

Don't be a Bystander: new campaign launches

Leader of the House and Chief Whip Julie James will meet survivors to talk about their experiences and how the actions of those people around them can make a difference.

Julie James said:

"We want to encourage everyone to act, to do something, however small or simple when they are worried that someone they know is, or may be experiencing violence, abuse or sexual violence.

"Just the very act of asking someone "are you ok?" can have a huge impact.

"We do not advocate stepping in and intervening in a potentially dangerous situation or where people could get hurt – please call the police in this situation.

"We want to create a culture where people feel empowered to help prevent violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence and to make Wales the safest place to be a woman."

The campaign film encourages everyone to support someone they are worried about and signposts them to the Live Fear Free helpline and website. The campaign also includes a short film which explains what happens when you call the helpline as a concerned person.

Mary* is a survivor of domestic abuse; her colleagues had noticed her behaviour change and one sat her down to say "that's one bruise too many". Mary's neighbours had suspicions and became involved when her daughter went to them for help.

They brought Mary into their home and she accepted their offer to ring the police. Only then did she realise that a number of her neighbours had suspected something was wrong. Her partner was arrested that night and her life changed.

Mary said:

"Suddenly I didn't feel alone. People asked "are you ok?" and "how can we help?" and I felt that I could answer. I'm not sure I would have felt safe enough to answer before but hope that I would have at some point.

"I know I had been relieved when my colleague had asked, even

though I didn't feel able to speak to them about what was happening.

"What I would say to people who suspect things are not right with a family member, friend, colleague or neighbour, is trust your instinct, ask them if they're ok and keep asking, it may not be the right time for them to speak to you when you ask that first time, but your words could be the glimmer of hope that leads to a life being saved."

Sarah* grew up in Nigeria, where Female Genital Mutilation is common in her community. The traditional beliefs and practices were so instilled that it was something that every girl endured. Crucially, Sarah did not know that the practice was called FGM.

When her midwife asked her if she had been subjected to it, she said:

"I was confused and got upset and angry, it wasn't what I was expecting, in our culture women who are not cut are seen as unclean. I tried to walk away and as I did I was asked by the receptionist, "are you ok?". Thankfully she helped me to calm down as I realised that I wanted to talk to my midwife. Even though it must have been difficult for her too, she was understanding and helped me."

She brought her daughter to Wales so that she would not be cut after she came to realise what had been done to her. She said:

"I wish the people who helped me could see the impact on mine and my family's lives, I wish they could see the confidence they have given me. I would like them to see how happy I am day to day, my children are not going to go through this, I am a survivor."

Find out how to support someone today to live fear free. Visit www.livefearfree.gov.wales or call 0808 8010800 for 24 hour confidential advice and support.