**Background information to Shakti**

Shakti Women’s Aid (Shakti) is a specialist voluntary organisation set up in 1986 to provide information, practical and emotional support to women from all Black Minority Ethnic (BME) communities, experiencing and or fleeing domestic abuse. The need for a specialist service for BME women experiencing and or fleeing domestic abuse was recognised by the Edinburgh Council and consequently Shakti was funded by the then Edinburgh District Council and continued to fund. Currently Shakti employs 24 staff from diverse ethnic backgrounds speaking around 21 languages. 75% of the staff can speak two or more languages therefore we are able to provide emotional support to majority of our service users in their mother tongue and or the language they are comfortable with. All staff employed by Shakti have sound knowledge and understanding of the nature and dynamics of domestic abuse/honour based violence perpetrated in BME communities; the cultural and practical barriers confronted by the BME women it serves. Shakti has all its leaflets in 5 community languages.

We provide information, safe temporary accommodation, culture sensitive emotional support (in the mother tongue of the women) and practical support to help her make informed choices. The support we provide reflects the service needs identified by the service users, especially the BME in Edinburgh’s Domestic Abuse Strategy and Improvement Plan.

**Shakti currently have the following services**

**Housing Support/Outreach Service for Women**

**Refuge Accommodation** Operates culturally specific accommodation and support to victims and children from black and minority ethnic communities. Shakti currently operates one dedicated refuge with four self-contained flats of which one is designed to accommodate women with disabilities and one flat for a larger family. We ensure the cultural and religious needs of our service users are met by providing separate utensils for women of different faiths. Example: If we have clients who cook pork/non halal meet, we give new utensils for Muslim clients. Similarly, women who are vegetarians we give them new utensils. We provide prayer mats and at the refuge and have Quran if women want to borrow.

**Visiting Support:** The key case workers provide follow on support for women and their children who move from refuge and other temporary accommodation into permanent accommodation; help them access funding to set up a safe and independent home for their children and themselves. Refer women to any local support groups and organisations to receive continued support as needed.

**Outreach Service:** Shakti’s outreach case worker provides information and emotional and practical support to those women who are living with domestic abuse situation but are not yet ready to leave the abusive relationship and women who go back to their abuser/s. We currently have outreach workers in Tayside, Forth Valley (funded by Big Lottery), Fife and Edinburgh (funded by VAWGF) which ends in June 2017 and have applied for the new VAWG funding). Having BME services outside Edinburgh helped women to stay close to their area and reduce the burden on Edinburgh housing.

**Maitri (LGBTI+) Project:** This project will benefit BME women and young people living in Scotland experiencing or at risk of domestic abuse (DA) and requiring support concerning their gender or sexual identity.

**Supporting individuals through their LGBTI journey**
We will offer emotional and practical support, particularly regarding any risk or experience of DA, to all individuals who disclose their LGBTI status. This will include a risk assessment, safety plan and individual support plan that meets the needs of the woman (and children, if any) or young person.

Individuals are then supported to:
• Find suitable temporary accommodation then helped to move into permanent accommodation;
• Helped to secure white goods and furniture;
• Provided with one to one emotional support and where necessary referred to other agencies to access counselling;
• Supported in legal issues such as forced marriage protection orders, interdicts and child residency;
• Provide support where needed when liaising with other service providers

**Children Service**

Refuge and Follow on Support: The refuge/follow on children and young people’s workers provide information and emotional and practical support to children to help them cope with effects of domestic abuse and to the new environment.

Outreach Service for CYP: The outreach children and young people’s worker provides information and emotional and practical support to children and young people a) whose mothers are not using women’s aid services; b) whose mothers have gone back to the abuser/s; c) whose mothers have exited Shakti services. (the posts are funded by VAWF Children Service which will end in June 2017 and have applied for new funding from July to Scottish Government)

**Capacity Building and Training**

In addition to the secondary prevention Shakti also provides awareness raising training on Domestic abuse/forced marriages/honour based violence within BME communities to statutory and voluntary staff. Shakti does awareness raising about domestic abuse/forced marriages through training, workshops, presentations and talks. The training is well received, and the feedback is very positive. Following is an email from one of the participants at our recent training in Aberdeen - shows the impact Shakti training has on improvement in service delivery

“I really appreciated the 2 days spent listening to you. I have many years’ experience of working with BEM which I didn't own up to in the group, however I was really affected by the case studies you portrayed and it made me realise that I may have been missing things in practice for a long time. …… but now I'm maybe questioning my previous practice a bit. I suppose that it is all a learning process”