

## Scottish Women's Aid survey of funding for Women's Aid services 2015/16

Measuring the impact of funding cuts on domestic abuse services for women and children in Scotland

Scottish Women's Aid has a membership of 36 Women's Aid groups providing domestic abuse services across the whole of Scotland from the Borders to Shetland. Women's Aid groups provide specialist domestic abuse services to women, children and young people; ranging from crisis intervention - providing safe refuge accommodation – to supporting families as they rebuild their lives. They provide visiting support services in the community – working with women and children in their own home, or at drop-in services at local health or community centres. Many also carry out awareness-raising work, deliver training locally and carry out prevention work with schools, employers and other agencies.

*'The need is there, service quality is there, the drive to improve is there but there's no corresponding funding.'*

### Methodology

The funding survey was conducted using a confidential online questionnaire that was sent to all our members in May 2016. The questionnaire asked a series of questions relating to the previous financial year (1 April 2015 – 31 March 2016). The response rate to the survey was 83% with 30 Women's Aid groups completing the survey.

### Key Findings

- 97% of services were working with a reduced or standstill local authority budget. This is up from 81% of services in 2013/14.
- 90% of service budgets included no inflationary uplift to cover increased energy, transport, VAT and other operational costs.
- 41% of services had to make cuts to their services as a result of reduced funding. This included cuts to refuge, visiting support for women and children living in the community, therapeutic children's services, hours of support for women, training and prevention work, and increased waiting times for accessing services.
- 1 in 5 Women's Aid groups cut back on staffing costs, through redundancies, or freezing posts. Other measures included pay freezes and reductions in hours. 57% of groups were unable to pay a cost of living increase to staff.
- 52% of Women's Aid groups reported an increase in demand for their services during 2015/16, with a further 45% of groups reporting that demand equalled that in 2014/15.
- Over 30% of Women's Aid groups reported a deficit in the last financial year, with insufficient funding to cover their costs.

- 26% of groups are working without a contractual arrangement or service level agreement. Of those groups that have a contractual arrangement 50% of them are working with a 1 year contract.

### **Funding for Women's Aid services**

The Scottish Government and local authorities are the main sources of funding for domestic abuse services in Scotland. In 2015/16 Women's Aid groups reported that, on average, 58% of their funding was provided by their local authority, with 30% being provided by the Scottish Government. Women's Aid groups are also reliant on funding from charities, trust funds, and that raised through local fundraising activities. In 2015/16, 30% of groups received funding from the becoming a Survivor Big Lottery Fund - this represented, on average, 20% of recipients funding for the year.

The survey asked Women's Aid groups if funding from the local authority was the same, more or less than the previous financial year.

- 33% reported a decrease in funding averaging 15%,
- 63% received the same level of funding,
- 1 group received more funding from their local authority,

63% of the Women's Aid groups that took part in this survey received the same level of funding from their local authority in 2015/16 as 2014/15. However, in real terms this amounted to a decrease in funding as, for over 90% of groups, no inflationary uplift was provided to cover rapidly rising energy costs, or travel, VAT and other costs.

*'In effect the reduction in public funding over the last few years has meant that Women's Aid services have had to absorb higher costs within reduced budgets - a real term cut in their funding.'*

### **The impact of funding cuts**

Over 40% of Women's Aid groups reported having to make changes to the services they provide as a result of reduced funding. Since 2009 the percentage of Women's Aid groups that have had to make changes to their services has increased year on year from 14% to 41% in 2015/16. Changes reported for the year 2015/16 as a result of cuts to funding include:

- Reductions in refuge provision;
- Cut backs to visiting support for women, children and young people living in the community;
- Reduced contact time for individual women and children;
- Increased waiting lists for both refuge and outreach services;
- A cut back on counselling services for women;
- Reductions in therapeutic activities and support for children;
- Fewer hours for on-call workers and drop-in support; and

- Reductions in the provision of training for other agencies and workers supporting women, children and young people affected by domestic abuse.

*'Although there is much talk of increased support for victims of domestic abuse this has not translated into support for frontline services.'*

Since 2009 Women's Aid groups have reported making significant reductions in their operating costs. 1 in 5 Women's Aid groups cut back on staffing costs through redundancies or freezing posts in 2015/16. Other measures for reducing staffing costs included pay freezes, reducing staff terms and conditions, and cutting back on staff training and travel.

*'Cuts and efficiencies have been made to core services but if this continues, frontline hours will be hit.'*

*'Just a few weeks after staff received their pay increase our funding was cut.'*

### **Increasing pressure on services**

At the same time Women's Aid groups are facing increasing pressure with over half (52%) of groups reporting a greater demand for their services during the last year. An indicator of group's inability to meet demand is the reporting of increasing waiting lists – now up to 8 weeks in one group - and concern about the impact of this on the safety and wellbeing of women and children. Groups also highlighted the need to provide support to women with no recourse to public funds and their inability to do so within current funding constraints.

*'Staff are working harder because of complex issues, with no uplift in wages and with fewer staff. Ultimately a compound impact on the women and children.'*

*'We are unable to provide support to one of the most vulnerable group of clients who experience domestic abuse - those women who have No Recourse To Public Funds.'*

*'Demand for our services increases year on year and we cannot continue to absorb with no increase in staffing levels.'*

The introduction of changes in welfare benefits has placed an additional pressure on services an impact on staff time involved in supporting women with more complex benefit issues and appeals. Groups highlighted an increased demand from women and children at crisis point, higher levels of poverty amongst women and children, and the increased need for provision of items such as food and clothing. They also reported that women and children now need to remain in refuge longer and consequently that fewer women and children are able to access refuge at crisis point.

*'More sanctions, more clients in debt and with complicated financial circumstances, which is time consuming to untangle. Costs go up as we are providing more food, electricity, clothes etc. for families with no money.'*

*'Women are requiring more referrals to food banks and are more likely to present in financial crisis and require support to purchase basic foods/items for survival.'*

## Short term funding – increased uncertainty

Uncertainties around funding are exacerbated by the short term nature of the contractual relationships Women's Aid groups have with their principal funders. 50% of groups reported that their contract with the local authority is only for one year, with 26% working with no contractual arrangement or service level agreement in place.

*'In general both for the charity and staff, insecure funding gives a feeling of being in limbo and makes business/personal planning very difficult. Decision-making for Board on financial matters is very difficult due to constantly changing parameters.'*

One of the major implications of reduced and insecure funding is that Women's Aid groups find it difficult to plan ahead. Many report having to 'fire-fight' to ensure survival rather than look at long term planning. Additional time is taken up with funding bids which in turn diverts staff time from service provision.

*'Other means of raising funds such as trusts and donations do not cover the shortfall resulting from public expenditure cuts.'*

*'The nature of our service is such that it is difficult to plan, with increased juggling of cases inconsistency in service delivery more common.'*

*'Women's Aid groups - whose primary focus is on service delivery - have limited capacity to divert to additional fundraising activities.'*

Insecure funding and short term contracts mean that Women's Aid staff constantly work under the threat of redundancy and receive no cost of living increase. In 2015/16, 57% of groups reported that they are unable to pay a cost of living increase and have limited opportunities to develop their skills because of cuts to staff training budgets.

*'Late notification of funding puts serious pressure on staff who, though acting professionally, report the dilemma of providing support services whilst knowing that service provision is insecure.'*

*'We lost a valued member of the team this year entirely due to insecurity of funding.'*

*'Number of workers has been reduced from 11 to 6 therefore affecting the capacity of our service.'*

## Funding shortfall

The cumulative impact of reduced funding over a number of years has resulted in an increasing number of Women's Aid services reporting a deficit, with insufficient funding to cover their costs. In this survey 27% of groups reported a deficit year. In 2015/16, however, groups have been less able to draw on their reserves to fund the shortfall, with 30% of groups reporting that they drew on their reserves to cover operating costs. For some groups, reserves have been depleted year on year in order to maintain service levels.

*'We had to designate funds for running our services from our reserves, which are not yet at the optimum level as per our Reserves Policy.'*

*'We have had notice of further funding cuts, which will mean eating into our reserves if we cannot find alternative funding.'*

## **Conclusions**

Funding cuts are having a serious impact on the provision of domestic abuse support services to women and children across Scotland. The results of our 2015/16 annual survey highlight the accumulative impact of funding cuts since 2008/9. Protecting service levels has been a constant theme throughout these surveys as Women's Aid groups looked for other ways to cope with a reduced budget. The findings from this survey demonstrate that Women's Aid groups have exhausted their capacity to do that. Compared to previous years, many groups are no longer as able to draw on their reserves to subsidise service levels, more groups have had to reduce staffing levels and groups have made more significant reductions to their support services. The impact is now being felt by women and children who are unable to get the specialist support services they need when they need them.