

P-05-882 Transforming the response for older people experiencing domestic abuse – a call for action, Correspondence – Petitioner to Committee, 08.10.20

Thank you for your email and providing a letter from the Older People's Commissioner for Wales in response to our community-led petition, **P-05-882 Transforming the response for older people experiencing domestic abuse – a call for action.**

We are pleased to hear that housing is considered a priority for the Older People's Commissioner, as it is an issue we have previously raised. Our research with older victim-survivors highlights the lack of immediate emergency accommodation for people aged 60 years and over, who may have complex needs or care needs, for example, limited mobility, disability and health conditions. For individuals who are shielding during Covid-19, entering into a multi-occupancy refuge may not be possible.

We support the comments made by Leanne Woods MS at the last Committee meeting on the importance of marketing outreach services and the recognition that organisations are not seeing older people accessing their services. Leanne Woods MS emphasised individual and cultural barriers including stigma, shame and societal assumptions that suggest older people do not experience abuse. **Our research¹ with 111 older victim-survivors and practitioners in Wales also evidenced the organisational and systemic barriers that inhibit disclosure and further help-seeking behaviours.**

Dewis Choice initiative is the only dedicated service in Wales to support older men and women, including those who identify as LGBTQ+ and those living with dementia. We are concerned that there is a lack of appropriate specialist service provision in Wales to respond to the needs of older victim-survivors of domestic abuse. The Adopting a 'whole family' approach, Dewis Choice also supports adult family members. Our initiative will no longer be operating as a service from April 2021 due to our current funding coming to an end and lack of further funding for service provision. We welcome the OPC's mapping exercise and have no doubt it will further evidence the lack of service provision for older victim-survivors in Wales, particularly provision through the medium of Welsh.

Although Covid-19 has presented services with new opportunities for engaging online and remotely, it is important to remember that not all older people are digitally connected. Therefore, gaining help and support for prevention, protection and recovery online during Covid-19 is challenging. **Comparable services must be made available for those who are not able to access help and support**

¹Wydall, S., Clarke, A., Williams, J. and Zerk, R., 2018. Domestic abuse and elder abuse in Wales: A tale of two initiatives. *British Journal of Social Work*, 48(4), pp.962-981.

Wydall, S. and Zerk, R., 2017. Domestic abuse and older people: Factors influencing help-seeking. *The Journal of Adult Protection*, 19(5), pp. 247-260.

digitally. Face-to-face service provision must continue to be made available, particularly for those with additional communication needs.

Our research in Wales has highlighted good practice in Carmarthenshire, where the VAWDASV regional group have expressed a commitment to improving the response to older people, including securing specific ring-fenced funding for older victim-survivors alongside carrying out a regional scoping exercise on existing housing provision. However, feedback suggests that this is not a standard response across Wales and therefore, older victim-survivors are subjected to a postcode lottery response. **We would like to see the Welsh Government provide direction to ensure all regions across Wales commit to addressing the needs of older people.**

28th September 2020

Response provided by Sarah Wydall, Elize Freeman, Rebecca Zerk, 'Dewis Choice – Transforming the response to domestic abuse in later life' The Centre for Age Gender and Social Justice, Aberystwyth University.