



Dumfries and Galloway  
Violence Against Women and Girls  
**Biennial Report** 2020 - 2022



## Foreword – Hamish McGhie, Independent Chair, Dumfries & Galloway Public Protection Committee



Being chair of the Dumfries and Galloway Public Protection Committee since September 2021, I am proud to publish this first dedicated report for the Violence Against Women and Girls agenda. I hope that this biennial report will now be followed up by annual reports to illustrate the breadth of work to protect those who may or have come to harm.

I must firstly pay thanks to those staff and partners who rose to the unprecedented challenges over the past two particularly demanding years to progress Violence Against Women and Girls priorities and responsibilities. Staff and partners stepped up to support and protect our communities and assist those most in need of support and protection in unprecedented times.

In Dumfries and Galloway, the Violence Against Women and Girls agenda and responsibility now firmly sits within our Public Protection Partnership, and unlike the responsibilities for Child Protection and Adult Support and Protection within the partnership, a dedicated Violence Against Women and Girls Sub-committee reports to the Public Protection Committee. The

sub-committee has been pivotal in ensuring the critical role our third sector partners is firmly at the forefront of work undertaken and help steer our priority development and we are able to support wherever possible the work they do. I am particularly proud of the case studies presented in this report, illustrating the life changing work undertaken.

There remain significant challenges ahead that will impact our local capacity in this area. There are concerns surrounding the cost-of-living challenges and national centralisation agenda and direction of the National Care Service. The emergence of both will again severely test the capacity and ability to adapt of staff and partners.

### **Vikki Binnie, Chair, Violence Against Women and Girls Sub Committee and Community Justice Partnership Manager**

I have had the honour and privilege of Chairing the Violence Against Women and Girls Sub Committee for the last two years, taking on the role mid-way through this reporting period after being Vice Chair for a number of years. Whilst we are a sub committee of Public Protection we see ourselves very much as a partnership of equals, recognising each other's expertise and valuing what each of us brings to every meeting. I can't thank partners enough for their passion and enthusiasm in driving work forward to support women and children across our region and to highlight the impact of this often hidden harm. We must not forget that violence against women is 'both a cause of and caused by gender inequality' this cannot be tackled by any single person or agency and must be continually challenged. Sadly the ongoing cost of living crisis exacerbates existing inequalities making it even more important that we ensure Violence Against Women is absolutely everyone's business.



Covid saw us all facing some of the most challenging times in our lifetime. We were acutely aware of the increased risk to women and children during this time and partners were keen to see meeting frequency increase in recognition of this, ensuring effective sharing of information and concerns. Services stepped up to the challenge, going above and beyond to make sure contact was maintained and people felt safe and supported. We should also recognise the impact of this on staff who were also working very differently, often having to have very difficult conversations within their own home rather than the office and the effect of this on their own wellbeing.

Again, a sincere and heartfelt thanks to all. Unfortunately the impact of covid continues, we are seeing this particularly with court backlogs, meaning Victims and survivors are having to wait long periods of time before their case comes to court. Services are having to support these women and children for much longer than they did previously and have shared the increasing trauma and stress this causes families and the workers involved.

One of the busiest times of the year for us is always 16 Days of Activism for the Elimination of Violence Against Women. Raising public awareness has always been a strength of the Violence Against Women and Girls Sub Committee but this 16 day period pushed that up to another level. Very much multi agency, it was engaging, challenging and powerful.

Finally a huge thanks to our Violence Against Women Coordinator Kerry Herriott and also to Luis Pombo (Research and Information Officer and MARAC Coordinator) for coordinating this work, pulling together national and local expertise, sharing the programme of 16 Days events so widely and driving forward the collective work of the Violence Against Women and Girls Sub Committee. I'm sure I speak for us all in expressing my gratitude to you both.

## Introduction

Violence against women and girls is part of the continuum of abuse that falls within gender based violence. It has been recognised locally and internationally that it is both a cause of and caused by gender inequality.

**Equally Safe Scotland's Strategy** for preventing and eradicating violence against women and girls is the national Violence Against Women strategy that was published by the Scottish Government and COSLA in 2016. Violence Against Women Partnerships are the multiagency group who are tasked with carrying out the activities to prevent and eradicate all forms of Violence Against Women in their local areas. In Dumfries and Galloway the Public Protection Partnership with a Public Protection Committee and dedicated Violence Against Women and Girls Subcommittee undertakes the role of a Violence Against Women Partnership. [www.dgppp.org.uk](http://www.dgppp.org.uk)

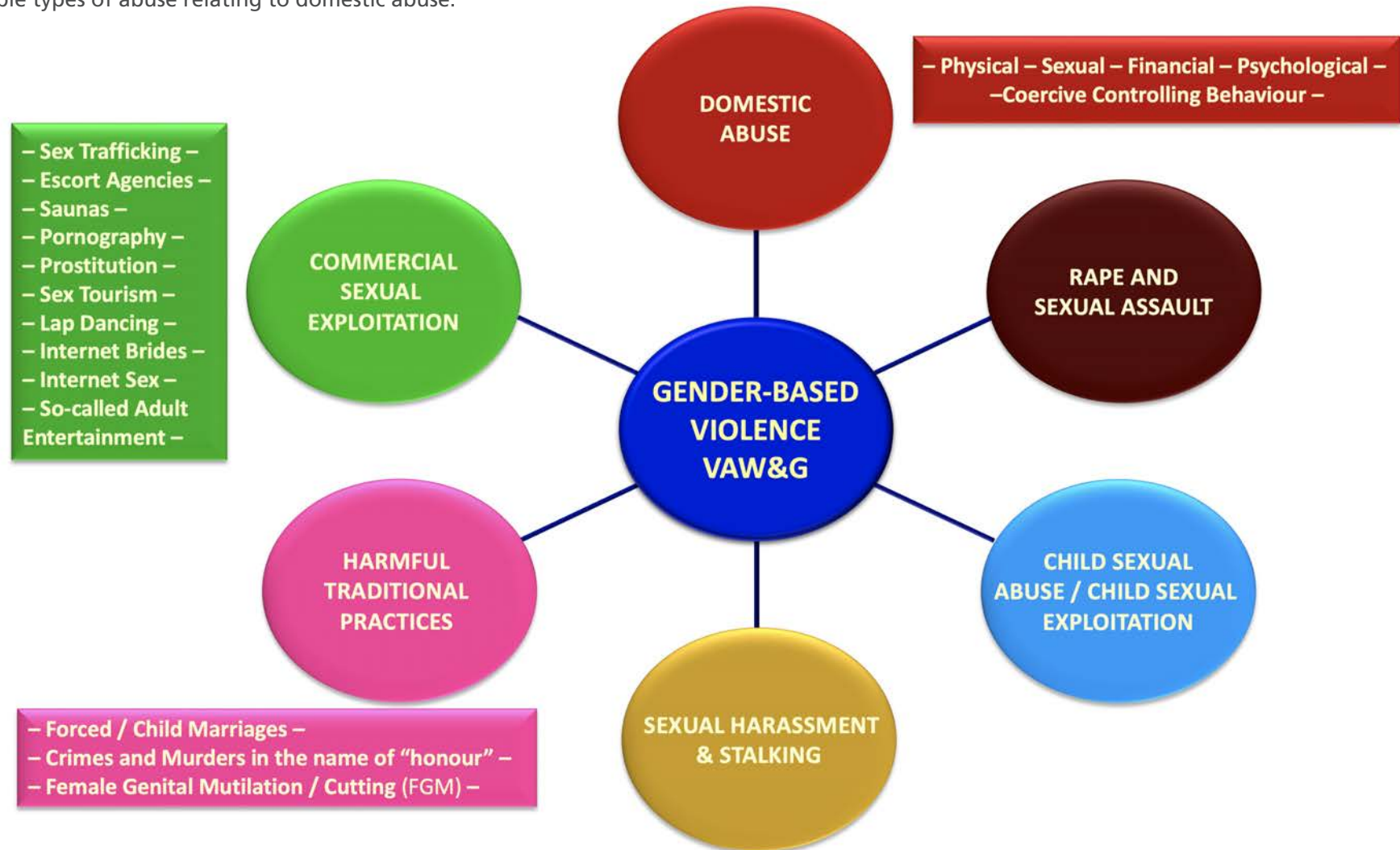
In line with Equally Safe, Dumfries and Galloway has adopted the following definition of violence against women.

*"Violence against women and girls encompasses (but is not limited to):*

- physical, sexual and psychological violence occurring in the family (including children and young people), within the general community or in institutions, including domestic abuse, rape, and incest.*
- sexual harassment, bullying and intimidation in any public or private space, including work.*
- commercial sexual exploitation, including prostitution, lap dancing, stripping, pornography and trafficking.*
- child sexual abuse, including familial sexual abuse, child sexual exploitation and online abuse.*
- so called 'honour based' violence, including dowry related violence, female genital mutilation, forced and child marriages, and 'honour' crimes."*



The diagram below provides an overview of violence against women, with the arrows outlining some of the links between the different forms of Violence Against Women and the most commonly recognised domestic abuse; providing an overview of how individual women can be impacted by multiple types of abuse relating to domestic abuse.



## Covid-19 – impact and response

### Life Reflections While On Lockdown!

*If I was my younger self again, I would tell my future self to stand up for myself more and not to let people walk all over me like they have*

*I would tell myself I do matter, and I do mean something and to the ones I don't mean anything to they don't matter*

*I would tell myself to respect my family more because family is the most important thing to me*

*I would tell myself not to lose myself after the years I spent on a man who has treated me with nothing but nastiness*

*I would tell myself I am worth so much more than one sided love*

*I would tell myself to never give up again no matter how hard things get there will always be better days ahead*

*I would tell myself not to be as forgiving with people who really don't deserve it and who have manipulated me*

*I would tell myself popping pills to forget my problems won't make them better it's just a temporary solution which creates bigger problems*

*I would tell myself to laugh more to smile more and to have fun more*

*I would tell myself to be happy and do things that I enjoy doing even if it's not classed as cool by others because their opinions don't matter*

*And most important I would tell myself to live life to the fullest because you never know what's truly around the corner.*

Poem by a survivor supported by Dumfriesshire and Stewartry Women's Aid



The impact of Covid-19 was significant during the period of this report for survivors of Violence Against Women with such abuse having the potential to be even more hidden than usual with fewer sources of support.

The potential for an increase in domestic abuse and other forms of violence against women was anticipated when lockdown was imposed. Services were particularly concerned that women and children would be forced to remain with their domestic abuser, and this could have significant impact when the national message was to stay at home. During the period April 2020 - 2022 staff and organisations working to prevent and respond to violence against women experienced many challenges. The lockdowns and isolation caused by the pandemic mirrored the abuse experienced by many women and children living with violence against women.

It was recognised that victims would not have their usual support and escape mechanisms (both emotionally and physically) and perpetrators would use the external restrictions as a further means of control. The Violence Against Women and Girls Subcommittee moved to monthly meetings during the latter part of 2020 and into 2021 to ensure that domestic abuse and other forms of Violence Against Women and Girls was given sufficient focus.



Photos courtesy of Dumfriesshire and Stewartry Women's Aid

The local Rape Crisis and Sexual Abuse Support Centre Manager provides the following reflection:

*In what is already a challenging and often contentious area of work we, like many organisations, were thrown into turmoil early in the year as the reality of a global public health crisis hit home. While guidelines and directives changed almost hourly in those first days we quickly set to work to safeguard our service with only one priority in mind: that survivors of sexual violence in Dumfries & Galloway would continue to receive trauma informed support in whatever form we could deliver it.*

*Of course this couldn't be achieved without also considering the wellbeing of our team as we all grappled to make sense of the personal and professional implications of living with a potentially deadly virus.*

*Face to face support was replaced with telephone, text and email support. The supportive working environment, where debriefs and workforce wellbeing conferences were the norm was, due to home working, replaced by Zoom and MS Teams where it's fair to say that the online world was easier to navigate for some than others- I include myself in the latter. But we managed. The team didn't miss a beat. We continued to take referrals and to uphold our commitment to everyone receiving an initial appointment within two weeks of referral.*

*Those already receiving support were kept informed of the changes every step of the way and were offered additional phone appointments to help manage anxieties related to the pandemic as well as continuing to work towards personal outcomes for healing and recovery. Additional external support for staff was made available to help mitigate vicarious trauma and burnout and to support them to work safely: we strongly believe that our person centred ethos extends to everyone involved with our service and it is this that has allowed us to continue to meet the challenges of this past year.*



Despite the challenges of providing services during lockdown, staff within support services continued to do so and for some survivors that support was a lifeline. This is evidenced by feedback

*"You are the only people who have continued to speak to me during lockdown, I really appreciate your calls"*

*'Thank you for always being there I have found this service very supportive and a regular call has helped no ends. Especially through the lockdown'.*



Nationally the vulnerabilities for women involved in selling or exchanging sex was highlighted. It was recognised that even in non-pandemic times women involved in commercial sexual exploitation are often invisible to services and experience multiple harms. Locally, information on CLICK (National project for women selling/exchanging sex) and available grants was circulated to Violence Against Women and Girls partners and to the Council's communication section during lockdown. Sexual Health expanded Routine Enquiry to specifically ask about payment for online sexual 'favours / activity' for adults.

The pandemic meant that public awareness of violence against women has been particularly important along with information on sources of help. Throughout lockdown public information on support for domestic abuse (and sexual abuse) victims was included in the Council's Community Newsletter along with all partners' social media.

The Education Hubs were also sent information on domestic abuse and support pathways to encourage recognition of violence against women and the potential for increased risk.

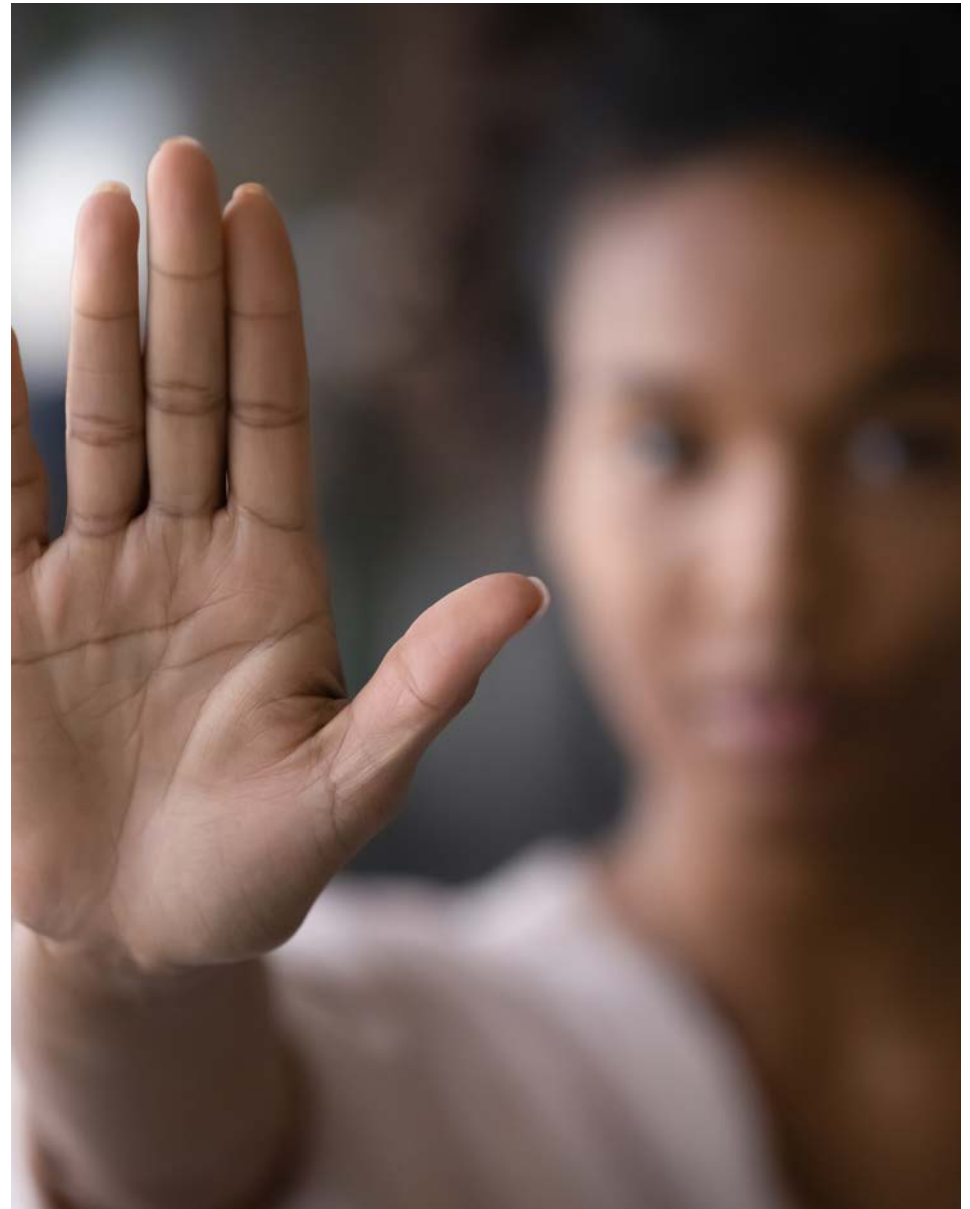
It is evident that the short, medium, and long-term impact of Covid-19 has had an adverse effect on the levels of vulnerability locally and was felt most

Photos courtesy of Dumfriesshire and Stewartry Women's Aid

acutely by the most vulnerable individuals and families in our region. It has been recognised that the impact on all services continues. The Violence Against Women Subcommittee is required to ensure effective oversight to the level and type of abuse suffered by individuals and how these impact on demand within both our services and across the wider protection partnership.

For Justice Social Work, face to face contact was maintained throughout the pandemic with highest risk perpetrators (including Violence Against Women). Locally face to face group activity restarted at the end of June 2020; one of the earliest restarts across Scotland.

Importantly, domestic abuse perpetrators were not targeted in the emergency prison releases. Throughout the pandemic, Caledonian Women's workers remained in contact with their service users; face to face contact available if the risk/need warranted. (The Caledonian System is the Court Mandated Group work programme for domestic abuse perpetrators).





## Partnership Working and Specialist Violence Against Women Services

One of the main strengths of the Violence Against Women and Girls Subcommittee is the continued engagement with and by key specialist violence against women services in the region. These organisations are key in providing regular feedback from service users, challenging other agencies regarding poor practice and keeping the Subcommittees' focus on victim/survivors. The pandemic further highlighted the need for their key input. Within Dumfries and Galloway there are three specialist services whose sole focus is violence against women.

Feedback on the importance of the partnership approach can be further evidenced by feedback from two of the specialist partners:

*"I find the Violence Against Women and Girls meetings helpful for me, as they allow me to give a perspective from the service user to strategic leads and decision makers (often which otherwise they would not be aware of), which I hope can often make a difference when difficult decisions are required.*

*I also feel it is a platform to gain knowledge and pass on knowledge, which otherwise I probably wouldn't be privy to coming from the 3rd Sector. It is no surprise to anyone who has worked with me for nearly 15 years, that the gap between statutory services and 3rd sector does infuriate me and seems never to narrow, however such is life and I feel it is my duty to do all I can to form good relationships with the statutory sector to allow good work to be done despite this gap. I always feel like a valued member at the Violence Against Women and Girls meetings, and said gap is never visible within these. Whenever I have points to raise, they are understood and thought given to them and actioned upon wherever possible."*

*"We've been able to form links with local youth work agencies through our continued engagement with the Violence Against Women and Girls subcommittee; our involvement in the committee, where capacity allows, is invaluable to our wider partnership working."*

Dumfries and Galloway Rape Crisis and Sexual Abuse Support Centre

Services provides support and advocacy to survivors of sexual abuse (including rape) aged 12 and above. They also host a Sexual Violence Prevention Worker who works across the secondary schools in the region. During lockdowns the service provided remote support; however, they like other support agencies found that many survivors of sexual abuse chose to wait until they could have face to face support. Due to the closure of schools, the Sexual Violence Prevention work was also limited during much of this period however, face to face work resumed with pupils at the earliest opportunity.



**"sex without consent is rape or sexual assault"**  
(Sexual Offences Scotland Act 2009)

**When she said "I'm not sure," she never meant "yes"**

**Help is available**

Rape Crisis Scotland 08088 01 03 02 (Freephone - every day 6pm to midnight)  
South West Rape Crisis and Sexual Abuse Centre 01387 253113  
National Domestic Abuse Helpline 0800 027 1234 Police 101

The following are quotes from adult survivors:

*'You have helped me realise that I no longer see myself as a victim but as a survivor'*

*"Sexual violence is something everyone should know about. Gone are the days where we should sweep it under the carpet! Thank you for believing in me!"*

Dumfriesshire and Stewartry Women's Aid provide support and advocacy (including safe housing) to women and children affected by domestic abuse across all parts of the region apart from Wigtownshire.

Dumfriesshire and Stewartry Women's Aid engaged with their clients who identified feelings of loneliness and isolation that mirrored their experiences of abuse; this was echoed by clients supported by the other specialist series. The restriction of movement led to heightened anxiety. This was further exacerbated by challenges for survivors trying to negotiate safe child contact with difficult ex-partners; some who used the pandemic to attempt to force resumption of abusive relationships. Survivors identified behaviour regression in their children and challenges in home schooling. The challenge of having no breaks from their children and being unable to keep them physically active due to restrictions was also raised. Wearing facemasks also caused increased, anxiety, fear and sense of entrapment (including flashbacks) associated with abuse and trauma.

In November 2021 at Dumfries & Galloway Life Awards Ceremony, Dumfries & Stewartry Women's Aid won the Voluntary Group/Charity of the Year Award 2021.

The judges described this charity as having a "great record of sterling work helping to protect women." Referrals to the organisation that provides safe accommodation, support and advocacy to women, children and young people affected by domestic abuse, rose dramatically during the pandemic. Described as "lifesavers" and "shining stars on the darkest night" by service users, the charity provided support by telephone, video calls, e-mails, and texts, and its 24 hour on-call service continued as normal. A safe place to stay was also provided when needed.

Wigtownshire Women's Aid provide support services to women, children and young people affected by domestic abuse. They also undertake prevention work that focuses on healthy relationships in the two Secondary Schools in their area. Wigtownshire Women's Aid identified that services to children and young people was the area which they found most difficult to deliver during lockdown periods. Unexpectedly, children did not respond well to online/ phone contact; identified reasons included lack of privacy, lack of technology and generally lack of interest. As soon as schools re-opened Wigtownshire Women's Aid staff went back into schools to deliver support to children and young people affected by domestic abuse. This took some time but with the support of the Violence Against Women and Girls Subcommittee staff were able to get access to schools and pupils. Wigtownshire Women's Aid identified a number of lessons learnt included providing all children and young people with technology and leaving the door open for them to contact them if they required.

Wigtownshire Women's Aid also undertook changes to their safe housing (refuge) during the pandemic - their refuge stayed open throughout the pandemic and unlike many others, they made the decision to accept referrals from outwith Dumfries and Galloway. Service delivery was altered to allow for remote admittances into refuge by installing key boxes to the accommodation and using video calling. Outdoor spaces and gardens were utilised to allow service users to gain face to face support and interact with other residents. Zoom and other platforms were used to facilitate group sessions during lockdowns.



## Case Study from Wigtownshire Women's Aid:

**Part of our role as the Out of Hours (OOH) Team is to organise group activities in the evenings and at the weekends for women and children in our Refuge and Safehouse accommodation. This is often seen as a lifeline for women because evenings and weekends can be the loneliest time for women.**

COVID-19 has unfortunately put a stop to the way we would typically deliver not only our group work but one to one sessions as well. We have strived to continue supporting women and children all be it in a very different way.

As lockdown began to ease, we began to arrange small group meetings in the garden encouraging the women to meet in a safe environment. We made sure chairs were two meters apart and sanitized before and after use. We had a sanitising station located at the back door, enabling everyone to use it as they were going out to the garden and returning back into the building.

The time in the garden meeting up was a very important part of their stay in refuge for some of the women. Currently we have a woman staying in our refuge who does not speak English as a first language and often finds it hard to communicate with us and others. Through attending group sessions, we have really seen her come out of her shell. She has built a friendship circle with two other women in refuge through these garden meetings. This has given her confidence to go out into the community with the other two women exploring the town and shops, out for coffee, cooked for each other and learnt about one of the woman's beliefs around food, what she and her children can and cannot eat. One woman has now started to learn English on YouTube and through these friendships she is able to practise her English.

These friendships have had a great impact on all three women, one woman said on a number of occasions that she would have moved back home to her ex-partner if it had not been for the support networks she had built up within refuge. It has given her the confidence to move into her own accommodation and she is doing things she would never have done before such as painting her new house at the moment, before she moves in. She has said that being able to share her experiences with others was something she never imagined herself being able to do but through group sessions she has built up friendships and trust and has been able to chat to others and share experiences, this has led to her feeling stronger and being able to stay in refuge, becoming more independent and confident in her own abilities while also giving her new aspirations for her future.

Another woman who is from out with our local area, initially moved here as it was the only place available and she felt she needed safety for her and her children right away. As time went on and circumstances with her situation developed, she felt more and more that she was missing home and her strong family connections. We are in the process of supporting her to return to her previous area but until then she is thoroughly enjoying taking part in group sessions, building up relationships with others, she said that it has been good to be able to talk to others and it made her realise that she is not alone. Building up these friendships has given her the opportunity to laugh with everyone and spending time with others in similar circumstances. All of these things have helped her to make a difficult time a little less lonely for her and her children.

It is very rewarding as workers to see the friendships develop and the support the women give each other some of these relationships are made and continued once they leave our refuge safe house.

## What our data tells us

Women were most affected by Psychological Harm and Domestic Abuse in the current reporting period, consistent with concerns identified under Child Protection. Families were most affected by parental mental health, domestic abuse and substance misuse, impacting on the emotional and physical wellbeing of children and young people. Justice Social Work also reports and increase in the number of Caledonian programmes (a Court appointed programme for male perpetrators of domestic abuse who meet set criteria) imposed in 2020/22 (126 programmes) compared to those imposed in 2018/20 (60 programmes).

The reporting period shows an increase in concerns in relation to drug misuse and suicidal ideation, increasing to between 23-25% compared to the previous two-year period. There was an increase in substance misuse as an identified area of risk and concern, with more women affected by substance misuse aged between 30-59 years old in 2020/21. These increases are not unexpected because links between Violence Against Women and both poor mental health and alcohol and substance misuse have been recognised in research and practice.

We also saw an increase in those aged 16-29 years old impacted by alcohol and drug misuse in 2021/22 compared to the previous year. This poses challenges for staff as time is required to build relationships with adults who have experienced trauma and find themselves in complex and risky situations. Rape Crisis and Women's Aid report most survivors are aged under 40 years old, consistent with those supported under statutory services.

**Police Scotland report that dealing with incidences of domestic abuse is the greatest single demand on their time,**



**with an average of one incident being reported to them every nine minutes.**



Source: Police Scotland, 2018.



## Activity

### MARAC

Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conferences (MARACs) meet to create action plans for the victims of domestic abuse who are most at risk of extreme harm or death and develop multiagency action plans to reduce that risk.

The MARAC Coordinator is based within Social Work Services and the meetings are Chaired by local staff from Police Scotland. Safe Lives (a UK wide charity focusing on ending domestic abuse) provide guidance on membership of MARACs and how they should operate. The fast-changing Covid-19 situation forced MARAC to implement quick changes in the way they used to operate, and some MARACs encountered difficulties as a result. This was not the case of DG MARAC as the MARAC Chair (Police), and the MARAC Coordinator quickly implemented a new system to operate remotely.

MARAC has been operating remotely since lockdown which has improved decision making, identified actions, and attendance. Moreover, in the case of MARAC Transfers (where victims relocate), Virtual MARACs have also made it possible for Agencies out with Dumfries and Galloway to attend and share first-hand knowledge and intelligence, thus enriching the discussions and adding clarity to the decision-making process.

MARAC membership has also expanded in this time, eased by the online format.

Both Women's Aid organisations have provided advocacy support to victims going to MARAC which has been challenging for them at times, given the lack of additional funds to carry out this role. It has been appreciated by the statutory services (who by their very nature are unable to offer independent advocacy) and has enabled MARACs to continue. Good practice indicates that MARACs do not operate without Independent Domestic Abuse Advocacy (IDAAs). Funding was provided to Women's Aid to enable staff to undertake national IDAA training.

### Disclosure Scheme for Domestic Abuse Scotland (DSDAS)

You have the right to ask about whether your partner or someone you're seeing has an abusive past.

You can also apply on behalf of a friend or relative.

Find out more at:

[www.scotland.police.uk/advice-and-information/domestic-abuse/](http://www.scotland.police.uk/advice-and-information/domestic-abuse/)



RIGHT TO ASK

## 16 Days of Activism for the Elimination of Violence Against Women

16 Days of Activism for the elimination of Violence Against Women is an international campaign that runs from the 25th of November until the 10th of December. The campaign focuses on raising awareness and challenging violence against women in all its many forms.

In Dumfries and Galloway the Violence Against Women and Girls Subcommittee is responsible for coordinating a multiagency programme of events and public information and awareness campaigns with support from communications departments. The protecting people team within the Improvement Service also provide support and information for local areas to use as part of their campaigns.

In 2020 the local programme of events included:

- White Ribbon overview (delivered by Violence Against Women Team)
- Disclosure Scotland Domestic Abuse Scheme; Right to ask/Power to Tell (delivered by Police Scotland)
- Bystander Theory (delivered in partnership with White Ribbon Scotland) Covid-19 and Sexual Exploitation (delivered by Women's Support Project)



In 2021 the local programme of events again included:

- Disclosure Scotland Domestic Abuse Scheme
- White Ribbon Overview

With the following additions:

- Film Screening (Dying to Divorce in partnership with Burns Cinema)
- Virtual event for local Leaders' with input from a survivor of domestic abuse who articulated her concerns for the wellbeing of her children. She reinforced the importance of services understanding the impact of domestic abuse, focusing on when abuse manifests as controlling behaviour rather than physical abuse.

The event for leaders provided an opportunity to showcase local and national activity to prevent and tackle violence against women, recognising the cross-cutting impact and links to other areas of people protection including alcohol and drugs and community justice.





Feedback was sought from the Leaders at the local event on key issues to support understanding of the impact and the need for all organisations and individuals to work to end violence against women. A variety of questions were asked via Menti a selection of these responses included:

**1. What are the key issues/challenges currently facing women, children and young people in D&G who have experienced violence, abuse and trauma?**

Answers included: the impact on the Court system (delays and Sheriffs understanding/responses); prevention work with young people; links between violence against women and suicide; fear of victims that their children will be taken from them; isolation; impact of trauma and women feeling trapped.

**2. What are the priority areas that you would like to see Dumfries & Galloway focus on in the year ahead?**

Answers included: the need to work with survivors of abuse; the need for those working in alcohol and drugs and violence against women to bring their focus together; resources for schools; to be more trauma informed; to have Safe and Together training; to promote the White Ribbon Campaign.

**3. What will you commit to doing to support these priorities?**

Answers included: challenge sexism; be more trauma informed; keep having conversations about violence against women; raising awareness; making links to other areas and to continue to believe women's voices

Following the Leaders' Event held within 16 days of activism, feedback was used to develop an action plan to help tackle Violence Against Women in partnership with members of the Violence Against Women and Girls Subcommittee and approved by the Public Protection Committee in advance of being presented to Chief Executives Group. Going forward the action plan will be used to record ongoing activity and identify challenges in order to develop effective solutions wherever possible. The action plan also ensures accountability from those leading on actions if required.

Directly following the development of the Action Plan, a joint event was arranged with the University of the West of Scotland and Dumfries and Galloway College for International Women's Day on the Emily Test project. This identified the need to raise awareness of and respond effectively to gender based violence in the student population; this joined up work with be further developed in the future.

## Learning and Development

Initially during this period, the programme of in person training was halted. It was recognised that the need for training continued and information on local and national online training was circulated to staff within the public protection partnership.

NHS Dumfries and Galloway developed a 7-minute briefing to support staff in their response to domestic abuse. This included links to training resources and information on available support including the National Domestic Abuse (DA) Helpline and the 2 local Women's Aid organisations.

The 7-minute briefing was modified with a multiagency focus and circulated to all partners within the Violence Against Women and Girls Subcommittee.

The Homeless Service within the local Council, (along with other partners and supported by the Violence Against Women and Girls Team) developed a Domestic Abuse Pathway for staff working in Housing/Homeless. The launch of this resource identified a training need for staff including additional awareness of domestic abuse and use of the Safe Lives DASH RIC (an actuarial checklist to support the identification of domestic abuse risk to victims). Two online training sessions were held for staff within the Homeless Service. Both Women's Aid organisations also provided input to housing staff on their services to raise awareness and confidence, encouraging statutory staff to make referrals for support.

In 2021, the Public Protection Committee's Learning, and Development Subcommittee undertook a learning needs assessment. Domestic Abuse was identified as the number one training need by partners. Following on from this the Domestic Abuse and Response training was modified to be delivered online in a half day online format as part of the Public Protection Committee Training Calendar.





## Safe and Together

In 2020 the Scottish Government announced that there would be a Delivering Equally Safe Fund that partners could apply to for funding and the Public Protection Committee agreed that a bid should be made for Safe and Together (S&T) which was successful. Safe and Together is an internationally recognised approach to developing domestic abuse informed services.

The main principles of Safe and Together are:

- Keeping the child safe and together with the non-offending parent.
- Partnering with the non-offending parent as the default position; and
- Intervening with the perpetrator to reduce the risk and harm to the child.

S&T training and tools support services to be domestic abuse informed and protect survivors and children whilst engaging with perpetrators in their role as fathers, emphasising that domestic abuse is a parenting choice. The funding will allow there to be Overview Sessions; Core Training for key staff over both years (initially focusing on staff involved in child protection); Training for Supervisors and Training for Trainers. In March 2022, the first overview session took place (online) and was positively received.

A multiagency Steering Group has been established to drive and embed S&T in Dumfries and Galloway and has developed a vision that

“All women & children affected by domestic abuse in Dumfries & Galloway will experience services and supports that are trauma informed and focussed on providing them with the best opportunities to enhance their safety and recovery. Perpetrators of domestic abuse will be supported to reduce risk and harm to their children.”

The additional aim is, “To make Dumfries and Galloway a better place for women and children affected by domestic abuse perpetrators”

## Conclusion

Violence Against Women continues to be a priority in Dumfries and Galloway, as recognised by Public Protection Committee. Whilst domestic abuse and sexual abuse are the main focus of work, Violence Against Women issues are threaded throughout other public protection priorities within their Strategy. The Violence Against Women and Girls Sub Committee have driven forward strategic issues whilst partners have focussed on service delivery, supporting women and their children across the region through a particularly challenging time.

The importance of multiagency working in this area cannot be underestimated and this has been particularly key during the Covid pandemic.

## Looking Forward

The collection and analysis of data for Violence Against Women and Girls is a long-standing challenge for this agenda that has been recognised nationally. The Improvement Service (IS) collates the Equally Safe Quality Standards and Performance Framework from all the Violence Against Women Partnerships in Scotland and reports this to the Scottish Government. The local partners in the Violence Against Women and Girls Subcommittee have provided annual data and information to IS.

The Public Protection Committee has supported a Short-Term Working Group to progress the collation and analysis of Violence Against Women data. Positively there is significant collaboration from both the specialist and statutory services to progress this work. Going forward it is expected that there will be both quantitative and qualitative data to continuously develop the understanding of Violence Against Women in Dumfries and Galloway; data alone will never provide the full picture.

For future years there will be an annual Violence Against Women report that will link to the Equally Safe Quality Standards and Performance Framework and help highlight some of the extensive work being undertaken by staff across all services to prevent all forms of violence against women and support survivors.

The White Ribbon Campaign will be reinvigorated locally with the aim encouraging men to understand the impact and extent of violence against women and girls and to challenge it.

A community survey will seek feedback from residents of Dumfries and Galloway on their understanding of Violence Against Women and the findings will inform future awareness campaigns.

There will be a programme of public and staff awareness of all forms of violence against women during 16 days of activism (25th November – 10th December) to support increased understanding of the impact of gender based violence on women and society in general.

The role out of Safe and Together will continue with the provision of Core Training for staff within child protection services and also awareness of the approach and tools for other staff. Domestic abuse will be the focus of a case file audit to gain additional understanding of the baseline of local practice prior to embedding the Safe and Together approach to further enhance the support to women and children victim/survivors and the engagement with domestic abuse perpetrators.

The Violence Against Women and Girls Subcommittee will respond to national and local consultations and requests for information and work support other partnerships to understand the impact of violence against women across all aspects of society. Going forward there will be activity to promote greater understanding of the links with other inequalities across all types of violence against women.