



Justice Minister Naomi Long MLA

Date 17 June 2020

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Dear Justice Minister Long,

We are writing to voice our concern as an active organisation engaging with families, young people and children affected by domestic abuse. We are asking for the Government to clearly recognise and address the **full impact** of this issue on children and young people in Northern Ireland. Our research highlights the psychological damage caused by living with domestic abuse and children and young people's needs for emotional support to recover and thrive¹.

Specifically, we believe that to do this effectively, **legislation should provide not only for situations of direct abuse of a child, but also the impact on children who see, hear or are otherwise exposed to domestic abuse perpetrated by one adult against another**². We agree with Women's Aid NI that, "For every woman experiencing violence in the home there will usually be children who are also suffering," and that, "The experiences of these children and young people are often overlooked."³ We must not lose sight of these young lives within our legislative processes.

Our staff are providing vital services to many families under pressure, using innovative and creative ways to support those who are extremely vulnerable during this time⁴. We urge our leaders to do the same and to create robust policy frameworks that provide **comprehensive safeguards for children and young people exposed to these increases of physical and mental abuse**, particularly during this crisis period and in the recovery phase. Our programmes focus on mental health, creating safe and stable homes and giving children the best start in life and our interaction with the effects of domestic abuse is felt across our services. If we can assist you and your department in addressing this challenge with the urgency it deserves, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Kind regards,

Sheena McMullen

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¹ Read our report, "Patchy, Piecemeal and Precarious: Support for children affected by domestic abuse" [here](#)

² Read our report, "Patchy, Piecemeal and Precarious: Support for children affected by domestic abuse" [here](#)

³ Women's Aid NI website [here](#)

⁴ Find out more about our work with Families in Northern Ireland [here](#)