

Health Watch Newcastle – Scoping Paper

Service provision for children and young people affected by domestic abuse

The issue Domestic abuse has a huge impact on families across Newcastle. Prevalence rates are high (one in four women will experience domestic abuse in their lifetime) and there are well-founded concerns about the short and long-term impacts of the pandemic on victims who have faced additional barriers to help-seeking in 2020-21. Newcastle has relatively well-developed services for adult victims (refuge provision, advocacy, support groups). However, provision for children and young people is patchy and under-resourced.

Research shows that children who experience/witness domestic abuse are at significantly increased risk of emotional, behavioural and learning difficulties and that the impact can last into adulthood. These difficulties may include, but are not limited to, anxiety, depression, aggression, nightmares, bedwetting, sleep problems, self-harm and low self-esteem.

Currently a small number of voluntary organisations (Action for Children, Angelou Centre and Barnardo's) provide some specialist, child-focused responses but these are extremely limited in capacity and funded through charitable donations or short-term grants. As one provider put it 'we get all our referrals from the police and don't dare advertise it more widely as we'd be inundated and we already have a waiting list'. Another said 'we have 85 children on our waiting list and our (lottery) funding expires in a year'.

The opportunity The Domestic Abuse Bill, which is due to become law in 2021, introduces a number of changes including:

- asserting that a child who sees or hears, or experiences the effects of, domestic abuse and is related to the person being abused or the perpetrator is also to be regarded as a victim of domestic abuse. The aim of this provision is to ensure locally commissioned services consider and address the needs of children affected by domestic abuse
- requiring local authorities to establish Domestic Abuse Local Partnership Boards (DALPBs) made up of representatives of local authorities, victims and their children, domestic abuse charities, health care providers and criminal justice agencies

Newcastle council expects to hold the first meeting of its DALPB in the summer of 2021.

What we are seeking to achieve (our goal) Health Watch Newcastle (HWN) will amplify the voices of (non-abusive) parents and their children to identify the support children and young people need to cope and recover from the impact of domestic abuse.

The change we want to see (outcomes) HWN will contribute critical service user voices, to a wider effort to ensure more comprehensive provision of recovery and support services for children and young people, with greater security of funding.

Type of work There are three stages to this proposal:

1. Scoping existing provision to establish a baseline by talking to local statutory leads and voluntary sector providers. Talk specifically to Streetwise, CAHMS etc about responses for young people. Also talk to neighbouring specialist providers (e.g. Acorns in North Tyneside) to establish likely levels of need if services are available.
3-5 days of staff/consultant time over one month.

2. Survey survivors of abuse to see what services were available for their children and what they would like to see. Do this by working with organisations working with survivors including: Newcastle Women's Aid; West End Women and Girls; Building Futures East; Changing Lives. Explore the idea of a short survey and work with organisations to hold some focus groups. Develop specific survey questions regarding the needs of young people and hold focus group with Streetwise or similar. Offer small grants of around £500 to (up to six) organisations to support their involvement in this stage. *10-15 days of staff/consultant time over three months.*
3. Produce a report which centres the voices of parents, children and young people and consult with key partners (inc. providers and statutory leads) to produce some clear recommendations relating to commissioning of future provision. Share the report with relevant multi-agency bodies including the Health and Well-being Board and the new DALPB. *5-10 days of staff/consultant time over two months.*

Resources required Total resources required include:

- 18-30 days of staff/consultant time for stages 1-3
- Up to £3,000 in grants (£500 for six orgs) to support focus groups and survey

Key collaborators / partners

- Statutory leads, including: Joan Flood (Newcastle council community safety lead for domestic abuse) who has contributed to this scoping exercise and is keen to help; safeguarding lead and health leads to be identified; Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner which is already active on this issue and will support a co-ordinated approach across health, social care and criminal justice.
- Current children's services providers, including: Action for Children, Angelou Centre, Barnardo's, Children North East, Streetwise and children's centres.
- Services working with survivors, including: Newcastle Women's Aid; West End Women and Girls; Building Futures East and Changing Lives.

Pros and cons of HWN undertaking this work

Pros:

- Changes in legislation, combined with increased awareness around domestic abuse and its impact on children create a unique opportunity in 2021
- HWN can play a key role as an **independent body** amplifying the voices of children and young people (and their parents) to advocate for more and better provision
- Domestic abuse requires co-ordinated multi-agency responses and the health and social care responsibilities here are clear.

Cons:

- New statutory funding is going to be very hard to come by in 2021, a report may be read with interest but achieve little of practical value.

Demonstrating impact In the short-term, impact can be measured by the number of times the report is discussed at key multi-agency meetings and referenced in plans. In the medium-term we would hope the work would contribute to visibly improved provision.

Recommendation to committee To pursue this work with a view to producing a report and recommendations to go to the relevant boards by autumn 2021.