overcoming the barriers

For this year's review we have chosen the theme of overcoming barriers to reflect all the work of the Operations and Support Services teams.

When looking for support women face many barriers because of the significant physical and emotional impact of domestic violence. Women's Aid recognises and works to reduce, overcome and eliminate these. We also work to challenge and overcome the less obvious barriers that are created by racism, homophobia, age, poverty and discrimination against people with disabilities, asylum seekers and refugees.

The Women's Aid 24 Hour Helpline reaches more women than any other service. It is the most readily accessible service on offer and identifies a range of options for women seeking safety and support.

It is our duty to ensure that women can easily find out about Women's Aid services. We need to be confident that once they know about services that all women and children are able to access and use them.

Women's Aid is committed to providing practical support via an open door policy to women with insecure immigration status. We want to secure effective support to every woman and child, from



every agency and service. We delivered briefings and support around Northern Ireland to improve the response to the complex needs of women with insecure status.

As ever, we are not working on our own. We recognise that effective responses to women require joined up services and maintained our commitment to inter agency cooperation.

But there is always more we can do. As well as the practical and institutionalised barriers that women meet, there is an even bigger one that we all face. Attitudes that accept and tolerate domestic violence are the biggest barrier to overcome if we want to help build a society that is free of all forms of abuse.

Women's Aid sets its work within a framework of international human rights standards. These standards demonstrate the links between domestic violence and other forms of violence against women. NIWAF is pleased to be working with and to endorse Amnesty International's campaign on violence against women. The campaign has set a key target to challenge the attitudes of young men about violence against women. This reflects NIWAF's commitment to education and prevention work and we hope and believe this will have far-reaching and positive effects in eliminating domestic violence altogether.

What NIWAF did this year...

- ▶ We promoted the use of the "language line" interpretation facilities - women needed a range of languages translated.
- ▶ We participated in *Refuge Online* – a UK wide initiative which will ensure quicker access to the most appropriate services for every woman fleeing domestic violence.
- ▶ We became a partner with Disability Action in the 'Business Support Scheme'.
- ▶ We piloted *Helping Hands* with CCEA and primary schools.
- ▶ We trained PSNI Community Beat officers to improve responses to women.
- ▶ We piloted a domestic violence awareness raising programme for professional community interpreters.
- ▶ We published leaflets in Arabic, Chinese, Hindi, Irish, Portuguese and Urdu.
- ▶ We developed relationships with organisations working with women whose first language is not English.
- ▶ We published an audit of Northern Ireland's interagency work.
- ▶ We supported the development of organisational policies and procedures.
- ▶ We facilitated review and planning sessions with local domestic violence forums.
- ▶ We lobbied successfully for the inclusion of domestic violence in children's services planning.
- ▶ We conducted an audit of training by Women's Aid groups.
- ▶ We began developing the first regional strategy to provide standardised, high quality training.
- ▶ We developed a strategic approach to volunteering in Women's Aid.
- ▶ We reviewed policies, procedures and information in response to legal, contractual and good practice requirements.