

PRESS RELEASE

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Minister Sacramento announces Gibraltar Domestic Abuse Strategy to be launched in early 2018

The Hon Samantha Sacramento MP, Minister for Equality, has announced that the Gibraltar Domestic Abuse Strategy, which is to be rolled out over a five-year period, will be launched in the first quarter of 2018. The objective of the strategy is to eradicate domestic abuse in Gibraltar in all its forms, as well the stigma attached to it.

The announcement which coincides with International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women is the result of a multi-agency Domestic Abuse Working Group which was established by Minister Sacramento in 2013. International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women is marked by the United Nations and falls on 25th November each year.

The multi-agency Domestic Abuse Working Group consists of heads of the various Government departments and agencies who regularly come into contact with victims of domestic violence and/or abuse including the Royal Gibraltar Police, the Care Agency, the Gibraltar Health Authority, the Courts Service, the Drugs and Probation Services, the Housing Department, Department of Education and other relevant stake-holder departments.

The working group had two operational objectives to effectively deal with domestic abuse and its victims:

1. for all relevant departments to establish internal policies and procedures to deal with domestic abuse; and
2. holistically, to develop an overarching national strategy developed by the stakeholders in partnership and in consultation.

As a result of the working group which is led by the Ministry of Equality, the Royal Gibraltar Police and the Care Agency as frontline agencies, each has individual policies for dealing with cases of domestic abuse which have been developed and are more robust. As part of the strategy, these policies will be aligned to ensure that there is a consistent referral procedure.

Throughout this period, there has also been extensive training of staff to equip them to deal with the issue more effectively. In particular, in 2014 the Care Agency overhauled the way that it dealt



with domestic abuse and also introduced the Freedom Programme, an accredited therapeutic programme that supports and empowers victims to recognise abuse and control and ultimately to understand the full impact of domestic violence to them as victims and to any children in the family.

A true understanding of the scale of the problem locally has been enabled by the collection of statistics relating specifically to reports of domestic abuse over the course of the last three years. It is well known that statistics relating to domestic abuse will rarely be accurate because of the reluctance of victims to report. Victims choose not to report abuse for a variety of reasons, including shame and embarrassment as well as fear. This tendency is more prominent in a small community like Gibraltar.

The Department of Equality is also working closely with Women in Need in order to support them to provide the help that is needed to victims. Recently, the Head of Equality, together with the Principal Housing Officer, visited women's shelters in the UK to better understand structures and frameworks and learn from best practice so as assist Women in Need further.

A key strand of the strategy is to increase awareness of domestic abuse and to encourage victims to speak out and seek help and support.

Prevention through education has been a continuous theme in the last few years. Schools have been actively involved in promoting healthy relationships like the recent Respect campaigns carried out by all primary and middle schools. Secondary schools have once again also promoted awareness of domestic abuse by taking a united stand against violence. Secondary schools have also focused on the issue of domestic abuse and healthy relationships in PSHE lessons.

As part of this awareness campaign, which will be delivered throughout the course of the year, the Ministry of Equality has commissioned an information video that will be first aired on GBC on the evening of Monday 27th November 2017. The purpose of the video campaign is to raise awareness of domestic abuse and to encourage anyone who is affected by it or may know that this is happening, to report it. The video emphasises that there is "No Excuse for Domestic Abuse".

If anyone wishes to report any case of domestic abuse, the Royal Gibraltar Police can be contacted on telephone number 190 (Emergency) or 20072500, alternatively, the Social Services Department of the Care Agency can be contacted on telephone number 200 78528.

The Hon Samantha Sacramento, MP, said: "Domestic abuse has a devastating impact on victims and on society, it should have no place in our community. Informative campaigns like this one are very important if we are to achieve this goal.

I have been working very closely with all Government departments over the past few years to make domestic abuse a priority. We are now in the final stages of a consolidated strategic plan which we are undertaking in partnership with all stakeholder agencies.

There is no shame to being a victim, and people must be aware that support structures exist to help.

Throughout the Ministry of Equality, we aim to challenge attitudes towards domestic abuse to prevent it from happening in the first place. Education is key and over the last few years we have



worked very successfully with the Department of Education as we look at working on prevention through education of the next generation. We have also established a consolidated approach to early intervention, support for victims, working with perpetrators to break the cycle. We are also looking at legislative changes to strengthen protection.

As a community we must all stand against domestic violence in all its forms.”