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WOMEN'S AID FEDERATION OF ENGLAND

NATIONAL QUALITY STANDARDS



for services supporting women and
children survivors of domestic violence

Author

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Author's acknowledgments

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Women's Aid is the national charity for women and children working to end domestic abuse. For over 40 years Women's Aid has been at the forefront of shaping and coordinating responses to domestic violence and abuse through practice. We empower survivors by keeping their voices at the heart of our work, listening and responding to their needs. We are a federation of over 220 organisations who provide more than 300 local lifesaving services to women and children across the country.

We provide expert training, qualifications and consultancy to a range of agencies and professionals working with survivors or commissioning domestic abuse services, and award a National Quality Mark for services which meet our quality standards. Our campaigns achieve change in policy, practice and awareness, encouraging healthy relationships and helping to build a future where domestic abuse is no longer tolerated. The 24 Hour National Domestic Violence Helpline on 0808 2000 247 (run in partnership with Refuge) and our range of online services, which include the Survivors' Forum, help hundreds of thousands of women and children every year.

Introduction

The Women's Aid National Quality Standards were developed in response to the needs expressed by services across the Women's Aid federation, who wanted support to demonstrate the unique way in which dedicated specialist support services achieve lasting change in the lives of women and children survivors of domestic violence.

The need for women's services, accessible to survivors, whether or not they are known to the criminal justice system, is expressed by women fleeing violence across the world, and historically the UK has been a leader in developing practice. Survivors engage with services when they experience a needs-led approach and feel safe. This excellence has been defining characteristic of Women's Aid member services for four decades.

There is now an urgent need to articulate this practice in a way that meets the needs of the commissioners who make vital choices about how public money is spent, and that enables specialist services to demonstrate their added value in a competitive marketplace.

There are other accreditation systems available which cover specific aspects of service delivery, and this is why Women's Aid is working together with Imkaan, SafeLives, Respect and Rape Crisis England and Wales to establish a co-ordinated framework of standards for the sector. The National Quality Standards have been written with this piece of work in mind and provide a quality benchmark for all domestic violence services that will work in tandem with other issue or service specific standards.

The most important role of Women's Aid is to provide a national voice in partnership with its members for women who experience and survive domestic violence, influencing government, opinion-formers and the public. This collective voice will be strengthened at both national and local level by the existence of the National Quality Standards. The more services are accredited, the stronger the voice will become and the wider the understanding will be of how long-term positive outcomes for survivors are achieved.

Through our capacity-building work we have developed expertise in protecting specialist knowledge, while bringing commercial skills to bear, in a way which is rooted in the values we share. Without those values, our services will be compromised, while without taking account of commercial realities, they will be threatened. This understanding is the foundation of these quality standards.

The National Quality Standards form part of a Quality Framework developed by the capacity-building partnership between Women's Aid and Imkaan. The partnership is rooted in a gendered understanding and analysis of the violence women experience and in an international human rights framework. We are committed to supporting organisations to work together locally in a way that respects specialist knowledge and places the needs of survivors at the heart of partnership work.

WOMEN'S AID NATIONAL QUALITY STANDARDS



Background

The Home Office has made a commitment to “improve local provision and quality of services for violence against women and girl victims”¹ The Women’s Aid Federation of England National Quality Standards, referred to hereafter as the Women’s Aid Standards, deliver that aim. They have been produced by the Imkaan² and Women’s Aid Capacity Building Partnership and focus on “...the overarching outcomes of supporting victims to cope with the immediate impacts of crime and recover from the harm experienced...”, outlined in the Ministry of Justice Victims’ Services Commissioning Framework, providing a framework for, “...victims’ service providers... to ensure the holistic needs of victims are met.”³

The Women’s Aid Standards form a set of accredited criteria through which dedicated specialist services addressing domestic violence perpetrated against women and children can evidence their quality. There is a formal accreditation process organisations are required to complete to evidence they meet the standards. Embodying principles of participation, transparent governance and needs-led service delivery, they set out the nature and standard of service provision necessary to enable women and children survivors of domestic violence to cope with and recover from their experiences of abuse.

The Women’s Aid Standards sit within an overarching Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) and Inter-Personal Violence (IPV) sector framework developed by the Sector Sustainability Group that includes Imkaan, Rape Crisis England and Wales, Respect and Safe Lives⁴. Women’s Aid initiated the Sector Sustainability Group, which is mapping standards across the five participating organisations in order to capture the specialisms within the sector.

The Women’s Aid Standards have been mapped against:

1. Council of Europe: Minimum Standards for Violence Against Women Support Services
2. Home Office: A Call to End Violence Against Women and Girls: Action Plan 2013
3. Imkaan Accredited Quality Standards (IAQS)
4. Rape Crisis National Service Standards
5. Women’s Aid Scotland’s National Service Standards
6. Ministry of Justice: Victims’ Services Commissioning Framework
7. Every Child Matters Outcomes Framework
8. National Occupational Standards addressing Domestic and Sexual Abuse

Reference has also been made to the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (1979); the Convention of Belém do Pará (1994); and the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (2011) (Istanbul Convention).

1 Home Office, *A Call to End Violence Against Women and Girls: Action Plan 2013*, London, 2013

2 Imkaan is a UK-based, black feminist organisation dedicated to addressing violence against women and girls. www.imkaan.org.uk

3 Ministry of Justice, *Victims’ Services Commissioning Framework*, London 2013

4 www.womensaid.org.uk/statement-new-group (2013) *Sector bodies form working group to support VAWG and IPV services*

The Women's Aid Standards sit within Change that Lasts, a strengths-based, needs-led model developed by Women's Aid that supports domestic violence survivors and their children to build resilience, and leads to independence. The components of the model are:

- L** Listen — always listen to survivors and place their needs at the centre.
- A** Ask & Act — ask the right questions safely and act appropriately.
- S** Specialist support — know when and how to refer to your local specialist service.
- T** Tools — provide clear procedures, roles, information and training across agencies.
- S** Sustained independence and freedom — work together for an independent future for survivors.

The Women's Aid Standards also sit alongside a sector-wide outcomes framework, developed by the Imkaan and Women's Aid Capacity Building Partnership, and prescribe the minimum essential conditions that need to be in place to deliver the following overarching objectives of the National Outcomes Framework:

1. Enabling women and girls to cope with and recover from experiences of violence and abuse.
2. Working towards ending violence against women and girls.
3. Ensuring women and girls have opportunity to attain their full development and advancement.

Evidence of meeting the standards in this document entitles a service provider to the Women's Aid Federation England Quality Mark.

Principles

The principles underpinning the Women's Aid Standards relate to the principles and approach of the Change that Lasts model and reflect the feminist frontline practice of the women's domestic violence sector that has saved women's lives for decades:

- ▶ The shared goal for services is independence for women survivors, defined as sustainable safety and wellbeing for themselves and their dependent children.
- ▶ Service responses should build on and nurture the internal and external resources available to individual survivors, building on their personal and social capital.
- ▶ Every point of interaction with a survivor is an opportunity for intervention. It should not be missed, and should not add to the multiple and intersecting barriers survivors already face.
- ▶ Rebuilding of stability, resilience and autonomy for women survivors is facilitated in women-only spaces and environments of mutual respect.
- ▶ Barriers on the journey to safety and independence are most effectively removed or reduced by services led by and for women survivors and their children.
- ▶ Barriers for women facing multiple oppressions of all types, including race, sexual orientation, ability and age, are more effectively removed or reduced by services led by women facing similar barriers and inequalities.
- ▶ Services should be gender-sensitive and gender-specific. The experiences and needs of male victims differ from those of female victims and should be met in specialist men's services located separately from services for women and children
- ▶ Raising community and agency awareness of domestic violence as a gendered form of violence rooted in women's inequality is an essential component of responding to victims.
- ▶ Inclusion of service users in service planning and review supports the work of challenging and dismantling patterns of coercive control.
- ▶ Children and young people are service users in their own right and need to be given dedicated support and a voice in service planning.
- ▶ Dedicated specialist women's services benefit women survivors when they work in partnership valuing and supporting each other's specialisms and offering integrated local pathways between their complementary services.

The Standards

1. Safety, security and dignity

Women and children's rights to life, liberty and dignity are upheld.

- 1.1 Women contacting the service for help are assessed for and offered services on the basis of their individual need for safety and support.
- 1.2 Women can access crisis support at any point they need to and receive an appropriate response, including access to temporary crisis accommodation while a refuge place is found.
- 1.3 Women who are misusing substances or who have mental health needs are assessed for and offered a service on the same basis as other women and every effort is made to accommodate their needs.
- 1.4 No woman who has a need for support is refused a service because English is not her first language, because of her immigration or asylum-seeking status or because she has no recourse to public funds.
- 1.5 The organisation provides, values and protects women-only spaces for women survivors.
- 1.6 Provision for male survivors is delivered in locations separate from services for women.
- 1.7 Services for men use the Respect assessment toolkit for work with male victims of domestic violence and are skilled in assessing who does what to whom and identifying and referring clients to appropriate services through established referral pathways.
- 1.8 The organisation protects the security of women through use of confidential addresses, and rigorous security measures.
- 1.9 The organisation supports women to keep themselves and each other safe, and minimise the emotional pressure and control they are subjected to from perpetrators.
- 1.10 Women are supported to report to the police and participate in the criminal justice system if they choose to.
- 1.11 All women survivors are provided with a female practitioner as their main, or key, support worker.
- 1.12 Group work with perpetrators is accountable to victims, is Respect accredited or working towards Respect accreditation, and includes partner safety work as integral to any intervention with perpetrators.

2. Rights and access

Equal access to their rights and entitlements is ensured for all survivors and barriers to equality are addressed.

- 2.1 Women are believed and listened to with respect and sensitivity.
- 2.2 Women are informed of their legal and human rights and the services they are entitled to receive.
- 2.3 Women's needs and strengths are assessed in order to identify and address barriers to their safety and independence.
- 2.4 Service interventions and practice are respectful of women's rights to confidentiality and women are informed of situations where that confidentiality may be limited.
- 2.5 Women have sufficient time to make informed decisions and no action is taken on their behalf without their prior knowledge, unless there is an overriding need to safeguard a child or vulnerable adult.
- 2.6 The organisation monitors service user profiles in order to identify and address under-representation of groups with protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010.
- 2.7 The organisation monitors management and staff profiles to ensure they are reflective of the diversity of service users in terms of their protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010.
- 2.8 The particular and individual needs of Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) survivors are addressed.
- 2.9 The organisation removes or reduces barriers to physical access, support and communication for disabled women and employs a social rather than a medical model of disability.
- 2.10 The organisation ensures it is accessible to lesbian, bisexual and transgender women.
- 2.11 The organisation refers to, and engages with, sexual violence, Black and Minority Ethnic (BME), Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender (LBT), disabled, young women's and other dedicated specialist services to ensure that women with those identities or experiences can access a specialist or identity-based service delivered from a gendered perspective if they choose to.
- 2.12 The organisation responds positively to women's needs around their faith and spirituality.

3. Physical and emotional health

Women and children's rights to the highest attainable standards of physical, sexual, reproductive and mental health are upheld, promoting long term recovery and well-being.

- 3.1 The organisation ensures that women have access to medical care and health services appropriate to their needs.
- 3.2 The organisation ensures that women have access to sexual health and pregnancy advice services and are supported to explore their options in pregnancy, including their right to choose a termination.
- 3.3 Women are enabled to disclose sexual violence, sexual exploitation and childhood sexual abuse and are offered specialist support with these issues, where available, from organisations accredited under the Rape Crisis England and Wales National Service Standards.
- 3.4 Women have access to specialist support and mental health services to address coping strategies, including substance misuse and mental health issues.
- 3.5 Women have access to individual counselling or group work to recognise their strengths and resources, and increase their capacity to identify the exercise of coercive control.

4. Stability, resilience and autonomy

Women survivors are supported to achieve long-term stability, independence and freedom from abuse.

- 4.1 Women's needs and strengths are assessed on entry to the service, including their physical safety; health needs; children's needs; need for legal and immigration advice; and social and economic welfare.
- 4.2 The organisation supports women to articulate their needs, access their rights and entitlements and take charge of decision-making about their own lives.
- 4.3 Women are encouraged to identify goals for the future and access or maintain education, training and employment to maximise their financial independence.
- 4.4 Women are supported to participate in community life and to develop strong support networks.
- 4.5 Women are supported to achieve financial stability and independence.
- 4.6 Women are supported to access stable accommodation and resourced to sustain independent tenancies.
- 4.7 Women have access to resettlement and follow-up services with exit strategies tailored to individual need, sufficient to sustain their move to independence without promoting dependence.

5. Children and young people

The rights of children and young people to safety, education and family life are upheld.

- 5.1 The organisation has effective policies and procedures for safeguarding children.
- 5.2 The physical, mental and sexual health needs of children and young people are addressed through individual needs assessment and support planning processes appropriate to their ages.
- 5.3 The organisation provides age appropriate information for children and young people and supports the authentic voice of children and young people through participation, involvement and consultation.
- 5.4 Pregnant women are enabled to make their own pregnancy and childbirth choices, and are supported to prepare for caring for their babies.
- 5.5 Mothers of babies and children aged 0 to 3 years old are supported to care for themselves and their children and access resources to meet their own and their children's needs.
- 5.6 Children and young people aged 3 to 11 years old are supported to understand their experiences of domestic violence, build their resilience and confidence, and attend nursery or school.
- 5.7 Young people aged 11 to 18 years old are supported to understand their experiences of domestic violence, build their resilience and confidence, attend school or college, and be fully involved in decisions which affect their lives.
- 5.8 The organisation addresses the particular support needs of young women survivors of abusive relationships, builds their assertiveness and ensures their access to all rights and benefits.
- 5.9 Support is provided to mothers to develop their parenting resources and maintain and strengthen their relationships with their children.
- 5.10 The organisation advocates for appropriate support for the non-abusing parent in order to improve the safety and well-being of children in family court and child protection procedures.
- 5.11 The organisation ensures staff have the necessary skills and training to enable them to meet the assessed needs of children and young people.

6. Leadership and prevention

Women and girls' voices lead the development of strategic responses to violence against women and girls.

- 6.1 The organisation engages with the development of local Violence Against Women and Girls strategy and supports women survivors to engage individually or through survivor forums.
- 6.2 The organisation contributes to initiatives to educate children and young people around consent, healthy relationships, gender inequality and violence against women and girls.
- 6.3 The organisation contributes to training and presentations to raise awareness of violence against women and girls and the needs of women survivors in communities and agencies.
- 6.4 The organisation takes a strategic role in advocating with other agencies for improved responses to women survivors and their children.
- 6.5 The organisation works with other dedicated Violence Against Women and Girls service providers to provide a collective women's sector voice in defining strategic goals and shaping service provision.
- 6.6 Outcomes measures are survivor-identified.

7. Governance and Accountability

The organisation demonstrates women's leadership of services for women and children and is accountable to survivors and communities.

- 7.1 The organisation promotes a gendered understanding of domestic violence as a cause and consequence of women's inequality in all its publicity and promotional material.
- 7.2 The organisation is led by women, or where the domestic violence service is part of a larger organisation, the service is managed by a separate board led by women; the chair and vice chair of the board, the chief executive, senior managers and a majority of the trustees are women.
- 7.3 Dedicated services for BME women survivors are led by BME women; the chair and vice chair of the board, the chief executive, senior managers and a majority of the trustees are BME women. Where the service is part of a larger organisation, the BME-specific project is managed by a separate BME women's board or steering group.
- 7.4 Where eligible, dedicated BME VAWG services are accredited against, or working towards, Imkaan Accredited Quality Standards or Imkaan Safe Minimum Practice Standards.
- 7.5 The organisation manages its funds entirely for the benefit of service users and employs robust financial and organisational risk management.
- 7.6 An outcomes-focused approach is taken to service provision and the organisation contributes to national evidence-gathering on Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG).
- 7.7 The organisation forms partnerships with other dedicated Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) service providers to protect and improve dedicated provision and unique specialisms, and, wherever possible, enters into non-competition agreements.

7. Governance and Accountability Continued

- 7.8** Trustees understand the dynamics of Violence Against Women and Girls and principles of anti-oppressive practice.
- 7.9** Staff members are trained at least to the level of the Council of Europe Minimum Standards, and in line with the National Occupational Standards addressing Domestic and Sexual Abuse.
- 7.10** Staff receive the same pay for similar or equivalent work and pay is aligned to a nationally recognised pay scale.
- 7.11** Measures are in place to ensure safe working practices and to protect the physical safety and mental wellbeing of staff.
- 7.12** Measures are in place to protect the safety and mental wellbeing of volunteers, and to ensure that volunteers are supported and developed while volunteering.
- 7.13** Service users are involved in the planning and evaluation of services and there is a mechanism for the board to consult with current service users to inform its decision-making.
- 7.14** Opportunities are provided for autonomous staff organisation and there is a mechanism for the board to consult with staff to inform its decision-making.
- 7.15** The organisation provides complaints and grievance processes for those who feel they have been discriminated against or mistreated, and informs all service users, staff and volunteers of these processes.
- 7.16** The organisation prioritises conserving energy and the natural environment and has a purchasing policy aligned to these values.



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