

WE HAVE SOMETHING TO...



HAVING OUR SAY!

Young people's thoughts on professional learning and development.

Consultation report: Compiled by Women's Aid Federation Northern Ireland for the Safeguarding Board for Northern Ireland

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Voices of Women's Aid Social Action Youth (SAY) group

Women's Aid
 FEDERATION
NORTHERN IRELAND



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Women's Aid Federation Northern Ireland

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Safeguarding Board Northern Ireland

Website: www.safeguardingni.org



A HUGE thank you to the SAY (Social Action Youth) group

Women's Aid NI and SBNI (Safeguarding Board of Northern Ireland) would like to take this opportunity to thank each young person who participated in this consultation workshop and those who gave feedback to the process individually. Their honesty, openness and willingness to share their experiences and ideas has been truly thought provoking and inspiring.

Their thoughts and feedback on the importance of professional training is invaluable. They are the experts by experience and their thoughts and ideas for change are informed by their unique experiences.

Their ideas for support provision have identified skills, creative ideas and solutions (often so simple) that we as professionals may never have thought about or even considered. We have been blown away by the wealth and breadth of their vision for professional training.

These young people want to make a difference, they are change makers, now it is up to all of us, as professionals, to listen to these voices and do them justice by creating change and making a difference for all young people experiencing domestic abuse.

We hope you find these voices as powerful and important as we do.

Thank you for listening!

*Bernie McNally, Chair, Safeguarding Board Northern Ireland
and Patricia Lyness, Chair, Women's Aid Federation NI.*



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SECTION ONE

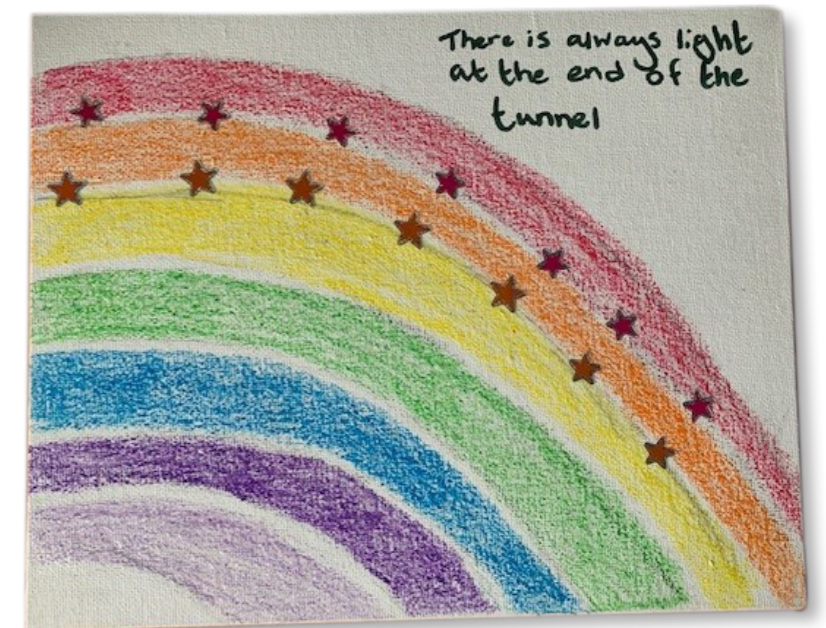
Background to SBNI Domestic Violence and Abuse Subgroup and the Learning and Development Task and Finish Group



1.1 The Domestic Violence and Abuse Subgroup (Coordinated by SBNI)

The Domestic Violence and Abuse Subgroup is coordinated by SBNI (Safeguarding Board for Northern Ireland) and has approximately 20 members. Membership is drawn from all Health and Social Care Trusts (HSCTs), Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI), Public Health Agency (PHA), Probation Board NI, Youth Justice Agency and the Education Authority (EA). There is also representation from a wide range of voluntary organisations who work within the area of domestic violence and abuse including, Include Youth, Barnardos, NSPCC, Women's Aid and Nexus.

The subgroup produced a report in March 2020, *Equally Safeguarded*¹. This report was based upon the findings generated from two processes, a Scoping Exercise and a Training Needs Analysis, conducted among its membership. Both processes were planned and initiated by the Safeguarding Board for Northern Ireland (SBNI), in consultation with the Domestic Violence and Abuse Sub-Group (mandated by the Stakeholder Assurance Group of the *Stopping Domestic and Sexual Violence and Abuse in Northern Ireland, 7-year strategy*). Both processes formed an action listed under the *Stopping Domestic and Sexual Violence and Abuse Strategy, draft 4-year action plan* under the Prevention and Early Intervention strand, priority 9 and 11 (page 3)².



1. SBNI. (March 2020). *Equally Safeguarded- Increasing capacity to support children and young people affected by domestic violence and abuse*. A report based upon findings from a Scoping Exercise and Training Needs Analysis conducted by SBNI on behalf of the Domestic Violence and Abuse Sub-Group: Produced by Women's Aid Federation NI.

2. Justice-ni.gov.uk. Department of Health and Department of Justice. (Online) (Viewed February 2020). *Stopping Domestic and Sexual Violence and Abuse Strategy Draft 4-year action plan*. Available from: <https://www.justice-ni.gov.uk/publications/stopping-domestic-and-sexual-violence-and-abuse-northern-ireland-seven-year-strategy-march-2016>.

1.2 The need for quality professional training

The primary purpose of the Training Needs Analysis was to capture the following:

- Internal and external training received by staff in member agencies in relation to children and young people affected by domestic violence and abuse.
- Whether or not organisations provide training to staff (internally and externally) who work directly with children and young people affected by domestic violence and abuse.
- Any perceived gaps in training for staff who work directly with children and young people affected by domestic violence and abuse.



While limitations with the scale of both the Scoping Exercise and the Training Needs Analysis are acknowledged, both processes provided rich qualitative data highlighting clear understanding of context and need in relation to both service provision and training available.

The *Equally Safeguarded Report* provides a useful insight and perspective from expert agencies, and presents a series of robust recommendations in relation to services available to families experiencing domestic abuse and training provision for all professions who may come into contact with families experiencing domestic abuse.

To follow up on training recommendations presented in *Equally Safeguarded*, an interactive workshop, *Equally Safeguarded, the next steps...* took place on Thursday 8th September 2022. The workshop was coordinated and supported by the Safeguarding Board for Northern Ireland (SBNi), in consultation with the Domestic Violence and Abuse Sub-Group (mandated by the Stakeholder Assurance Group of the *Stopping Domestic and Sexual Violence and Abuse in Northern Ireland*, a seven-year strategy³). It was facilitated by Women's Aid Federation NI and attended by a range of professionals from the statutory and voluntary sector including membership from the Domestic Violence and Abuse Sub-Group.

3. <https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/dhssps/stopping-domestic-sexual-violence-ni.pdf>

The purpose of the workshop was to consider the recommendations relating to training presented in the *Equally Safeguarded* report (below) and to identify next steps in progressing these:

TRAINING NEEDS ANALYSIS:



Establish a Training and Education Sub Group (attached to the Stakeholders Assurance Group) with a specific focus on children and young people.



Develop a standardised framework for training and development that recognises the different levels of training required at the varying points of support intervention.

The workshop made great progress in relation to beginning to explore a structure for a standardised Learning and Development framework for professionals working with families who have experienced or are at risk of experiencing domestic abuse. It also established the Task and Finish Group to develop the Professional Learning and Development Framework. This group, chaired by Nexus NI and with representation from voluntary and statutory training professionals has since met several times to explore and produce a draft Learning and Development framework for professionals.

1.3 Involving the experts by experience

The Learning and Development Task and Finish Group identified the need to consult with children and young people to ensure their voices are heard in the development of the Learning and Development Framework. They are experts by experience and are best placed to identify what best practice in terms of support provision looks like and the skills, knowledge and understanding needed to ensure this.

Women's Aid Federation NI was appointed to deliver a creative and robust consultation process to capture the views and ideas of a diverse group of young people involved in the Women's Aid regional Youth Social Action project, funded by Children in Need.

SECTION TWO

Background to Women's Aid SAY group



2.1 Background to the group

Women's Aid NI has established and launched an exciting youth led project, funded by Children in Need through the Youth Social Action Fund. The SAY (Social Action Youth) project has involved the coordination of a series of regional Women's Aid youth led workshops for young people aged 11-18. The SAY project brings together a diverse group of young people (of post primary age) currently engaged in Women's Aid services across NI, who are survivors of domestic abuse. The young people work in partnership with staff to help drive forward change. The project has three clear outputs:

- **Facilitate** young people's input into government strategy.
- **Inform** the development of a Training and Learning Framework for professionals working with children and young people affected by domestic abuse.
- **Develop** branding for educational resources for young people including a Healthy Relationships Website and a post primary education programme focusing on Healthy Relationships.

2.2 SAY Workshops – the journey so far

The SAY project has involved a series of regional, fun filled productive workshops between Spring and Autumn 2023. The workshops enable young people from Women's Aid groups across NI to come together, have a say in issues affecting them and make a difference for other young people. Young people participating will benefit from three overarching outcomes (big differences) as presented:



There are currently 17 young people involved in the SAY group, 13 girls and 4 boys, ranging from 11 - 18 years of age. The workshops have been facilitated in partnership with Tinderbox Theatre Company and are divided into morning and afternoon sessions. Morning sessions are facilitated by Tinderbox and are therapeutic in nature, providing the young people with an opportunity to explore an area of personal development in a creative way using movement, drama etc. Morning sessions include ice breakers and team building activities. Some themes we have explored to date in morning sessions include, *our relationship with ourselves, resilience, how our body keeps the score in relation to trauma, and creative activism*. These have been well received by the young people and are a good way to encourage them to relax together as a group and prepare them for the afternoon session which has the social action element.

Afternoon sessions have drawn on young people's experience as change makers and experts by experience. These have a Social Action element and draw on young people's views and expertise through discussion, working in groups etc. The first Social Action session encouraged young people to develop their vision for the project and think about how we can raise awareness of healthy relationships with young people. They shared their ideas on key messages for young people in relation to healthy relationships and how we can ensure these messages are heard (including the development of a website and schools programme). Other Social Action topics worked on include, responding to the draft *Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy*, and on 3rd August the workshop focused entirely on consulting on a *Learning and Development Framework for Professionals* working with children and young people affected by domestic abuse (for the Safeguarding Board NI). The group has also worked in partnership with Allstate NI to develop branding for the website and resources. The Social Action element of the workshops has been very powerful and young people have shared their views honestly and articulately, and have evidenced their valuable role as agents for change.

2.3 A safe and supportive environment

All young people participating in the SAY project have experienced domestic abuse. Their safety and support is always the priority. All young people attending are accompanied by their Women's Aid Children and Young People's Support Workers, ensuring a full wrap around support framework if they are triggered in any way before, during or after workshops.

Each session is opened with a review of boundaries and how everyone works together as a group to ensure a safe and supportive space for all young people participating. Each of the local Women's Aid NI groups have robust child protection and safeguarding policies in place.

If anything was disclosed on the day that caused concern, it is the responsibility of the local project to follow the procedures and guidance within their policy. Young people are invited to participate in all activities and are fully supported to do so.

WORKING TOGETHER

The SAY group agreement



SECTION THREE

Consultation approach



3.1 Focus of consultation

It was decided that, in order to best consult with young people from the SAY group in relation to The Learning and Development Framework for Professionals, it would be best to dedicate an entire workshop to this. This would ensure young people had enough time to focus on all issues involved. Given the importance of professional training, it was also felt this would ensure a robust and thorough response.

The consultation workshop was held on 3rd August 2023 in the Dunsilly Hotel, Antrim. The focus of the consultation was:

To gather young people's thoughts on the importance of training for professionals, the skills, knowledge and understanding needed and what their vision of best practice support would be.

The session was participative in nature and followed the format below:

10.00	Arrive, snacks and get settled
10.30	Welcome, purpose of day, review group contract
10.45	Tinderbox drama workshop – The body keeps the score movement therapy and the drama triangle
12.45	Lunch and treats
1.30	Over to you! Your thoughts on the SBNI training framework What training do adults need to help them support children and young people? What does good support look like? Working in groups
3.45	Creative evaluation, close

Young people who were unable to attend on the day, were invited to respond to the questions individually and Women's Aid Support Workers facilitated this process outside of SAY workshops. The previous workshop held on 27th July focused upon a consultation on the NI draft Violence against Women and Girls Strategy. Many comments relating to

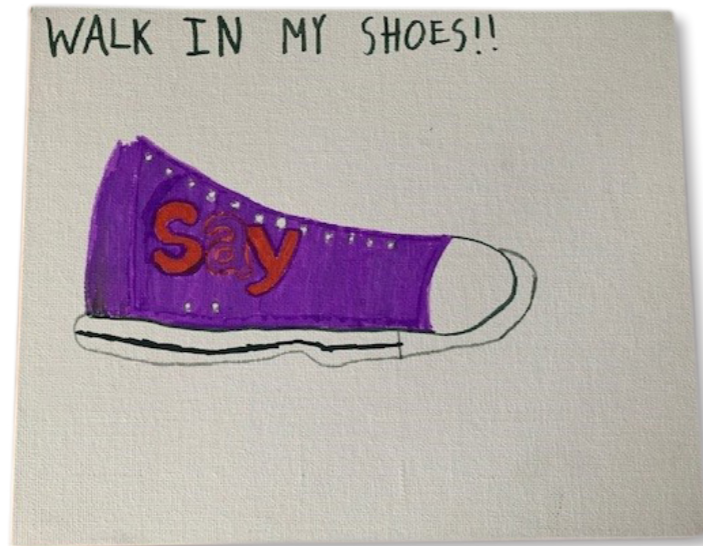
professional training were shared at this workshop and have been included also. Additionally, the discussion was revisited at the following workshop on 23rd August to ensure all young people had an opportunity to input. The session began by setting the background and context for the consultation by exploring:

- Why are we here?
- What is SBNI?
- What are the expectations on you?
- How will the information provided from this workshop be used?
- How we will keep you informed and updated



The aim of the Domestic Abuse Learning and Development Framework was presented to the group:

This Domestic Abuse Learning and Development Framework will contribute to the improvement in recognition and support for children, young people and their families affected by Domestic Abuse.



3.2 What young people bring to the table

The importance of the group's input into this process was highlighted in terms of what they bring to the table. This is presented on the right.



The importance of their voice being embedded in this process was highlighted from the outset. They are the experts by experience and are best placed to define best practice in support provision.

3.3 Structure and questions

The session focused on the provision of timely and effective support to families experiencing domestic abuse and ultimately what needs to happen to ensure this is achieved. It was based upon the premise that support is holistic, and professional development (Learning and Development) is only one element of this. Good support is based upon a holistic approach which must be centred on four distinct elements (*Place, Process, Professional development and Person*). These 4 Ps are further explored:

Place: the creation of a safe space is vital. One where a young person feels comfortable. A calm space where the young person feels welcomed and valued.

Process: based upon the needs of the young person. It must be timely and tailored to their needs. It must be based upon a clear support plan. It is crucial the process is not rushed in any way.

Professional development: it is important professionals have the necessary knowledge, skills and understanding to identify support needs and ensure best practice in support provision.

Person: values, behaviours and approach of the person delivering support. Training can only go so far in terms of developing skills and understanding. The delivery of person centred, trauma informed approaches will be down to the values and behaviours of the person and ultimately their desire to make a difference.



Questions for discussion

Each group had four key questions to consider (based on the 4 Ps presented). Questions were as follows:

GROUP 1

1. Why is it important we have trained professionals to support children and young people who have experienced domestic abuse?
2. What would good support (a safe space) look like?
3. What might stop a young person from seeking support?
4. What would help or encourage them to seek out support or talk to someone?

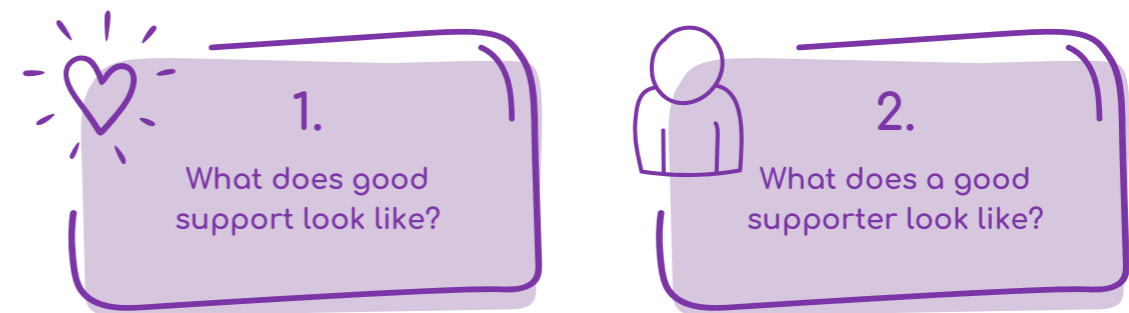
GROUP 2

1. What skills, knowledge and qualities would a good supporter have?
2. What sort of things would they say/how would they appear/ behave?
3. What would you like the professionals in your life to know about children and young people's experiences of domestic abuse?
4. What training do they need to have?



Drawing activity

Each group was then provided with arts and crafts supplies and asked to participate in a drawing activity as follows:



Group one was provided with flipchart paper and art supplies and was encouraged to come up with a “toolbox” to be included in professional training based upon question 1, What does good support look like?

Group two was provided flipcharts and craft materials. Flipcharts had been prepared and were cello taped together. One person was encouraged to lie down on the flipchart sheets and others drew around their body shape. The group then worked together to create their vision of an ideal supporter based upon question 2, What does a good supporter look like?

Each group then appointed a rapporteur to present to the larger group and highlight discussion that took place in groups.

SECTION FOUR

Young people have their SAY!



Each group had time allocated to consider the questions provided. Questions generated a wealth of discussion which was recorded and captured on flipcharts. Responses to all eight questions are now provided:

Question 1: Why is it important we have trained professionals to support children and young people who have experienced domestic abuse?

What the Women's Aid Social Action Youth group SAY!

- *To make young people feel comfortable.*
- *So that young people feel heard.*
- *It is important the body language matches what is being said.*
- *So they can respond appropriately when a young person discloses, but also so that they are approachable to young people, which may encourage disclosure.*
- *So they are aware of the signs and can concentrate on these.*
- *So they are not pushy – and can better communicate.*
- *To understand children's and young people's right to privacy.*
- *So they have better awareness of the issues involved with DA i.e. contact arrangements.*
- *Professionals and practitioners should be vetted regularly and receive regular training.*



Key discussion highlights

The importance of support services for children and young people who have experienced domestic abuse was discussed at length in both groups. All young people felt this was vital. There was unanimous agreement that children and young people are equal victims of domestic abuse and as such are entitled to quality support provision from trained professionals. The need for early intervention was also highlighted to ensure the trauma experienced through domestic abuse does not carry on into adulthood and lead to further problems for the young person. The need for tailored support was also discussed and it was felt that both group support and individual support are needed from a wide range of professionals. The group felt strongly that training is only part of the bigger picture. As one young person said: **You can have someone who has all the training in the world but if they don't want to help a young person then it's not going to make any difference.**

“
Because of how complex domestic abuse is. It has so many variables and outcomes. Guidance is so important because it's so different to any other experience you could be in. It's years of buildup and trying to break this down. This is impossible without the proper support person.
”

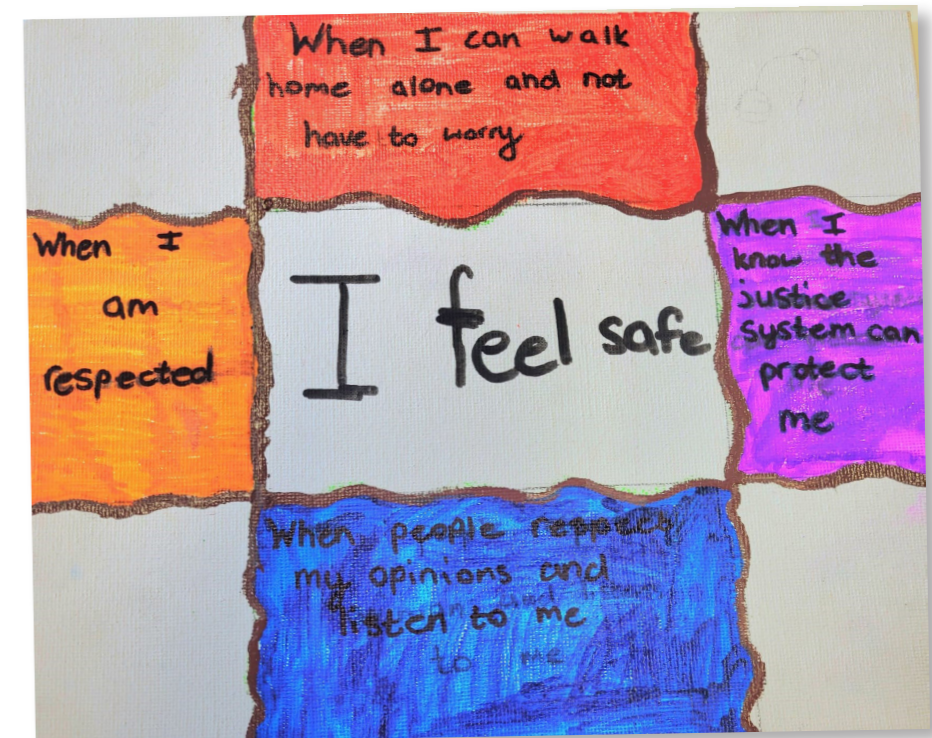
“
Police should try and be more engaged and human with children.
”
“
Play therapy before things like meeting contact social workers/ABE interviews with police.
”

“
It is important to have trained professionals to support children and young people who have experienced domestic abuse so that this will not affect them from developing relationships themselves later in life - This will always affect them, but this support may help them to be able to have their own relationships while also understanding their feelings are validated and they are not alone.
”

Question 2: What would good support (a safe space) look like?

What the Women's Aid Social Action Youth group SAY!

- Somewhere that is comfortable and has space.
- Somewhere with no stigma.
- Somewhere I feel welcome.
- A sensory room.
- Outside school.
- A certain teacher's classroom.
- Happens naturally (not forced).
- Balance between openness and privacy.
- Other options for support rather than just talking – art, drama etc.
- Option of confidentiality.
- Open transparency.



Key discussion highlights

The environment in which support is provided was discussed and all young people felt the creation of a safe supportive space was important. Financial and capacity issues were taken on board and understood by the young people, and it was agreed, creating a safe space need not cost lots of money, it just needs thought and understanding. The term **“support without stigma”** was used frequently. Young people talked about being embarrassed to be singled out and called to the **“school counsellors’ room”**. Instead, they would prefer a neutral, natural space that provides a relaxed and comfortable environment where they can open up and talk at their own pace. Young people shared ideas such as an anonymous **“question postbox”** in schools and youth settings where they could leave a message if they felt they needed support. Young people also talked about **“support where you are at”**. This involves bringing support to the young person in a place where they feel safe. This could be a coffee shop or a walk in a park. Additional comments and suggestions included:

“In the classroom, rather than being rushed or removed, have a safe space in every room.”

“Instead of the teachers coming in and saying where you are going, they should say you need to do a job, but it’s like a key word to say you’re going to counselling.”

“A good support or safe space will not look like a counsellor’s room, but it may look like a comfortable place to each person - For some this could be a coffee shop, for others it could be school, or an office with cushions and candles. This will be different to each person.”

“Group and one to ones like I have. Being able to talk but also sit in silence in comfort. To be there to receive support. As little pressure to commit as possible and more freedom around this.”

“A safe space to be vulnerable and show your flaws that have developed through domestic abuse with no judgement. No expectations to get better instantly and to know this is a gradual process and there is no rush to get better.”

Question 3: What might stop a young person from seeking support?

What the Women's Aid Social Action Youth group SAY!

- Fear that home life might change.
- Waiting time for support to help you, what way it affects you mentally.
- Social services involved and life will change, and you don't know how it will change your life and fear of being at home because you have sought out help.
- Not knowing where to seek support.
- Being treated differently at school.
- Fear of corruption from the perpetrator.
- Broken trust from seeking help (unsuccessfully) before.
- Fear on speaking out because trusted adults told people above them without the young person knowing.
- If you don't mesh (gel) with the support organisation you won't talk to them.



Key discussion highlights

The fear of reaching out to access support is very real for children and young people and must never be underestimated. Fear of change and loss is a huge factor. As one young person said: **My bedroom was my safe space, it was where I could go, and all my things were there. Suddenly it looked like I could lose all that and have to move somewhere I didn't know and that was really scary.** Access to support services was discussed as a major barrier to seeking support. Young people said that it's hard to know where to start, others talked about lengthy waiting times, especially for mental health services such as CAMHS. Others talked about times when they had reached out previously and felt they had been let down and how this has, to a certain extent, broken their trust with supportive adults. Once again, the stigma attached to domestic abuse was discussed. Young people did not want to be treated differently, either by teachers or by their peers, they simply wanted someone to be there for them when they needed it. The need for tailored support was also discussed and some people felt that you needed to find the right organisation for you. Sometimes young people just don't gel with a support worker or a support organisation and when that is

the case, it is important that an alternative is available. Additional comments and suggestions included:

“
There is a lot of things that could stop a young person taking support - Their parents could be one of them; Their mum might not be ready to admit they are in this type of relationship so the children or young people may not be able to reach out for support. They also might be embarrassed that they need help.
”

“
Cultural background. Fear of abuser. Paranoid he is everywhere and will know you are getting support. Isolation. Knowledge of support that's there. A lot of abuse is normalised. Knowing you are not alone after years of feeling alone.
”

Question 4: What would help or encourage a young person to seek out support or talk to someone?

What the Women's Aid Social Action Youth group SAY!

- Talking about different situations and raising awareness about domestic abuse.
- Making it normalized to talk about if you need to talk to a charity.
- Creating peer friendships.
- Be honest and keep confidentiality to a need-to-know basis and if it needs to be broken there needs to be a plan that has the child's best interest, and the child needs to know.
- A support room for the young person that has any questions or leaflets if they need any numbers or charities or organisations for certain situations.
- Young people NEED to have a say in their life.
- Trust between authority figures.
- Feeling that you can talk to the adult for just someone to talk to and it not be shared as the new gossip in the staff room.
- Advocacy if someone needs help but has disabilities.
- Showing that they are human and are not just doing their job because they are paid.
- Being told how you can support family members in this situation and what support you can both get to stop the frustration and help the young person understand why it is happening.

Key discussion highlights

Talking about domestic abuse more widely to bring it out into the open and help to normalise it was highlighted. Young people felt the strength of the Women's Aid Social Action

Youth project is that it provides opportunities for them to meet other young people who have been through similar circumstances and create peer friendships. Comments from young people have included:

“
*It helped me find more like me.
Everyone got the chance to express themselves.
It is important to give young people an opportunity to express themselves and their opinions on the future.
We talked about what the government needs to do.
It shows how important it is that things like these need to be talked about.
We need to be heard!
We came together as a community to share ideas.
I met new people, people validated my feelings.*
”

Listening to young people and spending time to develop trust was also highlighted. Young people talked about having a support who **had their back** and would **go that extra mile** to make a difference for them. Additional comments and suggestions included:

“
*Young people need to know and understand there are young people and children going through this daily and there are people in and out of support. They need to know asking for help is nothing to be embarrassed over. Hearing other kids' stories may help to encourage young people to step forward.

(Have) letters from other young people on experience of the service.*
”



Question 5: What skills, knowledge and qualities would a good supporter have?

What the Women's Aid Social Action Youth group SAY!

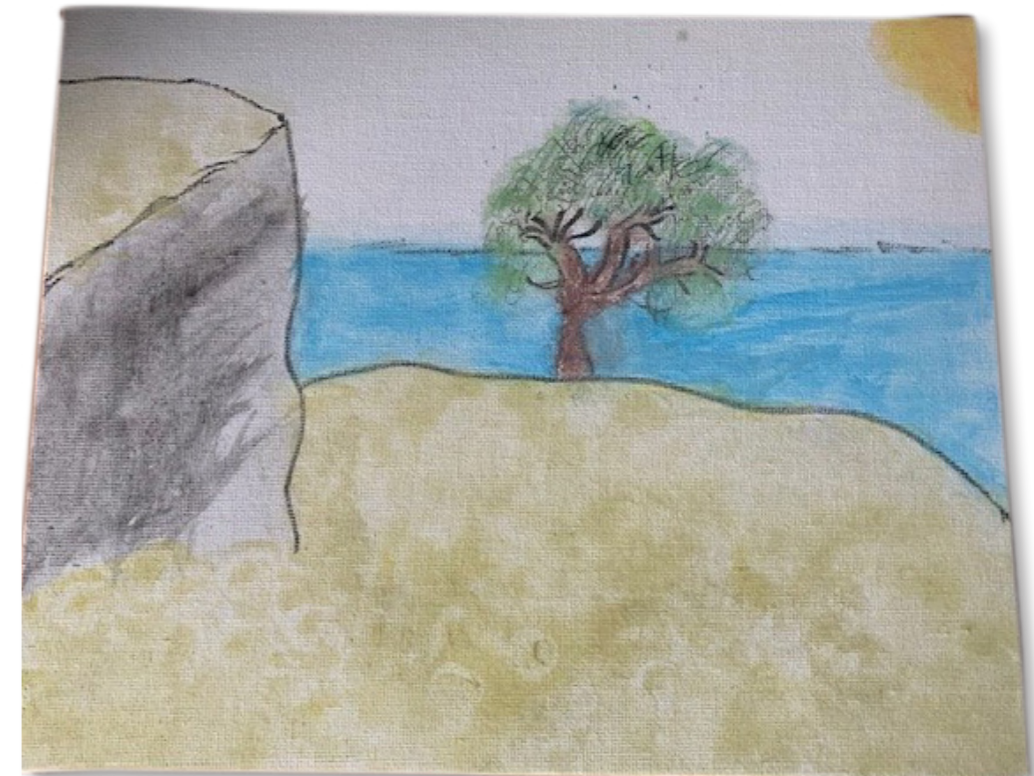
- Confidential.
- Connection.
- Present.
- Support that is not time focused (such as 6 weeks).
- A heart.
- Flexibility.
- Listening skills are essential.
- Trauma informed.
- Understanding of teenage mental health needs.
- Understanding of situation.
- More loyalty.
- Length of support (tailored to needs of child or young person).

Key discussion highlights

Young people had so much to say about what would make a good supporter and this was further developed in the drawing activity. Again, it was agreed that training is important, but this is only part (although a very important part) of the picture of support provision. Young people talked about the need to be human first and felt that qualities such as compassion, empathy and understanding are to a certain extent more important than training. All young people had good examples of adults who had been positive role models and social guardians in their lives. Common traits included, listening skills, flexibility, time and loyalty. It was agreed that some people can be trauma informed without ever having had trauma informed training. As one young person said **It's just in them, it's how they are and how they want to be.** Additional comments and suggestions included:

Compassion, understanding of domestic abuse, emotionally mature, empathy, active listening, interpersonal relationship skills, sincerity, genuine and someone who doesn't treat you like a "client" or "patient."

Good qualities for a supporter to have is to be able to listen and acknowledge young people, They are not looking for solutions always as it's not an overnight fix - a lot of time they aren't listened to at home and just want to be listened to and their feelings validated. They need to know that the stories they hear can be very sad or traumatic and young people or children do not need their support being surprised or look scared when [they are] telling their story.



Question 6: What sort of things would they say/how would they appear/behave?

What the Women's Aid Social Action Youth group SAY!

- Question without judgement.
- Be supportive.
- Explain 'it's not your fault.'
- Body language.
- Communication skills.
- Not intimidating.
- Aware of uniform (take off jacket or body armor if police)
- Open body language.
- Don't stand (or sit) too close.
- Have contact at eye level.
- Calm voice.
- Confident, strong – allow the child to leave the 'protector role' and just be a child.
- Focus on child... not notes.
- Connect, be genuine.



Key discussion highlights

The importance of body language was discussed at length. Young people are naturally attuned to body language and as young people in the group said, **it is easy to spot when someone isn't genuine**. In terms of behaviour, young people felt it was important to give the young person 100% attention. This would involve having direct eye contact at their level (even if this means getting down on the floor to be at their level) while still respecting the boundaries of space and privacy. Making sure the young person doesn't feel rushed was highlighted e.g., not checking watches for time, or reading notes. The importance of dress was discussed, and young people felt strongly about this, they explained that they need to feel comfortable with a supporter. If they are wearing a suit or a uniform this could hinder this and present a barrier. The example of a police officer was used, and young people suggested that they could simply take off their headwear and body armor or possibly put a more casual coat or hoodie on over their uniform. The importance of genuine connection was emphasized, and young people said that ultimately what they want, is someone who you can tell wants to be there and wants to make a difference for you and your family. Additional comments and suggestions included:

“
The Supporter would appear casual and not wear anything logoed or that would identify them to the public or anyone else, they would try stay calm and collected to the child. They would speak calmly to the young person. They would remember the child or young person has probably spent a long-time reading body language so should keep this in mind.
”

“
Eye contact, reassurance, good at handling and talking about self-worth, don't dismiss important feelings, taking the time to break down the young people's struggles, i.e. learning why the young person feels the way they do. Relaxed appearance and a good balance between full of energy and completely zen.
”

Question 7: What would you like the professionals in your life to know about children and young people's experiences of domestic abuse?

What the Women's Aid Social Action Youth group SAY!

- *Safeguarding – like knowing about orders, and schools knowing who can pick them (children and young people) up and who cannot.*
- *Pastoral care, office workers and Principals knowing arrangements with care and pickups... risks and dangers.*
- *Listening, and the importance of really listening.*
- *If you haven't been in the situation, you can empathize, but you don't truly understand.*
- *Do not make assumptions based on what you have read about them in notes.*
- *Don't try and tell them (young people) how they should feel.*
- *Listen to their story.*

Key discussion highlights

Young people talked about the need for adults to know when there are legal orders such as non-molestation, contact and residency and occupancy orders in place to ensure safety and reduce risk. Examples were shared within the group where communication and information sharing had broken down between professionals and this had resulted in dangerous situations. Young people talked about how unique every person's experience of domestic abuse can be and how it isn't a **one size fits all** approach when it comes to support.

The importance of not making assumptions was highlighted and the importance of not forming a picture of the young person solely based upon what is in their notes, there is so much more to their story. Additional comments and suggestions included:

It is a very traumatic event and may have been going on for years or weeks. Every case is different, and every child/young person will react or need to be treated individually not as another number.

It's completely individual. Some reactions can't be explained so patience is required. Just because you don't physically experience abuse doesn't mean you haven't experienced it or been impacted. It's important to treat two siblings as two individuals with two very separate experiences.



Question 8: What training do they need to have?

What the Women's Aid Social Action Youth group SAY!

- Children's experience of domestic abuse and its impact.
- Risks of domestic abuse – how serious it is and can be.
- Listening to your story on your view and perspective.
- Understanding of Orders, and how to deal when (perpetrator) goes to the school.
- Mental Health and physical wellbeing of young people (and issues that impact this).
- Information sharing, when you need to and don't have to... updated constantly.
- Child protection training constant... NOT ONE-OFF!
- Training on trauma and its impact, how to support young people through trauma.
- How to communicate with children and young people.

Key discussion highlights

All young people felt training for professionals was important, but again, only part of the bigger picture of support provision. Young people felt that professionals working with families who have experienced domestic abuse need to have a clear understanding of the prevalence and impact it can have, especially on children and young people. They need to be aware of issues such as coercive control and ensure they can spot the signs. Training needs to be focused on children and young people as equal victims and not as merely witnesses. Again, an understanding of legal remedies was felt to be important. Young people felt that training needs to be a continuous process, not a one off, especially in relation to child protection. Again, training in how to listen, really listen to young people was highlighted. Additional comments and suggestions included:

“
The training they need to have will depend on the age group they are working with as some things will work for younger kids but not work for teenagers or older kids.
”

“
Experience is so much more than reading a book/ text on domestic abuse. Understanding it is important and more important than knowledge.
”

General comments from young people about training for professionals:



DRAWING ACTIVITY 1



A professional **toolbox** for supporting young people who have experienced domestic abuse.

- 💡 **Knowledge** - of domestic abuse
- 💡 **A paintbrush** - to paint a brighter future
- 💡 **A scraper** - to strip back the trauma
- 💡 **A hammer** - to break the silence
- 💡 **A spanner** - to turn the mindset from victim to creator
- 💡 **Creative pliers** - to pull out the truth (skillfully)
- 💡 **A torch** - to shine a light on domestic abuse
- 💡 **A measuring tape** - to set goals and measure the road to recovery
- 💡 **A balloon** - for fun and enjoyment
- 💡 **A padlock** - to create a safe space
- 💡 **A first aid kit** - for emergency support, as well as long term
- 💡 **Tea and a hobnob biscuit** - for calm and comfort
- 💡 **A sign!** - to show direction and not to miss the signs of abuse
- 💡 **A genuine smile** - to put people at ease

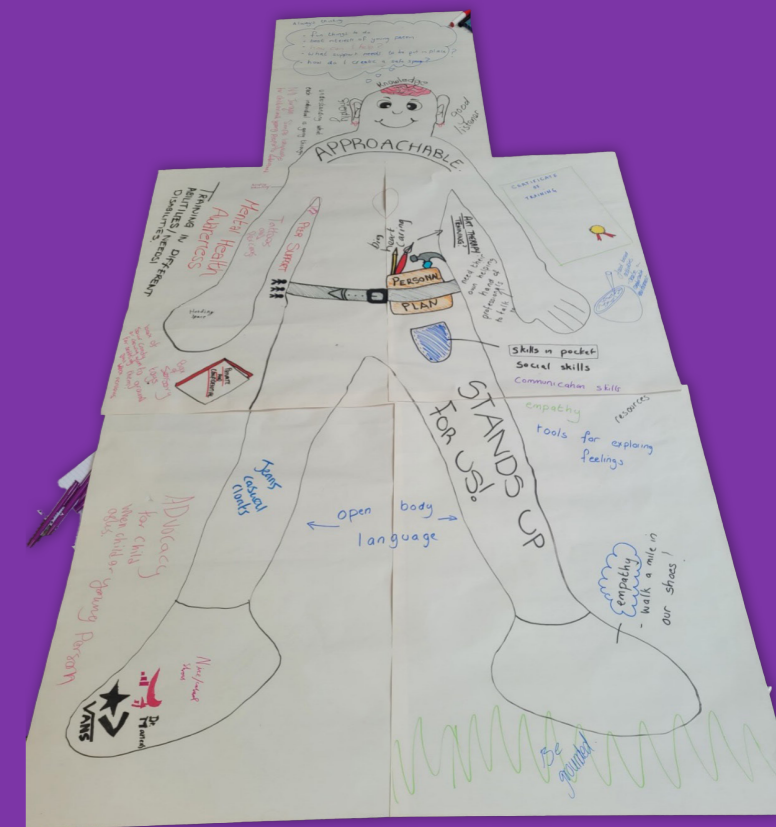


DRAWING ACTIVITY 2



A professional **supporter** for children and young people experiencing domestic abuse

- 💡 Always thinking...
 - Of fun things to do
 - Best interests of young person
 - How can I help?
 - What support needs to be put in place?
 - How do I create a safe place?
- 💡 Friendly, knowledgeable, a good listener
- 💡 Understanding what each person is going through
- 💡 No jargon – simple language for children and young people to understand
- 💡 Good listener, approachable
- 💡 Mental health awareness
- 💡 Training in different abilities/needs/disabilities
- 💡 Tattoos and piercings (not essential) – smell good
- 💡 Peer support
- 💡 Holding space
- 💡 Big heart – caring
- 💡 Personal plan
- 💡 Art therapy training
- 💡 Need their own helping hand of professionals to talk to
- 💡 Food based activities
- 💡 Create a comfortable environment
- 💡 Skills in pocket – social skills, Communication skills, empathy, resources and tools for exploring feelings
- 💡 Box of sour candy or chewing gum to help settle you down
- 💡 Box of sensory toys to ground them
- 💡 Private and confidential book
- 💡 Jeans, casual clothes, nice casual shoes, Dr. Martens, Vans, Nike
- 💡 Advocacy for child
- 💡 Open body language
- 💡 Stands up for us
- 💡 Empathy – can walk a mile in our shoes!
- 💡 Be grounded



SECTION FIVE

Reflections, suggestions and 11 top tips from the SAY group



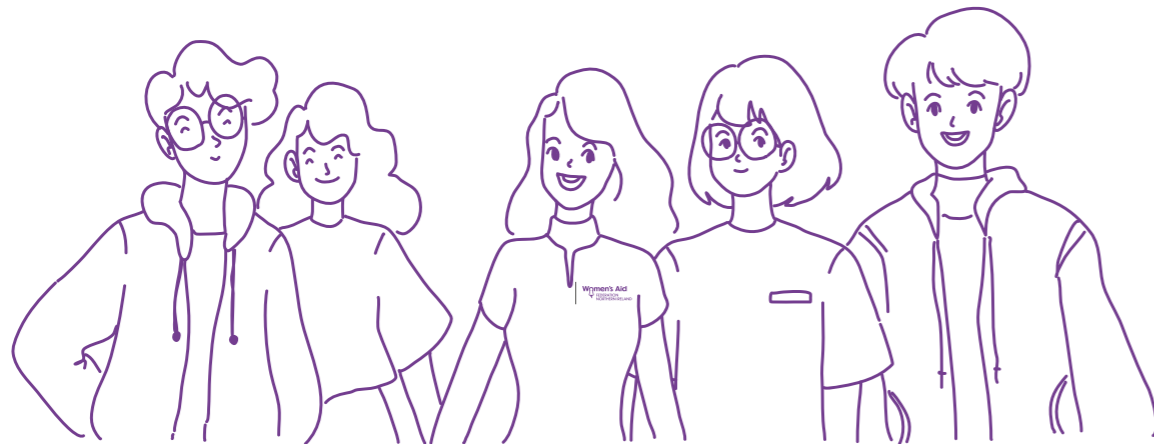
5.1 Reflections

This report has:

- **Provided** background to the SBNI Domestic Violence and Abuse subgroup and the Learning and Development Task and Finish Group.
- **Introduced** the Women's Aid NI Social Action Youth (SAY) group and outlined group purpose and achievements.
- **Described** the consultation approach used to gather feedback and thoughts from the SAY group on the importance of and need for professional training.
- **Presented** young people's voices in relation to best practice support and training provision.
- **Highlighted** that training is only one element in an overall support framework and while important, needs to be considered in line with the four Ps, Person, Place, Process and Professional development.
- **Shared** the SAY group 11 top tips for supporting young people who have experienced domestic abuse.

5.2 Suggestions – 11 top tips from the experts

As professionals and practitioners, we bring our own perspective to training and development, in the belief that we have a good understanding of what is needed and where the gaps are. This is often based upon our perceived understanding of children and young people's experiences and interpretations of need. It is also supported and endorsed by our professional experience and up to date research and relevant policy.



While this perspective is important and our commitment to making a difference is genuine, we must remember that unless we listen...really listen, to children and young people, our plans for effective support provision will never be fully informed. We must continually remind ourselves that children and young people are experts by experience and know what is needed to make things better in their lives. Unless we actively listen to children and young people, to their stories, to their views, to their hopes for the future and to their ideas for change, we will never get it completely right, even with access to a quality professional Learning and Development Framework. Training in itself is not enough; we must also take action based on what they tell us and play our part in improving the lives of children and young people affected by domestic abuse.

What this consultation process has shown us, is that we need to listen attentively to what children and young people are telling us. It is only through really listening and seeing things from their perspective that we, as professionals, practitioners and adults who want to make a difference, will be fully informed to act, for and with them, to make things better and to ensure service development is based upon real need.

Young people were asked what their top tips for professionals supporting young people who have experienced domestic abuse would be. Their open and honest responses provide us all, as professionals, with a wealth of food for thought.

These fall into the following 11 top tips and are presented in no particular order or priority:

11 Top tips

for supporting young people from the Women's Aid SAY (Social Action Youth) group

1. **Listen to our needs** - don't be complacent in your role and don't be reliant on your notes.
2. **Stand for us** - have our best interests at heart AT ALL TIMES.
3. **You don't need loads of training** - it's more important to be human and approachable.
4. **Your best tools are your values and personality.** How you are with us is as important (if not more so) than the service you provide.
5. **Check in on young people** - say hello and acknowledge us, get to know us on a personal basis.
6. **Be transparent about what is happening** - what the process is, young people need to hear this.
7. **Everybody needs different tools within their roles**, i.e, police officer, teacher, counsellor.
8. **Be a person... not your job.** Be human first and your profession next.
9. **Respect children and young peoples need for privacy.** We understand some things need to be shared but only do this when necessary to keep us safe.
10. **To stay safe we might need to close down and box up our feelings.** Help us open up at OUR pace.
11. **Recognise that experience of abuse is completely individual.** It's important to treat siblings as individuals with separate experiences.

And finally...What young people said about having their SAY

The BEST things about the workshop...

Knowing I was getting heard.

It will be change for the better finally.

Making us feel empowered that our voices were heard.

Something I am taking away...

Memories.

That we have helped generations that haven't even started yet because our voice is heard.

What I would like to happen next...

Stormont hearing about us.

For our politicians to do the job they are paid for and not what their personal view is.

That we are heard.

Today was important because...

To change the WORLD for the better.

Of abuse and our voices being heard.

It will help children in the future.

We looked at what training people need.

One other thing I'd like to say is...

Thank you so much for listening to me.

Thank you for giving me this opportunity.

Thank you for funding this.



Women's Aid
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