

## **Written evidence submitted by Hestia (COR0020)**

### **1. About Hestia**

- 1.1 Hestia is one of the largest providers of domestic abuse refuges and support in London and the South.
- 1.2 Last year we supported 2,225 people to recover from the trauma of domestic abuse.
- 1.3 We are the home of domestic abuse and sexual violence campaign UK Says No More and developed the Bright Sky domestic abuse app in partnership with Vodafone.
- 1.4 We delivered the Tampon Tax funded Everyone's Business pilot working with employers to provide tools to support employees enduring domestic abuse.
- 1.5 Our turnover is £29 million, which makes us currently ineligible for existing hardship funds. However last year our operating surplus was only£100,000, so we do not have significant resources to redeploy.

### **2. More refuge bed spaces will be required**

- 2.1 We have not yet seen an increase in demand for our refuges, although this is anticipated.
- 2.2 We have been able to provide refuge accommodation in a self-contained unit to a family with Covid-19 symptoms. However self-contained units are not common place.
- 2.3 We have had cases where residents have had symptoms and we have still had women willing to come into that refuge and risk Covid-19 rather than stay in abusive situations.
- 2.4 Due to a bottle-neck with move on accommodation, we expect our refuges to be at capacity within the next weeks.
- 2.5 We are currently working with partners such as MOPAC to identify suitable accommodation (such as a Bed & Breakfast).
- 2.6 Based on our experience of supporting survivors of the Grenfell disaster, we are concerned by potential plans to move victims into large hotels without an exit plan.

### **3. Increase in people seeking support through digital channels**

- 3.1 Bright Sky is a free to download app which provides help and support to victims of domestic abuse and friends and family who might be worried about them.
- 3.2 Since the introduction of lockdown, we have seen a 47% increase week on week in downloads of the app.

### **4. Significant lack of Personal Protective Equipment**

- 4.1 When residents in our refuges have displayed symptoms, they are not able to be entirely isolated due to share facilities.
- 4.2 Due to prohibitive costs, lack of capacity and lack of availability, we have been unable to source and supply PPE. Staff and other residents are therefore continually at risk.

### **5. No resources available for women with No Recourse to Public Funds**

- 5.1 Across the UK there is an under provision of services for women with complex needs, single women and women with No Recourse to Public Funds
- 5.2 Last year we provided spaces in our refuges to 54 women who initially had no recourse to public funds.

5.3 This was funded through charitable donations. However our funds have now been deleted and with fundraised income drying up, this will not continue to be possible.

## **6. Increased staffing costs**

6.1 Domestic abuse services have had a long history of underfunding and operating on the most skeletal service models.

6.2 Across our services around 25% of our staff are currently shielding or in self-isolation. Where possible they are continuing to work remotely. However, in our refuges, we still require staff to be present on site.

6.3 As a result our staffing costs are increasing dramatically and unless we have additional funding to support this, it will begin to push Hestia to the edge financially.

## **7. The needs of families isolated in refuges**

7.1 Women often arrive at our refuges with nothing but the clothes on their back.

7.2 Families that are now confined to one room are struggling to entertain children and provide access to education.

7.3 Through a successful fundraising appeal we have managed to provide tablets, Netflix accounts, colouring books and games for families to use.

7.4 This will be an ongoing need.

## **8. Supporting victims through their employers**

8.1 Through our Everyone's Business network, we are already providing support and guidance to employers on communications they can send to their employees.

8.2 The role of employers could be expanded significantly as a channel for ensuring messages reach victims.

8.3 However, only a handful of businesses have access to specialist support (such as an IDVA) to provide advice if an employee is at risk. Funding to deliver this service is urgently needed.

## **9. Getting the message out to victims through social media**

9.1 Lockdown provides a new means of control for perpetrators of domestic abuse.

9.2 UK says NO MORE has launched its social media #ListeningAtHome campaign. This reminds neighbours of the role they can play in listening out and acting (such as calling the Police). Billboard adverts and radio PSAs are planned for the coming weeks and a co-ordinated approach is needed to get these messages out widely.

## **10. Providing a Safe Space for victims in pharmacies**

10.1 UK says NO MORE piloted a Safe Spaces model with Islington Council which is ready to be rolled out to pharmacies following consultation with the General Pharmaceutical Council.

10.2 The model would be to: Provide information in the form of posters, that specialist domestic abuse services are open and ready to provide support; identify that this is a Safe Space and that the consultation room is available to anyone needing to contact a specialist domestic abuse support service; provide access to helpline telephone numbers specialist support services via Bright Sky; and provide a chair, access to a plug socket and a pen/paper.

10.3 We urgently need a coordinated effort to push this out.