

Safeguarding

As White Ribbon Champion for the East Riding of Yorkshire Council (as well as Beverley Town Council), and a member of the Council's Voluntary and Charity Sector Safeguarding Meeting as safeguarding officer here at Toll Gavel, I was approached by the council's Domestic Abuse Lead and Safeguarding Development Officer, Gemma Jennison, to get involved in organising two conferences on domestic abuse - one targeted at the Faith sector and another focusing on older people. She was very keen that Toll Gavel Church was the venue for both of these conferences as we host the Domestic Violence and Abuse Partnership (DVAP), we are central so easy to get to by car, train or bus, and we are very well-respected for the part we play as a community hub in Beverley.

When I first became an East Riding Councillor, 5 years ago, there were 3 'safe' houses for domestic abuse victims, who are mostly women and my first piece of Ward work was a handwritten note from an abused woman who had a 5 year-old daughter. Now, 5 years later there are 18 safe houses in the East Riding, most of them sheltering victims at any one time. The incidence of Domestic Abuse in the East Riding, not even including Hull, is just shocking. There are now 19 police officers across the Humberside Area dedicated to Domestic Abuse and Violence against Women and Girls - and I have it on good authority that 25% of them are based in the East Riding.

White Ribbon is the charity which campaigns to change the culture of toxic masculinity which prevails in much of society and which is an excuse for violence against women and girls, including domestic abuse. I am proud to have been the councillor who proposed the motion, which was unanimously supported by all councillors, to make East Riding a White Ribbon organisation. Beverley Town Council is also signed up. The East Riding of Yorkshire Council has taken their membership of White Ribbon VERY seriously, with Exec Director, Paul Bellotti supporting Lead Director Angela Dearing and other heads of department in developing a comprehensive plan for training and development of all staff, including those in local authority-run schools.

The Police and Fire Services, both front-line services, are signed-up organisations to White Ribbon and our own Scouts have been very involved -in developing White Ribbon badges!

With regards specifically to DA, there are referrals coming in from all sectors of society with meetings every morning between the council and the police to discuss new cases; however, when we crunched the numbers, there are fewer coming in from the faith sector than would be expected. Although we Methodists have robust training for safeguarding for staff and members, we don't necessarily concentrate on DA - although I went with the Late Peter Clark and Ailsa to DA training run by the United Reform church pre-Covid and only a few weeks ago, Sheffield District ran an on-line morning session on DA, which demonstrates that there is concern across the Methodist Church in other parts of Yorkshire, not just here in East Yorkshire. One of the challenges is reporting possible cases, the fact that so many agencies can be involved but that the lead in the East Riding and Hull is the local council whereas elsewhere it might be the charity, IDIS

Gemma and I met first to discuss a possible agenda for the half day and then met with Rev Fran to discuss practicalities. Rev Fran was very supportive BUT she will be on sabbatical on April 20th when this is going to happen.

The Safeguarding and Domestic Abuse Faith Sector Conference is therefore aimed at anyone in the faith sector who comes into contact with the public. It is NOT Methodist but is Christian-focussed and anyone who attends a church, volunteers at church or leads worship at a church is encouraged to come. The need for such a conference is so important and our response to domestic violence or VAWG as Christians is grounded in the Bible. Jesus said, "Let her alone; why do you trouble her? She has performed a good service for me" in Mark 14:6 when Mary of Bethany was criticised for anointing Jesus with nard, which the Bishop of Hull preached on at the last High Sheriff's Civic Service at the Minster. There is an excellent book 'Because the Bible doesn't tell me so: why you don't have to submit to domestic abuse and coercive control' by Helen Paynter for further reading.

The day will start with registration from 9,30am with the agenda as follows:-

10am introductions and welcome from me and Gemma
10.05 Domestic Abuse and Faith Responses (speaker to be confirmed)
10.30 Domestic Abuse delivered by the Domestic Violence and Abuse Partnership (DVAP, which is based here)
10.50 Domestic Abuse Practitioner Standards Training (Gemma Jennison)
11-11.15 Refreshments
11.15 Making a referral to the Adult Safeguarding Team
11.30 Making a referral to the Children's Safeguarding Team
11.45 - 12.15 Local Support services including Mind, Fraudwatch and Age UK
12.15 - 13.00 Lunch and Networking

ERYC are paying for the hire of the church and the lunch but we are invited to serve and provide refreshments at 11am in return for donations.

We would welcome a 'welcomer' at 9.30am from the church (possibly someone who is attending, anyway, and a projectionist - again, it could be someone who is attending). Could someone prepare the tea, coffee and biscuits, but there will be help to serve from ERYC staff, who will also come early to help set the room up. We will need trestle tables around the room, like we did for the 'How to Go Greener day' for the different agencies to set up their wares, with seating in the middle. More details to follow!

This is a free conference and, as soon as we have posters, I would ask if information about this is spread to other churches in Beverley and the East Riding so as many people as possible come, although we will ask people to register for catering purposes.

Training sessions when organised can also be held here at TG, and then there is the Age UK DA conference later in the year!

Linda Johnson