National Strategy on Violence against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence
Consultation response from

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ABOUT THE CHARITY

1. FNF Both Parents Matter Cymru is a children’s rights charity supporting parents and grandparents who are facing exclusion from the lives of the children they care about. Our work is underpinned by the UNCRC – specifically Articles 9.3 and 18.1
2. Our charity runs a telephone Helpline for parents and grandparents with child contact problems – receiving around 1000 calls per annum. We also help people at our monthly face to face support meetings that take place in 11 different locations across Wales from Bangor to Newport and Carmarthen to Queensferry attended by around 1100 people attend each year.
3. All of our meetings are registered with the Law Society’s charity Law Works Cymru as Legal Advice Clinics where attendees can meet with a family law solicitor on a one to one basis to receive free specialist legal advice.
4. The charity also provides the Secretariat to the newly formed Cross Party Group on Fathers and Fatherhood in the Welsh Assembly.
5. In response to the needs of our service users the charity has launched a new service to support male victims of domestic violence and abuse on a pilot basis in the Ely area of Cardiff.
6. We have met with the National Adviser on Ending Violence against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence on two separate occasions. She has attended our Cardiff support meeting in August 2016 where she was joined by 18 male and 19 female service users and volunteers for the charity. She also attended the meeting of the Cross Party Assembly Group on fathers and fatherhood on the 11th September in Ty Hywel where Erin Pizzey, founder of the world’s first refuge spoke on the subject ‘Are Fathers Disposable?’ Our charity has great respect on a personal and professional basis for Rhian Bowen-Davies and remains ready to work collaboratively with her and others to achieve the ultimate aim of moving to a society where everybody is able to live fear free.
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

7. Our charity has contributed to all of the consultations undertaken by Welsh Government and by the Assembly. We attended each of the public consultations organised by the VAWG team in Welsh Government.

8. We have seen the Welsh Government’s consistent statements throughout the process including in this strategy document:

9. ‘The Act covers all forms of ‘gender based violence’ in recognition that both men and women are victims of violence……’

10. Sadly this reference in the Introduction is one of the few examples of a recognition of a gender inclusive response in the Strategy.

11. In the foreword by the Cabinet Secretary we see the importance of the ‘Ask and Act’ agenda. This policy will, inadvertently, add significantly to the problems faced by male victims of abuse. Without a clear message to front line practitioners to ensure that they apply this agenda proportionately to male victims we will see a further marginalisation of their experience. While services adopt a gender prejudiced view towards the experience of men there will be no justice in Wales. No greater example of this gender prejudice could be found than the practice adopted by domestic abuse services in Wales of ‘screening’ male callers ONLY. Until this practice is prohibited by Welsh Government – possibly by requiring services funded by the state not to breach the Equality Act 2010 – discrimination and unfair treatment will be the inevitable consequence of this strategy.

12. The importance of listening to the voice of survivors of abuse is rightly at the centre of the strategy. Sadly however the work commissioned by Welsh Government from Welsh Women’s Aid cannot possibly claim to be representative, nor is it a safe basis upon which to build this strategy. ‘Are you listening and am I being heard’ is a powerful document capturing the experience of 65 women and ONE man – perhaps the embodiment of the expression ‘Token male’. It is impossible to square the building of a National Strategy upon a document that fails to even remotely capture the picture of a large number of victims who are currently being further victimised by the response of the State to their misfortune.

13. The six Objectives in the strategy set out on p17 & 18 are laudable. We do not disagree with the rhetoric. Talk of healthy relationships and gender equality (Objective 2) or challenging perpetrators (Objective 3) are unlikely to be realised within such a gender exclusive framework of action. Objective 5 is perhaps the greatest hope and the worst disappointment of all – stating that victims will be provided with equal access to appropriately resourced, high quality, needs led, gender responsive services. The reality is a millions miles away from these empty words if you are a man and face the prospect of being re-victimised by statutory and third sector services. Your position is even worse if you face being
Falsely accused as a perpetrator. If you are a man in Wales there will be no justice.

14. We have drawn the Welsh Government’s attention to these issues time and time again. We have clearly failed, so a new approach is needed. In that vein we make the following proposals:

- **Separate support services for female and male victims of abuse** – so that women can access and be supported to access gender exclusive support – but so too can men.
- **Ban the discrimination currently practiced against men by DV support services** that ‘screen’ only men to determine whether they are ‘genuine’ victims and without their knowledge or consent pass on their details to other services that further victimise them.
- **Resource appropriately, NOT EQUALLY**, services for men run by men unconstrained by a feminist ideology that sees men as perpetrators that provide training, support, awareness raising and other important services in an appropriate way.

15. Fundamentally we ask the Welsh Government to recognise that services for men cannot be commissioned from organisations that have developed from a feminist ideology of domestic violence. These organisations and individuals perform excellent work to safeguard and support women facing the reality of male violence and abuse. It is unfair to expect them also to support male victims effectively. Of course it is even more unreasonable to expect men who suffer abuse at the hands of female partners and ex-partners to be represented and supported by these feminised services.

**Question 1 - Do you agree with the priorities under prevention? Do you have any further suggestions? Please include any evidence (data, research or anecdotal).**


**Question 2 – Do you agree with the priorities under protection? Do you have any further suggestions? Please include any evidence (data, research or anecdotal).**


Question 3 - Do you agree with the priorities under support? Do you have any further suggestions? Please include any evidence (data, research or anecdotal).


Question 4 - Do you think the priorities will have a positive / negative impact on protected characteristics? If so, which and why/why not? Are there further opportunities not covered by the priorities to promote equality? Please include any evidence (data, research or anecdotal).

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**Question 5 - What opportunities does this strategy give to promote the use of the Welsh Language? Do you have concerns that this strategy could have an adverse effect on opportunities to use the Welsh language?**


Question 6 - We have asked a number of specific questions. If you have any related issues which we have not specifically addressed, please use this space to report them.


CONCLUSION

Following many years of engagement with Welsh Government on the domestic abuse agenda our volunteers and service users have the very clear impression that their voices are not being heard and that the Welsh Government is not listening: a terrible irony in view of the title given to the Survivor’s Stories that inform and underpin this strategy. That reality is central to the understanding of our answers to the specific questions above. The settled view of those we seek to represent is that whatever we say about male victims will not be heard.

We have drawn attention to the impossible imbalance in resources provided by Welsh Government to organisations that support men compared with women in this media report http://www.walesonline.co.uk/news/politics/wales-gives-77-times-much-11780326 where a Welsh Government spokesman is reported as saying that:

‘Many of the organisations cited in this list also support men’s issues. Welsh Women’s Aid, for example, receives funding from us to deliver the Live Fear Free helpline – a 24 hour help and advice service for both men and women.”

We believe that this approach is a cause and a consequence of gender discrimination in domestic abuse and seriously undermines the National Strategy.

We agree with much reported by the Western Mail from Eleri Butler, CEO of Welsh Women’s Aid on 20th September. We have enormous respect for the achievements of the organisation and the individual. Eleri said:

‘The fact that domestic abuse is gendered is supported by research and crime data...’

We agree

‘The fact that domestic abuse is gendered underpins our work to end domestic abuse and all forms of violence against women.’

We agree

‘Women and their children are much more likely to need lifesaving support like refuge services. This does not mean that men don’t experience domestic abuse or don’t need support.......... It means that safe, separate and different kinds of support are needed, which respond to the different needs of all victims.’

We couldn’t have put it better ourselves.

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