

FREEDOM



Women's Aid Worker Victimised For Speaking Out Against Cuts

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In recent years, the Women's Aid domestic violence shelter in Doncaster has faced repeated threats to its future from funding cuts. After being forced to close in 2016, a determined campaign from workers and service users were able to reopen the service as South Yorkshire Women's Aid. As mentioned in a previous [Freedom article](#), the campaign has been active in recent months trying to keep the centre open in the face of Doncaster council's refusal to provide funding past December. Now, Louise Harrison, a worker who's been central to the campaign, has received a letter threatening the future of her job, in a move that appears to be direct retaliation for her activity speaking out against cuts.

The letter, which Louise received while she was off sick from work as a result of stress, alleges that some of the centre's trustees are unhappy with the service she has been providing. People involved in the campaign to save the centre believe that this is a result of Doncaster's Labour councillors putting

pressure on Labour-affiliated trustees to silence the campaign against their cuts.

One witness reports having seen Labour MP Rosie Winterton, who is involved in the management of the service, talking about “volunteers and staff militantly leading a campaign to save the service and [claiming] that this could make the service unattractive for funders and clients.”

In a statement, Louise said “I am deeply shocked about the inference in the letter that I have let women down. For the past 7 months I have worked largely unpaid to try to secure funding for our service with little or no support from some of the Trustees. It is deeply upsetting to read that I would do anything that would harm the women who desperately need our services.”

In a [petition](#) circulated in defence of Louise, other people involved in the campaign to save South Yorkshire Women’s Aid argue “The trustees are working to distance SYWA’s image from campaigners. We think that it is a mistaken belief of the trustees that they and campaigners should placate the council. If all it took to save women’s specialised domestic violence services was difficult discussions with the council then we wouldn’t see VAW services disappearing from our towns and cities. This weak position could lead to SYWA trustees now in charge of negotiations with the council, folding to the position of the council that there ‘is no funds’.”

To get involved in the campaign to defend Louise against the council’s attempts to silence her, you can sign [the petition](#), and send messages protesting against any further victimisation to SYWA at The Point, South Parade, Doncaster DN1 2DR.

Messages can also be sent to SYWAdoncaster@outlook.com, and to Doncaster mayor Ros Jones, at themayor@doncaster.gov.uk. If you copy in Amy Cousens at amycousens123@gmail.com, it will allow those involved in the campaign to see how much support they have – Amy Cousens is also the recommended point of contact for people wanting more information about the campaign.

For anyone who can make it along, there will be a demonstration in support of both Louise and South Yorkshire Women’s Aid in Doncaster on Saturday the 27th of January, starting outside the Mansion House at 12.

Photo: Sisters Uncut

<https://freedomnews.org.uk/womens-aid-worker-victimised-for-speaking-out-against-cuts/>