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until women & children are safe

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Statement of intent from specialist domestic and sexual abuse organisations

We are a collection of organisations and professionals working with victims and survivors of domestic and sexual abuse whose experiences have been minimised or dismissed in family court proceedings, leaving their children at risk of further harm.

The realities of the family justice system, as experienced by those we support, were vividly represented through the [Ministry of Justice's Harm Panel Report](#) in 2020. Since then, we have seen the introduction of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021, improvements in transparency and special measures and key case law highlighting the importance of coercive control. We welcome the trial of the Pathfinder model and the Government's intention to repeal the presumption of parental involvement. All of these have been positive reforms for victims and children.

Yet, despite these efforts, progress in relation to culture change in the past five years has been too slow. The recent report from the [Domestic Abuse Commissioner 'Everyday Business'](#) found domestic abuse to be present in 83% of case files in private children cases. It demonstrated that family courts remain stubbornly sceptical when it comes to identifying domestic abuse. We can only attribute this lack of progress to a knowledge and skills gap in our family justice system.

The role of the judiciary, as the authority in the court room, is key in creating the necessary culture change within the Family Justice System. Judges must have access to the best and most up to date research on domestic and sexual abuse. Without specialist and high-quality training on domestic abuse, problems with child and domestic homicide, suicide and revictimisation in our family courts will persist.

In [their current strategy](#), the Judicial College states it wishes to "make best use of external expertise to design and deliver training" yet public information on the format and content of judicial training on domestic and sexual abuse remains unavailable. None of the organisations or individuals who have signed this statement have been able to support the development of training for the Family Court judiciary, despite being leading specialists in our field.

That is why, as a collective, we have sent the Judicial College a list of key training principles. These were designed alongside those with lived experience. We implore

the College to develop such training, in conjunction with specialist organisations and survivors, so it can equip judges to identify risks of harm for children, and mitigate court-induced trauma for all victims.

We also call on the Government to make resources available to the Judicial College, so that cost is not the barrier to equipping our family court judiciary with the routine and high quality training that enables them to best safeguard children in their everyday decision making.

Signed by:

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