



Cymorth i Ferched Cymru  
Welsh Women's Aid

# State of the Sector 2024





# Introduction

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Welsh Women's Aid were pleased to see the UK Government pledge to halve violence against women and girls. Their commitment is a crucial step to recognising the impact that this epidemic is having on the lives of survivors everywhere. This is a positive alignment with the Welsh Government's strategy to end violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence. However, this pledge is destined to fail if an approach that incorporates all lived experiences of violence against women and girls and adequate funding to address this, is not considered. True and sustainable progress requires a whole systems approach which unites statutory, non-statutory and third sector specialists to support the multifaceted needs of survivors.

The violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence (VAWDASV) sector, is no longer simply on its knees. It is being pushed down into the ground by a system that creates more pressure than it alleviates. Survivors and support services are being left to pick up the pieces of a statutory system that is not designed or funded to properly address the issue of VAWDASV. Demand is increasing with no sign of slowing down. Survivors are being left to navigate complex systems which are not trauma informed, leaving them with the choice of whether to even continue seeking justice.

In our last State of the Sector report, we raised concerns around the financial situation that both survivors and support services were facing. Once again, we have seen funding that has not increased in line with inflation, a lack of support for by and for specialist organisations and a housing crisis that is leaving women and children in unsuitable accommodation and blocking refuge bedspaces. Without both the financial and political will to address these issues, these challenges will deepen and needs will continue to be unmet.

The choices being faced by support services are being made more difficult every day by the increased scrutiny of statutory budgets. Governments and Local Authorities are all trying to make cuts in their own financial outgoings and a new readiness to say 'no' to support services is having a detrimental impact on survivors. The tightening of these budgets is having a devastating impact on support services, who are often left subsidising this work with reserves that are very quickly running out.

The endless uncertainty of funding is meaning that incredibly passionate and skilled staff are leaving the VAWDASV sector for more stable contracts. Not only is this costing the sector in recruitment campaigns, but it also means that specialist skills and knowledge are leaving for good.

Without a significant overhaul working towards a sustainable solution which meets the needs of all survivors, the promise to halve violence against women and girls risks becoming a failed goal. To succeed, we must see a Change That Lasts<sup>1</sup> approach which focuses on strengths-based, needs-led and trauma informed approaches across all aspects of a survivor's life.



<sup>1</sup> [Change That Lasts : Welsh Women's Aid](#)

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# Barriers to support

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Since the COVID-19 pandemic, services across Wales have experienced an increase in the complexity of cases. A number of factors are feeding into this, including the cost-of-living crisis, the housing crisis and the increasing difficulty in finding suitable support for survivors. Waiting lists are getting longer, which means survivors are waiting longer to get the support that they need.

Statutory services are oversubscribed, and their budgets are being heavily scrutinised, meaning much of the work being cut or unable to be delivered is left to the underfunded third sector. Additionally, other services meant to support survivors are putting barriers in the way with a lack of trauma informed approaches to healthcare and housing support. Survivors who have multiple needs, for example support with mental health or substance misuse, are left navigating difficult and inconsistent support provision. A lack of a trauma informed approach can also mean that support is often cancelled after non-attendance. No one should be punished for their experiences but having a system that does not make flexible allowances makes it harder for survivors to seek the right kind of support. There can be a variety of reasons why a survivor does not attend an appointment. A trauma informed approach would mean that those supporting a survivor through challenges are able to make supportive decisions that focus on their strengths and are led by their needs.

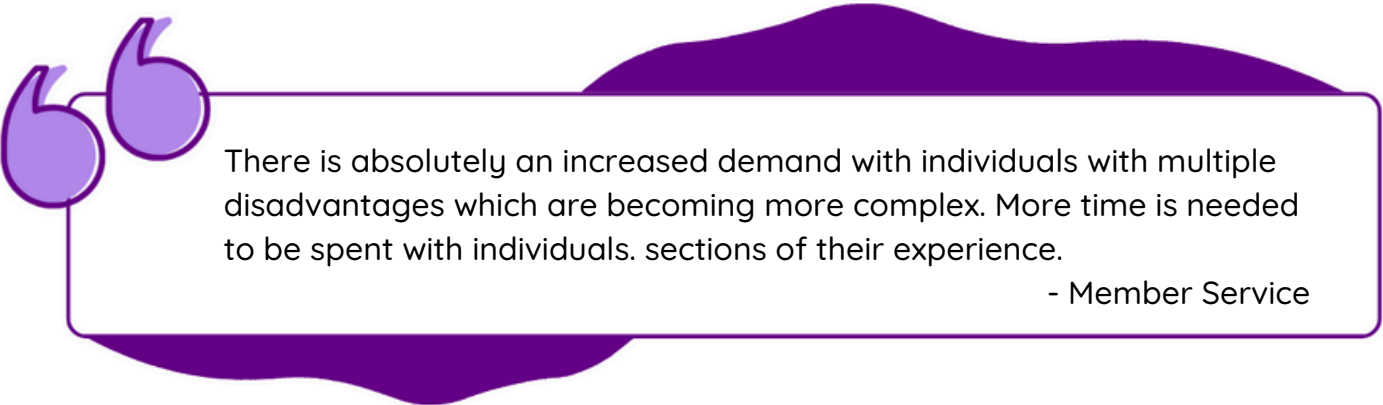
Commissioners often require services to provide new models of dispersed emergency accommodation to best meet the needs of survivors who have multiple and intersecting needs. This can result in an increase in cost and staffing for refuges with no additional funding provided. Concerningly, when these needs are not able to be met due to a lack of appropriate funding that reflects the gravity of the ask, survivors are often housed far from any support systems. A number of survivors who accessed the Live Fear Free Helpline in the last year have had to be housed in England.

Live Fear Free Helpline Case Study 1: Survivor keen to have access to their children in the future but is faced with having to be housed in England due to a lack of support locally for drug and alcohol healthcare support.

The time that a Helpline Advocate spends speaking on the phone to a contact is referred to as talk time, while the time spent dealing with the follow up of a call, including paperwork or other actions, is referred to as handling time. Notably this year, average talk time and handling time have increased significantly, which we believe reflects the complexity of calls that Helpline Advocates are dealing with. This year's average handling time was 27:59 minutes, and the average talk time was 21:01. Compared to the 22-23 year, this was an increase of 45% for handling time and 31% for talk time.

Our member services are highly skilled in being able to provide trauma informed, strengths based and needs led support for survivors but are struggling to keep up with the shortfall left by a lack of statutory service provision. Member Services find that outcomes for survivors can be restricted due to a lack of focus around multi-agency partnerships which enable both statutory services and specialist services to work together and be equitably remunerated. Refuge providers are consistently working on negative budgets, which can make filling this shortfall difficult or even impossible. Services are left with the impossible decision on potentially being unable to support a survivor without the vital partnerships with from statutory services.

We need to move away from a system that sees survivors as complex and instead focus on how governmental departments are failing in their duty to provide a whole systems approach which would prevent the funnelling of additional needs to the third sector. A system that is already set up to support survivors who are facing barriers to accessing proper healthcare and social services support will mean that less pressure is placed on service providers.



There is absolutely an increased demand with individuals with multiple disadvantages which are becoming more complex. More time is needed to be spent with individuals. sections of their experience.

- Member Service

For too long, the narrative has been focused on saying that it is survivors who are complex. Realistically, the survivors are disadvantaged by a system that is not set up to support all lived experiences. Survivors are being left to fall between the cracks without access to services that deal with the intersections of their experience.

# The administrative strain

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In last year's State of the Sector report,<sup>2</sup> we highlighted the need for longer term funding streams. We are still calling for sustainable funding models with inflation-linked increases and payments made in advance. Short term funding, where cycles often are between one or two years, does not allow for long term planning or organisational sustainability. Worryingly, after Welsh Women's Aid submitted a Freedom of Information request on the average length of Capital and Revenue funded projects in the VAWDASV sector to the Welsh Government, we found that the average grant funding offered is just 12 months.<sup>3</sup> It is critical that longer funding cycles are offered to ensure that frontline services are able to plan for the long-term. This also allows for a more efficient way of utilising that funding.

**88%** of member services have experienced an increase in demand on their services.

Sexual Violence services have also raised the issue of short-term funding and the challenge it presents. This is also the case for by and for services. One member of our Sexual Violence and Exploitation Frontline Workers Forum described the impact of short-term funding posts on "staff recruitment, retention and the ability to provide trauma informed support". They went on further to add that this can "have a detrimental impact on the survivor. Particularly with cases of sexual violence or female genital mutilation, as it can take a significant amount of time for survivors to build a rapport with services. By the time that rapport has been built, the funding has come to an end".

Our Member Services listed 'Sustainability of Funding' as the biggest barrier to supporting survivors of Sexual Exploitation. Closely followed by a lack of specialised funding.

It is crucial that we secure long-term funding commitments to enable our frontline services to plan effectively for the future. Without this assurance, their ability to provide consistent and uninterrupted support to survivors is at risk. Our services must be able to operate with the confidence that comes from financial stability and sustainability.

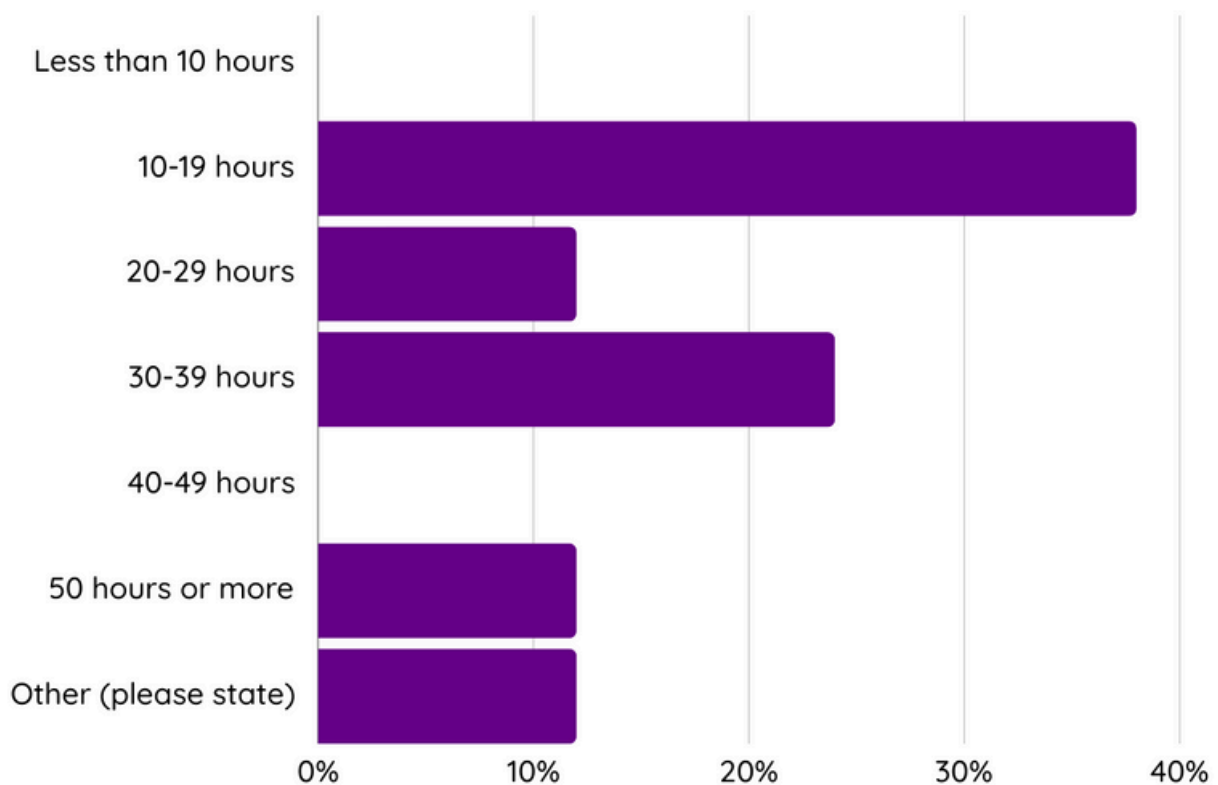
<sup>2</sup> [Welsh Women's Aid State of the Sector 2023-24](#)

<sup>3</sup> FOI Request ATISN 20911 - VAWDASV funding

Frontline services are left waiting for confirmation on funding that is fundamental to work. We have become increasingly concerned about the future of the Rape Support Fund, particularly in light of the approaching deadline of April 2025. Our members require concrete assurances regarding the long-term stability and continuity of this essential funding. This uncertainty poses significant challenges for our member organisations, which rely heavily on this support to sustain their vital services. At the time of writing, the VAWDASV sector currently has no confirmation on the continuation of funding that is vital to their work. This creates further uncertainty for staff within the VAWDASV sector whose role may be funded by these grants. With no reassurance on whether roles will continue, individuals may look elsewhere for job stability. Not only does this result in lost skills and experience, but re-recruiting for these specialist roles can be expensive and difficult.

Short funding cycles also create additional administrative burden on services. It takes time to apply for funding and having to do this more often can be difficult for services who are limited and do not have the time to research, review and plan funding bids.

Question 6. Applying for funding presents complicated challenges for frontline services. We want to understand how this affects your workloads. How long per week does your organisation spend on funding application paper and associated work?



8 Answered / 0 Skipped



Not all services have dedicated fundraisers and those that do will have wider roles than bid writing alone, meaning that fundraisers are, like many within the sector, balancing many competing priorities. Contract and grant information is also delivered ahead of significant holiday periods, meaning there are less staff available to be able to support these bids or staff are left with the decision on whether to cancel planned leave or not.

Last minute changes and funding bids are also causing a strain on those working on bids. Statutory underspend can often be beneficial in providing additional funding to the VAWDASV sector however, these bids are often published last minute and with little notice. In the last departmental underspend, a large amount of time was spent by third-sector organisations in coming together in a partnership in order to apply for these specific bids. However, the UK Government then notified organisations that the funding was no longer available. This resulted in a huge waste of time and resources for those organisations that prepared for this last-minute funding.

Reduced funding available alongside fierce competition for funds means that income from these channels is increasingly challenging to secure. One funder recently disclosed a 3000% increase in applications for two of their programmes after the announcement that the programmers would subsequently close for a strategy review. Not only does this mean that the success of funding applications feels even more uncertain but as previously highlighted in last year's State of the Sector report, it also results in services being unable to share best practise with one another.

Funding streams are becoming limited, with a significant increase in trusts and foundations that are divesting themselves of their funds, otherwise closing, pausing to restructures, or moving to a policy of not accepting unsolicited applications. There is also a growing trend in foundations giving away less money to 'good causes'.<sup>4</sup> This affects sexual exploitation services in particular, as these specialist support services are not commissioned and rely on community funders. Sexual exploitation needs to be included as part and parcel of core funding for VAWDASV. It is crucial that we secure long-term funding commitments to enable our frontline services to plan effectively for the future. Without this assurance, their ability to provide consistent and uninterrupted support to survivors is at risk. Our services must be able to operate with the confidence that comes from financial stability and sustainability.

<sup>4</sup> [Are wealthy UK trusts hoarding their charitable donations?](#)

# Funding that is not fit for purpose

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Not only are funding streams limited, but those that are released are often overly complex and include intense reporting requirements. Scrutiny of the work done as a result of governmental funding is important, however unrealistic requests of delivery outputs in specified timeframes are often made of third-sector organisations. These budgets will often not reflect the true cost of service delivery or organisational and staff expertise. Requests and changes from both the Welsh Government and the UK Government are often unfunded. For example, The Renting Homes (Wales) Act has resulted in additional administrative burden on many of our member services who provide accommodation, without additional funding from the Welsh Government to be able to deal with this new legislation.

Overcomplicated reporting requirements are not allowing services to be able to fully demonstrate the positive work that is being done as a result of funding. These reporting requirements do not properly reflect the complex nature of the needs led, trauma informed support for survivors. There is also currently, an inability to carry over funding from one year to another, meaning that services are having to apply for the same funding over and over again. Service delivery is rarely seamless, and plans will often need change to reflect this reality, for example, service user needs, or other changes. Additionally, some services find it particularly difficult to demonstrate outcomes in a way that governmental funding can validate. Sexual violence and exploitation services have fed back that commissioners do not fully understand the particular nature of service provision. There is a lack of understanding in the value of non-counselling, therapeutic interventions such as art therapy and hobbies and the role they can play in trauma recovery as the commissioning has focused heavily on models of support that statutory health services would provide. Our members and partners specialising in this work are delivering life-saving support and we would like to see the opportunity for them to formally extend their portfolio of interventions to be more inclusive of alternative approaches that they know can be effective.

Funding can also find itself being used inappropriately and not reflecting the aims set out in the bid briefing. Overall, the UK Government's own evaluation of Safer Streets Funding is that "no evidence of statistically significant impacts from the delivery of SSF3 on improving perceptions and feelings of safety in public spaces".<sup>5</sup>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/evaluation-of-the-safer-streets-fund-round-3-year-ending-march-2022/evaluation-of-the-safer-streets-fund-round-3-year-ending-march-2022#summary-of-key-findings-implications-and-recommendations>

CCTV was also included in 74% of applications. However, due to procurement challenges, there was a delay in getting these installed. Whilst some of the effectiveness of installed CCTV as a result of the Safer Street funding was praised, the College of Policing's own data suggests that there is "no evidence" that CCTV is an effective deterrent of violent crime.<sup>6</sup>

We feel that this funding might be more effectively used if applications were supported by expert organisations that can assist in advising how to best tackle violence against women and girls. Other organisations, like EVAW are also sceptical on the benefits of CCTV over a preventative approach.<sup>7</sup>

Alternatively, Bystander Intervention Training has been shown to have positive impacts on crimes like sexual harassment and assault.<sup>8</sup> Data shows that people want to help when they witness sexual harassment towards women and girls but are unsure in how to safely assist.<sup>9</sup> With more Bystander Intervention Training we can equip communities in making Wales a safer place for women. Investing in Early Intervention and Prevention education and awareness packages, such as those which are contained within the Change That Lasts suite of interventions, would be a more effective use of these funds to enable everyone to be rather than to simply feel safer.

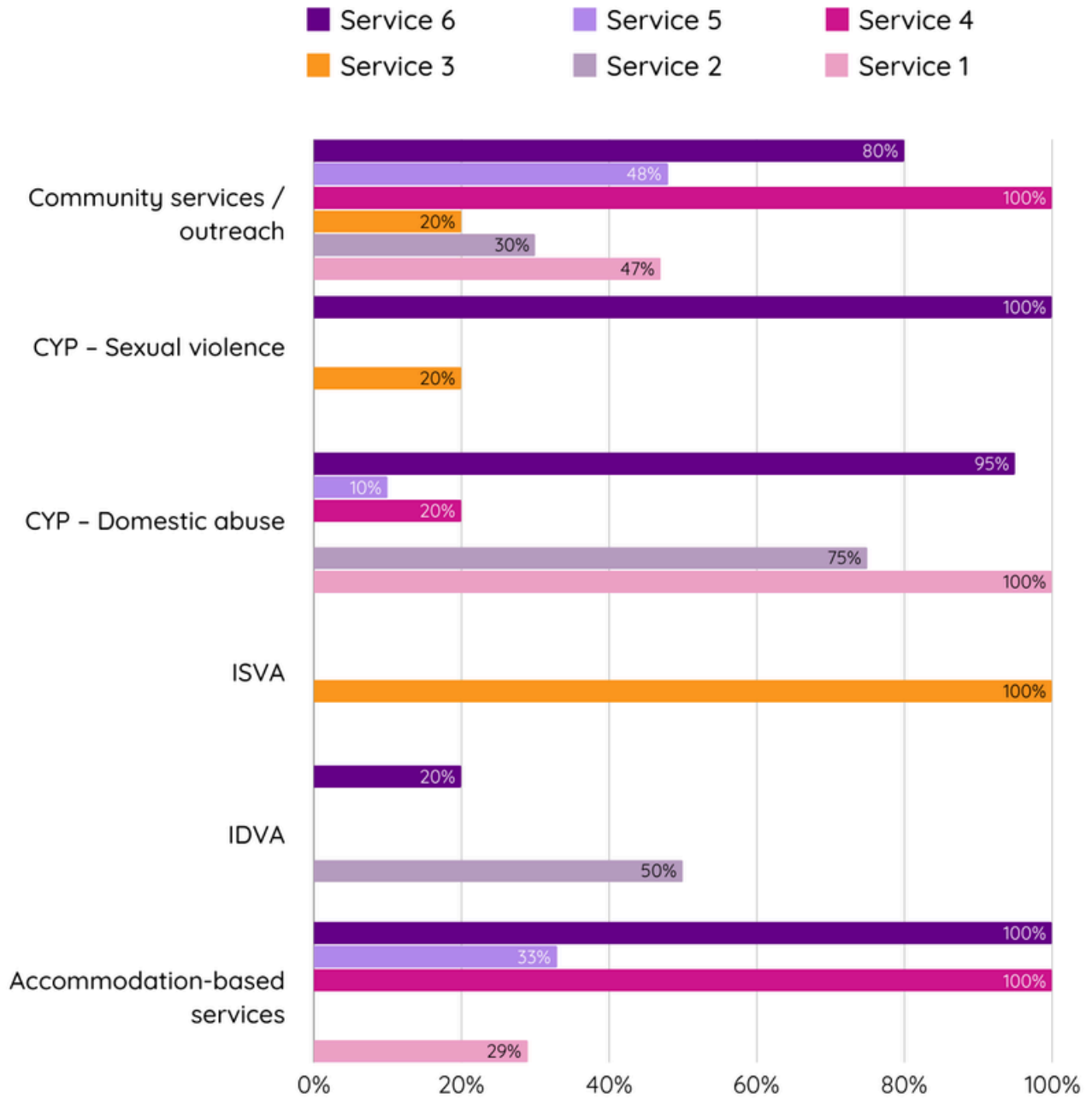
6 <https://www.college.police.uk/guidance/interventions-reduce-violence-against-women-and-girls-vawg-public-spaces/physical-environment-interventions#:~:text=Strong%20evidence-,CCTV,a%20lesser%20extent%2C%20residential%20areas>.

7 <https://www.endviolenceagainstwomen.org.uk/report-violence-against-women-and-girls-snapshot-report-2021-22/>

8 <https://www.breakingthesilence.cam.ac.uk/prevention-support/be-active-bystander#:~:text=Research%20shows%20that%20bystander%20intervention,in%2C%20try%20the%20ABC%20approach>.

9 <https://phw.nhs.wales/news/a-majority-of-people-in-wales-would-attend-bystander-to-violence-training-if-offered/>

## Services waiting for funding

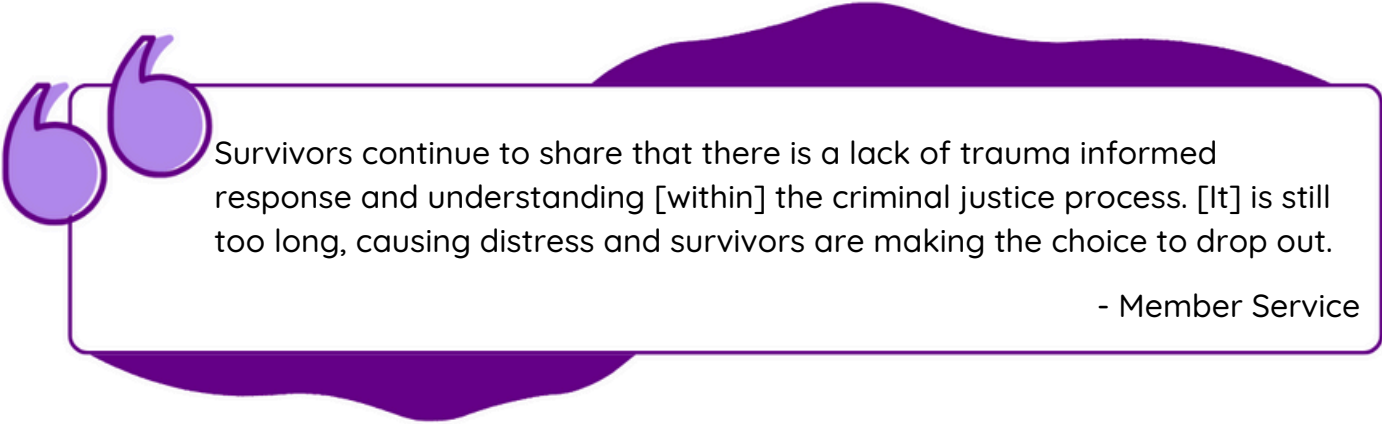


In summary, funding needs to be designed with the acknowledgement that specialist services and survivors are the experts. More flexibility in what services are allowed to use the funding for, will allow a trauma-informed and sustained approach to tackling violence against women and girls. Funding led by the experts rather than governmental tender writers will mean better outcomes for survivors.

# A retraumatising legal system

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Survivors are often faced with a choice on whether accessing the criminal justice system or civil justice system will be beneficial and the prospect of retraumatisation or weaponisation may lead them to the decision not to pursue justice. Many survivors withdraw from the justice process due to a lack of trauma informed processes and long waiting times.<sup>10</sup> In the latest CPS statistics, it takes on average 24.77 days just to approve a domestic abuse charge.



Survivors continue to share that there is a lack of trauma informed response and understanding [within] the criminal justice process. [It] is still too long, causing distress and survivors are making the choice to drop out.

- Member Service

Concerningly, the time it takes to approve an adult rape charge is 129.9 days, which is an increase of 5 days from last year.<sup>11</sup> This is already after an on average of 346 days taken for the police to charge in the first instance.<sup>12</sup> The same report details an increase of 21.6% in adult rape survivors withdrawing from the criminal justice process entirely. 40.9% of all rape cases result in a non-conviction.<sup>13</sup>

We are still awaiting the latest statistics from the UK Government on specific court backlogs, however at the end of 2024, 27% of cases were rearranged on the day.<sup>14</sup> Not only is this retraumatising for survivors, but it costs the survivor time and money when such last-minute decisions are made.

Despite the Welsh Government publishing their progress report for delivering justice in Wales,<sup>15</sup> there seems to be a lack of an update on VAWDASV progress for the year 2024. We keenly await the next progress report on VAWDASV in Wales. Without data from the CPS that disaggregates between England and Wales, it can be difficult to assess the outcomes for survivors facing the Criminal Justice System in Wales.

<sup>10</sup> [RCEW - Breaking Point report - March 2023 E4ugKBL.pdf](#)

<sup>11</sup> [CPS data summary Quarter 1 2024-2025 | The Crown Prosecution Service](#)

<sup>12</sup> [Criminal justice system overview - CJS Dashboard](#)

<sup>13</sup> [Rape-Quarterly-Data-Tables-Q1-24-25.xlsx](#)

<sup>14</sup> [Criminal Justice System - All metrics - CJS Dashboard](#)

<sup>15</sup> [Delivering Justice for Wales: 2024 progress report | GOV.WALES](#)

Giving evidence and facing the criminal justice system can be incredibly difficult for survivors. Special measures are “often not accessible to survivors”.<sup>16</sup> In the Labour government’s pre-election manifesto, a pledge was made to implement legal advocates for every police force area to assist and advise survivors from the moment of report to trial. Concerningly however, the funding source for this will be taken from projects funded by the Police and Crime Commissioners that already support survivors and services.

Despite the UK Government recently raising the threshold on when therapy notes were able to be used during rape trials, two of our Member Services reported an increase in requests for pre-trial therapy or support notes. Therapy is vital to a survivor if they are to be able to work through their trauma. The disclosure of these notes can be traumatising and harmful, potentially leading many survivors to opt out of therapy.

A focus on early intervention and prevention would also give more capacity to the legal system. An approach which stops VAWDASV before it occurs would mean that survivors are less likely to be affected in the first place. For many survivors, a disclosure of abuse can be one of the most difficult things they face. Initiatives like ‘Change That Lasts’ which focus on a whole community-led and systems led response ensures that moments like this can happen in a safe and supportive environment. Whilst the justice system has an incredibly important role to play in tackling VAWDASV, the focus needs to be on preventing it from occurring in the first place. Change That Lasts and other preventative programmes like Bystander Intervention training can equip communities across Wales in playing their part in ensuring that VAWDASV is eradicated for good.



<sup>16</sup> [committees.parliament.uk/oralevidence/14675/pdf/](https://committees.parliament.uk/oralevidence/14675/pdf/)

# A housing crisis with no sign of abating

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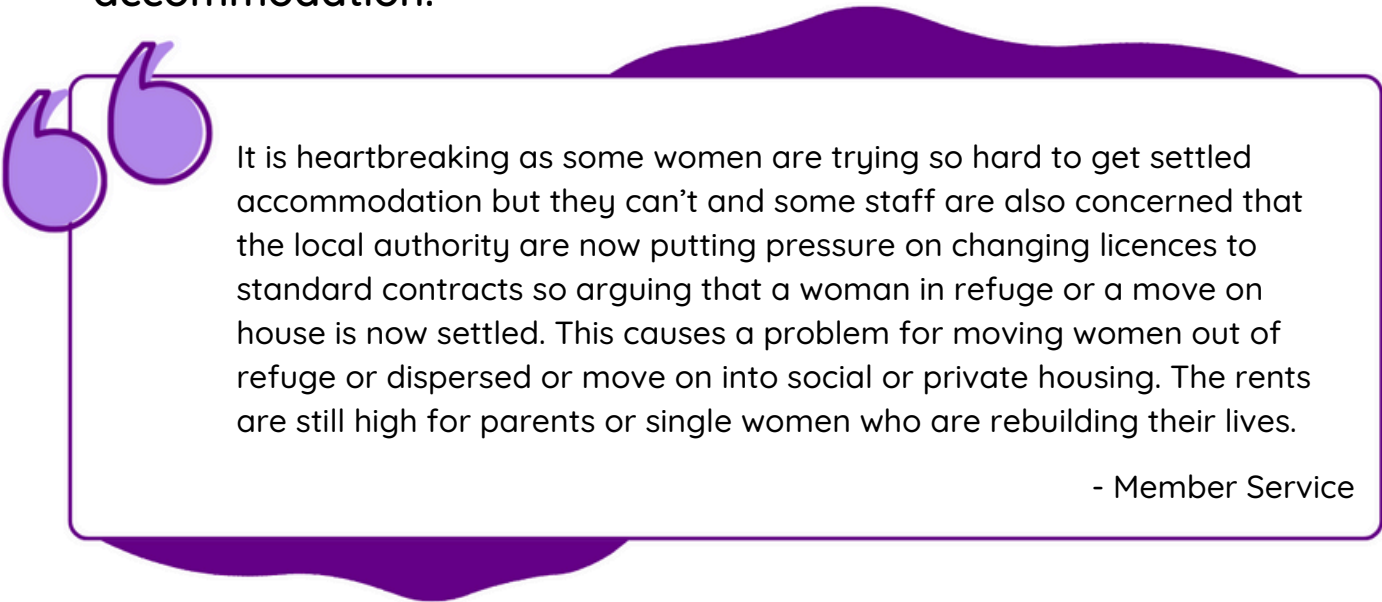
A whole systems approach means that housing policies and allocations are considered with survivors in mind.

**88%** of our member services feel that the housing crisis is impacting on the support available for survivors.

The lack of housing available is having a huge impact on survivors and refuge providers. This problem is being exacerbated by the Renting Homes Act. Whilst the administration of refuge licenses and contracts are still required to be delivered in line with the Renting Homes Act, staff are having to provide additional hours in admin work and survivors are at risk of being kept in emergency accommodation on a long-term basis. Refuge is intended for short term, emergency use but using the contracts that are issued under the Renting Homes Act has meant that survivors are often in refuge accommodation for longer, therefore having an impact of the availability of spaces.

The lack of adequate settled housing for survivors is also causing a bottleneck in waiting lists. Service users of refuge accommodation are having to wait longer to find homes.

Last financial year, **117** survivors in Wales were in refuge for longer than six months, largely due to a lack of move-on accommodation.<sup>17</sup>



It is heartbreaking as some women are trying so hard to get settled accommodation but they can't and some staff are also concerned that the local authority are now putting pressure on changing licences to standard contracts so arguing that a woman in refuge or a move on house is now settled. This causes a problem for moving women out of refuge or dispersed or move on into social or private housing. The rents are still high for parents or single women who are rebuilding their lives.

- Member Service

<sup>17</sup> [Welsh Women's Aid Annual Membership Report 2022-23](#)

The Welsh Government must tackle the housing crisis urgently but building more houses is not the only solution. Particular policy choices make it harder for survivors to find accommodation. Local Authorities will sometimes only consider housing someone if they have a 'local connection' to the area despite this being a discretionary area of housing legislation which should be waived for people who cannot reasonably be expected to return to their local area due to violence and/or abuse. Whilst some survivors wish to remain close to their previous address, others may benefit from being housed further away. Allowing survivors to be housed within Local Authorities without a 'local connection' would provide more flexibility within the housing shortage. Welsh Women's Aid have previously raised our concerns on how this test disproportionately affects survivors<sup>18</sup> and were encouraged to see the Welsh Government looking at adding exemptions to the local connection test in the White Paper on Ending Homelessness in Wales however in the most recent White Paper on securing a path towards adequate housing, including fair rents and affordability, this seems to have been dropped.

**87.5%** of Member Services believe that the housing crisis is impacting the support available for survivors.



The housing crisis is having a significant impact on survivors.

- Member Service

There is a lack of move on accommodation which is creating a bottleneck, putting new victims at risk from not being able to access refuge.

- Member Service

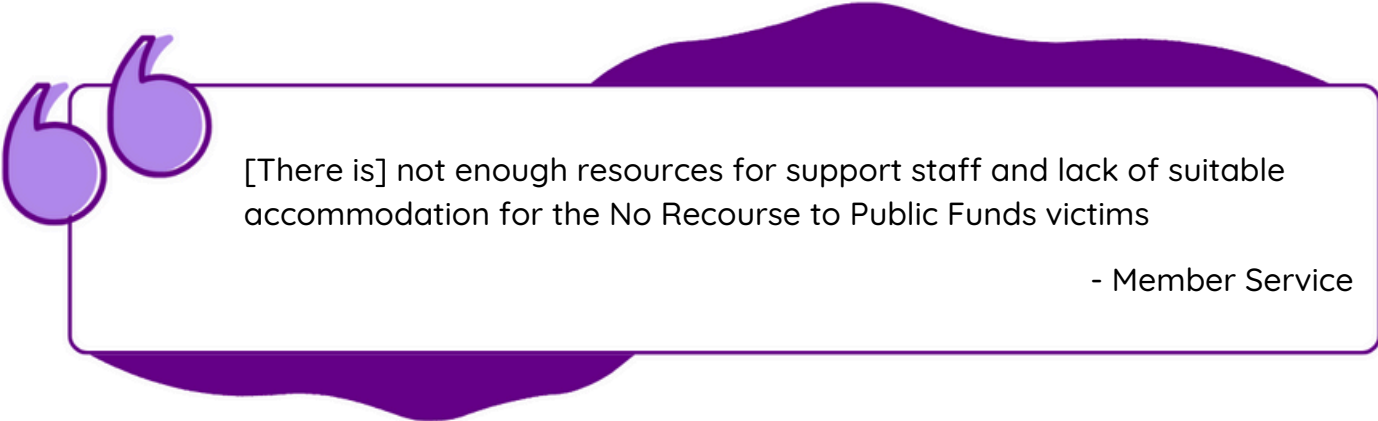
For a long time, the lack of support available to those with No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF) has had a huge impact on being able to support and find safe accommodation for survivors.

**75%** of our member services feel that they are not able to deliver sufficient support for survivors who have NRPF.

<sup>18</sup> <https://welshwomensaid.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/WWA-Response-Consultation-on-the-White-Paper-on-Ending-Homelessness-in-Wales.pdf>



Welsh Women's Aid have previously raised a lack of understanding and implementation of social services' duty under the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 and a lack of accountability of the failure to implement these duties.<sup>19</sup> Social services support is not a public fund for immigration purposes, and it should not be refused solely because the individual has NRPF.<sup>20</sup> Under Section 35 of the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014, the local authority has a duty to meet the care and support needs of an adult if they meet the eligibility criteria or if its necessary in order to protect the adult from abuse or neglect or the risk of abuse or neglect.<sup>21</sup> Therefore, there is significant scope to ensure survivors with NRPF, who are at risk of abuse are placed in safe accommodation, provided with subsistence and support by ensuring that duties are implemented.<sup>22</sup>



[There is] not enough resources for support staff and lack of suitable accommodation for the No Recourse to Public Funds victims

- Member Service

19 [MW07 - Welsh Womens Aid and BAWSO.pdf \(senedd.wales\)](#).

20 <https://www.gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2020-02/access-to-social-services-and-other-care-and-support-for-destitute-asylum-seekers-with-no-recourse-to-public-funds.pdf> - there are very few categories of immigration statuses which are exempt from this support under Schedule 3 of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002.

21 Duty for children is under Section 37 of the Act.

22 [MW07 - Welsh Womens Aid and BAWSO.pdf \(senedd.wales\)](#).

# An intersectional approach to tackling VAWDASV

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Violence against women and girls, domestic abuse and sexual violence affects women with all lived experiences. In order to provide tailored support to survivors, it is crucial to look at the issue as an intersectional one. We know that multiple layers of oppression can “create unique experiences of violence against women and girls”.<sup>23</sup> Acknowledging how differently VAWDASV affects individuals from a wide variety of lived experiences and identities is vitally important.

Specialist support and by and for organisations are vital to providing support that enables and validates every aspect of a survivor’s identity and experience. However, our by and for member services are consistently reporting a lack of funding available to provide this intersectional support. Both the UK and Welsh Government need to acknowledge that without specialist and tailored support, survivors cannot access comprehensive assistance.

Like many minoritised communities, disabled people are three times more likely to experience abuse in their lifetime. 22 Deaf women are at risk of domestic abuse every day<sup>24</sup> and 27.5% of deaf adults reported they were emotionally abused during their lifetime. Any form of disclosure is difficult for a survivor, but when barriers like language, a lack of accessibility and understanding is added in, it can be almost impossible. We need to ensure that further barriers are not put in the way of any survivor accessing support.

Women with experiences of poverty are facing additional challenges when looking at seeking support in the midst of a cost-of-living crisis. 77% of frontline workers said that “the cost-of-living crisis is stopping women from leaving their abusers”.<sup>25</sup> Financial barriers can often impact on a survivor being able to leave a dangerous situation. The Emergency Fund provided many survivors with additional financial tools and included specific funding for by and for Black and minoritised survivor services. However, 25.4% of applications being rejected were due to the fund already being used.<sup>26</sup> This shows that there is a significant need for the continuation of the fund to ensure that survivors are able to access the vital resources they need. At the time of writing, despite the UK Government releasing it’s Autumn Budget, there is no confirmation on whether the Emergency Fund will continue.

<sup>23</sup> [The value of intersectionality in understanding violence against women and girls.pdf](#)

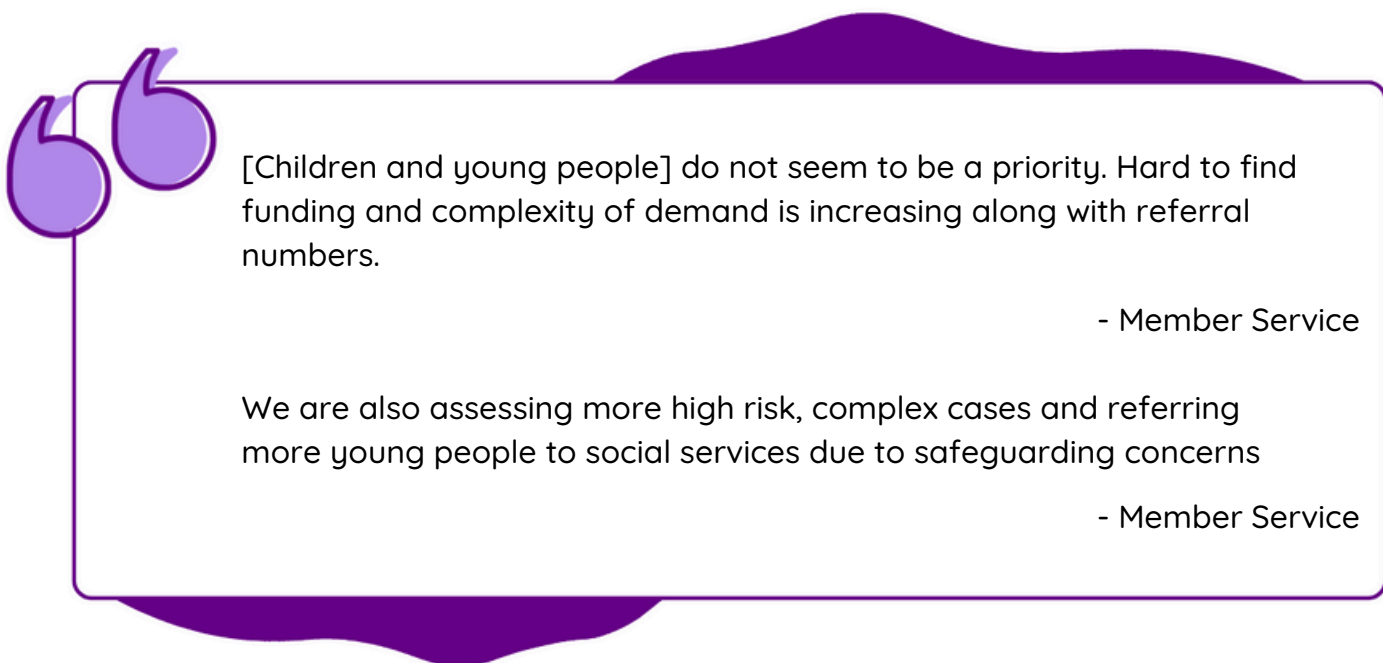
<sup>24</sup> [Domestic Abuse Information and Service Details - SignHealth](#)

<sup>25</sup> [New data from Refuge warns that cost of living crisis is forcing survivors of domestic abuse to stay with abusive partners.](#)

<sup>26</sup> [Emergency\\_fund\\_evalaution\\_2023.pdf](#)

Survivors from marginalised communities and ethnic minorities often experience additional barriers when it comes to seeking support. The Equality and Human Rights Commission have called for urgent further protections for migrant women in the UK.<sup>27</sup> A lack of understanding on the right to safe and adequate housing for those with No Recourse to Public Funds often leaves migrant survivors with a lack of uncertainty over their safety. This was raised in our previous State of the Sector report and we are awaiting on an improvement in this situation.

There is also a distinct lack of ‘knowledge and understanding regarding forced marriage, Honour-Based Abuse, and the support that a victim may require amongst statutory and support agencies’.<sup>28</sup> This continued lack of knowledge must be countered with adequate training to enable all statutory services to be able to properly support survivors.



[Children and young people] do not seem to be a priority. Hard to find funding and complexity of demand is increasing along with referral numbers.

- Member Service

We are also assessing more high risk, complex cases and referring more young people to social services due to safeguarding concerns

- Member Service

According to Safe Lives, children and young people (CYP) experience the highest rates of domestic violence of any age group.<sup>29</sup> However, there is a lack of specialised funding to be able to support young survivors. In the last financial year, 349 children were on waiting lists for support. The Children Affected by Domestic Abuse fund has still not been confirmed for the next financial year, meaning that many services are having to make the difficult decision to close their waiting lists until funding is confirmed. A lack in certainty over funding is also meaning that many highly skilled, specialist CYP workers are leaving for more stable contracts, often with the statutory sector.

<sup>27</sup> [Migrant victims of violence against women are in urgent need of further protection, Equality and Human Rights Commission says | Electronic Immigration Network](#)

<sup>28</sup> BAWSO, Understanding Forced Marriages Report

<sup>29</sup> [Safe Young Lives | Young people & domestic abuse - SafeLives](#)

Additionally, according to the latest briefing from the Wales Violence Prevention Unit, violence against older people has continued to rise across Wales. However, the report highlighted that not all police forces were reporting full data sets. Whilst we fundamentally believe that a survivor does not have to report to the police if they choose not to do so, having full data sets can allow services to properly plan responses. This lack of data can mean that inaccurate assumptions are made when it comes to commissioning.

Survivors from the LGBTQ+ community can experience additional isolation. Galop, a charity which looks to support LGBTQ+ survivors of abuse and violence, found that 61% of survivors did not seek support from services following a particular instance of abuse by a family member or a partner/ex-partner.<sup>30</sup> 41% of those not accessing support stated that they did not know there was any support available.

It is clear that more is needed to ensure that survivors who face a number of compounding inequalities have an equality of access to support. However, a lack of by and for funding for specialist organisations can mean that by and for service provides struggle to deal with demand.





## Our recommendations

- Increase in the VAWDASV budget that properly reflects inflation and the cost-of-living crisis that services are facing.
- A whole systems approach to commissioning appropriate services that meet the diverse needs of survivors.
- A commitment to providing survivors with the means to address emergencies regardless of their economic status.
- A cross-party and governmental commitment to early intervention and prevention which looks at programmes like Change That Lasts to educate, raise-awareness and engage our communities.
- Longer funding cycles that properly support the work being done to end VAWDASV which include inflationary periodic increases.
- More flexibility within funding to allow services to effectively provide needs led and trauma informed support for all survivors.
- An exemption for Refuge under the Renting Homes (Wales) Act.
- An intersectional and tailored approach to all responses and funding.
- Ensure that appropriate, consistent training is given to ensure that Local Authorities understand their responsibilities under the Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act 2014 in relation to survivors with No Recourse to Public Funds.

# Conclusion

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It is clear that without a whole systems approach, with all organisations and departments working together, we will not see a sustainable end to violence against women and girls. Every survivor is different. Every survivor has multifaceted experiences that feed into the support that they need. Without a commitment from statutory services to engage meaningfully and to align their practices with needs led, trauma-informed and survivor-centred principles, these barriers to support will persist, leaving survivors in crisis and third-sector services overwhelmed.

Without statutory services being engaged to meet these needs, the crisis of barriers to support will continue. Despite every effort being made, the third sector cannot continue to meet the unmet needs of survivors in Wales.

Refuge services are doing everything they can to be able to meet the gap left by a system that is not fit for purpose. The current strain risks threatening progress as underfunded support services struggle to meet the rising demand.

Whilst the UK Government's pledge to halve violence against women and girls is a hopeful commitment, it will only succeed with a comprehensive and sustained approach. This must incorporate all experiences of violence, secure adequate and appropriate funding and involve coordination and cooperation across statutory and non-statutory organisations. Achieving this pledge requires political and financial investment to build a sustainable, unified response that genuinely supports every survivor and support service. Only then can we make meaningful strides towards a Wales that is free from violence against women and girls.

Additionally, the newly announced increase in national insurance contributions will have significant budgetary impacts for the third sector. With the UK Chancellor having already ruled out an exemption, it is imperative that the Welsh Government consider and mitigate this increase when looking at funds provided to the sector. Without the additional funding to cover increased national insurance contributions, specialist services face further financial constraints which will inevitably impact on their ability to provide vital lifesaving support to survivors.

Welsh Women's Aid would like to thank our incredible Member Services who have provided invaluable insight into this report on top of the work they 365 days a year to support survivors across Wales.

Anyone affected by these forms of violence and abuse should be able to access help and support when they need it and every case should be taken seriously. The Live Fear Free Helpline is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week for women, children and men experiencing domestic abuse, sexual violence or other forms of violence against women.

Call: 0808 80 10 800

Email: [info@livefearfreehelpline.wales](mailto:info@livefearfreehelpline.wales)

Text: 07860 077333

Webchat: <https://gov.wales/live-fear-free/contact-live-fear-free>





## Welsh Women's Aid

Pendragon House, Caxton Place,  
Pentwyn, Cardiff, CF23 8XE

02920 541 551

[info@welshwomensaid.org.uk](mailto:info@welshwomensaid.org.uk)

Follow us:

[@welshwomensaid](https://www.instagram.com/welshwomensaid)

[www.welshwomensaid.org.uk](http://www.welshwomensaid.org.uk)

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Putting Women & Children First