

PLVAW 21

Ymchwiliad ôl-ddeddfwriaethol i Ddeddf Trais yn erbyn Menywod,  
Cam-drin Domestig a Thrais Rhywiol (Cymru) 2015

Post legislative inquiry into the Violence against Women,

Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (Wales) Act 2015

Ymateb gan: Atal y Fro

Response from: Atal y Fro

### **About Atal y Fro**

Atal y Fro provides support to families in the Vale of Glamorgan who have experienced, or are experiencing, domestic violence:

*We do this by:*

- Sustaining and developing work relations with partners & stakeholders;
- Raising awareness, informing, and educating communities in the Vale about domestic abuse and its causes, consequences, and prevention;
- Continuing to provide and develop specialist services available to all stakeholders;
- Consistently monitoring and evaluating our services;
- Raising the profile of Atal y Fro

### **Inquiry**

- *To what extent the approach to tackling violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence is improving as a result of the obligations in the Act?*

Atal y Fro welcomes the Welsh Government's commitment to eliminating Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse, and Sexual Violence (VAWDASV) through the introduction of the recent Act (*Welsh Government, 2015*). We have seen small changes in terms of increased awareness of the nature of VAWDASV, better responses from the police and schools, and pockets of good practice. However, we feel that it is too early to evaluate its true impact on the lived experiences of victims and survivors.

We would like to highlight the importance of ensuring that national and local VAWDASV strategies have attached ring-fenced budgets for the provision of specialist services. We welcome the *Collaborative Commissioning Toolkit for Services in Wales* and in particular its recommendation for creating ways 'to level the playing field' to ensure smaller providers are able to compete effectively with larger players. This would ensure that local and specialist provision for victims is protected.

Since the introduction of the Social Services and Wellbeing Act (Wales) 2014, we have seen a slow but steady increase in the number of informal referrals directed to our service without any local budgets allocated to ensure adequate provision. We are concerned that on-going fiscal tightening will strain already stretched third sector providers that are delivering crucial services to keep victims safe, and we would welcome an impact assessment of other legislation on VAWDASV provision.

- *What are the most effective methods of capturing the views and experiences of survivors? Are arrangements in place to capture these experiences, and to what extent is this information being used to help inform the implementation of the Act's provisions?*

Ataly Fro supports the co-production of services with victims and survivors of abuse by continuously listening to their views and seeking feedback from them. We are interested in the development of a national framework for on-going survivor engagement and involvement. As an organisation that provides frontline services, we believe that any process to capture survivors' views should be undertaken in a sensitive manner that puts their needs at the centre of every interaction and minimises the risk of re-victimisation. Our experience is that whilst some survivors may wish to be involved in formal consultation processes and have their views heard, many wish to move on and focus on rebuilding their lives away from abuse. Informal arrangements to capture their experiences can be embedded in the day-to-day contact of front line staff with victims and survivors. As well as developing a framework for consultation, it is just as important to develop a mechanism for feedback and accountability to ensure that meaningful change occurs as a result of consultations.

Our recommendations would also be for policy makers to regularly reach out directly to the public and survivors in order to hear their views and capture their experiences. Overreliance on specialist services to consult with their service users misses out the experiences of those who may not identify as victims/survivors or those who have not sought any formal support. Whilst the provision of services is paramount, a more holistic approach would allow for the development of approaches and interventions that build on the strengths and resilience of individuals and communities in line with the well-being goals of the Well-Being of Future Generations Act 2015.

- *Whether survivors of abuse are beginning to experience better responses from public authorities as a result of the Act, particularly those needing specialist services?*

We recognise the gendered nature of domestic abuse and the disproportionate impact it has on women and girls. Improved responses and service provision is required particularly for those women that experience multiple disadvantage (e.g. LGBTQ women, older women, BME women etc.) However, we are also concerned about the lack of male voices in the development and implementation of VAWDASV

policy and legislation. For example, only one male victim agreed to take part in the recent *'Are you listening and am I being heard?'* report. Tailored approaches need to be developed to encourage male victims and survivors to come forward.

Traditional gender roles and expectations of masculinity are particularly harmful to male victims of domestic abuse and sexual violence as they act as barriers for them to disclose abuse and seek support. This hinders any efforts by policy makers and commissioners to identify the true extent of the issue in order to map out and fund specialist provision. The subsequent lack of services for male victims further deters them from self-identification. For those who do seek support there aren't adequate specialist local services that understand their needs and can appropriately support them. We support the *Collaborative Commissioning Toolkit's* statement:

*'Those affected by violence and abuse – either currently, or in the past – may have no contact at all with public services. Any commissioning must therefore recognise that provision must anticipate and address the needs of those who are not actually demanding services.'*

We are also worried about the lack of preventative interventions. One of the ten recommendations from survivors is a *greater focus on perpetrators' behaviour and holding them to account*. Seven years ago, our organisation changed its name to Atal y Fro as it was becoming increasingly clear that if we are to break the cycle of domestic violence we need to concentrate our energies on prevention. This means tackling it within the whole family (including dads/partners) and educating children and young people. As a result, we developed a program for male perpetrators of domestic violence, called C.H.A.T. (Choosing Healthy Alternative Techniques). With funding by the Welsh Government's Sustainable Social Services Third Sector Grant, we are rolling out the programme across different areas of Wales.

The aim of the programme is to:-

- Enable participants to identify and acknowledge their current / past abusive behaviour and use skills and strategies taught on the programme to make positive changes in their behaviour. This is done through conversation / individual and group exercises and the practice of the skills and strategies taught on the program.
- Enable participants to take responsibility for their use of abusive behaviour in their intimate relationships.
- Enable participants to identify the beliefs and intents which underpin their abusive behaviour.
- Enable participants to acknowledge the effects of their behaviour on themselves, their partners, children, and others.

Currently, interventions for perpetrators of domestic abuse are primarily rooted in the Criminal Justice System. We welcome the Welsh Government's commitment to address the root causes of domestic abuse by commissioning our work with

perpetrators through the Sustainable Social Services and Wellbeing Third Sector Grant. However, we would also like to see the Welsh Government taking a leadership role in mapping the range and nature of interventions for perpetrators and developing a national framework with particular focus on programmes that work with non-court mandated perpetrators in the community. There are discrepancies in service provision across Wales, a real dearth of accredited programmes, and no formal mechanism or network for sharing information and good practice. Atal y Fro is in the process of applying for Respect accreditation and is consulting with partner organisations to ensure that programmes operate in those areas of highest need and local resources are maximised.

- *To what extent does the good practice guide to healthy relationships guide successfully influence the development of a whole-school approach to challenging violence against women, domestic abuse, and sexual violence?*

We are concerned that the development of good practice in schools continues to be driven by the commitment and passion of individual professionals in the sector. In addition, good practice remains open to interpretation which leads to variations in local approaches.

Feedback that we have received from teaching staff suggests that there is a significant lack of specialist knowledge and confidence to address this issue directly with children and young people. We would therefore recommend that the delivery of preventative work in schools is undertaken by specialist local agencies that are able to raise awareness on VAWDASV, and who have the local knowledge to provide follow up support to young people that disclose personal experiences of abuse.

Support for children and young people often takes the form of crisis intervention usually as a result of safeguarding concerns. This approach ignores the long-term impact that witnessing and experiencing domestic abuse has on children. Many survivors talk about early experiences of abuse and their re-victimisation as adults. The Welsh Government should prioritise the needs of children and young people with a particular focus on therapeutic interventions tailored to their needs.

Finally, we would like to see the National Training Framework to be widened to include higher education institutions. Atal y Fro's *Talk* programme, which is commissioned by the South Wales Police and Crime Commissioner's office, works with four universities in Wales. The programme has highlighted the need for university staff to have access to the e-learning pack developed for Health and Education professionals and to be included in any staff learning and development initiatives.