Press Release December 2015

**New Domestic Abuse Law on controlling behaviour comes into force**

Berkshire Women’s Aid (BWA) welcomes new legislation which recognises that abuse comes in many forms. It may never be physical, but the psychological impact of controlling and coercive behaviour can have a longer lasting impact.

Controlling and coercive behaviour is defined under section 76 of the Serious Crime Act 2015 as causing someone to fear that violence will be used against them on at least two occasions, or generating serious alarm or distress that has a substantial effect on their day to day lives.

BWA has supported thousands of victims over many years and have witnessed the patterns of threats, humiliation and intimidation that many victims experience over a long period of time. Victims are cut off from family and friends, they often have no access to money and in more recent years are tracked and kept under surveillance through GPS on their phone and social media.

Liz Terry, Chief Executive explained by giving an example of a recent victim who was helped by BWA to understand what had been happening to her. She told us that her partner uses looks, actions and gestures to make her feel afraid and is also putting her down, making her feel bad about herself, calling her names, making her think she is crazy and playing mind games’. Using the ‘Power and Control’ wheel \* with the BWA team the victim particularly related to the ‘using intimidation’ and ‘using emotional abuse’ categories allowing her to understand. that this was a common abuse tactic and that she was not alone in being manipulated in this way.

Liz Terry went on to say:

“This new legislation is important in enabling victims to not wait until the abuse escalates into violence. Being believed is the first important step but then knowing the law is on your side can be very empowering. BWA would like to see this legislation being used to send a clear message to perpetrators that just because there has been no physical abuse it doesn’t mean that the psychological, sexual or financial abuse is ok – it is never ok!”

In two other recent reports figures from Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabulary show the number if domestic abuse cases reported to the police in England and Wales rose by 31% between 2013 and 2015, and according to Citizens Advice 1,500 people sought help for domestic abuse between July and September 2015, a rise of 24% on the same period in the previous year.

BWA’s helpline received 4,000 calls in 2014/2015, calls have increased month on month in 2015 and by March 2016 are forecast to be running at an annual rate of 5,000 or more.

BWA provides support for male victims of domestic abuse but the majority of victims seeking help are female.

Liz Terry, Chief Executive of BWA would encourage anyone suffering domestic violence to call the helpline on 01189504003.

For more information about BWA and the support they offer visit [www.berkshirewomensaid.org.uk](http://www.berkshirewomensaid.org.uk)

\* [www.ncdsv.org/images/powercontrolwheelnoshading.pdf](http://www.ncdsv.org/images/powercontrolwheelnoshading.pdf)