

**Wigtownshire u3a Monthly Meeting
28th May 2021 (via Zoom)**

Viv Nelson, Wigtownshire Women's Aid

Viv Nelson, Community Engagement Office from Wigtownshire Women's Aid (WWA) gave a talk on 28th May about her organisation which advises and helps women (and men) in abusive relationships.

It was formed in 1987 by a group of female volunteers and is now a company with charitable status which relies on grant funding. They are constantly involved in fundraising in order to maintain, and improve, the work they do.

They have recently had a new logo and strapline – 'Challenging Attitudes, Changing Lives' - designed to raise awareness of the valuable work they are doing. The Scottish Government adopts a broad definition of violence against women and girls which ties in with the UN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women (OCHCR, 1993). The definition refers to 'a range of actions that harm, or cause suffering and indignity to, women and children' (Scottish Government, 2020).

(Source: <https://www.gov.scot/publications/scottish-social-attitudes-survey-2019-attitudes-violence-against-women-scotland/pages/2/>)

Viv started by saying that domestic abuse is a very real problem – WWA works mainly with women and young people who are affected when relationships break down. However, although the majority of reports involve men being abusive towards their partners, not all men are abusive and in fact most are not.

WWA is in partnership with the White Ribbon Campaign (<https://www.whiteribbon.org.uk/>) which aims to end male violence against women.

82% of domestic abuse victims are female; 16% are male with a female perpetrator; 1% are male same sex; 1% female same sex. WWA offers support to young people up to the age of 25, after that they are referred on to other agencies, e.g. Victim Support, or Men's Advice Line in the case of abused men.

Domestic abuse, Viv explained, is a very emotive subject, which can cover physical, emotional, sexual and financial abuse (which can be very subtle); as well as coercive control. This last type of abuse involves a pattern of intimidation, which limits the victim's liberty and reduces their ability to take action.

In 2019/19 there were 60,641 cases of domestic abuse recorded; only 41% of these were taken forward. The highest proportion of domestic abuse occurs between the ages of 26-30. During the same period, 1,296 were recorded in Dumfries and Galloway – an increase of 50 incidents. But more people are now speaking out about abuse.

WWA has eight flats in Stranraer and three safe houses in Newton Stewart for people who find they have no alternative but to leave a relationship. They also operate a call service 24/7. Their office is open 9am-4.30pm Monday-Friday; and 11am-5pm Saturday and Sunday. They also have an out-of-hours team.

Wigtownshire Women's Aid is run by a diverse team comprising Management/Finance; a Crisis Team, an Outreach Team and a Young Persons' Team. There is also a Refuge and Safe House Team. Viv said that the local police are very supportive of their work. She showed a video about why domestic abuse happens, which showed that while there may be lots of excuses why the perpetrator does what they do, ultimately it's a choice.

Women's Aid nationally campaigned and succeeded in making coercive control a criminal offence (<https://www.womensaid.org.uk/information-support/what-is-domestic-abuse/coercive-control/>) It finally became law on 30th April 2021. This abuse makes the victim feel isolated, intimidated and dependent, but is different from other forms of abuse in that it's not at first obvious but nevertheless, it does real harm

Viv revealed some appalling statistics:-

One in four women still suffer; two women are killed by their abuser every week; women will attempt to leave seven times before actually taking the plunge; 30% of domestic abuse starts, or gets worse in pregnancy. On average, a woman will live with abuse for four years and experience between 3-35 beatings before finally reporting it.

Viv ended her talk by pointing out how people can help someone in an abusive relationship. You can:-

- Refer people to WWA – for a chat or support. The victim doesn't need to follow the advice through if they don't wish to. Arrangements can be made to meet in a safe place
- Download the apps Holly Guard, or Bright Sky
- Follow Wigtownshire Women's Aid on social media
- Help by fundraising
- Donate - women and young people seeking refuge come quite often with just the clothes they stand up in, so donations of toiletries etc. are very welcome
- Make suggestions

Contact: email info@wigwa.org.uk Tel: 01776 703104 (24/7) or visit www.wigwa.org.uk.

Lesley Miller