

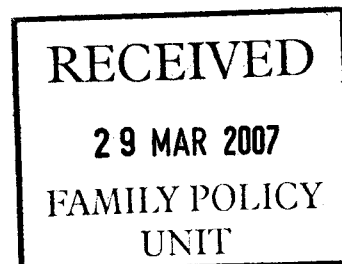
## Consultation Questions Response Document

Please respond to the consultation document by e-mail, letter or fax.

Responses should be sent to:

e-mail: [familypolicyunit@dhsspsni.gov.uk](mailto:familypolicyunit@dhsspsni.gov.uk)

Family Policy Unit  
Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety  
Room C4.22  
Castle Buildings  
Stormont  
Belfast  
BT4 3SQ



Fax: 02890 520529

Responses must be received no later than **30th March 2007**.

(Please tick a box)  
I am responding:  ~~as an individual~~ on behalf of an organisation

Name: ANNE GRAHAM

Job Title: OPERATIONS MANAGER

Organisation: WOMENS AID FEDERATION N. IRELAND

Address: 129 UNIVERSITY ST  
BELFAST  
BT 7 1HP

Tel: 02890 249041 Fax: 02890 239296

Email: anne.graham@womensaidni.org

# **Families Matter: *Supporting Families in Northern Ireland***

The Department of Health, Social Services and Public  
Safety's Proposals on a Regional Family  
and Parenting Strategy

**Q1. Do you agree that the aims stated are the right aims?**

Women's Aid endorses the 'whole child' model and the high level outcome statements contained in the Children's Strategy for Northern Ireland. The aims of this strategy recognise the key role of parents in supporting their children to reach their full potential and of the need for parents to be assisted and supported in this role.

**Q2. Do you agree that the vision stated is the right vision?**

**Q3. The document lists 10 principles that underpin the strategy.**

**Do you agree with the principles stated?**

**Q4. The document lists 7 outcomes from the Children and Young People's strategy, 'Our Children and Young People- Our Pledge'. Do you agree that these are the right outcomes for this strategy?**

The vision, principles and outcomes are worthy and Women's Aid could not fail to agree with them.

Children need a safe and secure home, free of violence and parents that love and protect them. For too many children home is far from a safe haven. Unicef's publication "Behind Closed Doors" 2006 indicates that there are between 240,000 and 963,000 children living with domestic violence in the UK. When we extrapolate the figures to a Northern Ireland population the number is between 8,126 and 32,607 children. Violence in the home is one of the most pervasive human rights challenges today however it still remains a largely hidden problem.

The government in its strategy TV@H and through its recent media campaign has shown its commitment to raising awareness of domestic violence among the general public.

Early and effective responses and support to women can help to increase their safety and protection and reduce repeat victimisation. “Children who are experiencing domestic violence may benefit from a range of support and services, and some may need safeguarding from harm. Often, supporting a non-violent parent is likely to be the most effective way of promoting the child’s welfare” (working together to safeguard children, Department of Health, Home Office, Department of Education and Employment 1999). In order to achieve many of the outcomes we need to recognise the reality that many families live with. All agencies working with families have responsibilities to provide their staff and volunteers with domestic violence training to raise awareness of the issue and ensure effective responses and interventions.

**Q5. The focus of this strategy is primarily on preventative and early intervention to support parents at particular times of need and at particular stages in the development of their child. Do you think that this is the appropriate scope for the strategy?**

Preventative and early interventions are crucial to support parents. While support to families is beneficial when children are very young, access to support and assistance should be available at all stages of their development.

**Q6. Do you agree that Theme 1- Parental Support is an appropriate theme?**

Yes

### **Actions**

The role of health professionals is essential in ensuring that women affected by domestic violence receive the response and support they need. 30% of domestic

violence begins during pregnancy and a violent relationship can also become more abusive at this time. Routine universal screening at all maternity units would promote early disclosure (recommended in the TV@H action plan 2007-2008).

As previously stated all agencies working with families in Sure Start, Parenting Education and Positive Parenting initiatives should ensure that staff and volunteers undergo training on domestic violence and related issues to ensure that disclosures are responded to appropriately and information on support services offered.

### **Family Mediation**

While family mediation and relationship counselling can be beneficial supports for some families they are not appropriate for families where there is a history of domestic violence. For family mediation and relationship counselling to work effectively both parties must agree on equal terms to them. In cases of domestic violence, where there is an abuse of power and the perpetrator has control over the victim such agreement is not possible. It is essential therefore that all staff and volunteers engaged in the provision of family mediation and relationship counselling undergo training on domestic violence and related issues to alert them to the signs, symptoms and dynamics of domestic violence.

### **Child Contact Centres**

5.26 The significant difference between supervised contact centres and general contact centres should be explicitly clarified in the document. Within Northern Ireland there are currently 10 contact centres and 1 contact centre where supervised contact is available.

While there are mechanisms in place in public law proceedings regarding child contact to take account of domestic violence, these are missing in private law proceedings. This is a gap which needs to be addressed.

Any proposed development and/ or expansion of Child Contact Centres should take account of the quality standard requirements of the National Association of Child Contact Centres. In addition all staff and volunteers should receive comprehensive training on domestic violence.

**Q7. Do you agree the actions suggested in Theme 1 are appropriate actions to take under this theme?**

**Q8. Do you agree that Theme 2- Access to Information is an appropriate theme?**

Yes

**Q9. Do you agree the actions suggested in Theme 2 are appropriate actions to take under this theme?**

### **Actions**

Any work on regional data base should build on the existing audits carried out by children's services planning departments and other agencies.

### **Helpline**

Parents' advice already operates an effective helpline. Rather than reinvent the wheel, existing services and good practice should be supported and adequately funded.

**Q10. Do you agree that Theme 3- Assessment of Needs is an appropriate theme?**

Yes

**Q11. Do you agree the actions suggested in Theme 3 are appropriate actions to take under this theme?**

Yes. The adoption of UNOCINI will ensure a consistent approach across the region.

**Q12. Do you agree that Theme 4- Information Sharing is an appropriate theme?**

Yes

**Q13. Do you agree the actions suggested in Theme 4 are appropriate actions to take under this theme?**

The development of guidance and protocols for information sharing is essential though in order to embed and ensure effective implementation training must be provided for all relevant staff. The proposed timescale of April 2008 may need to be extended to take account of a training programme.

**Q14. Do you agree Theme 5- Integration and Multi-Agency Working is an appropriate theme?**

Yes

**Q15. Do you agree the actions suggested in Theme 5 are appropriate actions to take under this theme?**

There is no detail in the report about the financial resources attached to the strategy. Without such information it is difficult to comment on how realistic some of the proposed actions are- not just in this theme but throughout the document.

Integration and multi-agency working can be achieved without the establishment of 6 new children's centres. This proposed action will neither result in improved convenience nor access for parents and families. Parents and families depend on resources/ centres within their local communities. This document fails to recognise the existing network of resource and support centres in Northern Ireland eg: Women's Centres; Community Centres; Community Health Centres etc which provide a range of support services for children and parents. Any resources should be used to improve and consolidate interagency working and linkages between existing voluntary resource centres and their staff teams and service providers. They should be further assisted to implement and promote the proposed regional information databases.

**Q17. Are the actions or proposals, which are set out in this document likely to have an adverse impact on any group of people in terms of the nine equality dimensions?**

Unable to comment as the document does not provide sufficient information on proposed actions.

**Q18. Are you aware of the indication or evidence- qualitative or quantitative- that the actions or proposals in this document may have an adverse impact on equality of opportunity or good relations?**

Unable to comment as the document does not provide sufficient information on proposed actions.

**Q19. Does the proposed strategy and actions afford an opportunity to promote equality of opportunity and/or good relations?**

Unable to comment as the document does not provide sufficient information on proposed actions.

**Q20. Do you have any other comments, which you think might be relevant to the development of the strategy?**

No