

South Yorkshire Women's Aid
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To whom it may concern,

I am writing on behalf of South Yorkshire Women's Aid to ask that your union branch kindly consider making a donation to South Yorkshire Women's Aid. As a registered charity, we assist women who require advice and support as a result of domestic abuse.

Nationally, every week, two women are murdered, three commit suicide to escape abuse and it is estimated that domestic abuse affects one in four women. Studies of domestic violence highlight that many women who experience financial abuse in their relationships then go on to experience financial difficulties as benefits are low, take a long time to process and, when claimed, are often then subject to sanctioning.

Locally, Doncaster has more reports to the police, than any other comparable sized town in the UK and across South Yorkshire domestic abuse accounted for a third of all violent crimes during 2014-2015, with children featuring prominently in serious case reviews.

Clearly, there is a need for specialist services like Women's Aid, yet public spending cuts show that since 2010, 54% of domestic violence specialist services have disappeared from our towns and cities. Doncaster has not been immune from cutbacks; Women's Aid has contracted and now operates on a smaller budget employing three part-time staff making it difficult to meet the needs of the community. Our service struggles financially as it is, however Doncaster council have now told us they will not renew our grant in December, which means our service faces closure.

Based in Doncaster, our organisation offers a confidential one-to-one advice service. We also run empowerment courses whereby women are offered specialist therapeutic and psycho-educational programmes with trained facilitators. The courses are integrated with wider domestic abuse support and advice.

Importantly for those branches we are contacting outside of Doncaster, we are the last Women's Aid in South Yorkshire. Women's Aid is one of the only specialist domestic violence services. Other services are often run by generic providers and will not necessarily specialise in violence against women or the non-victim blaming empowering approach we take. Therefore our therapeutic courses and advice is always open to all women who need it within South Yorkshire and indeed the rest of the country, as women often have to flee miles to escape perpetrator networks. As Unions it's important to recognise that your members will need this service or a service like ours closer to you. As a trade union movement we must work to keep these services open. A closure to a women's aid in one area of the country is an injury to women and children everywhere.

As an experienced caseworker and therapeutic trainer, I am well aware of the physical, emotional and psychological trauma of domestic abuse on women and children. With your help, we believe we can make a significant contribution to the fight against domestic abuse and in so doing help women and children rebuild their lives.

There are a number of areas with which we need financial support. With the prospect of closure we desperately need to fundraise to keep us open as long as possible past December to buy us time to get larger funding pots. Our rent is £350 a month, we have other expenses also, such as the phone service we offer for free but is not covered by our initial council grant. Whatever you may be able to offer us will be spent on providing life saving support.

It is only through the support and solidarity of our community and the trade union movement that we will be able to rebuild our service and tackle the ingrained issue of violence against women in our communities. We hope that you will extend your solidarity to us on this issue.

In solidarity,

Louise Harrison & Amy Cousens,
on behalf of South Yorkshire Women's Aid (Doncaster)