

**RESPONSE TO WELSH PARLIAMENT PETITIONS COMMITTEE –
BOTH PARENTS MATTER CYMRU**

**P-05-798 “Male domestic violence victim support services to be
independently run & funded”**

Response by petitioner to the Minister (Jane Hutt, Ref JH-/00459/20, 20th July 2020)

SUMMARY

In response to the Minister we wish to make the following points:

- Service provision for male victims funded by Welsh Government is currently grounded in feminist theory that sees men as second class victims at best and lying perpetrators at worst.
- Service provision for men must be safely separated from services for women and delivered by organisations whose perspective is grounded in the experience of men.
- Service provision for male victims is disproportionately lower than that for women and other groups despite the Minister’s explicit assurance to the Committee. We ask the Committee to seek data from Welsh Government on the number and percentage of male victims identified in each region of Wales. Until we have clarity on the extent of the problem it is difficult for Welsh Government to plan solutions.
- We ask the Committee to seek information on the terms of the funding of the Dyn Project specifically cost as well as outcome and output measures, and the number and percentage of male callers to the Live Fear Free Helpline, to ensure value for money.
- The revision of the National Strategy and Delivery Framework (2018-2021) provides the opportunity to ensure that services for men are separated from those for women. They must be funded according to need - proportionate to the numbers of male victims identified in Regional Needs Assessments - and must be grounded in the experience of men in terms of design and delivery. We seek the Minister’s reassurances on this point.
- We ask the Member for the Rhondda to expand upon her comments made at the last session of the Committee when this petition was considered when she seemed to suggest that it was reasonable to assume that men are likely to lie about their experience while women should be believed.

It seems that the Minister has responded to the wrong question. We have not asked what support is available for male victims of domestic abuse. We have instead asked Welsh Government and the Petitions Committee to consider whether it is appropriate for male victims to be signposted to and supported by services that are grounded in the experience of women and that see men as second class victims at best and as lying perpetrators at worst. This is the experience of many men who have accessed other services.

We were struck by one particular sentence in the Minister’s response:

Services must be provided which meet the needs and experiences of men and women, and which acknowledge the different services these groups require and are proportionate to need. The Act will, therefore, enable a gender-specific response where necessary.

We agree that services should be gender-specific. However the Minister's vision is simply not being realised. Public money is being used to design and deliver services for men that are grounded in feminist theory. This treats men and women differently – assuming that men are likely to lie about their experience whilst women must always be believed.

We request that the Petitions Committee ask the Minister what evidence she has that men's experience and voices have been included in the design and development of services for them. Their needs are absent from the Welsh Government strategy ⁱ They are mentioned in the most perfunctory way in the Cross Governmental Delivery Framework ⁱⁱ where it is stated that Welsh Government have:

- *consulted with stakeholder groups that support men to inform our campaigns;*
- *engaged with young men and boys during the development work for 2018-2020 VAWDASV campaigns;*

That just two mentions are made of male victims in a 29 page document demonstrates the lack of interest Welsh Government has in this issue. We also suspect that the 'stakeholder groups that support men' referred to above is a reference to our charity.

The petition called for services for male victims to be provided *independently* of "Women's Aid Cymru & all associated". Safer Wales who run the 'Dyn Project' is a member organisation of Welsh Women's Aid. Live Fear Free Helpline is commissioned from Welsh Women's Aid directly. We are aware of other member organisations of Welsh Women's Aid who are seeking and receiving public funding to provide services to male victims of domestic abuse. We contend that this is an inappropriate use of public funds.

The Minister correctly identifies that the provision of services to male victims by organisations primarily serving the women's sector, or having been developed from the women's sector, fails to fulfil the requirements of the Act. It is welcome to see recognition of this principle, but we see no evidence that this is being realised in the commissioning of services for male victims.

Whilst the specific experience and needs of male victims may differ from those of female victims, all parties will surely agree that equitability of approach must be the objective. In this respect it should be recalled that the Equality and Human Rights Commission (Wales Office) obtained independent legal opinion on a pertinent issue in 2017.

The view of the EHRC had been sought by a private individual via her Assembly Member (Mark Drakeford). The question related to the different treatment frequently encountered by male victims contacting support services who deploy Respect's "Toolkit for Work with Male Victims", or similar "screening" procedures such as the Dyn Project. The ruling of the EHRC, based on independent legal advice, was that, "*a policy of screening male but not female callers to an advice line is likely to constitute direct discrimination, in breach of section 13 of the Equality Act 2010*". In further correspondence the EHRC noted that it remained lawful for the Dyn Project to use a 'screening' tool to determine whether callers were lying ONLY because the service did not support female callers.

ⁱ <https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2019-06/national-strategy-2016-to-2021.pdf>

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