

Help Women's Aid Groups Across Scotland: Open letter for needs-based funding structures

Dear Party Leaders in Scotland,

2021 marks the 30th anniversary of the Global 16 Days of Activism Campaign (25th November – 10th December). This year, we are using this time to reflect on what still needs to be done to support women, children and young people experiencing domestic abuse to feel safe. We need your help.

Women's Aid services have been providing vital frontline specialist support for domestic abuse survivors for over 50 years. In that time, we have grown into a network of services across Scotland. Grassroots community action, side by side with survivors, has been the basis for our work and continues to drive us.

Women's Aid services in Scotland continue to be at the forefront of supporting women, children and young people experiencing domestic abuse; lobbying for policy changes; conducting research to enhance understandings of domestic abuse; and challenging negative attitudes. From the inception of the Women's Aid movement, Women's Aid workers and service users have marched, protested, lobbied, and campaigned to deliver our vision: a Scotland with no domestic abuse, where women, young people, and children enjoy all their human rights and have equal opportunity to explore all their ambitions and aspirations.

Unfortunately, lack of political will has meant that Scotland's network has been eroded by salami-slice cuts to funding, competitive tendering of specialist domestic abuse services, and other poor practices. The upcoming 2022 local authority election offers local politicians a crucial opportunity to shape a future Scotland that we all want to have – one where survivors of domestic abuse get the specialist support they need, how they want it, where they need it, and when they want it. Local women, supported over the years by so many local authorities and politicians, started 50 years ago to build our network of services in Scotland. Most of these services were started by volunteers and survivors.

Now, more than ever, we need your help to protect the safety of children and women living with or experiencing domestic abuse.

"Reports of domestic abuse incidents by Police Scotland have risen for the fourth year in a row, while 81% of Women's Aid services in Scotland suffered cuts to funding from local authorities."

A human rights approach to domestic abuse requires a need-based funding structure for frontline services for women, children and young people experiencing domestic abuse.

Every year thousands of women, children and young people receive critical specialist domestic abuse support from Women's Aid services. Staffed by dedicated, skilled, expert women, who provide life-changing, life-saving emotional and practical support for children and women, advocacy in courts and local services and where appropriate, access to emergency refuge accommodation. Our services also deliver training for professionals and community members in schools and workplaces to shift

attitudes, strengthen practice and highlight the systemic and structural inequality that lies at the root of violence against children and women.

It is in this context that, every day, Women's Aid workers have to make gruellingly difficult decisions about how to use the too-scarce resources they have to meet rising demand for their services. The impact of COVID-19 continues to be felt through court delays and funding cuts.

In the last set of data we collected from services before the outbreak of COVID-19 (April 2019 - March 2020), 65% of Women's Aid services saw demand for women's support services increase. In that same period, 81% of services saw real term cuts to their funding from local authorities, 36% had the same or less money in their overall budgets than the year before, and 39% had to use their emergency financial reserves to maintain essential services.

Relying on a patchwork of funding destabilises and demoralises these critical services. Scotland's domestic abuse support services must have stable, adequately funded, core services based on the needs of survivors accessing services. Minimum funding for core services needs to be protected in law to allow frontline staff to stop chasing ever-smaller pots of money and focus on what they do best – challenging domestic abuse and supporting survivors.

Change at the margins in the form of short-term fixes at national or local levels is not good enough. Real, lasting change requires bold vision, and we're asking that from each of you.

Your championing of our vision of Scotland that is better and safer for women, children and young people will make 2022 a turning point in our joint efforts to end domestic abuse. Please lead from the front by committing, ahead of the 2022 Scottish local elections, to a new model of adequate, stable and sustainable funding for specialist domestic abuse services.

Scottish Women's Aid

Angus Women's Aid	East Ayrshire (Kilmarnock) Women's Aid	Monkland's Women's Aid
Argyll & Bute Women's Aid		Motherwell District Women's Aid
Border Women's Aid	East Dunbartonshire Women's Aid	
Caithness and Sutherland Women's Aid	Edinburgh Women's Aid	North Lanarkshire Women's Aid
Clackmannanshire Women's Aid	Glasgow Women's Aid	Orkney Women's Aid
	Glasgow East Women's Aid	Perthshire Women's Aid
Clydebank Women's Aid	Grampian Women's Aid	Renfrewshire Women's Aid
Dumbarton & District Women's Aid	Hemat Gryffe Women's Aid	Ross-shire, Skye & Lochalsh Women's Aid
	Inverclyde Women's Aid	
Dundee Women's Aid	Inverness Women's Aid	Shakti Women's Aid
East and Midlothian Women's Aid	Lochaber Women's Aid	Shetland Women's Aid
		South Ayrshire Women's Aid

Stirling Women's Aid

WASLER

West Lothian Women's Aid

Western Isles Women's Aid

Wigtownshire Women's Aid