

# Women's Aid definitions

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## Specialist Women's Domestic Abuse Services & 'By & For' Services

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### Background and context

Within the domestic abuse and wider violence against women and girls (VAWG) sector there is a shared understanding of 'specialism'. This concept is based on established knowledge and practice and has developed through the years with the expansion of services for women experiencing male violence - from refuges, support in the community, to rape crisis services and many more.

There is currently no legal definition of a 'specialist' or 'by and for' service in the context of domestic abuse, although the government have adopted the following definition:

*"Specialist services are those which are specifically designed and whose primary purpose is to support someone who is, or has been affected by domestic abuse, sexual violence and/or any other form of VAWG.*

*By and for services are specialist services that are led, designed, and delivered by and for the users and communities they aim to serve in responding to VAWG (for example victims and survivors from ethnic minority backgrounds, Deaf and disabled victims and survivors, and LGBT+ victims and survivors).*

*Communities can be both by virtue of characteristic and/or shared experience. Therefore, by and for services can likewise offer support based on characteristic (e.g., LGBT+ victims) or based on shared experience of a particular VAWG crime type (e.g surviving FGM.<sup>1</sup>)*

We are concerned that these definitions lack clarity, specificity and crucially lack any mention of the gendered nature of specialist domestic abuse services. Women's Aid therefore sets out its own definitions in order to ensure that the value and work of specialist women's domestic abuse services and 'by and for' specialist services are understood.

## Purpose

This paper sets out Women's Aid's definitions of:

### **A. a specialist women's domestic abuse service;**

### **B. a specialist 'by and for' service**

These proposed definitions have been informed by research and publications from Women's Aid, Imkaan<sup>2</sup>, the Welsh Government's Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (VAWDASV) Commissioning Statutory Guidance<sup>3</sup>, and the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (the Istanbul Convention).<sup>4</sup> They are supported by criteria, and indicators, which evidence the definitions.

## A. Definition of a specialist women's domestic abuse service

1. Specialist women's domestic abuse services are run by women's, feminist organisations. They are run by women, and for women and their children.
2. Their core business and organisational purpose it is to support survivors and/or children and young people impacted by domestic abuse and other forms of violence against women and girls (VAWG). The services they deliver are

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<sup>1</sup> Home Office, Violence Against Women and Girls Support and Specialist Services Prospectus, November 2022

<sup>2</sup> Imkaan, The State of the Sector: Contextualising the current experiences of BME ending violence against women and girls organisations. Available online:

[https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5f7d9f4addc689717e6ea200/t/61e6a32fa8fe28662d9da4e7/1642505008903/2015+\\_Imkaan+\\_State+of+the+Sector+%5BExecutive+Summary%5D.pdf](https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5f7d9f4addc689717e6ea200/t/61e6a32fa8fe28662d9da4e7/1642505008903/2015+_Imkaan+_State+of+the+Sector+%5BExecutive+Summary%5D.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> Welsh Government, Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (VAWDASV), Statutory Guidance for the Commissioning of VAWDSV Services in Wales, May 2019. Available at:

<https://www.gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2019-05/statutory-guidance-for-the-commissioning-of-vawdasv-services-in-wales.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> Council of Europe, Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence, 2011. Available online: <https://rm.coe.int/168008482e>

specifically designed to support women and children affected by domestic abuse, sexual violence and/or other forms of VAWG.

3. Specialist services differ from generic services because they are independent from the state. They were established as local, grassroots and independent organisations, which is critical for women survivors' ability to trust them.
4. The lived experience of women experiencing domestic abuse (survivors) is represented within their governance and staffing structures.
5. Their delivery of support and services is needs-led and gender-responsive. Support is delivered by specially trained staff, with an in-depth knowledge of domestic abuse and VAWG - and the way it impacts women and children.
6. Specialist services understand how sex and other intersectional inequalities - including ethnicity, class, gender identity, age, ability, sexuality, religion, and belief - drive wider patterns of VAWG. This equips them with the technical knowledge required to understand the nuances of domestic abuse and how it manifests.
7. Specialist services provide significant added value to their local communities and fundraise from a range of different sources to meet the needs of women and children. In most cases they have developed as a response to the particular needs of the area and contain within them years of specialist knowledge and expertise relevant to the communities they serve.
8. Specialist organisations operate within an established framework of sector best practice and accredited quality standards led by second tier organisations, which provide benchmarks for training, quality, and safeguarding.

## **How is this evidenced?**

Unless specified otherwise, specialist women's domestic abuse services are required to meet all of the indicators below to be defined as such.

The below information will be split into two headings, "Criteria" and "Indicators to evidence" per criteria point:

### **Criteria 1:**

1. Specialist women's domestic abuse services are run by women's, feminist organisations. They are run by women, and for women and children.

### **Indicators to evidence:**

- i. Founding documents demonstrate or specify that the organisation holds feminist values and principles.

- ii. The organisation is led by women; the chair and vice chair of the board, the chief executive, senior managers, and a majority of the trustees are women.
- iii. Services deliver support for women and children separately from men and where refuge services are available, provide either single sex or single gender safe accommodation.

### **Criteria 2:**

- 2. Their core business and organisational purpose is to support survivors and/or children and young people impacted by domestic abuse and other forms of violence against women and girls (VAWG). The services they deliver are specifically designed to support women and children affected by domestic abuse, sexual violence and/or other forms of VAWG.

### **Indicators to evidence:**

- i. Founding documents specify that the organisation has been established/specifically designed to support women and children affected by domestic abuse, and their core business is domestic abuse/VAWG.
- ii. Charitable objectives or constitution includes a strategic commitment to ending VAWG and achieving gender equity. Where refuge services are provided, accommodation meets the definition of a refuge on Routes to Support<sup>5</sup>, and critically, must be solely for survivors of domestic abuse or VAWG.

### **Criteria 3:**

- 3. Specialist services differ from generic services because they are independent from the state. They were established as local, grassroots and independent organisations.

### **Indicators to evidence:**

- i. The organisational governance structure is independent from any statutory body.

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<sup>5</sup> Routes to Support is the UK violence against women and girls service directory run in partnership with Women's Aid Federation of Northern Ireland, Scottish Women's Aid and Welsh Women's Aid.

**Criteria 4:**

4. The lived experience of women experiencing domestic abuse (victims and survivors) is represented within their governance and staffing structures.

**Indicators to evidence:**

- i. Survivors are involved in the planning and evaluation of services and there is a mechanism for the board to consult with current survivors to inform its decision making.

**Criteria 5:**

5. Their delivery of support and services is needs-led and gender-responsive. Support is delivered by specialist staff, who have an in-depth knowledge of domestic abuse and VAWG - and the way it impacts women and children.

**Indicators to evidence:**

- i. The organisation promotes a gendered understanding of domestic abuse as a cause and consequence of women's inequality, in its publicity and promotional material.
- ii. Staff members are trained in line with the National Occupational Standards addressing Domestic and Sexual Abuse.
- iii. Support plans for survivors demonstrate a needs-led approach.

**Criteria 6:**

6. Specialist services understand how sex and other intersectional inequalities - including ethnicity, class, gender identity, age, ability, sexuality, religion, and belief – drive wider patterns of VAWG.

**Indicators to evidence:**

- i. The organisation's constitutional and strategy documents explicitly recognise the gendered nature of domestic abuse and wider forms of VAWG.
- ii. The organisation's publicity and promotional material recognises the ways in which domestic abuse manifests for different groups, such as Black and minoritised women, and the additional barriers and inequalities they face.

### **Criteria 7:**

7. They add significant value to local communities, and fundraise from a range of different sources to meet the needs of women and children.\*

#### **Indicators to evidence:**

- i. The organisation has established referral pathways with local statutory agencies and community groups.
- ii. The organisation secures income from non-statutory sources.

### **Criteria 8:**

8. Specialist organisations operate within an established framework of sector best practice and accredited quality standards led by second tier organisations, which provide benchmarks for training, quality and safeguarding.

#### **Indicators to evidence:**

1. The organisation may hold Women's Aid's National Quality Standards or Imkaan's Accredited Quality Standards (IAQS) or are working towards this accreditation.

## **B. Definition of a specialist 'by and for' service**

1. Specialist 'by and for' services are run *by and for* the communities they serve, such as for Black and minoritised women, Deaf and disabled women and LGBT+ survivors. In doing so they offer a uniquely empowering experience to the communities they support, as the client group is reflected in staffing, management, and governance structures of these organisations.
2. Specialist 'by and for' services have emerged as distinct from wider specialist services, in that they are led by, and seek to support, further minoritised and marginalised groups. They respond to parallel state-imposed barriers due to the marginalisation of the communities they support, who face additional forms of structural inequality (racism, homophobia, classism, Islamophobia etc), alongside misogyny, sexism and violence. While wider specialist services may also support

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\* This is currently a distinction between generic and specialist services because sufficient funding is not available, and commissioned contracts to do not cover work within local communities.

these groups, 'by and for' organisations run independent, specialist and dedicated services *specifically* for the minoritised community they seek to serve.

3. Equality is an active practice within specialist 'by and for' services; it is central to the values and working practice of the service. The organisation takes an intersectional approach to practising equalities and observing the rights of people with protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010.
4. Specialist 'by and for' services are designed to tackle the barriers facing the marginalised communities they support and have specific expertise in meeting their needs. They provide highly tailored, wrap-around holistic recovery and support that addresses a victims and survivor's full range of needs - which often means their work covers all forms of VAWG, as well as wider issues. Specialist by and for services are rooted in the marginalised communities they support, which means they can engage with survivors who may be reluctant to make contact with statutory agencies or generic organisations.
5. Despite the clear evidence that specialist 'by and for' services deliver improved outcomes for minoritised survivors<sup>6</sup>, they often operate in a hostile environment - their expertise and holistic work to support survivors is often devalued and exploited by commissioners and generic or larger services.

## How is this evidenced?

Unless specified otherwise, 'by and for' specialist services are required to meet all the indicators below to be defined as such.

The below information will be split into two headings, "Criteria" and "Indicators to evidence" per criteria point:

### Criteria 1:

1. Specialist 'by and for' services are run *by and for* the communities they serve, such as for Black and minoritised women, Deaf and disabled women and LGBT+ survivors. In doing so they offer a uniquely empowering experience to the communities they support, as the client group is reflected in staffing, management and governance structures of these organisations.

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<sup>6</sup> Domestic Abuse Commissioner, 'A Patchwork of Provision: How to meet the needs of victims and survivors across England and Wales', 2022.

Available online: [https://domesticabusecommissioner.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/DAC\\_Mapping-Abuse-Survivors\\_Long-PolicyReport\\_Nov2022\\_FA.pdf](https://domesticabusecommissioner.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/DAC_Mapping-Abuse-Survivors_Long-PolicyReport_Nov2022_FA.pdf).

### **Indicators to evidence:**

- i. Specialist 'by and for' services are led by the community they are designed to support - the chair and vice chair of the board, the chief executive, senior managers, and a majority of the trustees are from this community.\*
- ii. Where a specialist 'by and for' service is part of a larger organisation, this is governed by a board or steering group of individuals from that community.

### **Criteria 2:**

2. Specialist 'by and for' services have emerged as distinct from wider specialist services, in that they are led by, and seek to support, further minoritised and marginalised groups. Specialist 'by and for' organisations run independent, specialist and dedicated services specifically for the minoritised community they seek to serve.

### **Indicators to evidence:**

- i. Founding documents of the organisation specify that it has been established/specifically designed, to support a further minoritised or marginalised community – for example on the grounds of race, ethnicity, faith/religion, sexuality, disability, and other protected characteristics.
- ii. The organisational governance structure is independent from any statutory body.

### **Criteria 3:**

3. Equality is an active practice; it is central to the values and working practice of the service. The organisation takes an intersectional approach to practising equalities and observing the rights of people with protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010.

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\* This is not a requirement for 100% of the organisation to be from the specific community – but ensures that all of the leadership positions and majority of the trustees are. For example, this would prevent a white-led organisation, without the inherent expertise or knowledge, to hold 'by and for' status because they run a specific refuge dedicated to Black and minoritised women.



**Indicators to evidence:**

- i. Equalities data is monitored across the organisation; or staff, volunteers, trustees and service users.
- ii. Codes of conduct, ground rules, shared agreements across the organisation consider equalities.
- iii. Intersectionality is understood across the organisation- equalities are explicitly in organisational values, policies, processes and recruitment.

**Criteria 4:**

4. Specialist 'by and for' services are designed to tackle the barriers facing the marginalised communities they support. They provide highly tailored, wrap-around holistic recovery and support that addresses a victims and survivors full range of needs.

**Indicators to evidence:**

- i. Service user support plans and activity reports demonstrate needs-led, holistic interventions, which tackles the additional barriers facing marginalised communities.

**Criteria 5:**

5. Specialist 'by and for' services are rooted in the marginalised communities they support.

**Indicators to evidence:**

- i. Members of the community supported by the service are involved in the planning and evaluation of services.