



## **More than one hundred tradespeople learn to think differently at Domestic Abuse conference**

Repairs staff and contractors working with housing associations gathered to learn more about domestic abuse at the Domestic Abuse South West Conference in April.

Repairs staff are better placed than anyone to spot signs of abuse and the day was aimed at giving them clear skills and resources to help them do this. The event was attended by over 120 operatives from social housing maintenance contractors across the region.

The event was co-organised by MD Group and Homes in Sedgemoor along with the Domestic Abuse South West Steering Group and was a great success.

Domestic abuse survivors shared their moving stories and sparked coffee break discussions around what role housing associations and maintenance contractors can play to help stop domestic abuse.

One of the survivor's commented: "Spotting the signs of domestic abuse isn't always as simple as noticing holes in walls, or locks where they shouldn't be. The training toolkit gives clear guidance on how to identify more subtle indicators, helping those working in housing maintenance to understand more about domestic abuse, intimidation and coercive control."

Contractors heard moving accounts from a range of male and female survivors, including Westward's own Customer Enabling Manager, Nicki Spear, who had not previously spoken in public about her shocking survival story. The stories helped create impact for repairs workers to understand why it is so critical to report signs of domestic abuse.

The personal testimony heard, included CIH President, James Strang, who has personal experience of domestic abuse. He commended the training toolkit: "By making it available to all contractors and DLOs in the sector, they set something in motion that can make a real difference". The toolkit trains operatives on signs of domestic abuse, what to do about it and how to report it.

Westward trade's operatives gave feedback on their return to the office: "I left the conference feeling very moved and shocked. We all have a part to play with helping people trapped in abusive relationships, and there is something we can do, mainly to be aware and not ignore the signs."

Another said: "I found the day very interesting and hearing the guest speakers talk really put things into perspective, highlighting the importance and responsibility that we all have to report anything we notice. In short, the main thing I took away was 'Never walk by' as you really could be saving a life or be giving someone the ability/freedom to live one."

"The recent conference really educated me regarding thinking differently about identifying the signs of abuse, and the need to be more vigilant when visiting our properties. As part of a maintenance team we are in a position to play a vital role in reporting domestic abuse."

Suggestions for organisations included adding two weeks paid leave to the compassionate leave policy for those who are escaping domestic abuse and having a confidential 'concern button' on tradespeople's mobile devices, enabling them to report any concerns.

You can get your copy of the Domestic Abuse Training Toolkit here:

<https://www.mdgroup.co.uk/domesticabuseprevention> In addition, law firm Capsticks has produced free guidance on including [questions on domestic abuse prevention within the procurement process](#).

The report [Safe at Home](#), by Safe Lives and Gentoo, estimates that around 13% of all repairs jobs and 21% of repairs spend are potentially related to domestic abuse within the home. This is a significant cost and adds to the compulsion that all socially minded businesses should deal with domestic abuse as both the right thing and the smart thing to do.

Attendees were encouraged to sign the 'Make a Stand' campaign supporters' pledge, dedicated to preventing domestic abuse in the social housing sector.

1. The Chartered Institute of Housing created the pledge in partnership with Women's Aid and DAHA (Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance). It is aimed at organisations that work closely with the social housing sector and contains three commitments. To make information about national and local domestic abuse support services available on your website and in other places which are easily accessible to customers and staff.
2. To put in place an HR policy and procedure on domestic abuse, or amend an existing policy, supporting members of staff who are experiencing domestic abuse.

3. Appoint a champion in your organisation to own the activity you are doing to support people experiencing domestic abuse.

Organisations can sign up to the supporters' pledge at

[www.cih.org/makeastandsupporters](http://www.cih.org/makeastandsupporters)

