The For Baby’s Sake Trust urges a shake-up of how we tackle domestic violence, starting with amending the current Domestic Abuse Bill to be clear that it covers babies, including unborn babies.

17 September 2020

The For Baby’s Sake Trust (formerly the Stefanou Foundation) is calling on government, local authorities and charities to look at what new approaches can be taken to break the cycle of domestic abuse, such as the whole-family approach of the pioneering For Baby’s Sake programme which seeks to address the trauma that often sits at the heart of the issue.

As a significant signal of radical change, the Trust wants to see the recent amendment to the Domestic Abuse Bill currently in Parliament, which recognises children as victims in their own right, to be amended further so it is explicit in covering babies, including those still in the womb. Otherwise, those babies risk being overlooked, despite domestic abuse being particularly harmful to them and often starting in pregnancy.

The call comes as the Trust launches a powerful new animated film from BAFTA award-winning director, Emma Lazenby, featuring the raw testimony of a mother and father who are on the For Baby’s Sake programme, which works with the whole family to deal with the trauma and complex needs that are so often unaddressed for the parents, breaking the cycle and giving babies born into dysfunctional and abusive relationships a much more positive start in life.

The For Baby’s Sake programme has been running since 2015 and an evaluation of the first four years, led by King’s College London and published in May 2020, identified it as the first programme of its kind to ‘fill an important gap in provision’ through its ‘unique approach’, working with the whole family and starting in pregnancy, when babies need protection and parents are motivated to change.

Stelio Stefanou, Chairman of The For Baby’s Sake Trust, said:

“Trauma in infancy devastates lives and it can start even before a child is born. Left unresolved, it can lead to dysfunctional relationships, domestic abuse and more harm to children and families for generations. It affects the whole family – baby, mother and father. The current prevailing approach to domestic abuse is too narrow, practitioners are effectively being asked to tackle it with one hand tied behind their backs.

“There is another way. The For Baby’s Sake programme empowers expectant parents with what they need to break the cycle of domestic abuse and give their baby the best possible start in life, especially by helping them to come to terms with trauma and adversity in their own childhoods. Adopting approaches like this would reduce the burden on our stretched public services, supporting them to really tackle the issue rather than being left to pick up the pieces.
“We have a huge opportunity with the Domestic Abuse Bill going through Parliament at the moment. We have to use this as a chance to challenge the national ambition and move our system from one that primarily manages the fall-out of domestic abuse to truly targeting the trauma that is at the root cause. The alarming rise in domestic abuse during lockdown has made this even more urgent.”

The *For Baby’s Sake* programme adopts a unique three-way approach, with a specialist working with the father, another working closely with the mother, and both focusing on the overall wellbeing and development of the baby and any other children, starting before the baby is born. As a result, it deals with the entire cycle and history of domestic violence and abuse, identifying and directly addressing the trauma or traumas that lie at the heart of the problem. The end result is both parents play a positive role in raising their child, whether together or apart, turning one, two, three or even more lives around, and breaking the cycle caused by trauma in childhood.

The film is being launched at a virtual event on 17 September, supported by a discussion on new approaches to tackling domestic violence, with speakers including Nicole Jacobs, Domestic Abuse Commissioner, and Frank Mullane, CEO of Advocacy After Fatal Domestic Abuse (AAFDA) and the newly appointed first ambassador for the *For Baby’s Sake* programme.

Speaking about the need for new approaches, Nicole Jacobs, Domestic Abuse Commissioner, said:

“With so much concern for those subject to domestic abuse during lockdown, plus the passage of the Domestic Abuse Bill through parliament, we have a once in a generation opportunity to explore and take forward new ways of dealing with this pernicious issue. We owe it to all those affected by domestic abuse to challenge our current thinking and approaches, which is why it so important that we evaluate and learn from programmes like *For Baby’s Sake*.”

Later this year, the Trust is planning to launch *For Baby’s Sake CONNECT*, providing remote access to its ground-breaking programme and giving more families the chance to benefit from its pioneering approach to tackling domestic violence.

The programme currently operates in Blackpool, Cambridgeshire, Hertfordshire and west London (Westminster, Kensington & Chelsea and Hammersmith & Fulham).

*For Baby’s Sake CONNECT* was developed during lockdown, when parents across these four sites kept up their one-to-one sessions with practitioners by phone and video technology, some actually found it easier to work through painful issues in this way and new families continued to join.

Using technology makes it possible to deliver the programme to families located anywhere in the UK, working directly with mothers and fathers and contributing effectively to local multi-agency safeguarding arrangements wherever the parents live. The charity is intending to roll out *For Baby’s Sake CONNECT* this autumn, using existing resources to engage a small number of families initially, while building on experience and raising additional sources of funding to build capacity. The addition of *For Baby’s Sake CONNECT* service will reach families that do not yet have the benefit of a dedicated local team and scale up the *For Baby’s Sake* programme across the UK more rapidly than would otherwise be possible.
Notes to editor

The For Baby’s Sake Trust (previously the Stefanou Foundation) is dedicated to breaking the cycle of inter-generational domestic abuse. It does that by empowering expectant parents with what they need to break the cycle of domestic abuse and give their baby the best possible start in life, especially by helping them to come to terms with trauma and adversity in their own childhoods - https://www.forbabyssake.org.uk/

ForMed films, led by BAFTA award-winning director, Emma Lazenby, makes short animated films, using stories told by real people in their own voices, to highlight physical and mental health issues.

The For Baby’s Sake film has been selected to be shown at the Encounters Film Festival 2020, which is running from 18 September to 11 October 2020. Encounters Film Festival is the UK’s leading festival for short films and animation and a gateway to the world’s most prestigious awards: the Academy Awards, BAFTAs, BIFAs and European Film Awards.