

North Wales VAWDASV Strategic Board Response to rise in Domestic Abuse incidents due to Coronavirus

A number of news sources have reported a rapid increase in domestic abuse incidents due to the coronavirus and the need to keep people in their own homes, potentially away from their family and friends and other support networks.

On 28th March the Guardian reported "A pattern of increasing abuse is repeated in countries from Brazil to Germany, China to Greece" and on 30th March 2020 the BBC reported: *Nazir Afzal, domestic abuse advisor to Welsh Government, said abuse has already increased elsewhere in the world when countries have been in coronavirus lockdown, saying that pattern will continue in the UK.*

"It's as certain as night follows day that if there's a period where people are confined to the same space, then it creates an opportunity for the abuser to abuse," Mr Afzal said.

South Wales Police have reported a "worrying slight decline" in the numbers reporting domestic abuse over the last month and fear that the increasing pressure within households under lockdown could be making life a lot more dangerous for victims and their children.

To date, North Wales Police haven't seen the same level of reduction in domestic abuse reporting as South Wales have, but they are already starting to see a slight drop.

The information below details the current situation in North Wales, the support currently available to victims and survivors of VAWDASV and the steps taken by individual agencies to mitigate the effects of lockdown on their services.

Please be aware that this document is an overview of the situation and an attempt to bring together the policies from a number of agencies. Specific organisations may have slightly different procedures in place, so if you need local information, please contact the individual organisations.

It is important to remember that this is an ever changing situation and this information is correct as of Thursday 2nd April 2020. If things change considerably, the information will be updated and disseminated accordingly.

National

Safe Lives

Safe Lives are an internationally recognised UK-wide charity dedicated to ending domestic abuse, for everyone and for good. They work with organisations across the UK to transform the response to domestic abuse. They listen to survivors, putting their voices at the heart of their thinking and look at the whole picture for each individual and family to get the right help at the right time to make families everywhere safe and well. Their ethos is to support victims and challenge perpetrators to change, asking 'why doesn't he stop?' rather than 'why doesn't she leave?' This applies whatever the gender of the victim or perpetrator and whatever the nature of their relationship. Safe Lives have put together a number of different resources aimed to supporting victims and survivors during the coronavirus pandemic:

- <http://safelives.org.uk/news-views/domestic-abuse-and-covid-19>
- <http://www.safelives.org.uk/sites/default/files/resources/Safety%20planning%20guide%2C%20victims%20and%20survivors%2C%20COVID-19.pdf>
- <https://rightsofwomen.org.uk/get-information/family-law/coronavirus-and-child-contact-arrangements/>

Live Fear Free

The National Live Fear Free Helpline remain open 24 hours a day throughout the current crisis and can provide help and advice to:

- Anyone experiencing domestic abuse
- Anyone who knows someone who needs help. For example, a friend, family member or colleague
- Practitioners seeking professional advice.

All conversations with Live Fear Free are confidential and are taken by staff that are highly experienced and fully trained.

Call: 0808 80 10 800 - *Available 24 hours a day 7 days a week.*

Text: 07860 077333 - *Available 24 hours a day 7 days a week.*

Email: info@livefearfreehelpline.wales - *Available 24 hours a day 7 days a week.*

Welsh Women's Aid

Welsh Women's Aid is the umbrella body supporting the majority of 3rd sector specialist services supporting victims and survivors of domestic abuse. They work closely with national government to support this sector and ensure funding is available to support those in need. They have published a document giving advice to those requiring support during the lockdown period.

<https://www.welshwomensaid.org.uk/2020/03/safety-and-self-care-advice-for-survivors-in-isolation/>

WWA have also published some important information concerning children and young people at greater risk of domestic abuse due to current circumstances:

“In the light of the developing coronavirus pandemic, Welsh Women's Aid is concerned about the impact on children and young people who live with violence, control and abuse. Self-isolation will shut down routes to support and safety for women and children, as social distancing will mean that adult and child survivors will have reduced contact with supportive friends, families, communities and services. School closures will mean that children at risk or in need of care and support will not be observed everyday by teachers. Equally, children and young people who depend on the stability and relative safety of school will be kept at home. Finally, children may be impacted by economic hardship, as a result of parents not being able to work, and the accompanied pressures and stresses that this brings.”

<https://www.welshwomensaid.org.uk/2020/03/supporting-children-and-young-people-through-the-coronavirus-pandemic/>

Brightsky app

The Brightsky app is free and can be downloaded onto any Apple or Android phone. The app aims to support those experiencing domestic abuse, or anyone looking for information about issues around domestic abuse such as online safety, stalking and harassment and sexual consent. It is also easily concealed from perpetrators, as from the outside, it resembles a weather app.

<https://www.hestia.org/brightsky>

Regional

North Wales Police

The Protection of Vulnerable People Unit within North Wales Police is anticipating an increase in domestic violence and have been liaising with their support service partners to ensure that there is adequate support in place should numbers peak. They are continuously liaising with 3rd sector specialist services locally, as well as the National Helpline (Live Fear Free).

In order to ensure there isn't a reduction in reporting NWP are due to launch a communications strategy, which will emphasise victims should still call the Police, the Police will still deal with domestic incidents and will still go to their addresses, irrespective of what a perpetrator may say.

NWP recognise the increased threat to victims due to being confined to their home with the perpetrator. They will be raising awareness of the 'Silent Solution' via the NWP website and social media platforms. This is a system that is well established within the control room and is potentially life-saving. However, it is only effective if the public are aware of it and understand how to use it. The Silent Solution enables a 999 caller who is too scared to make any noise, to press 55 when prompted to alert the police that they are in a genuine emergency.

To support individuals at risk, leaflets with local and national contact details on will be distributed by local PCSOs, at key places such as supermarkets and food banks, GP surgeries, chemists etc. (These contact cards can be discreetly slipped into food/shopping bags as appropriate).

Further leaflets are being printed to highlight to local communities that they continue to have a duty not to remain silent and to report domestic abuse – the plan is to distribute these leaflets when a trend or pattern emerges so that perpetrators can see that the police are pro-actively targeting domestic abuse in their community and hopefully this will act as a deterrent. Digital versions of these leaflets will also be shared on NWP's social platforms as well.

NWP are very conscious refuge space is going to become scarcer, as incidents rise and have contacted a number of caravan sites to see if they have any provision that could act as a contingency should refuge space dwindle.

The police are concerned about their ability to house perpetrators released under bail conditions or DVPO restrictions with options being taken from them as a result of family or friends being infected or self-isolating. This has been raised on an all Wales basis with WG ministers in terms of increased housing capacity.

Local Authorities

Local Authorities are responsible for funding the majority of support within refuge provision (under the Housing Support Grant), as well as homeless provision (often a result of domestic abuse). They are releasing bulletins daily to show what provisions they are making for the homelessness, housing and support sector locally and across Wales. For the specific area of VAWDASV, Local authorities have information about the Live Fear Free helpline on all their websites and are referring people to them for support. The Helpline will then make contact with the local specialist services as appropriate.

Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board – Safeguarding

The Corporate Safeguarding Team within BCUHB remains fully functional during this time. Most staff are home working and some remain office based, exercising appropriate social distancing.

The Business Team are continuing on a daily basis to check the internal MARAC Referrals and these are still distributed to the relevant safeguarding specialist for action in a timely manner. They are currently seeing a reduction in all referrals – MARAC, Adults and Child at Risk Reports which they are closely monitoring and liaising with all partners to consider their next steps.

All internal VAWDASV Training for BCUHB employees has been suspended until May 2020 but they are encouraging staff to undertake relevant online training and they offer bespoke virtual training if and when required.

As all visiting on wards in hospitals across North Wales is now suspended and many patients will be alone, the Safeguarding team have highlighted this is an opportune time to carry out selective/routine enquiry regarding VAWDASV. A communication strategy to highlight this is currently being developed.

Domestic Abuse Specialist Services

Although the different 3rd sector organisations will differ slightly in their approach to the coronavirus crisis in North Wales, they are all following similar procedures, which reflect Welsh Government guidance. The following information sums up the general approach for each area of support:

Refuge and emergency accommodation

For existing service users within refuge, Welsh Government guidelines are being followed, bearing in mind that a distance of 2 meters (6ft) should be kept between individuals. Specific appointments are being made to support service users at supported housing schemes, while conducting support sessions in an appropriate and safe setting. Residents of all refuges have been provided with information on how to stay safe. This includes symptoms to watch out for, the regular and prolonged washing of hands, use of hand sanitisers and when to self-isolate. If individuals become unwell or are concerned they may have contracted the virus they have been warned not to go to their GP but to access the following website for the most up to date advice:

<https://phw.nhs.wales/coronavirus/> or ring NHS 111 and press 3 for further information and guidance.

Specific disbursed units have been identified in most areas for those at greater risk of contracting the coronavirus and for those travelling to refuge from parts of the UK where there are high numbers of COVID-19 cases. They are also for those entering refuge with children who are subject to court orders for visiting and overnight stays with a non-refuge based parent and new residents with serious underlying health issues.

Since the UK lockdown announcement, most services have added some additional screening questions to list of questions to be asked of potential new clients. These include assessing additional risk attached to new clients wanting to access refuges.

Floating support and outreach provision

It is a challenging time, especially for vulnerable individuals and often contact with their local specialist service is the only support or contact some individuals receive. The need for emotional support will undoubtedly increase during these uncertain times, and individuals will need someone to listen to them.

Support is largely being provided to floating support service users by phone as well as appropriate use of information technology including email and social media, where it is safe to do so. For the majority of service users, it is not possible to conduct face to face visits or visits to the homes of service users in the community.

IDVA provision

The majority of IDVA support will be delivered virtually and by telephone. If emergency target hardening equipment is required, it will either be delivered by post, or fitted by professionals maintaining social distancing. IDVA support in North Wales is now available 7 days a week. The IDVAs are on a rota covering 9-5pm at the weekends and bank holidays.

Working with children and young people

Services working face to face with children and young people will not be delivered, but it is important to consider the impact of the current situation on children and young people. Regular contact is being encouraged, especially by using IT and social media as appropriate. Specialist agencies will be in regular contact with outside agencies in order to make contact and receive updates on cases.

CID 16 referrals

Some specialist's services continue to receive CID16's from North Wales Police for low to medium level risk of harm women. Referrals are being received as usual but the services are replacing face to face support with phone and email support during the crisis. They are checking in on women in isolation for welfare and someone to talk to where appropriate as well as the usual advice and support.

Sexual Abuse Specialist Services

For the regional sexual violence support services in North Wales, offering counselling and support, all face to face counselling has been suspended and a range of alternative measures have been introduced to support individuals at this difficult time.

All practitioners, office staff and counsellors are remote working, which has an impact on the level of support that can be provided. An existing Service Level Agreement with the Live Fear free Helpline has been extended, to develop contingency plans focusing on increased referrals and/or reduced capacity

specifically around welsh speaking client needs and to provide support as an interim measure until therapy can be provided.

A major area of concern is the support for children and young people affected by sexual abuse. Online provision for children under 16 is complex and many factors need to be considered, mainly around safeguarding, online engagement, comprehension and maturity. This is an area still being explored, especially for those of primary age, and at present parental support weekly sessions are being offered as an interim provision.

Work with Perpetrators

Nationally, Relate, the organisation that delivers the Choose2Change perpetrator programme in North Wales have stopped all of their face to face delivery and are delivering as many of their services via telephone and IT as possible.

They have also put a lot of information on their website and via social media to offer help: <https://www.relate.org.uk/>

All face to face group work (including Choose2Change) has been stopped, but they are working to ensure some behavioural management can continue. Practitioners will have an initial conversation with new referees to maintain contact, discuss webcam contact in future, and talk about risk planning etc. Moving forward they will have weekly telephone or virtual conversations with them. Relate have been part of a regional pilot funded by Welsh Government to utilise an online tool (the Intervention Hub), with perpetrators not able to access a group. They will be hoping to extend the use of this online behaviour change tool in the future. They are also maintaining (in some circumstances, increasing) case management, partner support links, and facilitator supervision to provide support to staff and help to families.

Useful local and regional contact details

DASU

DASU provides informed, confidential, quality services that value and respect ALL survivors of domestic abuse.

Contact: via website at <https://www.dasunorthwales.co.uk/>

01244 830436 Flintshire

01745 337104 Denbighshire

01745 337104 Rhyl
01492 534705 Colwyn
01978 310203 Wrexham

Gorwel

Gorwel provides a range of support services for older people, people affected by domestic abuse and homelessness.

Contact: 0300 111 2122

post@grwpcynefin.org

Aberconwy Women's Aid

The group offers outreach support, refuge provision and a drop-in service

Contact: 01492 872992

aberconwydas@btconnect.com

CAHA Women's Aid

CAHA offers outreach, counselling and drop-in: 8:30am-4.30pm, as well as refuge provision

Contact: 01352 712150

cahawomensaid@clwydalyn.co.uk

North Wales Women's Centre

NWWC support vulnerable women and those with complex needs.

Contact: 01745 339331

Linda@northwaleswomenscentre.co.uk

www.northwaleswomenscentre.co.uk

Dyn Project Wales

The Safer Wales Dyn project provides support to Heterosexual, Gay, Bisexual and Trans men who are experiencing Domestic abuse from a partner.

Contact: 0808 80 10 321

<https://www.dynwales.org/>

BAWSO

BAWSO support people from Black and Minority Ethnic backgrounds, who are affected by domestic abuse and other forms of abuse, including Female Genital Mutilation, Forced Marriage, Human Trafficking and Prostitution.

Contact: 0800 73 18 147 (24hrs)

<https://bawso.org.uk/>

Galop

For information, advice and support contact Galop, a national LGBTQ + domestic abuse helpline. The helpline is for LGBTQ + people, their family, friends, and agencies supporting them.

Contact: 0800 999 5428

<http://www.galop.org.uk/>

Rape and Sexual Abuse Support Centre (RASASC)

Rape and Sexual Abuse Support Centre (RASASC), North Wales provides information, specialist support and therapy to anyone aged 3 and over who has experienced any kind of sexual abuse or violence.

Contact: 01248 670 628

<https://www.rasawales.org.uk/>

Stepping Stones North Wales

Stepping Stones offers individual counselling and group work to adult survivors of childhood sexual abuse.

Contact: 01978 352 717

<https://www.steppingstonesnorthwales.co.uk/contact-us/>

Local Authority Safeguarding Teams contact details:

County	Adults	Children	Out of hours
Anglesey	01248 752752	01248 752888	01248 353551
Conwy	0300 4561111	0300 4561111	01492 515777
Denbighshire	0300 4561000	01824 712200	0345 0533116
Flintshire	01352 803444	01352 701000	0845 0533116
Gwynedd	01766 772577	01758 704455	01248 353551
Powys	01597 827666	01597 827666	01597 827666
Wrexham	01978 292066	01978 292039	0345 0533116