Lloyds Bank Foundation Launches Three Year £3m National Domestic Abuse Programme to Underpin Struggling Sector and Calls on Government to Reform Poor Commissioning

Friday 13 November, 2015

Lloyds Bank Foundation for England and Wales today announced the launch of a three-year national programme designed to improve responses to domestic abuse and strengthen the sector. At a critical time when refuge bed spaces have reduced and demand is increasing for all services, the Foundation has identified an urgent need to make a strategic investment in the domestic abuse sector by focussing on influencing commissioning, policy and practice and preventing abuse occurring in the first place.

The Foundation's new national domestic abuse programme will invest £3m in the domestic abuse sector over three years, informed by its 30 years' experience of grant-making to individual domestic abuse charities, as well as wide consultation in the sector. With reduced funding and poor public commissioning , the survival of specialist charities is seriously threatened as outlined in the Foundation's recent report, **Expert Yet Undervalued and On the Front Line.**

Domestic abuse charities told the Foundation that the sector has been particularly hard hit by funding cuts and that public commissioning is increasingly favouring larger generic providers and not recognising the importance of specialist providers, particularly for black and ethnic minority (BME) communities, meaning that they and those they serve are excluded and marginalised.

The new programme was launched today with an initial investment of £800,000. This will support and expand a partnership between Women's Aid and Imkaan to enable small and specialist charities tackling domestic abuse to better prepare for, adapt and compete for funding contracts across England. In Wales, Welsh Women's Aid is also being supported to help charities prepare for new commissioning arrangements. In addition the Foundation is seeking to help change current commissioning practices by working with a wide network of organisations - including Imkaan, Welsh Women's Aid, Women's Aid Federation of England and SafeLives - to produce new guidance to help local commissioners assess need and fund services in an effective way for specialist providers and those they serve.

Even with this new programme and the commitment of other foundations, a long-term, sustainable response to domestic abuse cannot be achieved without the full commitment of government, which remains the primary funder of services. With the government due to announce the results of its Spending Review shortly, the Foundation is calling on Ministers to allocate sufficient funding to tackling domestic abuse, and to fulfil their Manifesto commitment to reform commissioning to “ensure a secure future" for refuges, rape crisis centres and other services to tackle domestic abuse and violence against women and girls.

Paul Streets OBE, Chief Executive of Lloyds Bank Foundation, said: “We are proud to be able to launch this new package of funding and advocacy for small and specialist domestic abuse charities which deliver life-saving services yet face uncertain futures. But as an independent funder our support can only go so far. With two women a week being killed by their partners and thousands more suffering domestic abuse, we need the government to take up the mantle in ensuring that those experiencing domestic abuse can access the support they need from the organisations best equipped to help them. The Prime Minister's manifesto commitment to reforming domestic abuse commissioning was an important one, but now we need concrete action in the Spending Review later this month to guarantee the future of specialist services. Because without it they may not survive, which could have a catastrophic impact on those who need their help now and in the future."

Polly Neate, Chief Executive of Women's Aid, said: “It is vital that our smaller dedicated and specialist domestic abuse services are protected. This will ensure they can maintain their survivor-led practice - practice that has been saving the lives of women and children for more than four decades. Through this partnership with Lloyds Bank Foundation we can support these life-saving services to survive in what is a very difficult funding climate and ensure those who make funding decisions locally understand the long term impact they have in women's and children's lives."

Marai Larasi, Executive Director of Imkaan, said: “As local commissioning structures are largely failing specialist BME women's organisations, this project is both timely and critical. Through this partnership, Imkaan will be able to reach out and offer targeted support to some of its most vulnerable

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members - dedicated BME specialist Violence Against Women and Girls services - many of whom are facing an acute crisis by having to navigate the constant threat of cuts and closure in the current funding and commissioning climate."

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