



Every child matters

November 2003

Refuge

Refuge is a lead agency campaigning against domestic violence in the UK.

Refuge runs a 24hour National Domestic Violence Helpline referring to over 500 refuges across the UK and offering counselling and advice on legal and welfare issues to support women and children experiencing domestic violence.

Refuge established the world's first refuge in 1971 and is now the single largest service-provider with a growing network of refuges. It provides specialist refuges for women from black and minority ethnic groups as well as community outreach programmes and floating support. In addition, Refuge operates a unique programme of services for children.

Refuge has a unique contribution to make in the creation of innovative policy and practice to meet the needs of domestic violence victims. Refuge would welcome the opportunity to further discuss its recommendations with government, particularly in terms of joint work and or support for specialist projects illustrated in this document.

Overview

Refuge welcomes the Green Paper and acknowledges the government's commitment to safeguard all children through better integration and expansion of services, as well as the development of clear systems for accountability.

Earlier this year the government presented another consultation document paper, Safety and Justice in an effort to address comprehensively the issue of domestic violence. Children's needs received insufficient attention in that paper and unfortunately, domestic violence receives insufficient attention in this paper. Refuge believes it is crucial that our approach to domestic violence acknowledges the overlapping abuse of women and their children and correspondingly overlapping services should be developed. Division between adult and child services at a national and policy level severely reduces the possibility of integration between adult and child services at a local and practical level.

One of the recommendations of Lord Laming's report was to create integrated structures for children and families, and this perspective is supported by many in the field.

"Most children in need have problems because of issues with their parents. If you only look at child-related services and don't tie in the adult service structures you end up dealing with the wrong end of the problem"(Andrew Webb Cheshire Social Services Dept)¹

The key to successful intervention lies in understanding the *inter-connectedness* of domestic abuse and its effects. Policy and services must reflect this reality.

Chapter 2

Strong foundations

Ensuring Children have a Sure Start

Refuge recognises the value of early intervention and the long term harm that can result from abuse and neglect during a child's early years. Pre-school children living with domestic violence are thought to witness more violence and be at greater risk for emotional and behavioural difficulties than older children.² Years of working with this age group at Refuge suggests that the experience of living with domestic violence can disrupt normal development and result in delayed speech, language and cognitive skills. Research is beginning to show that exposure to trauma in infancy and early childhood may have significant impacts on the developing brain, resulting in long-term cognitive and behavioural difficulties³. If this is combined with poverty, homelessness and limited support/intervention then we magnify the risks to such children.

The green paper proposes to build on the introduction of Sure Start and the National Child Care strategy through further investment over the next 4 years. However, it is unclear how Sure Start funds and centres will be of benefit to those providing specialist services for pre-schoolers like Refuge or to their clients.

¹ Guardian (09/10/2003) Rearrange the Pieces

² Fantuzzo, JW et-al (1997) Domestic Violence and Children: Prevalence and Risk in Five Major U.S. Cities. *Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry*, 36:1 and Hughes H et-al (1988) Psychological and Behavioural Correlates of Family Violence in Child Witnesses and Victims, *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 56.

³ Perry B (1997) Neurodevelopmental Factors in the Cycle of Violence in Children *Living in a Violent Society*. Ed Osofsky. JD.

Q How can we encourage better integration of funding for support services for children and young people?

Funding is a serious issue affecting the development and maintenance of services for all children in refuges, the lack of which generally results in skeleton provision or nothing at all. The funding framework and associated criteria (in terms of age bands) set out by government under the headings of Sure Start and or Connexions means that refuge services find it difficult, if not impossible to obtain vital funds via this route. Changing populations of children within refuges leads to problems in long term planning, particularly when establishing specialist projects.

Refuge has been running a nursery at one of its sites for many years. The nursery is registered with the local authority, is appropriately staffed by qualified nursery nurses and provides a professional service to under 5's and their mothers. To date, Refuge has been unable to obtain funds from the local authority for this service and has encountered a number of difficulties in terms of accessing government funds for nursery places. For instance, by the time the paper work is completed and funds have been released, the family may have moved on and then work must begin to return the money. Bureaucracy and rigid funding criteria mean that the valuable service offered at this site must come entirely out of the Refuge's own fund raising budget.

Refuge recommends that:

- resources are targeted for children affected by domestic violence and that specific services are designed both in refuges and in the community to meet their needs
- children 'in transit' can access these services, that is, that placements in centres are available to all 3 and 4yr olds
- refuges are able to access funds to establish specialist services for pre-schoolers (and others) without complicated and time consuming bureaucracy.

Improved access to ante and post-natal care

As the risk for domestic violence is known to increase during pregnancy and damage to the unborn child is a real danger, improved access to ante and post natal care is welcomed. Nevertheless, provision of specialist services following a positive screening for domestic violence is essential to meet the needs of and provide support to, this vulnerable group of women and their babies.

Refuge recommends that a domestic violence awareness and intervention strategy should be built into both strands of support. This should include:

- comprehensive training for all personnel, which reflects a gendered analysis of violence
- comprehensive screening for the presence of domestic violence
- follow up services which adopt an approach based on respect, empowerment and support.

Better early years support for disabled children

Refuge supports the government's proposal to improve early identification for children with disability or learning difficulties. A recent casework analysis carried out by Refuge indicates that as many as 32% of school age children were on their schools special needs register, 9% of whom had statements of special educational need. Amongst the pre-school population a large number show signs of developmental delay, particularly in speech and language.

Refuge recommends that:

- the government pilot specialist programmes for early identification, assessment and support of children with disabilities/difficulties who are affected by domestic violence and who may also be in transit or homeless (including living in refuges).

Improving school attendance and behaviour

Refuge strongly supports the intention to improve behaviour within schools, but is concerned that the government has not considered implementing **preventative** methods such as **anti-violence programmes** for all children. Refuge recommends the implementation of:

- violence prevention programmes that ensure work on gender equality, respect and non-violent conflict resolution run through the content and ethos of all school curricular and activity
- specific modules which directly address domestic violence and that these are built into the curriculum e.g. Personal Health Social Education, Citizenship and circle time for younger children
- an empathy training module within the early years curriculum for under 5's. This should incorporate gender equality, respect and non-violent conflict resolution as described above.

Increasing access to primary health care and specialist health services

Speech and language therapy

This is an important service for many children in refuges. Very often these young residents show signs of speech and language delay. This may be because they have been prevented from talking, making any noise or because their mother has encouraged them to be quiet to prevent either of them suffering assault. Although many children arrive at Refuge showing signs of delay, appropriate and timely intervention can yield improvements. Nevertheless, access to speech and language services, particularly from therapists with a background in domestic violence is limited. Refuge would recommend:

- enhancement of this service, together with mandatory training about the impacts of domestic violence on women and children for all speech and language therapists.

Mental health services

Refuge welcomes the government's intention to increase capacity and broaden services for children. The intention to provide assessment and identification of children in need of support, the use of specialist multi-disciplinary teams working within 'less stigmatising settings', such as schools, homes and family centres is also warmly received.

Nevertheless, Refuge would urge government to also make funds available to voluntary agencies that also provide high quality counselling and or psychology services to children affected by domestic violence. Voluntary agencies are also more likely than those in the statutory sector to offer an integrated service to both the woman and the child, recognising the way in which domestic violence impacts on them as individuals and in relationship to each other. Refuge has delivered an integrated psychological service to women and children for almost a decade and would be well placed to offer advice to government on establishing similar services within community and statutory settings.

Plans to commission high quality mental health services which take into account the needs of groups for whom there is currently poor or no provision, is also welcome. But it is of concern that

children affected by domestic violence are not included on the government's list. Refuge would recommend:

- the development of specialist psychological/counselling services for both women and children within refuge and community settings.

Substance misuse

The government acknowledges "that some children are more at risk of substance misuse than others, including those that are looked after, homeless, truants and young offenders". They do not mention the risks to children affected by domestic violence, even though this group is also thought to be more likely to become involved in drug or alcohol misuse⁴.

Refuge would recommend:

- inter-disciplinary training for professionals working with domestic violence and those working in the substance abuse field
- the development of successful strategies for partnership working e.g. referral systems across agencies
- screening for the presence of domestic violence and substance misuse in both sectors
- monitoring and evaluation of projects attempting to work with young people affected by both domestic violence and substance abuse, with built in mechanisms for dissemination of good practice.

Ensuring children are safe

Tackling bullying

Refuge supports the government's commitment to tackle bullying in schools by 'ensuring that PHSE, citizenship education and national healthy schools standards help children develop good relationships, learn about conflict resolution and encourage them to take responsibility for their own actions and to support their fellow pupils'. But also recommends that:

- issues of power, control and disrespect, which are at the root of all oppressive behaviour, should be stated explicitly and addressed within such programmes
- major social problems such as racism, sexism and other forms of oppressive behaviour, should be inter-woven or included within such programmes.

Supporting victims

Refuge supports the government's proposal to introduce special measures for those involved in the justice system, to treat those involved in prostitution as victims rather than offenders and to create a new offence of commercial sexual exploitation of a child.

Refuge would also recommend:

- actively giving children and young people a voice in all proceedings which involve them (see child contact section below)
- that those charged with representing children in the court system receive mandatory training in domestic violence issues.

Children and young people suffering from homelessness

⁴ Baker L, Jaffe P (2002) Children Exposed to Violence. A Handbook for Police Trainers to Increase understanding and Improve Community Responses.

Refuge welcomes the government's commitment that 'by March 2004 no homeless family with children should be placed in bed and breakfast accommodation, unless in a short term emergency' and the recognition that children in transition are particularly vulnerable to falling through the net of different services established to support them.

The commitment to improve standards for temporary accommodation, with the aim of ensuring all households (including families with children placed in temporary accommodation by housing authorities) is also welcome, as are proposals to ensure their health, education and social services needs are met⁵: Nevertheless, it is important to recognise that the needs of different homelessness groups, including those escaping domestic violence, will vary. For example, those escaping domestic violence will have practical needs for safe accommodation that must be met: they may also have psychological needs, requiring specialist support to overcome their experiences of abuse. It is not clear, how these 'health' needs will be prioritised, funded or even recognised by local authorities charged with implementing homelessness legislation.

Given that approximately 3035 children are resident in refuges on any one day across England and Wales⁶ it is of concern that they are not explicitly mentioned under the 'homelessness' or 'children in transition headings'. ***It is also of concern that the Supporting People framework, which was set up to fund services for residents of refuges and those living with and or escaping from, domestic violence does not provide resources for children in such circumstances.***

Supporting children entering the country

Refuge is pleased that the government recognises the very real needs of unaccompanied child asylum seekers and is seeking to increase levels of support to this group. Refuge would urge the government to consider the development of specialist services which takes into account the range of impacts they are likely to have suffered, such as violence (war, rape, enforced prostitution) absence of family/parents, possible bereavement, language issues, cultural issues, racism, schooling/employment etc.

Chapter 3

Supporting parents and carers

The government recognises the important role of parenting and the critical impact this has upon children but makes no mention of specifically targeting parents whose own problems place their children at risk e.g. substance misuse, mental health and domestic violence. Nor do they suggest the development of integrated services for these families, nor of specific assessment protocols to alert professionals that both child and adult may be at risk.

Amongst a range of interventions the government proposes the development of:

Home visiting programmes

The importance of support during the pre-post natal period is highlighted, but the fact that this is a particular risk in terms of domestic violence is not. In fact, the risk of experiencing domestic

⁵ Accommodation for Homeless households Placed in Temporary Accommodation. (ODPM Consultation document)

⁶ Betsey Stanko (2000) A Day to Count

violence rises during this period⁷ and frequently results in harm to the foetus⁸. Domestic violence has now overtaken gestational diabetes and pre-eclampsia as a cause of foetal death⁹.

Parent education programmes

These are to be targeted at parents with 5-8yr olds (where programmes have been shown to have the largest impact on children's behaviour) and consist of 6 weekly sessions aimed at training parents in behavioural techniques. Whilst Refuge recognises the importance of parent education, there is some concern that 6 weeks may be insufficient time to tackle all presenting problems.

Refuge has experience of running parenting groups for mothers who have lived with domestic violence. During that process we have learned of the specific issues, both practical and psychological, that women often face. The primary need of women abused within an intimate relationship, is not 'training' or 'education' though this can be useful in some circumstances. Their primary need is to work towards resolving the guilt and responsibility they feel about "making my child live with violence" and developing the capacity to communicate with their child without the hindrance of an unspoken family secret.

Refuge would recommend the development of:

- specialist parenting groups for parents with problems affecting children, such as mental health issues, substance misuse and domestic violence. These should be developed in partnership with specialist agencies in each field.

Family group conferencing, mediation services and stress/relationship counselling

In general, Refuge welcomes the government's work on restorative justice in the area of youth offending and its plans to extend evidence based good practice to other spheres. At the same time, Refuge expresses grave concern about the application of restorative justice practices to 'sensitive cases such as sex crimes and domestic violence'.

Issues of power and control lie at the heart of abusive behaviour and are likely to re-emerge within the context/process of mediation and or family group/community meetings. It is unrealistic to assume that victims of abuse will be able to advocate for their own needs/ rights and express their feelings freely and without fear when faced with their abuser. It may even be dangerous to place women in this position. We know that women are more at risk after they leave the perpetrator, and the presence of domestic violence is now recognised as a risk factor in child contact proceedings. The need for more supervised contact centres across the UK is well documented and accepted both within and outside government. Surely the risk to women and children during face to

⁷ 15% of pregnant women attending a primary care centre in East London reported violence during their pregnancy. Almost 40% said the violence began during the pregnancy. 30% of these women said they had experienced a miscarriage following a previous assault. Conference Report: Domestic Violence. A Health Response: Working in a Wider Partnership. London: DoH, 2000. Dr Jeremy Coid, p 41. Cited on WAFE website.

⁸ 60% of 127 women suffered violence during pregnancy with 13% losing their baby. McWilliams, M. and McKiernan, J. Bringing It All Out Into The Open: Domestic Violence in Northern Ireland. Belfast: HMSO, 1993. cited on WAFE website.

⁹ Friend, J (1998) Responding to violence against women: a specialist's role'. Editorial, Hospital Medicine, 59(9)

face meetings with the perpetrator during conferences, mediation, counselling etc must also be considered, particularly where she is expected to express herself as an 'equal'. To illustrate this point, a New Zealand study described how at a family group conference, the perpetrator was able to force his partner to leave the support of her family and sit beside him with a mere snap of his fingers. A year later he was found guilty of her murder¹⁰. In this country 23 children were killed between 1994 – 2003 during unsupervised contact visits.¹¹

Refuge recommends:

- the use of comprehensive screening to ensure women and children experiencing abuse are diverted from such programmes. And that reliable and valid risk assessment and safety measures are in place in those circumstances where such contact is considered beneficial.

Children with parents in prison

The government acknowledges research which shows that children usually want to maintain links with their imprisoned parents, but they lack help and encounter many obstacles particularly in visiting prisons. Whilst maintaining contact with separated parents is generally in a child's best interest, it is important to screen routinely to determine whether domestic violence has been a feature of the father's behaviour and or criminal activity. If fathers are in prison for violence against their partner we should not assume it is desirable or safe for children to visit them.

Support programmes for fathers as well as mothers

The importance of building positive relationships with parents, particularly fathers is also welcomed. Preventative work, of the kind developed in Finland¹² provides opportunities for fathers to bond with their children. Fundamental to this approach is the idea that if a parent bonds with a child and has opportunities to learn about child development, they are more likely to empathise with the child when it cries or has a tantrum than to inflict harm. Nevertheless, there are some dangers when promoting contact with fathers 'especially those who are living apart' where domestic violence is present. This is discussed in greater detail below.

Better communication between parents and schools

Again, this is an excellent idea. But there must be safeguards in terms of allowing fathers, especially those who are separated from their families as a result of domestic violence, access to children or information about children, especially their home address. Refuges have long been aware of the real risk of abduction for such children and the need for safety plans. In addition, lack of security/awareness about the dangers of confirming a child's attendance at a school or of divulging their home address can lead to women and children being traced by a man who poses a threat to their physical and psychological well being.

Child contact arrangements

Refuge is concerned that the green paper does not make reference to the risks posed to children experiencing contact with fathers who have perpetrated domestic violence, nor does it mention the safeguards necessary to ensure women and children remain free from harm. This harm can be physical and life threatening, as was the case for the 23 children killed in such circumstances in

¹⁰Stephen Hooper and Ruth Busch (1996) Domestic Violence and Restorative Justice Initiatives: The risks of a new Panacea

¹¹ Child homicides involving contact visits. Women's aid web site

¹² Father and baby groups run by Mikko Oranen, Helsinki/Oulu. Personal communication.

this country. The harm can also be psychological. For example, when a child is afraid of their father and is re-traumatised through unwanted contact arrangements, recovery can be jeopardised. An essential pre-requisite for work on trauma recovery is that children should not only feel safe, they should be safe from threat of further harm.

Consulting children

Refuge recommends, in line with the Children Act, that the wishes and feelings of *all* children should be ascertained in relation to any legal proceedings which involve them. This is not always easy - it can be difficult to find out what children want and feel about contact with a violent father for a number of reasons:

- the child is being asked to talk about a sensitive family secret, possibly for the first time
- for children who have been traumatised, there may be difficulties (or avoidance) in disclosing thoughts and feelings about traumatic events they have witnessed
- there may be fear that full disclosure of the abuse which has taken place could result in their own removal from the home
- the power dynamics within the family often results in women and children agreeing to almost anything, including contact, if they think this means they can avoid further violence
- unknown to others, the child may also have been abused by the father and fear of reprisals may inhibit a child's ability to disclose their true feelings about contact.

Responding to risk and arranging 'safe' contact

Refuge recommends that a risk assessment, including risk of psychological harm should occur prior to a court decision and that:

- professionals working in or for the court system should have comprehensive training in, and a thorough knowledge and understanding of, the ways domestic violence can impact upon a woman and her children. The need to build a trusting relationship with the child is crucial, therefore, assessments of children should take place over time
- assessments should be carried out by appropriately trained child focused professionals. We should *never* accept the view of a judge as a valid assessment – s/he is a legal expert, not a psychologist or psychiatrist
- cases should be monitored as they proceed through the court system by a multi-disciplinary group (involving representatives from refuges and or advocates for abused women)
- professionals should be particularly aware of 'safety' issues. Research shows that during the months following separation, a woman is at increased risk of death or physical injury from her ex-partner. In such circumstances, alternative forms of contact e.g. telephone calls, videotaped messages or letters to a neutral address (such as the court) should be considered viable alternatives to face to face meetings
- where contact is desired by the child and recommended by the court it should be arranged in a 'safe' manner. It should be supervised in a centre with a high adult to child ratio. For non-English speaking families, interpreters should be available to monitor communication between father and children. Appropriate safety procedures should be in place to protect women from assault, threats or from being apprehended before or followed after, contact has taken place
- if the contact progresses to unsupervised status, it should be closely monitored with a view to withdrawal, if any threat is made and or distress is shown by the woman or child
- professionals employed to ascertain the wishes and feelings of children should be aware of the impact of domestic violence on a child's well being and the conflict that can arise between what

a child wants and what is in their best interest. It does not seem appropriate to presume that contact with a violent man is always in the best interest of the child.

Refuge is aware that the government has issued best practice guidance for the courts and other professionals on how to deal with child contact cases where there is also domestic violence but believes this is insufficient to protect women and children from the risks associated with on-going contact with the perpetrator.

Refuge supports the work of Women's Aid and others in the area and recommends:

- a rebuttable presumption of no contact with the perpetrator in cases where there is domestic violence
- a review of the use of child contact centres with the aim of producing best practice guidelines to ensure that safety measures protect both the woman and the child
- mandatory training for all CAFCAS officers and those working in the family court system.

Compulsory action with parents and families

The government suggests taking compulsory action with families who are difficult to engage or who have entrenched problems and of course, this may sometimes be necessary in extreme cases in order to safeguard children, promote their well being or ensure the safety of others. However, when domestic violence is also a feature of such cases, it is important to recognise that some (mothers) may be harder to engage because they are depressed, fearful and exhausted from expending most of their energy keeping themselves and their children safe from a violent partner. They are also likely to be keeping a secret which they are afraid to share. Children living in such circumstances may be acting out and or getting into trouble because of the stress they are experiencing at home. They may even be being abused directly. Compulsory action, without thorough screening and delivery of appropriate supportive intervention to both woman and child, may not be helpful or successful in cases where there is domestic violence.

A national helpline for parents

Refuge welcomes this idea and would be particularly interested in offering support to the government in establishing this service and or in developing a specialist arm of its own helpline, dedicated to advising parents who are concerned about the impact of domestic violence on children. Refuge has many years experience of running a specialist helpline for victims of domestic violence and frequently responds to women concerned about the impacts domestic violence has had upon their children.

Chapter 4 -Early intervention and effective protection

Q What currently gets in the way of information sharing and how can we remove the barriers?

Improving Information Sharing

All professionals need a clear understanding of client confidentiality, current legislation and how to create an inter-face which promotes safety for women and children. In practice there can be confusion about what information can and should be shared. Sometimes this has tragic consequences, as in the Victoria Climbié case. All agencies should have a policy which has regard to an individual's right to privacy (under the Data Protection Act) and respects client confidentiality

but also recognises the limits of that confidentiality (under the Children Act) when it becomes necessary to safeguard children from significant harm. Refuge welcomes the government's commitment to promote the sharing of information across agencies working with children. However there is also a need, where adult problems create difficulties for children, to establish effective mechanisms between adult and child services.

Refuge suggests that:

- **safety** should be the guiding principle in any decision to share or keep information confidential
- the government needs to promote greater clarity through training on legislation re: data protection, professional confidentiality and child protection
- there are clear policies and procedures for information sharing **across disciplines** and **between adult and child services**.

Q Should information on parents and carers, such as domestic violence, imprisonment, mental health or drug problems be shared?

The presence of domestic violence (or other adult problems) within the home represents a real risk to children and should be shared. Nevertheless, it is essential to recognise that sharing information can also **endanger lives**. Domestic violence organisations generally work within the bounds of confidentiality for reasons of professionalism and of safety. Refuge recommends that confidentiality is retained with respect to sharing information (especially during court/legal processes) about:

- women's addresses
- current or proposed addresses
- telephone numbers
- place of work
- child's school
- the woman's fears, concerns about her partner
- details of her associates including family and friends
- any opinion or assumptions about either the woman herself, her perceptions or the case.

Children with special needs, who transfer across boroughs in an effort to escape domestic violence, are particularly vulnerable to being located when information is carelessly disclosed by professionals during the hand over process.

Q Should a unique identifying number be used?

Refuge has some concerns about *when* information should be recorded, *who* has access, *how long* it is to be kept, *who* decides and *why*. Stringent safeguards must be in place to ensure 'electronic trails' do not replace paper trails which aid perpetrators of domestic violence in identifying the whereabouts of vulnerable women and children. Safeguards against breaching an individual's right to privacy must also be balanced against rigorous identification and tracking of children at risk. It is also unclear how voluntary agencies fit into the system nor how those working with adults would alert their colleagues in children's services of the possibility that a child may be at risk.

Q What should be the thresholds and triggers for sharing information about a child?

The green paper suggests that 'the decision to flag concerns' and 'how many flags warrant action is at the discretion of the professional'. Refuge very much opposes such discretion. There should

be very clear guidance/protocols which indicate when flagging is non-discretionary, even if this is at an 'early warning' stage. Allowing discretion merely presents another opportunity for professionals to fail to identify and respond to children at risk.

Refuge would recommend:

- comprehensive training between adult and child services
- the use of a domestic violence flag, as suggested by the police and CPS for adult offenders when flagging 'at risk' cases
- logging *who* in the system, is working with the adult
- developing appropriate mechanisms for integration between adult and child services
- flagging cases should follow some form of validated check-list or criteria for action and not be left to the discretion of professionals
- warning signs should reflect factors within the family such as imprisonment, domestic violence, mental health or substance misuse problems amongst parents and carers
- that the government develop protocols for flagging and responding to at risk cases, evaluate the effectiveness and then roll out best practice. Be clear, be directive, be sure.

Developing a common assessment framework

Refuge recognises the need for such a framework as well as the weaknesses in the current system which led to its proposal. Nevertheless, Refuge is concerned that creation of such a framework may be complex and that detail in terms of examples of good practice, what this means in practical terms and how it is to be implemented across disciplines, is missing from the green paper.

Refuge recommends that:

- the framework should make reference to validated assessment tools (where possible)
- screening for the presence of domestic violence, followed by assessment for its impacts on children (and their mother) is a mandatory component
- comprehensive training should be mandatory for to all those involved in the application of the framework.

Lead professional

Having one person to co-ordinate services is a positive step, though it might be a heavy duty for one person, particularly if there are a high number of complex cases on which they must lead. Secondary traumatisation and burn out are common by-products of working with multiple cases of abuse, therefore, Refuge would recommend:

- sensitive allocation of cases to each lead professional
- appropriate mechanisms for management, support and supervision must be in place if this system is to work effectively.

It is proposed that lead professionals could come from a range of services, including schools, connexions, social workers or more specialist services. The document does not make clear whether voluntary services would have the opportunity to lead. If services are to be truly integrated within a culture of shared duty and respect, Refuge would recommend :

- affording the voluntary sector the same level of professionalism and trust by allowing them to take on the role of lead professional when appropriate.

Multi-disciplinary teams

Refuge supports the government's goal to bring together relevant professionals who can work together in places easily accessible to children and families such as schools, sure start centres and primary care.

Q What are the barriers to developing multi-disciplinary teams in a range of settings?

Deciding who will lead, where and how.

Integrating services through extended schools and clusters or schools

Q How can we ensure multi-disciplinary teams have greater leverage over mainstream and specialist services?

It is positive that the government aims to develop extended schools which will offer child care, study support, sports and arts facilities, family and life long learning, health and social care. But it is important to remember that there is also a role for the voluntary sector in providing **specialist community based** support. This kind of support would offer families greater anonymity and confidentiality and is often preferred by those with those experiencing abuse.

Accountability and integration

The government plans to ensure accountability from frontline services to Ministerial level. They propose placing one person in charge nationally and locally (a director of children's services for every local authority) who will have responsibility for integrating service delivery under a unitary budget. The long-term vision however, is to create Children's trusts.

Children's Trusts

Refuge supports this move to create co-ordinated services, including health, education, social services, connexions and youth offending team, but is concerned that voluntary groups are not included in membership.

Refuge is also concerned that a focus on 'separate' services for children and adults may reinforce the already dangerously entrenched division between the two. This is particularly risky where adult problems have the potential to negatively affect children, such as domestic violence, substance abuse and mental health issues.

The government requires that children's trusts will engage in partnership working with voluntary groups but allows local authorities 'flexibility over how this partnership working is undertaken'.

Refuge would recommend that:

- clear protocols are established to ensure work undertaken is truly a 'partnership' and that the valuable contribution made by voluntary groups is not marginalised.

Refuge views many of the proposed reforms as positive, but is concerned about the lack of clarity in terms of how these changes are to be achieved for example, who in the multi-disciplinary teams will take the 'lead' and how will the proposed interim changes be absorbed into the next phase of development, the creation of Children's Trusts. Refuge is also concerned that creating interim structural reform (combining education and social services) whilst simultaneously working towards

establishing another model of service (Children's Trusts) seems costly, time consuming, confusing and unnecessary.

Local safeguarding boards

The government proposes to replace area child protection committees with local safeguarding children boards. Refuge supports action already taken to place a new duty on education authorities, schools and FE institutions to reinforce the priority given to protecting children and young people. However, in order to implement significant change across all agencies Refuge believes:

- it is essential to invest sufficient time, money and training in this function
- in terms of domestic violence, it is crucial that training is given to all personnel about the impacts on both women and children and that appropriate protocols, including liaison with relevant adult services are developed
- that the establishment of local safeguarding boards should be a statutory duty of all local authorities
- that all authorities and other relevant local agencies should have a duty to promote the wellbeing of children.

Workforce reform

It is positive that the government recognises the value of work with children and has a commitment to improving training and career structures to promote and reward excellence. One of the stated aims is to "ensure effective incentives for good practitioners to stay on the front line". However, Refuge believes that it is also necessary to recognise that professional 'burn out' is a possibility, especially for those working with children at risk. Refuge would recommend:

- opportunities for high quality supervision/debriefing
- opportunities for sabbatical leave and job swaps.

Q Should all those working with children share a common core of skills and knowledge?

The proposal to develop common core training is also welcomed and Refuge would support all of the suggested components and would recommend the addition of:

- management/supervision skills in working with children and families at risk
- skills in working with systems e.g. the family, organisations, society
- the impact of adult problems on children e.g. domestic violence, substance abuse, mental health.

- ENDS -