

M2 Presswire

April 12, 2006

UK Government: New Leeds Campaign Says 'Enough' to Domestic Violence

A new advertising campaign aimed at encouraging friends of victims of domestic violence to report offences was launched today in Leeds.

There are some 12,000 reported incidents of domestic violence in Leeds every year. The estimated annual cost is nearly £80m.

The 'Enough' poster and radio campaign forms part of the Government's crackdown on domestic violence and comes alongside the roll-out of new specialist domestic violence courts, pioneered in Leeds some six years ago.

Home Office Minister Rt. Hon Baroness Scotland QC said, "Tackling domestic violence is a key priority for Government. This campaign will work to raise awareness of this unacceptable crime, which devastates families and ruins lives, and point victims in the right direction to get help.

"More than 60 per cent of victims tell someone about their abuse, usually a friend or family member, and we want these people to know that their voice can make a difference to end the violence. Remaining silent about domestic violence amounts to collusion.

"Our new specialist domestic violence courts give both victims and witnesses a stronger platform to get their voices heard and I have recently announced £2 million for additional dedicated domestic violence advisors based in the courts and expert advisors for victims of sexual crime. By bringing together specialists we can provide victims and their families with vital support and ensure perpetrators are brought to justice.

"We need to say 'Enough' to domestic violence. This campaign is the latest step we are taking to ensure the best possible help for victims; to encourage them to come forward in the certainty that they will get the help, protection and support they need."

Nik Peasgood, is manager of HALT (Help, Advice & the Law Team), a Leeds-based pioneering project working with survivors of domestic violence and abuse, and Chair of the Leeds Domestic Violence Court Steering Group. HALT was the first such advocacy project in the UK, putting Leeds on the map.

She said: "We were pleased to spearhead, with other Leeds agencies, the first Domestic Violence Court in the country, and work within the courts on a daily basis, giving advice, support and

advocacy to women experiencing domestic violence. It is so important for the courts to take domestic violence seriously, and to tell society that this crime is not going to be tolerated any more. Domestic Violence courts and HALT spread the message that if you experience domestic violence, it is not something you have to live with, and you are not on your own.

“Leeds has seen such a change in the way domestic violence is handled and how those experiencing such abuse and violence are supported. We have worked with the police, Crown Prosecution Service, Probation and the courts to ensure that people are treated professionally and are given time and space to tell their experiences.

“We give legal advice around reporting to the police, support at court, preparation for attending court, injunctions, issues involving children and separation.”

Superintendent Peter Nicholson, West Yorkshire Police said: “West Yorkshire Police are delighted to support the Home Office Domestic Violence Campaign. We are committed, along with our partners, to provide the best possible service to victims of domestic violence taking positive action to support them and prosecute offenders where appropriate.

“The force recognises that domestic violence is a very serious crime that not only affects those involved but often extended families and lasts for many, many years. We will investigate each case seriously and thoroughly ensuring that the perpetrators are brought to justice.

At the same time we will ensure that those subjected to domestic violence are given every opportunity to access support and regain control of their lives.”

Michelle De Souza, Manager of the Leeds Inter-Agency Project set up 16 years ago to try to end violence against women and children, said:

“Domestic Violence has historically being viewed as a ‘women’s issue’.

It’s actually an issue for the whole of society. Everyone has a role to play, whether as a friend, community member, practitioner or professional. It’s important that we all contribute to supporting women and children in seeking help and protection as well as challenging perpetrators.

“LIAP has worked with many Leeds organisations in undertaking innovative projects and the city has become a nationally recognised leader in developing work to combat violence against women and children.”

Rob Voakes, Assistant Chief Officer responsible for domestic violence programmes in West Yorkshire Probation, says:

“West Yorkshire was the first Probation Service to develop the national programme to change the behaviour of men who are violent to their partner. We have 30 specialist staff working in programmes, but all our operational staff are trained to recognise and respond to indications that domestic violence may be taking place.

“We maintain contact with the victims, which helps us to keep focused on our duty to protect them and prevent further violence, and we work closely in this with the police and other agencies.”

Leeds District Legal Director Jane Gill said: “Officers in Her Majesty’s Court Service – West Yorkshire have worked with the local Criminal Justice Agencies, and also the agencies who give support and advice to victims, in order to ensure that the District Judges and Magistrates dealing with the cases clustered into the Domestic Violence Courts have all the information they need to make their decisions in a timely way.”

An evaluation of a pilot specialist domestic violence court in Wales and London identified dramatic improvements in prosecutions and victim satisfaction. In Wales guilty pleas rose from 21 to 61% and the number of victims withdrawing from a case dropped from 53% to 17%.

In a London pilot, the number of cases withdrawn or discontinued before trial dropped from 36% per cent to 20%; and the number of cases proceeding through court doubled (from an average of 8 per month to 16 per month).

Specific measures which the courts have introduced include:

- Accredited independent domestic violence advisors who can offer victims one point of contact during and after their case;
- Dedicated prosecutors, specially trained magistrates, legal advisors and police officers who specialise in the issues involved in domestic violence cases;
- Either a fast-tracking of domestic violence cases, or a clustering of cases together on designated day/s each week – as in Leeds – or month to make courts run more effectively and speed up justice for victims; and
- Separate entrances, exits and waiting areas so that victims are not confronted by their attackers.

West Yorkshire Police figures for reported incidents of domestic violence over the past five years are:

- 2000/2001 – 7850
- 2001/2002 – 8729
- 2002/2003 – 10,151
- 2003/2004 – 11,665
- 2004/2005 – 12,208
- 2005 – Feb 2006 – 10,666

Notes to Editors

Attached are two tables showing the prevalence and cost of domestic violence in Leeds.

- 1) The Freephone 24 Hour National Helpline (run in partnership between Women's Aid and Refuge is 0808 2000 247
- 2) The Men's Advice Line and Enquiries for male victims of domestic violence is 0845 064 680
- 3) HALT operate a free and confidential legal telephone advice line, Monday - Friday, 10 am - 4 pm. Telephone and textphone 0113 243 2632.

People who have been supported by HALT have felt that they were stronger, more independent and happier with legal outcomes than without their support. Feedback from some of the women who have been helped at Leeds HALT has included the following quotes:

“When I felt there was no-one else around, you were there, you kept me going, and I couldn't be happier with my life now” “The future – I don't know how things will be but I do know I do not have to live like I did any more. I do have options. I do not expect the road over the next months to be smooth...and am making other plans just in case. I cannot thank your team enough and I am sure other women and families in my situation and much worse feel the same.”

- 4) The Specialist Domestic Violence Court Programme is currently supporting 21 new or existing specialist courts – at least one in each region in England and Wales by 1st April 2006. The Programme is being expanded further this year with a further £1m Government funding.

Issued on Behalf of the Home Office by GNN Yorkshire & Humber. Domestic Violence in Leeds (2004 Study Based on Report by the DTI Women & Equality Unit)

Domestic violence type Leeds Number of Leeds Leeds female victims* Number of Total male number of victims victims Domestic homicide 1 0 1 Choked or strangled 910 84 994 Used a weapon 182 154 336 Rape & assault (penetrative) 518 518 Of which rape (392) (392) Kicked, bit, hit with fist 2,870 2,478 5,348 Threat to kill 1,148 182 1,330 Threat with weapon 504 224 728 Pushed, held down, slapped 5,740 2,436 8,176 Stalking 6,244 994 7,238 Non-penetrative sexual 364 364 assault 18,481 6,552 25,033

* Based on Leeds population being 1.4% of England & Wales population

Type of cost Leeds Criminal Justice System 14,238,000 of which police (6,860,000) Health care 19,544,000 of which physical (17,080,000) of which mental health (2,464,000) Social services 3,192,000 Housing 2,212,000 Civil legal 4,368,000 All services 43,554,000 Economic output 37,408,000 Sub-total 80,962,000

Human and emotional 239,204,000 Total 320,166,000

Conclusion

The total yearly cost to the Leeds' population is £320,166,000 – based on a population size of 715,402

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