

Funding for Women's Aid services in Scotland

SCOTTISH WOMEN'S AID FUNDING SURVEY 2011

Introduction

This is the fourth year Scottish Women's Aid (SWA) has surveyed our members about their funding. This report highlights the results of the survey carried out in July and August 2011.

The decision to conduct an annual funding survey followed the removal of the ring fence from the Supporting People budget. Our concern, shared by others in the voluntary sector, was that this would impact negatively on funding for support services as local authorities faced competing pressures on their reducing budgets.

The necessity of monitoring funding was further reinforced by the uncertainty of the future of the dedicated Violence Against Women funding streams provided by the Scottish Government.

During July 2011 we invited Women's Aid groups in Scotland to complete an online questionnaire about their funding, which 31 out of our 38 members completed. Their responses illustrate the level of concern amongst our members about the on-going impact that reduced and increasingly insecure funding has on the services they provide.

The information that Women's Aid groups shared with us through the survey allows a greater understanding of the funding environment our members work within and the impact changes in this environment have year on year.

We would like to thank the Women's Aid groups that gave their time to complete the survey. This information is vital in supporting our work to ensure the sustainability of domestic abuse services for women and children Scotland.

"I don't feel I've healed emotionally from my experience at all. I needed counselling, but because of the financial constraints Women's Aid was no longer able to provide it."

Key Findings

- Women's Aid groups receive the majority of their funding from a local authority – but this year saw the proportion of funding from the local authority fall from 60% to 56%.
- The two funding streams from the Scottish Government make up on average almost 40% of Women's Aid groups budgets. The future of these funds beyond 2012 is uncertain.
- The majority of Women's Aid groups are operating with either a reduced or a standstill budget. This has increased from 61% of respondents last year to 84% in 2011.
- 1 in 5 Women's Aid groups have had to cut services as a result of reduced funding, compared with 13% of respondents in the previous year.
- A quarter of Women's Aid groups reported a funding deficit in the last financial year.
- A third of Women's Aid groups had to transfer funds from reserves to survive in the short term.
- Almost half of Women's Aid groups reported that they had no current service level agreement or contract. For those that do, the majority have a contract for only a year (59%). This level of financial insecurity is higher than previous years.
- Less than half of Women's Aid groups were able to pay their staff a cost of living increase. This is a substantial shift from previous years – when 61% of Women's Aid groups in 2010 and 98% in 2009 – reported paying a cost of living increase.

FULL REPORT FINDINGS

Profile of Women's Aid groups Surveyed

SWA has a membership of 38 Women's Aid groups providing specialist domestic abuse services across the whole of Scotland from the Borders to Shetland.

Women's Aid groups provide a specialist domestic abuse service to women and children, that ranges from crisis intervention – providing safe refuge accommodation – to supporting these families in their transition to a new home and schools and a new life – and everything in between. Women's Aid groups provide outreach work in the community – supporting women and children in their own home or at drop-in services at local health or community centres. Many carry out awareness raising work, deliver training locally and carry out prevention work in schools.

Women's Aid groups access funding to deliver these services from a number of sources. All Women's Aid groups receive funding from their local authority, and a large proportion are funded by the Scottish Government to provide services to children who have experienced domestic abuse. Most fundraise by applying to a wide range of trusts, fundraising events and from donations. Refuge accommodation is partly funded by housing benefit.

Methodology

The survey was conducted using a confidential online questionnaire that was sent to all our members in July 2011. The questionnaire asks a series of questions relating to the previous financial year (1 April 2010 – 31 March 2011).

"I hate to think of other women struggling to get safety and peace for their family because they can't get into Women's Aid"

In our fourth annual survey 31 (82%) Women's Aid groups responded.

The 31 Women's Aid groups that completed the survey provide services in 24 local authorities in Scotland.

Sources of Funding

We asked all 31 Women's Aid groups to tell us what the main sources of funding are for the services they provide.

- 31 (100%) received funding from their local authority.
- 17 (55%) from the Violence Against Women Fund (Scottish Government).
- 28 (90%) from the Children's Services Women's Aid Fund (Scottish Government).
- 26 (84%) from other sources – such as trust/lottery funds, donations etc.

We asked them to tell us what proportion of their overall funding came from the above sources. Women's Aid groups receive most of their funding from their local authority but a substantial proportion comes from the Scottish Government.

Respondents reported that on average:

- Just over half (56%) of their funding was provided by the local authority.
- The Scottish Government funding streams provided 38% of their funding.
- 18% of their funding comes from a range of trust/lottery funds, donations etc.

Changes in local authority funding

The survey asked if funding from the local authority was the same, more or less than the previous financial year.

- 5 (16%) Women's Aid groups received an increase.
- 5 (16%) Women's Aid groups received a decrease.
- 21 (68%) Women's Aid groups received the same level of funding.

For the Women's Aid groups that received an increase this was on average a 2% inflationary uplift. One group received additional funding to extend support provision.

For the 5 Women's Aid groups that received a decrease in funding from their local authority the decrease was on average 3%.

The majority of Women's Aid groups that took part in this survey (21) received a standstill budget – in effect a decrease in funding with no inflationary uplift to cover rising energy and travel costs, maintenance, cost of living etc.

In real terms 84% of respondents (26) received either a cut or a standstill budget. This means they face absorbing higher costs within existing or reduced budgets – representing a real reduction in the value of funding from the local authority.

Impact of funding cuts

We asked Women's Aid services what impact reduced funding had on their organisations and on service users.

- 8 Women's Aid groups reported a funding deficit in their annual accounts.
- 11 (36%) had to transfer funds from reserves to cover operating costs for the year.

- 6 (21%) had to reduce the level of services they provide.
- 4 (13%) had made staff redundant or frozen posts.
- 17 (55%) were unable to pay a cost of living increase to their staff.

Impact on service users

We asked Women's Aid groups what changes they had to make to services and what impact this had on women and children.

Changes to services due to reduced funding included:

- Reducing the time allocated to supporting women as they moved into a new tenancy.
- Decreasing the outreach service delivered in the community.
- Reducing the counselling service.
- Cutting down on the one to one support provided to women and children.
- Providing less activities and visits for children.

Changes to Staffing

Four Women's Aid groups had to make staff redundant or freeze posts due to a funding deficit in the last year.

Reduced staff training

Several Women's Aid groups reported that they have had to reduce staff training due to less funding. Unfortunately when funding is reduced staff training is usually one of the first areas to be cut back on. This raises concerns about staff development and consequent implications for the standard of service.

Funding insecurity

One of the most difficult issues that Women's Aid groups face is the uncertainty of their funding.

The two funding streams from the Scottish Government end on the 31st March 2012 and their future beyond that date is unknown. Potentially Women's Aid groups could lose, on average, 40% of their funding. As the Children's Services Fund provides funding for almost all the domestic abuse children's support work in Scotland this is of serious concern.

The efficiency measures imposed by local authorities have placed additional pressures on Women's Aid groups to meet increased targets even though resources are reduced.

Diversifying funding has become more difficult with greater competition for funding from charitable trusts – which themselves have less grant availability.

All of these factors cause considerable insecurity. This is further reflected in the contractual relationships Women's Aid groups have with their principal funders.

Contracting arrangements with the local authority

We asked Women's Aid groups what their contracting arrangements are with their local authority.

- 14 (45%) responded that they do not have a contract or service level agreement.
- 9 (29%) have a contract\service level agreement.
- 8 (26%) reported they were in negotiation over a draft agreement.

The majority of respondents who have a contract or service level agreement with the local authority are working with contract period of only a year (59%).

Only 6 Women's Aid groups have the security of more than a year's funding; 5 are working with a 3 year contractual arrangement and one with a 2 year agreement.

One of the major implications of reduced and insecure funding is that Women's Aid groups find it difficult or impossible to plan ahead. Many report having to 'firefight' to ensure survival rather than look at long term planning. Additional time is taken up with funding bids which in turn diverts staff time from service provision.

Insecure funding and short term contracts mean that Women's Aid staff constantly work under the threat of redundancy. There are difficulties in maintaining staff motivation and morale. As well as the challenges this leads to in terms of retaining skilled and experienced staff.

Comparison of Findings

We have undertaken a comparison of this year's funding survey responses with those we received in previous year. While it is difficult to make direct comparisons year on year – it does reveal some concerning facts.

- The main source of funding for most Women's Aid groups is from the local authority, although this proportion is down on the last two years from 60% to 56%.
- The proportion of Women's Aid groups reporting reduced or standstill funding from the local authority has increased to 84% from 61% last year.
- More services have been cut as a result of these funding changes. 21% of respondents reported they had to reduce services they provided over the last year compared with 13% of respondents in the previous year.
- Women's Aid groups are increasingly unable to pay their staff a cost of living increase – up from 2% of respondents in 2009 to 39% in 2010 and now reaching 55% in 2011.

“Women now get less support at what is a really crucial time – when they move out into the community on their own”

Scottish Women's Aid charity number SC001099. Recognized as a charitable organization by the Inland Revenue in Scotland.
www.scottishwomensaid.org.uk