

Joint Cross Party Group on Disability and Cross Party Group on Violence against Women and Children

Wednesday 1st May

Ty Hywel

12 noon – 1.30pm

Chaired by Mark Isherwood

In attendance: Elinor Crouch-Puzey, Zoe Richards, Natasha Hirst, Samantha Williams, Miranda Evans, Simon Green, Lizzy Fauvel, Tina Reece, Hilary Watson, Bethan Sayed AM (Co Chair), Sarah Keef, Mandi Glover, Vicky Snook, Helen Mary Jones AM, Melissa Wood, Gwendolyn Sterk, Sophie Weeks, Bethan McMinn, Sian Davies, Gauri, Heather Kiltie, Julie Richards, Iwan Williams, Sian Vining, Paul Hossack.

Apologies: Helen Jones AM, Fflur Emlyn, Sara Flay, William Fawcett, Wendy Ashton, Jane Ruthe, Lynne Ryan, Llyr Gruffydd AM, Ann Dann, Office of the Future Gen Commissioner, Shahien Taj OBE, Emmy Chatwer.

Presentations

The agreed purpose of the meeting is to launch the report: Supporting disabled people experiencing violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence in Wales. To acknowledge that current systems and programmes don't always understand the higher risk for disabled people and to hear the recommendations.

Tina Reece, Head of Engagement offered an introduction to WWA in Wales and highlighted the 2015 legislation which is unique to Wales. It outlines that Local Authorities have a duty to prevent and that is an important aspect of the legislation.

Following a piece of work previously done by Disability Wales and Cardiff University in 2011 this was an opportunity to re-visit that and push forward with new opportunities.

Elinor Crouch-Puzey led us through the key findings of the report:

They key findings from the report included:

- There was limited data available on the prevalence of domestic abuse experienced by disabled women in Wales, which is needed to inform domestic abuse policy and practice.
- Survivors felt they were sometimes perceived to lack credibility when seeking domestic abuse support from statutory bodies.
- One of the emerging themes was a dissatisfaction with the police response when reporting abuse. This also emerged in the 2011 report.

- There were inconsistent levels of engagement and probing about abuse by primary care services (i.e. GP, A&E) when disabled women sought support for violence against women.
- There was a lack of accessible information on domestic abuse in a range of formats.
- There were inconsistencies in response to domestic abuse provided by statutory bodies.
- There was limited access to accessible housing as well as an unavailability of safe, emergency accommodation that met the access requirements of disabled women
- Only 33% disabled survivors had been referred to or had accessed a specialist VAW service.
- Limited capacity and resources was highlighted as a key barrier by service providers, which prevented them from making adjustments to the built environment to improve physical access to benefit disabled survivors of abuse.
- Despite limited resources, Welsh Women's Aid members highlighted actions they have taken to maximise support for disabled survivors.

Miranda Evans talked through the recommendations:

Informed by survivors' and specialist services feedback, Disability Wales and Welsh Women's Aid makes the following key recommendations based on this survey (further recommendations are at the end of this report):

- We call for the incorporation of the UN Convention on the Rights of Disabled People (UNCRPD) in Welsh policy and legislation. The UNCRPD specifically refers to the multiple discrimination faced by disabled women and calls for appropriate governmental measures to ensure the full development, advancement and empowerment of women (Article 6). It also states the right of disabled people to freedom from exploitation, abuse and torture both within and outside the home (Article 16). The UNCRPD should be fully recognised and implemented through policies and services to tackle violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence.
- Agencies should work to identify disabled survivors and their experiences of abuse as early as possible, through enquiry, and ensure staff are trained to understand and know how to mitigate and reduce the specific barriers to disclosure for disabled people.
- Agencies need to recognise the specific forms which violence against disabled women may take.
- Accessible information on violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence to be available in a range of formats.
- Publicity campaigns aimed at tackling domestic abuse to include disabled people and diversity across different forms of impairments in different communities, recognising that disabled people aren't a homogenous group
- Publicity and materials to include messages that mitigate and challenge victim-blaming myths
- Agencies should routinely record and report information about survivor and perpetrator characteristics i.e. gender, age, sexual orientation, ethnicity, immigration status, and disability – to focus attention on what agencies need to be doing better and how they should adapt to needs rather than expect people to adapt to them.

A survivor then presented a video of her experience and talked about how her disability was used against her in the context of abuse and coercive control. Such as controlling her access to communication devices and undermining her memory of events by suggested she didn't hear things properly.

Samantha Williams talked about the need for early education for women with a learning disability to understand healthy relationships. She talked about particular issues with:

- Levels of understanding what a healthy relationship is
- Not being in control of their lives
- Being vulnerable and therefore targeted
- Not having accessible information
- Not being believed
- Restricted social circles

Questions and comments:

There is now an Easy Read resource available from CDAS developed in partnership with Carmarthenshire People First.

Iwan Williams asked if there are consistent challenges from around Wales or are there regional variations?

Eli answered that there have always been issues around rurality.

Bethan Sayed AM questioned the outcomes from the Chris Wade case and if the report deals with the institutionalised perspective.

Simon Green raised the point that for a lot of disabled people they do not recognise what abuse is in order to report it.

Gauri raised a substantial point around the role of early education in healthy relationships. Sian Davies asked how many of those who responded to the survey were people with a learning disability?

Actions

- To write to the Ministers for Housing, Health and Chief Whip to request meetings
- To write to the four PCCs for Wales to request meetings regarding the police response
- To write to the Equality, local government and communities committee, the Children and Young People Committee and Health, Social Care and Sport Committees and request the report is considered as a future agenda item.
- To send the report to all AMs and request they take forward the recommendations in their work

AOB

A 5 minute presentation was given by Bethan McMinn about a project called Oshi's world

Detail can be found here: <https://www.oshisworld.org/>

Mark thanked those for attending and the support shown for the report.