

women's aid

*Cookstown and Dungannon*

*Working to end domestic violence*

**ETHOS & PRACTICE  
OF WOMEN'S AID  
IN NORTHERN IRELAND**

## **1.0 WOMEN'S AID MISSION**

- 1.1 Women's Aid is the lead voluntary organisation in Northern Ireland addressing domestic violence and providing services for women and children. It recognises it as one form of violence against women. Women's Aid seeks to challenge attitudes and beliefs that perpetuate domestic violence and, through its work, promotes healthy and non-abusive relationships.
- 1.2 Ten local Women's Aid groups are all members of the Women's Aid Federation Northern Ireland.

## **2.0 CORE AIMS OF WOMEN'S AID**

- 2.1 To provide temporary refuge to women and their children suffering mental, physical or sexual abuse within the home.
- 2.2 To encourage women to take control of their own future, whether this involves returning home or beginning an independent life.
- 2.3 To recognise and care for the emotional needs of children involved.
- 2.4 To offer support and advice to any woman who asks for it, whether or not she is living in a refuge and to offer supportive aftercare to women leaving the refuge.
- 2.5 To educate and inform the public, the media, the courts, social services and other agencies, always mindful of the fact that abused women are a direct result of the general position of women in our society.

### **3.0 PRINCIPLES, VALUES & BELIEFS**

3.1 Cookstown and Dungannon Women's Aid believes that:

- Violence against women is a manifestation of unequal power relationships between women and men at all levels of society;
- Violence against women remains a historical and cultural feature of our society;
- The underlying cause of violence against women is the abuse of power and control by perpetrators;
- Domestic violence is one form of violence against women;
- Domestic violence is a violation of Article 5 of the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights – that “no one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment”;
- Women are not passive victims of domestic violence. With support women have the capacity to cope with and survive the violence and abuse they experience;
- Children who are experiencing domestic violence benefit from a range of services and support, and some may need safeguarding from harm. Often, supporting a non-violent parent is the most effective way of promoting a child's welfare.

3.2 Women's Aid in Northern Ireland is part of a worldwide feminist movement which is working for a better future in which equality of opportunity and real choice is available to all.

3.3 Our work is rooted in the principles of enablement, self-help, mutual aid, inclusion, equality and collective action. We recognise self-help as a gradual process which enables and promotes personal development.

3.4 All Women's Aid services have been developed in response to the needs of women affected by domestic violence. By listening and responding to the needs of women, Women's Aid has built up an expertise about violence and abuse.

3.5 Women's Aid recognises that domestic violence is a complex problem which requires effective and timely interventions by a range of agencies to protect and support women and children. Women's Aid is committed to working collaboratively with all relevant agencies to develop improved, coordinated responses and services for women and children experiencing domestic violence.

#### **4.0 WORK OF WOMEN'S AID IN NORTHERN IRELAND**

- 4.1 Managing and operating the Northern Ireland 24 Hour Domestic Violence Helpline;
- 4.2 Providing a network of refuges offering open access to crisis intervention and support for women and children. Women can refer themselves to refuge or seek referral from the Helpline or any other source;
- 4.3 Providing a comprehensive range of specialist services including one-to-one support, resettlement, aftercare and outreach to enable women who are leaving a violent situation to rebuild their lives and the lives of their children;
- 4.4 Providing education, training and personal development opportunities for all women and young people at risk of domestic violence;
- 4.5 Educating and informing the public, media, courts, social services and other agencies of the impact and effects of domestic violence through a range of training and educational programmes;
- 4.6 Advising, supporting and training all relevant agencies in the development of domestic violence policies, protocols and service delivery;
- 4.7 Working in partnership with all relevant agencies to ensure effective responses to women and children who have experienced domestic violence;
- 4.8 Promoting community development and action by involving volunteers in the delivery of services.

## **5.0 STATEMENT OF INTENT**

5.1 The work and services of Women's Aid are directed by a range of policies, practices and procedures which promote quality, effectiveness and efficiency.

In implementing all its policies Women's Aid intends:

- To state its purpose clearly and keep it current and relevant;
- To be explicit about the needs to be met and how to achieve them;
- To be clear about the quality standards of work;
- To manage and commit resources effectively;
- To identify all those to whom Women's Aid is accountable and how to fulfil responsibilities to them;
- To evaluate the effectiveness of work, to address poor performance and respond to complaints fairly and promptly;
- To recruit staff openly, remunerate them fairly and be a good employer;
- To have clear arrangements for involving, training, supporting and managing volunteers;
- To involve service users,
- To ensure that policies and practices do not discriminate unfairly or lead to other forms of unfair treatment;
- To have a systematic and open process for making appointments to management boards or committees; and
- To set out the role and responsibilities of members of management boards or committees.

## **6.0 GUIDING PRINCIPLES**

### **6.1 Women Only**

- 6.1.2 Women's Aid is an organisation that is run by women, for women and with women. Women consistently state that being supported in a women only organisation is the most effective and beneficial way to overcome the impact and effects of physical and emotional abuse.
- 6.1.3 Men are not members of any Women's Aid groups, management boards, committees or sub-committees, support groups or any other structures involved in the running of the organisation.
- 6.1.4 Within the specific limits of equal opportunities legislation, men are not employed by Women's Aid as paid or unpaid staff.
- 6.1.5 Men (aged sixteen and over) do not normally come to any Women's Aid refuge. Exceptions to this will be essential personnel such as maintenance officers, plumbers etc or other agreed agency representatives eg police, social workers etc.
- 6.1.6 Women's Aid groups do not provide direct services for abusive men, including those on perpetrator programmes, except in an advisory role<sup>1</sup>. If men come to Women's Aid advice centres, they will be referred on to other agencies that may be able to help them.
- 6.1.7 The 24 Hour Domestic Violence Helpline signposts men who call it to other agencies that may be able to help them.

### **6.2 Anti-Violence**

- 6.2.1 Women's Aid is opposed to all forms of violence. All Women's Aid services, including refuges, are safe, supportive places for women and children. There will be no physical, mental, verbal or sexual abuse directed towards women or children, members of staff, management board or committee members, volunteers, or any visitors to services.

### **6.3 Self Help**

- 6.3.1 Refuge and other support services operated by Women's Aid are non-directive. Women (service users) are encouraged to make their own decisions and enabled to determine their own futures. Services do not encourage women to become over dependent.

### **6.3.2 Self help works by:**

- Giving women practical help when necessary and being sensitive to each woman's needs;
- Giving women information about alternatives to enable them to make informed decisions;
- Supporting women in their choices;
- Encouraging women to have confidence in their abilities;
- Creating opportunities for women to develop their potential;
- Encouraging women to be mutually supportive;
- Informing women of their rights as residents and service users; and
- Informing women about the Women's Aid complaints procedure.

## **7.0 RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN MEMBERS OF WOMEN'S AID**

7.1 Local Women's Aid groups are affiliated members of the Women's Aid Federation Northern Ireland. A fee is paid by local groups to the Women's Aid Federation in return for membership of the organisation and the provision of services which include:

- training;
- information;
- support for policy development;
- informal representation;
- development of interagency work;
- representation of the concerns and views of Women's Aid at regional level;
- lobbying & campaigning to inform policy and shape services for women and children affected by domestic violence; and
- networking with Women's Aid Federations in the UK and Ireland to share good practice and seek support on issues of common concern.

7.2 In order to ensure effectiveness, Women's Aid Federation and local Women's Aid groups commit to:

- Participation of relevant staff in key events;
- Supporting the effective operation of the 24 Hour Domestic Violence Helpline;
- Ensuring all staff and volunteers complete induction and core training programmes;
- Attendance at the monthly Women's Aid Forum meeting (see terms of reference at Appendix 1);
- Participation in consultations on the development of internal and external policies, procedures and practice;
- Contributing their expertise and resources to Women's' Aid working groups;
- Effective communication on initiatives, developments and proposals; and
- Communication with and between all staff and volunteers in all member groups and Women's Aid Federation based on respect and trust.