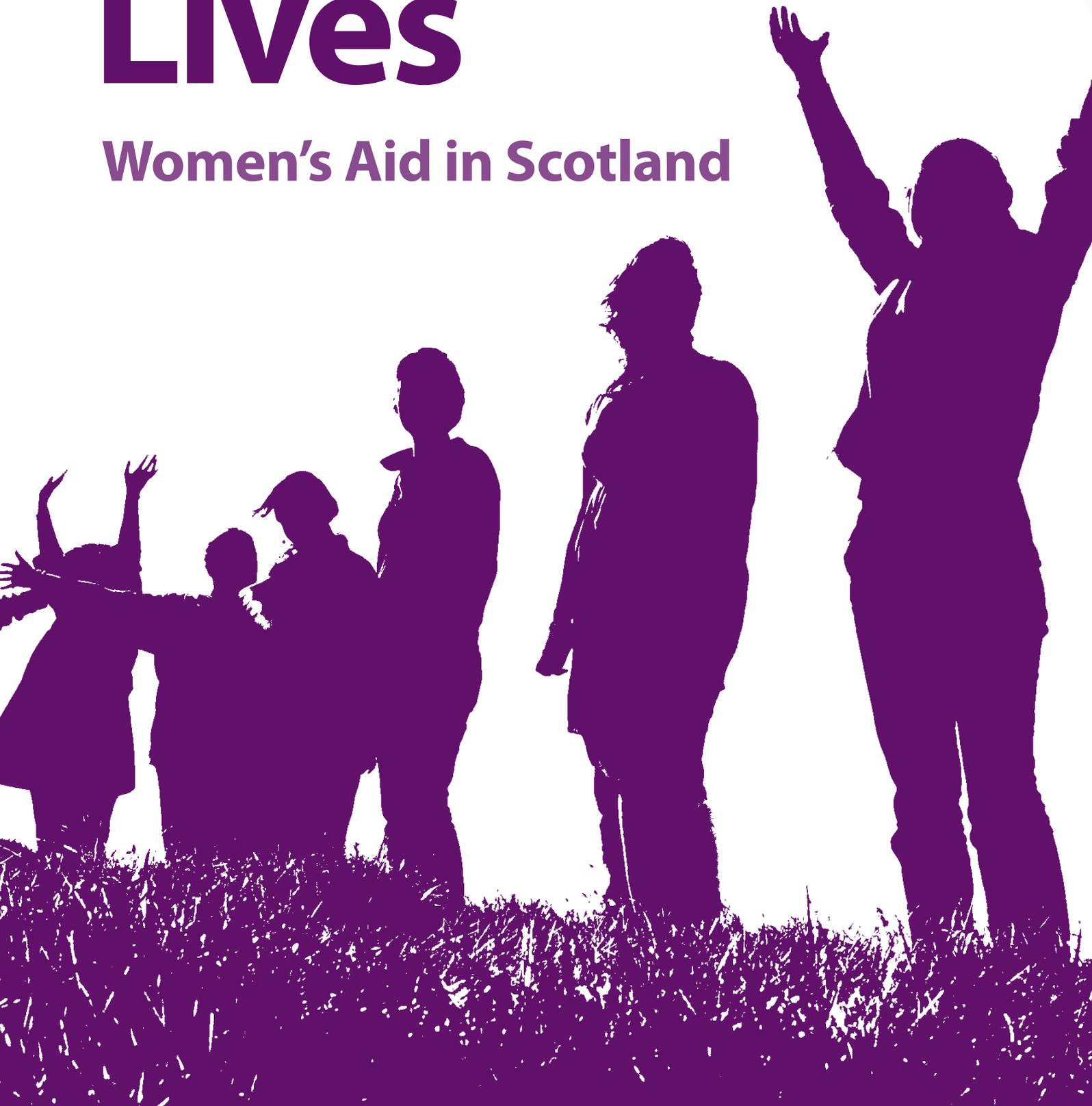


Changing Lives

Women's Aid in Scotland



Our mission statement

Scottish Women's Aid works to end violence against women by tackling its root cause, which is gender inequality. We do this by:

- › Promoting women's equality and children's rights.
- › Campaigning for responses which actively prevent violence against women.
- › Working to ensure that services are available to women, young people and children with experience of domestic abuse.
- › Providing services and advice to our members.



1. Introduction

Scottish Women's Aid is the lead organisation in Scotland working towards the prevention of domestic abuse. We play a vital role campaigning and lobbying for effective responses to domestic abuse.

Our members are local Women's Aid groups which provide specialist services to women, children and young people. This covers a broad range of services which include safe refuge accommodation, support and information and advocacy. Women's Aid works across the whole of Scotland from the Borders to Shetland. There are now over 40 Women's Aid groups and most are members of Scottish Women's Aid.

Women's Aid started in the 1970s as a response to the lack of protection and support for women who were experiencing violence from their partners or ex-partners. Although significant progress has been made to change criminal justice responses and public attitudes towards domestic abuse, thousands of women and children in Scotland each year continue to be affected. It is estimated that at least one in five women in Scotland experiences domestic abuse at some stage in her life.¹

Through over 30 years of listening to and working with women, children and young people Women's Aid has developed an in-depth understanding of domestic abuse and how it affects women and children. This experience has influenced and shaped the development of the range of specialist support services we provide.

Fundamental to Women's Aid is our underlying ethos of empowerment; it informs what we do – in supporting women to regain control of their lives – and more importantly, how we do it – by listening to women and children, giving them information and options to make their own decisions and respecting their choices.

"I'm beginning to feel that I'm taking more control of my life with support from Women's Aid and they're telling me what good qualities I have rather than being told what negative qualities I have."

"What helped most was having somebody that actually listened to you and somebody that believed you... that was one of the biggest things, the trust, you know, being able to speak and not be judged."

"Charities are leaders in the field of domestic violence. Charities first brought the issue to the public's attention, they set up the first refuges, they continue to innovate and share best practice... also provide the majority of specialist women-only services to victims of domestic violence. Victims need and want specialist services, with staff that have a deep understanding of their needs and how they can be supported effectively."

**Hard Knock Life: Violence against women, a guide for donors and funders.
New Philanthropy Capital April 2008.**

2. What is domestic abuse?

Domestic abuse is when a person uses coercion, intimidation and fear to control their partner in an intimate relationship. In most cases, it is experienced by women and perpetrated by men. In 85% of all incidents of domestic abuse reported to the police in Scotland in 2007/08 the perpetrator was male and the victim female.²

The Scottish Government definition of domestic abuse is gender specific, defining domestic abuse as a form of male violence against women.

“Domestic abuse (as gender-based abuse) can be perpetrated by partners or ex-partners and can include physical abuse (assault and physical attack involving a range of behaviour), sexual abuse (acts which degrade and humiliate women and are perpetrated against their will, including rape) and mental and emotional abuse (such as threats, verbal abuse, racial abuse, withholding money and other types of controlling behaviour such as isolation from family and friends).”

Domestic abuse usually takes the form of a pattern of controlling behaviour which gets worse over time. Physical violence and threats may be used to maintain this control, but domestic abuse does not have to include physical violence; it may take the form of psychological, financial or emotional abuse. Whatever form it takes, domestic abuse is rarely a one-off incident.

There is evidence that domestic abuse escalates in frequency and intensity over time, and may increase at specific points in a woman's life for example; during pregnancy and following the birth of a child or at particular times such as during separation or divorce.

Maria's experience

I was in a relationship for just over three years and all was great at the start, he was lovely, I couldn't have met a nicer guy you know. I'd been single for quite a while before I met him and obviously I had to consider my daughter in this relationship so I didn't plunge in to begin with. I was with him for about six months and I moved in with him and about six months later we got engaged. It was the night after we got engaged. He just went mental, kicked me down to the floor, booting in to me, ripped all the units off the kitchen walls, calling me all sorts of names.

There wasn't just physical abuse, there was mental abuse, constant comments about my weight, picking at bits of my flesh and saying Oh God you're getting fat, I'll never leave him because I need him and nobody else would ever want me.

I went out, in the whole time I was with him, three times, it was constant phone calls, texts, find out where I am, who I'm talking to, so there wasn't really any point in going out because it was just constant, you know, checking up on me.. I lost quite a few friends because of that, because it wasn't worth me meeting them for the hassle, you know. It meant I was isolated, I totally lost all my confidence, I stopped going out, I was in the house all the time just where he wanted me. I realise that now, obviously, looking back.

3. How widespread is domestic abuse?

Domestic abuse is a serious social problem; it affects women from any social class, ethnic group or religious background. It affects old and young women, women with disabilities, women who are married or cohabiting, women who have and who do not have children.

An analysis of 10 separate domestic violence prevalence studies by the Council of Europe showed consistent findings:

- › 1 in 5 women experience domestic violence over their lifetimes.
- › Between 6–10% of women suffer domestic violence in a given year.³
- › It accounts for between 16% and one quarter of all recorded violence with one incident reported to the police every minute.
- › In any one year, there are 13 million separate incidents of physical violence or threats of violence against women from partners or former partners.
- › 2 women a week are killed by a male partner or former partner.⁴

These statistics illustrate both the seriousness of the crimes committed and how widespread domestic abuse is. In Scotland, incidents of domestic abuse recorded by the police have increased each year since recording began in 1999. The British Crime Survey figures highlight that in a year victims experience an average of 20 incidents of domestic violence which increase in severity over time.

“People don’t realise that when you’re abused like that how your confidence goes, and the thing is it doesn’t start, it’s a gradual thing that grinds you away and grinds you away till there’s nothing left.”

4. The effects of domestic abuse on women

Domestic abuse can have a devastating and long-term impact on a woman's life. It can result in homelessness, isolation, loss of earnings, physical and mental health problems, injuries and even death.

Violence from a partner accounts for a high proportion of homicides of women internationally: between 40%–70% of female murder victims (depending on the country) were killed by their partners/former partners, whereas the comparable figure for men is 4%–8%.⁵

Common health effects of domestic abuse include physical injury, poor health and a range of psychological difficulties. The World Health Organisation states:

“Violence against women has serious consequences for their physical and mental health. Abused women are more likely to suffer from depression, anxiety, psychosomatic systems, eating problems and sexual dysfunction. Violence may also affect their reproductive health.”⁶

Domestic abuse has a damaging impact on women's mental health; they may experience anxiety, depression and low self esteem. One third of women who experienced abuse from their partner in the last year suffer from mental health problems.⁷ In a high number of instances women commit suicide; 500 women who experienced domestic abuse in the last 6 months commit suicide each year. Of these just under 200 had attended hospital as a result of domestic abuse on the day they committed suicide.⁸

Many women self harm or use alcohol or drugs as a way of coping with the abuse. Women experiencing domestic abuse are 15 times more likely to misuse alcohol and 9 times more likely to misuse drugs than women generally.⁹

Women may lose their home, their job, their income and their place in their community. In a study by Shelter, 40% of all homeless women stated that domestic violence was a contributor to their homelessness. Domestic violence was found to be “the single most quoted reason for becoming homeless”.¹⁰

“The morning I decided to make the move to seek help from the Women's Aid was, I was either going to go to Women's Aid or I was going to end my life. I had become that bad.

My sister told me one time that I looked like a deflated balloon and there was nothing behind my eyes, and I didn't realise that people could see those kind of things. I just thought I was my old self, but I wasn't.

The knot I had in my stomach – it was just a big knot and it was always there, I couldn't sleep for it being there, I just kept going out and taking long walks, long walks and it didn't go away, but it was just nerves.”

5. The effects of domestic abuse on children and young people

Domestic abuse affects the health and wellbeing of children and young people too. In many cases, children are in the same or next room when it is happening, have usually witnessed abuse or overheard it. Research has shown that children were aware of domestic abuse in their home even where their mother tried to hide it from them.¹¹ Children can be directly abused and are sometimes hurt if they try to intervene to protect their mothers. Living with domestic abuse can affect their emotional and psychological wellbeing, undermine the child's relationship with their mother and have other negative consequences. These can include moving repeatedly to escape abuse and disruption to their education.

The effects can be traumatic and far-reaching. Children can become depressed, anxious and withdrawn as a result of witnessing their mother being abused. They may have a lowered sense of self-worth and begin to self-harm. Many children experience nightmares and flashbacks and have difficulty sleeping. It can be very difficult for children to concentrate at school because they may have been kept up in the night or they may be worrying about what is happening to their mother while they are in school.

- › Nearly three quarters of children on the 'at risk' register live in households where domestic violence occurs and 52% of child protection cases involve domestic violence.¹²
- › The link between child physical abuse and domestic violence is high, with estimates ranging between 30% to 66%, depending upon the study.¹³
- › 29 children in 13 families were killed between 1994 and 2004 as a result of contact arrangements in England and Wales, 10 of them since 2002. In five of these families contact was ordered by the court.¹⁴
- › A study of 200 women's experiences of domestic violence commissioned by Women's Aid Federation England, found that 60% of the women had left because they feared that they or their children would be killed by the perpetrator.¹⁵ The Scottish Government in 2000 recognised the impact of domestic abuse on children and young people in the Audit and Review of Child Protection (Scottish Executive 2000) and recommended that children in this situation should be regarded as 'in need' under the Children (Scotland) Act 1995.

"It's a very hard thing growing up in a household where you are constantly afraid. That's what I remember, constantly being afraid and being very, very apprehensive about what was going to happen next, and when the next thing was going to happen, when the next violent thing was going to happen and what was going to trigger it."

"She was extremely low and I didn't realise, I didn't see it because I was in my own wee bubble in my relationship and mainly thought it just affected me and realised then that it also affected her."

"Basically, you've turned over a new leaf by trying to forget it, but it's just one of they things that sticks in your mind... Cos sometimes you get flashbacks at times... just when I just think about it. I try not to."

6. What prevents a woman from leaving?

Women may experience domestic abuse for a long period of time before they report it to the police or look for help from other agencies. The use of fear, intimidation and continual undermining to control a partner make leaving very difficult and often dangerous.

Women may be unable to leave for many reasons:

- › Fear that contacting the police or trying to leave will result in an escalation of the abuse. Research has shown that the period during which a woman is leaving or has just left is often the time when she is at most risk of serious injury or death.¹⁶
- › They may believe that leaving will endanger their children as it is common for perpetrators to threaten to harm or even kill their partners, or children, if she leaves.¹⁷
- › Women are concerned that they will not be believed by the agencies they approach, such as the police, homelessness, health etc.
- › They may have been deliberately isolated from family or friends who could provide them with support to leave.
- › They may have very little knowledge of their entitlement to housing, or of their legal rights, or financial support and where they can get advice on these issues.
- › Women may also hope that the abuser will change – they don't necessarily want to leave the relationship, they just want the abuse to stop.

"It was hard to get out of it because we just don't turn love off after thirty two years, so that was a thing I had to fight with to stop feeling sorry for him."

"I'd spoken to friends and work colleagues before about it and although they were to an extent supportive, they couldn't get why I was wanting to go back to somebody like that, why I kept going back and then it was almost like I'd go back and something else would happen and it was like well, you went back, so what do you expect? Some of my work colleagues were like well you must enjoy it and you're like no, you know, how can you enjoy that? They just couldn't get it... and as I said feelings are involved, you know, it can take so many times for a woman to leave her partner, you know, rather than feeling guilty about going back to that."

7. What does Women's Aid do?

Women's Aid is unique in providing a specialist domestic abuse service that ranges from crisis intervention – providing safe refuge accommodation for women and their children – to supporting these families in their transition to a new home and schools and a new life – and everything in between.

Women's Aid services are also different in that they are women-only services, that is, services provided to women by women. Women are often abused by someone they know on many occasions. Telling someone about this, let alone making an official report, can be very daunting. Many statutory services such as the police, social services and housing departments have very specific remits. Services may lack the capacity and expertise to provide the support that women and children in this situation need.

Research has also shown that women-only space is highly valued, many women would not attend a mixed gender service and that women considered “hard to reach” are more likely to use voluntary services provided by women.¹⁸

Women's Aid provides a safe place for women to talk in confidence about their experience, be believed and respected and begin to explore their options, allowing them to make their own decisions about their life.

“I could speak to my friends but they had never been in a relationship where their partner had been physically abusive, mentally abusive whereas in Women's Aid they're trained, they understand, and they speak to women like me regularly on a daily basis.”

Gender Equality Duty

The duty on the public sector to promote gender equality was introduced in 2007. The Gender Equality Duty (GED) requires all public bodies e.g. local authorities, police, health to assess the different needs of women and men and take action to meet these needs. The GED Code of Practice for Scotland states:

“Women make up the substantial majority of victims of domestic violence and rape. It would not be appropriate, therefore, for a local council to seek to fund refuge services on a numerically equal basis for men and for women. The promotion of equal opportunities between men and women requires public authorities to recognise that the two groups are not starting from an equal footing and identical treatment would not be appropriate.”

This requirement has been highlighted by the EHRC Commissioner for Scotland, Morag Alexander:

“The Gender Equality Duty (GED) sets the precedent for more single sex services not less. The focus of the GED is on outcomes and not procedure. We know that women only services can demonstrate very positive outcomes.”¹⁹

Refuge accommodation

The word 'refuge' has a number of meanings including protection, sanctuary, shelter and safe haven and Women's Aid offers all of these to women and children who have to leave their home because of domestic abuse.

Refuge accommodation provides emergency temporary housing for women on their own or with children who need a safe place to stay. This stay may be for a short period while a woman considers her options to a more lengthy stay while she waits for a new home.

Women's Aid groups lease housing from the local authority or a housing association to provide refuges. Most refuge accommodation is of a high standard and well furnished. Newer refuges are purpose built providing self contained flats, with some communal areas such as play rooms, counselling rooms and offices. The emphasis in refuge is safety and security both in physical terms – refuges have additional security measures such as CCTV and – in the emotional support provided by staff and other families who have shared similar experiences.

Women's Aid groups are members of the UK wide Refuges Online secure data base information system and have reciprocal arrangements with other Women's Aid Groups around the country. This means that where appropriate women can be supported to find safe accommodation in another area or elsewhere in the UK.

In refuge Women's Aid provides a package of support to women, children and young people including emotional support, information and advocacy services.

"Well my first day arriving at the refuge – it was daunting, I had pre-conceived ideas that it was going to be like dormitories and just loads of women and kids... and myself and my daughter got taken up to the flat and it was your own self contained flat, my daughter had her own room, you know, fully equipped and I just felt like a sigh of relief, you know, because it was nothing like what I was expecting it to be, it was just great."

"All I had really at that time was just the clothes I stood up in and there was toothpaste, all the basic things you needed like soap and deodorant you know and food and like anything, everything, all the home comforts, you know. And you didn't have to worry because you had a roof over your head more than anything else... I went in there I just felt oh my God this is refuge, this is what I need, and I just crashed for a couple of days, you know, to get my head round it."

Moving on from refuge – Follow on resettlement support services

Women's Aid provides continuation of support to women and children when they are re-housed. This support assists women and children with the transition to a new home, school and community. As well as visiting support many groups facilitate women's support groups that can enable women to develop both support networks and new skills and confidence to re-establish their lives.

"We've moved into a new flat now, they still work with myself and my daughter, they take my daughter out, she was out swimming yesterday, they do wee trips, and they just keep in contact with myself, make sure that I'm still safe and I've not got any worries, and if I have, they just still call me to let me know that they're there for me."

"I'm still continuing to develop and that's thanks to the support which Women's Aid offer and I could go to, I can phone them up at any time, they run different classes, we make jewellery and we paint, get together for lunches, they're always there, there's always something going on and you're – even though I've left Refuge, at the start I was always told that - I was always welcome back if I needed to come and speak to someone."

Outreach services – working in the community

Women's Aid groups provide different forms of outreach services. These are provided to women experiencing domestic abuse who are living in the community rather than in refuge. This can range from providing individual support to women, to providing a drop-in service at a local health centre.

"I went in and it was great to talk to somebody and I went in to the drop in a number of times before I eventually got a place in a refuge you just didn't feel that you were being judged or forced into making decisions that you didn't want to make."

Information

Giving women information on their rights and options is essential to enabling them to make informed choices and decisions about their future. Women's Aid groups provide information on women's housing options, benefits entitlement and legal rights and support women to access legal advice locally. Women can access this service in person by calling into the local Women's Aid's office or by telephone.

Advocacy

Women's Aid workers act as advocates for women, assisting them to negotiate the complexities of a range of agencies a woman will have to deal with in rebuilding her life. This covers everything from safety planning for a woman and her children, accompanying women to the police or housing departments, registering with a G.P., enrolling children at a new school and supporting them through legal action and the court system.

"I definitely made the choices; they just gave me the opportunity to have the choice you know, because before I didn't feel like I had any options open to me, I just had to stay."

"We were given help with housing, the different benefits I was entitled to, because I had walked away from a job, a flat, we had the clothes on our back, they helped me sort income support out within a week, so that I was at least getting some money coming in, they helped me find a school so that I could get my daughter into a more normal way of living, and a doctor and dentist."

Training and awareness raising

Many Women's Aid groups provide training in their local area to raise awareness of domestic abuse and its impact on women and children. They have a key role to play in developing the understanding of people working in front-line services who will come into contact on a daily basis with women who are experiencing domestic abuse, and who may not be confident in how they should respond. Women's Aid groups also provide sessions in school, to raise awareness of domestic abuse and promote healthy, respectful relationships.

Children and young people's services

Women's Aid provides a dedicated service to children and young people who have experienced domestic abuse. Services offered to children and young people mirror those provided to their mothers. Children's support workers work with children in refuge, and when they move into their new home and also provide an outreach service to children and young people in the community.

Women's Aids' work with children has a child-centred approach, encouraging children to talk about their experiences when they feel like it, listening and believing what they say and seeking to understand their experience and feelings. Support is provided on an individual basis and through group work. This support allows children and young people to explore and resolve the issues they have in relation to their experience of domestic abuse in a safe and confidential environment. Support workers also work with children and their mothers to rebuild the relationship between them which may have been damaged as a result of their experiences of domestic abuse.

All refuges have playrooms and many have separate rooms for older children. These facilities are essential to the therapeutic play and individual and group support work that allows children to come to terms with their experience.

"Obviously it was daunting for my daughter, she was over the moon that I'd left my partner but she'd been through a lot and at the refuge they have separate children's workers and they have a play flat and at first they have a one to one with my daughter to have a wee chat and see how she's doing and you know, make sure that everything's okay with her. She might speak with them and not talk with me because she was worried about upsetting me, you know, which was great."

8. The difference Women's Aid makes

Domestic abuse costs society dearly. The cost of providing increased public services – police, health, criminal justice and social services runs to billions of pounds in the UK each year. A study in 2004, conducted for the UK Government's Women and Equality Unit estimated that the cost of domestic abuse in England and Wales was £23 billion per annum.²⁰ A more recent report in 2008 estimated the cost to the public purse of violence against women to be almost double this figure at, £40 billion.²¹

Domestic abuse places a high individual cost on the women and children in Scotland who experience it each year. They have to cope with the impact of domestic abuse on their physical and mental health. They have to deal with society's attitudes, disbelief and the often unsympathetic response from the agencies they come into contact with. They may also lose their home and job and for children, their school, friends and belongings.

The range of support services provided to women and children by Women's Aid, from crisis intervention, advocacy, outreach work and support to resettle in the community have substantial short and long term benefits for both the individuals involved and society at large.

Research has found that where women and children are able to access the safety and support that they need, they are less likely to require as many, or as lengthy, interventions from other agencies such as the police, social services and health.

A number of studies carried out in England, Wales, and more recently, in Scotland, analysed the costs and benefits of the Supporting People (SP) programmes, which were the main funding stream for a range of housing support services provided to different client groups. These studies repeatedly found that support services provided to women 'fleeing domestic violence' had one of the largest impacts in terms of saving money to other services, notably the health service, local authority housing departments and the police.

In England, a study of the SP programme carried out by Matrix²² and commissioned by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, analysed the benefits of housing-related support in terms of reduced public spending for different client groups. The research found that support provided to women fleeing domestic violence provided financial benefits that were almost double the cost of the services.

The cost-benefit for this group in reducing public spending is £110 million, or £19,000 per individual woman, twice the level of the cost of providing support. This does not take into account the individual benefit to the women and children in reduction of fear, physical harm and mental suffering.

The research found that when women threatened by domestic violence were able to access support services and leave an abusive partner, the risk of further assaults was reduced by 80%. These figures were based on data from the British Crime Survey. When the research was repeated in Wales, it again found that the most substantial ratio of benefits over costs was for women fleeing domestic violence.

Research commissioned by the Scottish Government on the cost-benefits of Supporting People funding²³ analysed the findings from the previous research and carried out its own case studies.

This research in Scotland supported that found in previous studies:

“This client group is perhaps the most soundly researched in the Matrix study and we see no reason to depart greatly from the approach of that study. The main effect of SP is to enable women (and their children) to escape abusive partners. We are content to adopt the Matrix estimate of the cost savings related to health care and crime.”

Figure 1: Supporting People expenditure and benefits for women at risk of domestic violence in Scotland 2003–2006

Year	SP Expenditure²⁴	Financial Benefit²⁵
2003/04	£7.9 million	£42 million
2004/05	£6.8 million	£42million
2005/06	£7.3million	£42 million
Total	£22 million	£126 million

The Scottish research took a more cautious approach to the reduced risk of further assault than in the English and Welsh studies and used a figure of a 50% reduction in risk of further assault in their calculations. However, their analysis still found an enormous cost saving in public spending in Scotland of £42 million per year.

This research demonstrates that Women’s Aid not only provides essential services which make a difference at an individual level to the women and children who use them, but that these services also save substantial amounts of public money to health, criminal justice, social services, housing and education.

However, there is anxiety that with the removal of ring-fencing from Supporting People funding and increasing pressure on local authority budgets, Women’s Aid services will face funding cuts.

It is essential that future funding decisions at a local level take into account the cost-benefits to all the public services involved. Community Planning Partners need to recognise the shared benefits, joint planning and commitment required to ensure there is adequate provision of specialist domestic abuse services in every area of Scotland.

In a report published by the Equality and Human Rights Commission and the End Violence Against Women Coalition (EVAW)²⁶, Scotland was found to lead the way in the provision of specialist support services to women.

However, as the EHRC Commissioner for Scotland, Morag Alexander points out in the report, this position may be changing:

“The Commission has real concerns that Scotland’s gains may now be diluted by the delegation of responsibility to local authorities – the same system which is failing in the rest of Britain. We owe it to every woman to let them feel safe, secure and respected. The approach in Scotland, so far, has proved to be the most successful and I call upon the Scottish Government and all our Local Authorities to ensure that this remains the case.”

Local Authorities are legally obliged, under the Gender Equality Duty (GED), to promote equality between men and women. In failing to provide adequate services for women who have experienced violence, they may be breaching the Duty and are therefore acting unlawfully. The EHRC have stated that it considers this issue to be a key test against which it will judge Scottish Government departments and local authorities, health boards and the police in assessing how they meet their legal obligations under the GED.

While Scotland may lead the way in terms of the provision of specialist services, many are severely overstretched. Current refuge provision in Scotland does not meet the needs of women and children – 52% of women are unable to access refuge accommodation because of lack of space.²⁷

Women's Aid provides specialist domestic abuse services that research has evidenced as providing substantial savings to the public purse. It is crucial that sustainable funding is made available for these services if we want to be able to continue to change the lives of women and children experiencing domestic abuse in Scotland.

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