

AAFDA

Minutes/Notes from AGM

Held on 7th January 2011 at Swindon Council Offices

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AAFDA started because of my family's experience. My sister Julia and nephew William Pemberton were murdered by the husband and father Alan Pemberton in November 2003. Alan then killed himself. It took five years and real persistence to find out the facts of what happened; what the agency failures were. During this time I met many other families who told me of similar frustrations and difficulties with the criminal justice system (CJS). It became clear that I might be able to provide some help.

AAFDA's work

Listens to families tell their stories of fatal domestic abuse

Helps families after these tragedies – examples include advocating directly with service providers, attending court, providing information and listening, summarizing their stories, arranging and participating in meetings.

Educates – AAFDA is doing its bit to raise awareness with talks and the Co-ordinator has had articles published.

It's amazing some of the difficulties families have. One family showed me a letter that families receive shortly after trial; a trial that may have resulted in a hefty sentence for the person who murdered their child. The letter includes reference to the Victims Liaison Organisation helping the family on matters regarding the perpetrator's release. The family don't want to hear it like that. AAFDA will be collaborating soon with the Commission for Victims and Witnesses on these kind of difficulties.

AAFDA has influenced agencies. Swindon Council is developing an AAFDA idea, the privacy card which helps vulnerable people access privacy and hopefully complex help when seeking assistance for example in the One Stop Shop. It is also being rolled out to the Benefits agencies.

In response to an invitation from the Ministry of Justice, AAFDA submitted a briefing on domestic violence for Coroners.

Trains - AAFDA has delivered training to many police officers. Police need to know their training is working and perhaps that is the biggest contribution they can bring, to ensure they are trained properly in doing the things they should.

AAFDA wants to become involved in influencing medical professionals who see so many victims and perpetrators but are often uninformed on domestic violence and don't always have clarity on how and where to refer these people to.

This year, AAFDA will deliver training to around 80 priests.

AAFDA is continuing to help the Home Office on Domestic Violence Homicide Review policy, these inquiries becoming a statutory requirement in April 2011. The Pemberton Homicide Review into the murders in my family was a pilot for this legislation and Professor Neil Websdale, world leading authority on these inquiries, called it a gold standard.

Last August, I was in America at the invitation of the National Domestic Violence Fatality Review Initiative to learn about fatality review developments. The biggest one in the last five years has been the growth of family and community input.

Once homicide reviews are required by law from April this year, AAFDA wants to help more families contribute to these reviews. It is important to bring the victim's voice to these reviews. They bring new information and help professionals fully appreciate the effects of tragedy. Professionals should not pass by the opportunity to embrace the huge emotional toll of domestic violence. We can try to become objective in the decision making process too early. Feel the emotion first.

These reviews can provide healing for the families and agencies and also for the relationship between families and agencies.

Reports from these and other enquiries sometimes conclude right at the beginning of the report that the tragedy was not preventable. Then the report

lists a whole load of contacts that the victim made with agencies, i.e. intervention opportunities that may have been missed. The report should say that had we taken these opportunities, then the tragedy would have had the best chance of being prevented; that the tragedy was preventable.

Domestic Violence

In studying this area, two facts stood out for me - prevalence and the gendered nature. I'm sure you know the prevalence statistics. The ones for suicide really stand out.

500 women who have experienced domestic violence in the last six months commit suicide every year. Of those, just under 200 attended hospital for domestic violence on the day they died. (*The Cost of Domestic Violence. Women and Equality Unit, Walby, 2004*).

We know that women suffer domestic abuse from men and it is a much less common occurrence for men. We also know that men are not clamouring for refuge space.

We need a top drawer CJS response to calls for help. A quality investigation which can sometimes mean the victim doesn't need to go to Court and we know that some victims get killed or beaten up after testifying. So are police using body video wear enough ?

For lots of domestic violence there is no obvious CJS sanction - How can we help these victims escape ? That means government and local authorities prioritizing provision of an array of services to meet different needs It means equal pay, financial support for those flee-ing domestic violence, houses to flee to and a judiciary that understands this affliction. Many women do not leave abusive relationships because the alternative is poverty – social isolation & recriminations – from one tyranny to another.

Although Theresa May MP did protect some funding, the offering is miniscule. It simply means that we choose not to adequately fund the acquisition of basic human rights which Professor Stark calls security, liberty and autonomy for so many of our citizens, mostly female. These are rights that most governments profess to hold dear. We see attacks on these rights as terrorism and we apply significant funding to that field. **Domestic violence is terrorism.** Professor Stark recently e-mailed me two interesting

comments: Here's one:

"There's a clear double standard here. If men had their money taken, were followed, beaten, etc. etc... no one would think twice or require a self-defense plea if they killed...humiliation of men is much worse because they start higher"

Here's what one influential woman e-mailed me recently - If the State will not protect us, what democratic imperative is there for women to pay their taxes ?