

# Children & Domestic Violence

"Small Hands, Big Voices"



**W**ith Children in Need on our TVs tonight, families will be sitting down for a night of fun-filled entertainment with a cause. For many of us growing up, it made for happy memories and often came with the added bonus of extended bed times!

But as the appeal highlights annually, many children growing up in Northern Ireland will be living in homes where domestic violence takes place:

"It was always a struggle to watch my favourite TV Programme. I used to have to turn the volume up to around 40 because of the yelling crashing over me like waves." (Voice of a child.)

In Belfast & Lisburn Women's Aid alone, 225 children stayed in our refuges last year. In the community, 2048 children were supported through services provided to mothers. NSPCC research shows that one in five children has been exposed to domestic violence, with a third of those also experiencing another form of abuse.

As protectors, mums will often shield domestic violence from their children as much as they can. However, in the majority of homes where domestic violence is being perpetrated, children will be aware and will often hear or see it going on. Every child's experience will be different and they will be affected in different ways, emotionally, mentally and physically. Effects can include feelings of fear, shame or anger, distracted behaviour, underachieving, difficulty sleeping, tummy pains, outbursts of temper or aggression, low self-esteem or confidence and reluctance to engage in social activities- to name only a few. Mums can often feel guilty or to blame. A perpetrator alone is responsible for domestic violence in the home.

Children and young people have varying levels of resilience and it's important to build on this resilience. Women's Aid work with mums and children to support them and give them the tools to help move on from domestic violence. Children and young people can and do recover from the negative impact of domestic violence, provided adequate support and reassurance is in place.

Children and young people need "help to get them through it...help to find a solution for a better future." (Young person's quote). At Women's Aid, we offer a "safe space" and a "sense of belonging" to help children overcome the effects of domestic violence and know that there are other families and children like them who are going through what they are going through.

Children's voices are at the forefront of our work and underpin the core vision, mission and ethos of the organisation. There is no voice too small to be important or too little to go unheard.

*Sarah Bruce*

women's aid

Belfast and Lisburn