

Border Women's Aid Annual Report 2024-2025



“Border Women's Aid saved my life.”

[Eve Robertson, quoted in the Southern Reporter, 22 August 2024]



ABOUT BWA

Mission

Women supporting women to live empowered lives free from domestic abuse in all its forms.

Vision

A community where all women and children can be safe and strong.

Values

Equality...

Respect...

Commitment...

Trust...



KEY SERVICE STATISTICS

24/25 Summary

5 Women and 3 Children
In Refuge

666 Days
Women Spent in Refuge

243 Women
Referred to Outreach Service

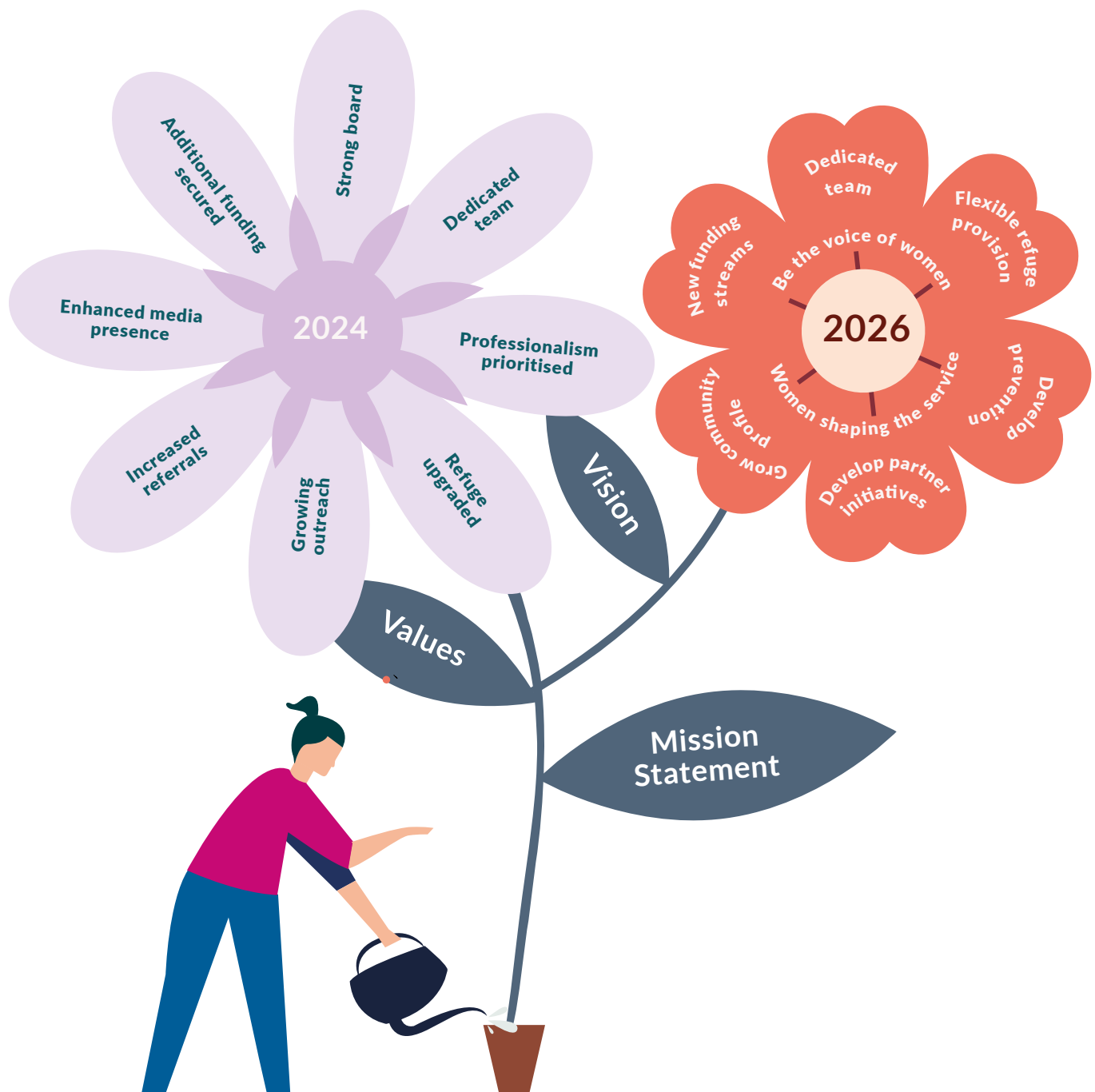
186 Women
Supported by Outreach Service



INTRODUCTION

2024-25 has been another busy and rewarding year for Border Women's Aid. Despite a challenging external social, political and financial environment, BWA has continued to flourish, delivering help and support to ever-increasing numbers of women in the Scottish Borders experiencing domestic abuse. Thanks to the dedication and commitment of our team, we are on track to meet most, if not all, of the goals we laid out in our Strategic Plan 2024-26.

Find out more by reading the BWA Strategic Plan 2024-26 here:
<https://www.borderwomensaid.co.uk/resources/BWA--STRATEGIC-PLAN-2024v3.pdf>



Women's feedback to BWA continued to shape and develop our service. We encourage women who have used the service to participate in and contribute to local and national consultations on domestic abuse and coercive control. Their experiences and insights are invaluable and necessary to understanding and enabling the sorts of support that women want in order to move on with their lives.

In November 2024, we had an unannounced inspection from the Care Inspectorate. The inspector spoke with five women using the service. Extract from report:

Women using the service benefitted from working with a staff team with a strongly held value basis recognising women as experts in their own experiences, needs and wishes. One woman told us: 'Support was tailored to me and I felt heard and not judged'. This gave the women confidence that they were being listened to and that any support would be highly sensitive to their situation and would not generate further risk.

<https://www.borderwomensaid.co.uk/resources/InspectionReport-321587.pdf>

"BWA – A safe place to talk about difficult things"

[Comment from woman supported by BWA]

SOME FACTS ABOUT DOMESTIC ABUSE

- One in five women in Scotland will experience domestic abuse
- Police Scotland recorded 63,867 incidents of domestic abuse (latest figures)
- Four out of five incidents had a female victim and a male perpetrator (83%)
- 38% of female homicide victims were killed by a partner or ex-partner
- Two women a week in the UK are killed by a partner or ex-partner
- Suicide is now the leading cause of death in domestic abuse cases

Many experts call domestic abuse 'intimate terrorism'.

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE YEAR



Q1

April - June

Moved into new office premises

Successful funding application to The Robertson Trust

Own My Life groupwork started in Galashiels and Hawick

Partnership working: Homelessness team meeting; linked in with Mental Health Service; attended "Together All" and Mental Health Awareness events

Awareness raising: Branhholme Castle event; Borders Older People's Forum

Q2

July - September

BWA Board and Staff session on BWA Communications Strategy and Vicarious Trauma

Consultation with Scottish Women's Aid on Prisoner Early Release policy changes

Meeting with John Lamont, MP

Partnership working: presentation to VAWP on Escape the Trap initiative; Borders College, Diverse Borders Event; Heriot Watt Feel Good Fest; Action for Children team meeting; Borders Housing Network Domestic Abuse team meeting; Waverly Housing donation of shopping vouchers

Own My Life groupwork started in Galashiels and Kelso

Q3

October - December

Unannounced inspection by Care Inspectorate

16 Days of Action: VAWG Events

16 Days of Action: Social media collaboration with poet, Len Pennie on Scots words and Domestic Abuse Social media campaign

Awareness raising: Escape the Trap programme started in Berwickshire HS

Awareness raising/fundraising: BWA staff volunteered at "Presents Galore" at Springwood Park, Kelso

Awareness raising: 16 Days of Action visit with Police to Hawick High School, "With You" team meeting

Partnership working/Training: MARAC awareness session, Trauma Community of Practice event

Q4

January - February

Funding: Grant awarded from CORRA/Henry Duncan

Funding: Rachael Hamilton MSP visit with CORRA CEO and funding officer at BWA office

Funding: DES Financial Monitoring visit

Escape the Trap commenced at Hawick High School

Own My Life programme commenced in Hawick and Kelso

Refuge: HMO Inspection

Awareness raising: Parent Group at Langlee Roundabout Café/ Newcastleton Parent & Toddler Group

Partnership Working: Attended "Meet your specialist gender-based violence services" session; Survivors Unite attended BWA Team meeting; Meeting with SBC Child Protection Education Officer to discuss prevention

Refuge

We continued to support women in our refuge accommodation. We have two spaces which currently meet our needs, and shall continue to do so for the foreseeable future. The arrangements we have in place are continually being reviewed with feedback from women and our partners, to ensure they align with our 'whole woman' approach.

5 women and 3 children lived in our refuge accommodation during the reporting period. Our refuge was occupied for a total of 666 days, giving an 89% occupancy rate. The longest stay was for 255 days.

We had a very successful HMO inspection, which reflected what one of the families who stayed in the refuge said:

"The good thing about refuge was that it felt like a family home, and the area is nice and the kids liked it."



Read more about our refuge here:
<https://www.borderwomensaid.co.uk/help-services-refuge/>

Outreach

Five years on, BWA's Outreach Service is now well established, and demand for this service continues to grow.

The number of women referred to the Outreach Service during this reporting period was 243, a 20% increase on the previous year. BWA responds to most referrals within 48 hours. Of these referrals, 186 women then received on-going support from the Outreach Service.

Over 50% were self-referrals, and the rest were referrals from partner agencies, including Scottish Borders Council's Domestic Abuse Advocacy Service and Police Scotland. DAAS referred 65 women for ongoing recovery support. There was a significant increase in the number of women referred by Mental Health – 10% of total referrals. The growing number of referrals from the Violence Against Women Partnership (VAWP) reflects the increased financial pressures across the sector as well as a recognition that BWA uniquely offers a specialist, holistic approach to women experiencing domestic abuse.

The Outreach Service is largely funded from the Scottish Government Waiting List Prevention. This grant ended in March 2025, which demonstrates the need to devote even greater efforts to grant applications and other forms of fundraising, so that the Outreach Service can continue to meet the needs of women experiencing abuse in our community.

“BWA means having people that actually see and understand the seriousness and impact domestic abuse has had on me. I’ve had counselling and felt like I was speaking to folk who didn’t have a clue. However, at BWA it is brutally gut wrenchingly accurate and they really understand the trauma of it all. Genuine help and support. I feel I’m not on my own and have a better understanding of the complexity and validation of the abuse I suffered.”



Read more about our outreach service here:
<https://www.borderwomensaid.co.uk/help-services-outreach/>

Own My Life (OML)

Own My Life - a 12-week online or in-person group programme to help women who have been subjected to abuse to regain ownership of their lives – was initially piloted back in 2022. It is now a fully embedded part of our Outreach Service, with online and face-to-face group sessions taking place right across the Borders. OML has been so successful that we have made the programme available to our partner agencies. 30% of OML attendees in the period were referred by partner agencies.

The National Lottery Community Fund will continue to fund this work until March 2026

“Own My Life has some very valuable help and will help you understand and change things to help yourself. You will make amazing friends who understand you.”



Escape the Trap

BWA's outreach is centrally focused on supporting women experiencing domestic abuse. However, BWA also sees prevention as an important additional strand to the service, an investment to prevent future abuse. Escape The Trap (Teenage Relationship Abuse Programme) is specifically designed to help all young people, however they identify, to recognise the difference between a healthy relationship and an unhealthy one, and to understand how coercive and controlling behaviour negatively affects their lives. By raising awareness of abuse and educating our young people about healthy relationships, we aim to help empower their generation.

During 2024-25, we ran Escape The Trap sessions in Berwickshire and Hawick High Schools. Student responses were very positive.

“Learning about abusive relationships and being taught how to handle it. It is very helpful and will help me in the future”.



Partnership working

BWA continued to play a key role in the Violence Against Women Partnership (VAWP), bringing a BWA perspective to bear. Over the year, we consolidated our partnership engagement and visibility at both local and national level, and identified ways we can work together.

Our commitment to partnership collaboration is reflected in our meetings with VAWP, NHS, Police Scotland, homelessness, housing and educational services, NHS and mental health organisations. We have worked across the board with local mother-and-toddler groups, schools, and colleges of higher education. At a national level, we were particularly pleased to be part of the Scottish Women's Aid consultation on Prisoner Early Release.

TOGETHER WE CAN DO IT!



Funding

The SBC Housing Support Grant for refuge provision is secured until 2026. The National Lottery Community Fund, and the Scottish Government's Emergency Funding have supported our outreach work and Own My Life delivery. The Scottish Government's Delivering Equally Safe grant funds our team leader post.

We are grateful for our funders' critical contributions which have enabled us to build a resilient, sustainable and effective service. However, we must acknowledge that there are significant financial challenges ahead as we anticipate the end of the major grants we have received in recent years. Unfortunately, our Scottish Government Waiting List funding ended on 31st March 2025, so we will be obliged to fund one of our key Support Worker positions from our reserves. Our current statutory funding structure does not cover our highly successful outreach service, for which there is a great, and an ever-increasing, demand. Continuing it without sufficient external funding is, quite simply, unsustainable.

Despite the cost-of-living challenges, we have been very fortunate in receiving donations over the period, and want to express our gratitude to everyone who has donated. We wish to acknowledge warmly the ongoing financial support from many local organisations and businesses who are listed at the end of this document.

All this financial uncertainty has made an increased focus on grant applications and other forms of fundraising an absolute necessity. Unfortunately, whilst necessary, these activities are hugely time-consuming, so we have hired a freelance communications consultant to help enhance and expand our communications capacity in line with our strategic plan. We intend to launch a major fundraising drive in November 2025 to coincide with the annual United Nations 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence campaign. We hope that our donors and partners will support us in this fund-raising drive.

DOMESTIC ABUSE FACT

Domestic abuse is a substantial burden on the UK economy. The Home Office estimates the costs in the tens of billions, amounting to £34,015 per victim. These costs are borne by the exchequer through various channels, including the criminal justice system, healthcare, and support services for victims/survivors. The emotional and psychological costs to those individual women and children in terms of lost livelihoods, emotional and psychological hurt, and stunted lives, is incalculable.

(Source: A Safe Fund: costing domestic abuse <https://safelives.org.uk>)

Thank You!!

This year has been another busy and rewarding year for BWA, despite the challenges we have faced relative to the increase in (often complex) referrals, and funding concerns. In the words of one woman we have supported, BWA remains a 'safe place to talk about difficult things.'

So, despite the current financial crisis and other uncertainties, we feel encouraged and optimistic. A massive "thank you" is due to everyone who has helped us achieve such a positive year – our team, management, our board members, donors, partner agencies and other stakeholders, and above all the women who have reached out to us for support.

"A massive thanks to BWA for everything you have done, I never thought when I first got in touch that I would be in such a good position now, I would never have dreamt how better my life would be after getting in touch with BWA."

"Thank you doesn't feel quite good enough after everything you've done for me but..."

"Thank you for offering me a safe space and for helping me make sense of my head."

"Thank you for showing me care, compassion and empathy at a time when I needed it the most."

"Thank you for helping me to heal."

"Thank you for listening – for making me feel heard and understood."

"Thank you for helping me break the cycle, so my baby never has to experience what I did."

Our thanks to:

The Wee Souk

Selkirk Sheriff Court Tea Bar

ACE Group Selkirk

Kiltwalk Fundraiser – Eve Robertson

Sidey Solutions

Hawick Lodge St James 424

Branxholme Castle Charity Quiz

Kelso & Ednam Church

Kiltwalk Fundraiser – Scott & Charters

Jean Wood – Scotland's Garden Scheme

Presents Galore (Springwood Park Fundraiser)

Kim's 40th Birthday Bash

Beanies Bubbles – Equine Car Boot fundraiser
by Jacqui & Sarah at Lindean Village Hall

Plexus, Kelso

Border Sovereign

Kelso North and Country Churches

And individuals who donated anonymously





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