

Scottish Women's Aid Strategy 2025-2030



Contents

Looking Back to Look Forward	3
Our Purpose	4
What We Value and How We Work	7
Mapping Change	10
Prevention	12
Strategic Goals: Our Mission	13
Contact	26



Looking Back to Look Forward

Fifty years ago
there were
few REFUGES &
NO HELPLINES



A Scotland with NO
domestic abuse
—NOTHING LESS.

Fifty years ago, there were few refuges, no helplines, no women's workers, no children's programs. It was legal for a man to rape his wife. Women weren't allowed mortgages or bank loans without a male co-signer, and women were forced out of public sector jobs if they married. Scotland's leaders were overwhelmingly male and pale, and domestic abuse was firmly in the "it's just a domestic" box.

We must never forget what we have done together. Remembering makes us brave, bold, and ambitious. Remembering gives us the energy to look ahead and the courage to resist and to persist.

We have set our sights on a Scotland with no domestic abuse - nothing less. How we get there and what we do in the next five years to shift power and practice, to make change real for women and children in Scotland, is our focus in this strategic refresh.

Our Purpose

Scottish Women's Aid (SWA) is an intersectional feminist organisation that works to end domestic abuse in Scotland.

We stand on the shoulders of decades of women's liberation and the Women's Aid movements, led by stubbornly courageous women working mostly in their communities and grassroots organisations. We are both a women's rights organisation and a children's rights organisation, and we know that domestic abuse is both a cause and a consequence of women's and children's oppression. Children's and women's rights are inextricably intertwined in our social arrangements, and any intervention, program, or policy designed for children must reflect the impact on their mothers, and vice versa. Our constituency is all women and children at risk of domestic abuse, which is all women and children.



We work to end domestic abuse by:



Challenging the cause of domestic abuse: systemic misogyny and patriarchy in Scottish institutions, as well as policies, practices and understandings that continue to oppress women and children and curtail their freedom.

Challenging the pillars of women's and children's inequality: poverty of rights, autonomy, resources, and power; and making all women and children visible by embedding intersectional gender competence into everything we do.

Provision of the highest quality, gender competent workforce development that upskills every tier of the workforce, all embedded with an implementation approach



Supporting and advocating for the women in the local Women's Aid services who work every day with women and children experiencing domestic abuse.

Advocating for a stable and sustainable funding model for specialist DA services is the foundation for ending all forms of DA.

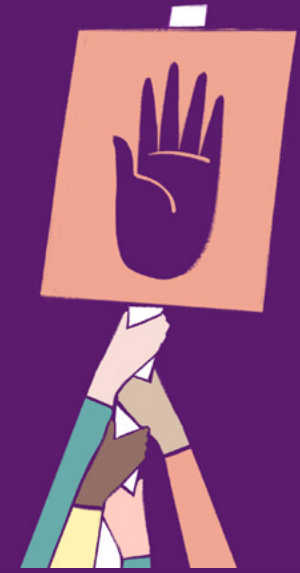
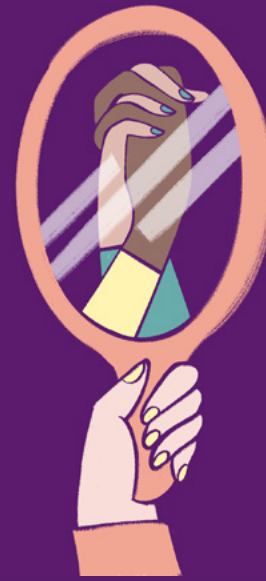
Working side by side with survivors and supporting them in making change.

Challenging governments, local and national policy makers, and other national stakeholders to respond boldly and competently to the problem of domestic abuse in Scotland.

What We Value and How We Work

A Scotland with no domestic abuse is our mission. A Scotland where women, young people, and children enjoy all their human rights and have equal opportunity to explore all their ambitions and aspirations. Our work to help deliver that vision relies on our inclusive feminist values. They are founded on commitments above and shape our internal policy and practice, our governance and our external collaborations. **These values mean:**





We are a learning

organisation: We resource learning, build leadership into our accountability structures, and actively support our staff and board to be feminist leaders.

We centre lived experience:

We use a range of mechanisms to meaningfully involve survivors, local WA groups, staff and helpline callers in shaping internal policy and practice.

We value reflection and supportive practice:

We protect and nurture learning through reflective practice, holding each other as well as our frameworks, processes and procedures to account - in kind, supportive and diligent ways.

We challenge discrimination and structural inequalities:

We challenge power structures that perpetuate discrimination and inequality. Our feminism actively opposes racism, homophobia, biphobia, ageism, ableism and all forms of discrimination. We participate in challenging racism and systemic inequalities that disadvantage the most marginalised women, both within SWA and beyond.



We ensure strong governance: SWA is governed effectively by a skilled, diverse and knowledgeable board of directors who will safeguard and promote our values and objectives.

We uphold fair work and good practice employment: We commit to good practice employment, fair work principles and continuous engagement with a progressive workforce.

We are strategic and accountable: We underpin our strategy with effective monitoring, evaluation, sound financial planning and clear accountability within our frameworks, processes and procedures.

Mapping Change

Women's inequality is the **cause** and **consequence** of domestic abuse

Feeder system
of inequality



Strategic
planning

What contribution can only SWA make to ending domestic abuse and women's inequality, prioritising work for and with the women and children who are the most marginalised

Why doesn't she just leave?

It isn't serious - he never
hit the children or her



Poverty,
financial/economic
dependence

Improving system
response to
coerced debt

Increasing mothers' incomes
through improving child
maintenance compliance

Preventing women's and
children's homelessness

Challenging 'No
Recourse to Public
Funds' policy



Representation
and decision
making

Campaigning for gender and
domestic abuse competence
of officials/professionals/
politicians/academics

Using media to challenge
victim blaming and
myths about gender
and domestic abuse

Using Istanbul Convention
and other international
human rights instruments to
improve official accountability



Freedom
from
abuse

Improving access
to legal services

Improved police and court
responses to coercive and
controlling abuse

Challenging child
contact system

He was under a lot of stress and she provoked him

Some women are attracted to abusers

She's failing to protect her children from him

Attitudes that enable domestic
abuse and protect patriarchy

GENDER
STEREOTYPES

GENDER
STEREOTYPES

Attitudes that enable domestic
abuse and protect patriarchy



We have adopted a theory of change approach that maps the critical domains of change, and this has allowed us to understand our priorities and to focus on what only we can do.

Our core premise is that dismantling the systemic drivers of domestic abuse—e.g., women’s and children’s poverty and patriarchal (in)justice systems—is required to end domestic abuse. As a result, we’re prioritising work that is critically important to women’s and children’s equality—work that improves access to justice and that supports the most marginalised survivors of domestic abuse to bring their powerful voices and expertise to the mission.

How does this translate to action? One example is addressing women’s and children’s poverty as a primary driver of women’s inequality and the source of endless constraints on our freedom and agency in the face of abuse. We have made developing

advocacy, evidence, and interventions on economic abuse (abuse generated by both the State and individual perpetrators) a key priority in the next few years. We will focus especially on coerced debt in the context of domestic abuse, something that only we can do at a national level. This work involves our policy, training, and members’ services teams, with additional support from Helpline data and joint work with the other Women’s Aid federations and UK-based financial institutions. It is ambitious, and it is critical.

SWA continues to wield influence well beyond our size, a position hard fought for by the women who came before us and a heavy responsibility for us and those who come after us. SWA’s unique position enables us not only to highlight and challenge gender injustice in systems, particularly for the most marginalised women and children. Thus, we, in collaboration with our member specialist services, iteratively test, pilot, and develop policy and practice models that are driven and shaped by women and children.



Prevention

Our strategy is underpinned by our commitment to prevention. Domestic abuse is both a cause and a consequence of women and children's inequality—this is the starting place for all prevention work.

Primary Prevention

Our work on primary prevention reveals and challenges the constraints of poverty and discrimination on children's and women's space for action.

Secondary Prevention

We prevent further harm and trauma by supporting secondary prevention across Scotland's communities and, most important, in our network of local grassroots Women's Aid services.

A stylized illustration of a person with red hair, seen from the side, aiming a bow and arrow. The person is wearing a yellow long-sleeved shirt over a dark blue and light blue striped tank top. The bow is light blue, and the arrow is dark blue with a light blue fletching. The background is a solid dark blue. The text "Strategic Goals: Our Mission" is overlaid on the person's yellow shirt.

Strategic Goals: **Our Mission**



Scotland is safer and more equal for all women and children so that they live free from domestic abuse.

How you'll know:

Domestic abuse is better understood and recognised as a cause and consequence of women's inequality and therefore better challenged and prevented.

There is a strong movement locally and nationally to end domestic abuse in Scotland as a result of wide support and investment from relevant public and private bodies.

1

Scotland is safer and more equal for all women and children so that they live free from domestic abuse.

How you'll know:

Domestic Abuse is better understood as a cause and consequence of women's inequality and, therefore, better challenged and prevented.

To achieve this, we will:

Support global evidence that all forms of violence against women and girls, including domestic abuse, stems from gender inequality, constitutes a violation of human rights, and is entirely preventable.

Raise the profile of domestic abuse nationally and internationally so that it is recognised and treated like the violation of human rights that it is.

Raise awareness of and challenge the impact of poverty and discrimination in limiting the opportunities and freedoms of women and children.

Challenge victim blaming in the media and myths about gender and domestic abuse.

Provide high-quality training and workforce development across public and private sectors that challenge the values and behaviours that harm all women and children.



How you'll know:

Domestic Abuse is better understood as a cause and consequence of women's inequality and, therefore, better challenged and prevented.

To achieve this, we will:

Promote awareness of available support and preventative strategies using a human rights framework, such as advocating for policies that protect children and young people affected by domestic abuse in accordance with the UNCRC.

Reframe prevailing narratives about perpetrators' behaviours to emphasise their active role in continuing abuse through our institutions, including sabotage of the mother-child relationship and manipulation of the family court and social security system.

There is a strong movement locally and nationally to end domestic abuse in Scotland as a result of wide support and investment from relevant public and private bodies.

Build strong partnerships with survivors, specialist services, and key public and private organisations to strengthen our movement across the UK and enhance cross-party understanding that domestic abuse is preventable.

Challenge the invisibility of women and children who have experienced and are experiencing domestic abuse by collaborating with survivors and specialist services, amplifying their voices, collecting, analysing and publicising national data and evidence of the issues they face, ensuring this informs our work and that of our partners.

How you'll know:

There is a strong movement locally and nationally to end domestic abuse in Scotland as a result of wide support and investment from relevant public and private bodies.

To achieve this, we will:

Maximise the power of communications to influence public discourse, using data gathered from the Helpline, survivor experiences, and specialist services to build a strong evidence base.

Continue to be an active and influential partner in Scotland's implementation of Delivering Equally Safe to ensure and protect a gendered response to domestic abuse.

Promote the valuable role specialist services and our national Helpline play in protecting children and women across Scotland.





2 Women and children receive high-quality support, and survivors feel confident in the system.

How you'll know:

Specialist services are strengthened and aided to meet diverse needs and mitigate the harm caused by abuse.

Survivors receive timely, high-quality support tailored to their needs, improving their choices, health, wellbeing, and autonomy.

2

Women and children receive high-quality support, and survivors feel confident in the system.

How you'll know:

Specialist services are strengthened and aided to meet diverse needs and mitigate the harm caused by abuse.



To achieve this, we will:

Deliver tailored support to members to enhance their capabilities, governance and the ongoing provision of high-quality services.

Continue to roll out accreditation and promote sector standards for specialist domestic abuse services through National Quality Service Standards to ensure quality, specialist, consistent provision in line with our shared values.

Campaign for stable and sustainable funding models and support improvements in commissioning practices so that the national network of specialist services can thrive.

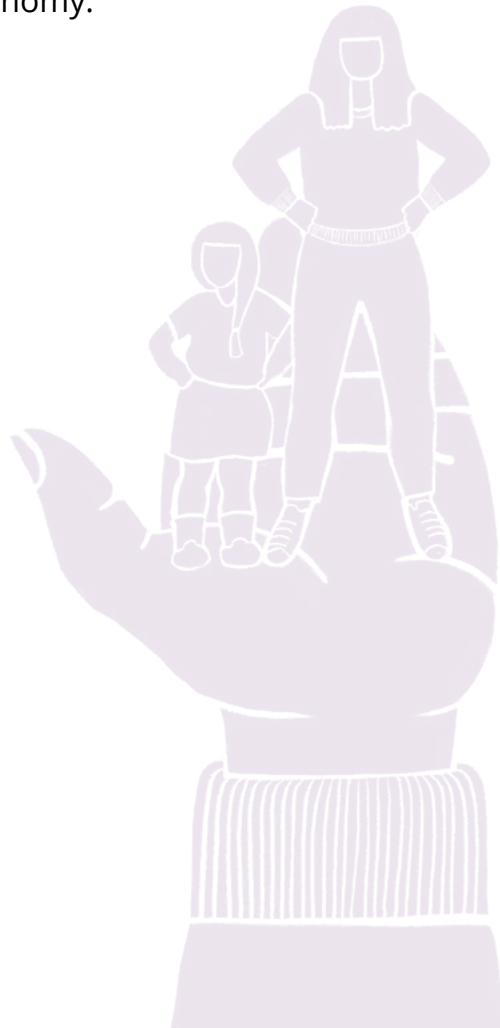
Deliver relevant and responsive training, improving access to nationally accredited qualifications such as IDAA and Safe and Together across the network.

Support services to establish partnerships to maximise their reach and facilitate opportunities for specialist knowledge exchange.

How you'll know:

Specialist services are strengthened and aided to meet diverse needs and mitigate the harm caused by abuse.

Survivors receive timely, high-quality support tailored to their needs, improving their choices, health, wellbeing, and autonomy.



To achieve this, we will:

Provide the infrastructure and tools to improve national data collection, ensuring services can meet local needs, evidence their impact, and deliver on their charitable objectives.

Ensure that all individuals in Scotland experiencing domestic abuse have access to specialist, confidential, and inclusive support and information 24/7 through the provision of Scotland's Domestic Abuse and Forced Marriage Helpline.

Build strong partnerships focused on increasing women and children's autonomy, expanding access to prompt, effective support, and addressing intersecting inequalities via universal and specialised services.

Provide survivors with access to a louder, more comprehensive collective voice and the opportunity to influence policies and services that affect them.

Collaborate with specialists, partners, and stakeholders to enhance evidence-based practices and co-create policies and services with survivors facing multiple forms of abuse and oppression.

How you'll know:

Survivors receive timely, high-quality support tailored to their needs, improving their choices, health, wellbeing, and autonomy.

To achieve this, we will:

Improve access to resources, practical help and local support for women and children within and out with specialist services.

Provide training to public and private bodies to educate them on how to effectively respond to survivors to reduce trauma and increase safety.





3

Women and children can live independently from abuse and abusers, because Scotland's systems (housing, economy, social security, justice) work effectively to increase women's autonomy.

How you'll know:

Women and children experience increased equity and tangibly reduced barriers and discrimination. This involves increasing children's and women's access to legal support, to financial independence, and to safety in private and public forums.

Government and public sector bodies improve their institutional and frontline responses to domestic abuse and are accountable for delivering action to address women and children's inequality.

3

Women and children can live independently from abuse and abusers, because Scotland's systems (housing, economy, social security, justice) work effectively to increase women's autonomy.

How you'll know:

Women and children experience increased equity and tangibly reduced barriers and discrimination. This involves increasing children's and women's access to legal support, to financial independence, and to safety in private and public forums.



To achieve this, we will:

Improve understanding of domestic abuse across public and private spheres.

Advocate for public and private reform which addresses women's and children's poverty as the primary driver of women's inequality and the source of significant constraints on their freedom.

Campaign for national and local governments to allocate resources in the most effective way to improve housing, social security, justice and public debt inequalities for women and children experiencing multiple or intersecting inequalities.

Advocate for social security and housing interventions which improve choices for women and children leaving abusive relationships, including the Fund to Leave.

How you'll know:

Women and children experience increased equity and tangibly reduced barriers and discrimination. This involves increasing children's and women's access to legal support, to financial independence, and to safety in private and public forums.

Government and public sector bodies improve their institutional and frontline responses to domestic abuse and are accountable for delivering action to address women and children's inequality.



To achieve this, we will:

Increase understanding of the financial coercion and debt caused by domestic abuse. Work to unite stakeholders behind a transformative action plan to combat coerced debt issues in Scotland's public institutions.

Amplify evidence and expertise from survivors, from research, and the Women's Aid movement to help institutions respond effectively, address diverse needs, and challenge perpetrator behaviours.

Advocate to ensure Scotland's strategy, legislation and Istanbul Convention duties and requirements are delivered.

Iteratively test, pilot, and develop policy and practice models that are driven and shaped by women and children affected by domestic abuse.

Represent specialist services nationally and regionally, create and protect space for services and survivors to share experiences and collaborate on campaigns.

How you'll know:

Government and public sector bodies improve their institutional and frontline responses to domestic abuse and are accountable for delivering action to address women and children's inequality.



To achieve this, we will:

Campaign for advances in law and policy to improve the treatment of women and children in the family court system, challenge the child contact system and address inherent discrimination for women with 'No Recourse to Public Funds'.

Work across multiple systems to challenge the violation of children's and women's rights in child contact decisions until no child or mother is forced into unsafe contact.

Mobilise stakeholders and government to support and scale up a needs-based access to free, specialised legal services for women, children, and young survivors of domestic abuse situated within women's aid services.

Provide expert training and implementation support to improve police and court responses to coercive and controlling behaviour.



In the next five years, we will begin to shift the dial, making real progress on ending domestic abuse. Together, we will break down the systems that enable abuse; we will demand justice; and we will build a future rooted in equality, safety, and hope.



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