

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

Scottish Women's Aid survey of funding for Women's Aid services 2011-12

*"We've cut our costs to the bone over the last few years – there is nothing left to cut. This is the second time we've had to dig into our reserves and we can't sustain that"*

Scottish Women's Aid has a membership of 38 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 and children; ranging from crisis intervention - providing safe refuge accommodation - to supporting families as they rebuild their lives. They provide outreach services in the community, supporting 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 in schools.

## Key Findings

- 84% of Women's Aid groups are working with a reduced or standstill budget with no inflationary uplift to cover increased energy, transport, VAT and other operational costs - up from 61% of services in 2009/10.
- Almost a third of Women's Aid groups (30%) had to make cuts to their services as a result of reduced funding. This included reducing the support provided to women and children, introducing waiting lists, reducing out of hours and crisis support availability, cutting back on the refurbishment of accommodation, on activities for children and outings for families. Services also reduced staff hours, reduced pension contributions, froze posts and cut staff training budgets.
- 7 out of 10 Women's Aid groups reported a greater demand for their services during 2011 -12; at the same time their ability to respond to this demand has been reduced.
- A third of Women's Aid groups reported a deficit in the last financial year – up from a quarter in 2010/11.
- 36% of Women's Aid groups had to transfer funds from reserves to be able to cover their costs. For several groups this has been the pattern for the last few years and these reserves are rapidly diminishing.
- Over half of Women's Aid groups are working with very short term funding contracts. 56% have a contract for one year with their local authority, and 16% are working with no contractual arrangement or service level agreement in place.

## Methodology

The survey was conducted using a confidential online questionnaire that was sent to all our members in July 2012. The questionnaire asks a series of questions relating to the previous financial year (1 April 2011 – 31 March 2012).

The survey received a high response rate with 31(82%) Women's Aid groups taking part. The 31 Women's Aid groups that completed the survey provide services in 25 local authorities in Scotland.

## Funding for Women's Aid services

The Scottish Government and local authorities are the main sources of funding for domestic abuse services. This year Women's Aid groups reported that on average 56% of their funding was provided by their local authority and 36% on average was provided by the Scottish Government. They also receive money from trust funds and donations.

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

- 16% reported an increase, on average a 2% inflationary uplift
- 19% reported a decrease, on average a cut of 4.5%
- 65% received the same level of funding.

Although most (20) of the Women's Aid groups that took part in this survey received the same level of funding from the local authority, in real terms this amounts to a decrease in funding as no inflationary uplift was provided to cover rising energy, travel, VAT and other costs.

*"It is important to reach women in isolated rural areas but we really struggle to cover increased petrol costs"*

*"I feel like we have to continually justify to funders what we are providing – and we can't do enough in the hours and funding we have"*

The Scottish Government in 2011 maintained funding for domestic abuse services for a further three years (2012 -15). Whilst it is positive that the Scottish Government demonstrated its continued commitment to funding frontline domestic abuse services, the funding awarded does not include any inflationary uplift within this funding period. 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 the value of their funding.

*"We no longer have the funds to cover staffing at the weekend and have to stretch existing staff and volunteers to provide some cover"*

Other means of raising funds such as trusts and donations do not cover the shortfall resulting from public expenditure cuts. Fundraising has become much more challenging in the current economic climate, with much greater competition for funding from charitable trusts, which themselves due to the recession, have less money available to provide as grants. Women's Aid groups whose primary focus is on service delivery, have limited capacity to divert to additional fundraising activities.

## The impact of funding cuts

Almost a third (30%) of Women's Aid groups reported having to make changes to the services they provide as a result of reduced funding. These changes have focused on stretching reduced resources to cover existing services, maintaining these as far as possible at the same level of capacity. This has meant:

- Reducing the number of hours of support provided to individual women to be able to help the same number of women
- Providing more telephone support and less face to face contact
- Cutting office 'drop in ' hours
- No longer providing crisis admissions to refuge outside office hours
- Introducing a waiting list - unable to respond to the number of referrals
- Cutting back on the upkeep of refuge accommodation
- Reducing advocacy services

*"Supporting women as they go to court or other appointments and being able to advocate on their behalf makes a vast difference to women, but we can't do that as much - we don't have the staff"*

*"To be able to continue to support the numbers of women who approach us for help we have had to ration the amount and length of time that we can give them support"*

*"We are providing more telephone support but it's not the same as being able to walk in off the street and talk to someone, which is particularly important when women first ask for help"*

Women's Aid groups have in recent years made significant reductions in their operating costs, making efficiency savings and taking difficult decisions about staff pay and terms and conditions. In this survey groups reported taking measures to reduce operating costs that included pay freezes, reducing staff hours, freezing posts and cut backs in other staff costs such as pensions, training and travel.

With the shortfall in funding many Women's Aid groups are finding it difficult to meet the increased demand for their services. In this survey 71% of groups stated that there had been a greater demand for their services but that they were struggling to be able to respond.

*"We're pleased with the success of our work promoting our service in the community; it's really raised the number of referrals we get from other agencies. But it's a becoming a real struggle to stretch our resources to respond"*

### Short term funding

Uncertainties around funding are exacerbated by the short term nature of the contractual relationships Women's Aid groups have with their principal funders. Over half of groups (56%) reported that their contract with the local authority is only for one year. 16% are working with no contractual arrangement or service level agreement in place.

One of the major implications of reduced and insecure funding is that Women's Aid groups find it difficult or impossible 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.

Insecure funding and short term contracts mean that Women's Aid staff constantly work under the threat of redundancy, receive no cost of living increase - 80% of groups reported that they are unable to pay a cost of living increase and have limited opportunities to develop their skills as staff training budgets have been slashed.

### 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 2011/12 a third of groups reported a deficit – up from a quarter in the previous year. This year 36% of groups reported that they had to use their reserves to be able to continue to maintain services.

For several groups this is the second or even third year they have had to transfer funding from their reserves to balance their budget. In theory these reserves are to deal with unforeseen emergencies or other unexpected need for funds such as an unexpected large repair bill or employing temporary staff to cover a long-term sickness absence. Recent research published by SCVO noted that it is smaller charities which have tended to make a deficit in recent years and had to draw on their reserves to cope.

*"Also of concern are the many smaller charities that spent more money in 2011 than they generated, meaning that taken as a group they overall ended up in deficit. It is to be expected that in harder economic times many groups dip into the assets they have set aside, but any continuing overspend at this level will have implications for the sector's sustainability."*

<http://www.scvo.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2012/09/SCVO-Scottish-Third-Sector-Statistics-2012.pdf>

### 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 fifth annual survey highlight the accumulative impact funding cuts have had over the last five years on the ability of Women's Aid groups to maintain high quality services, keep the staff they need to do this work and balance their budgets. Our survey found that to be able to do this services have had to dig into their reserves. For many this is the second year of deficit funding and with limited reserves this is not a sustainable solution to short-falls in funding.

*"We've been forced to use our reserves in the last two years but can't do that again. Unless we can get some funding from somewhere we will have to cut services to make up the shortfall"*

Scottish Women's Aid charity number SC001099.  
Recognized as a charitable organization by the Inland Revenue in Scotland.  
[www.scottishwomensaid.org.uk](http://www.scottishwomensaid.org.uk)