



**BWA**

**Border Women's Aid**

**STRATEGIC PLAN  
2024-2026**



**'Women's Aid saved my life'**

(Eve Robertson, quoted in the Southern Reporter, 22 August 2024)

## Our story so far

In 2018, we formalised the foundational principles which we wanted to underpin and inform the work of BWA in the coming years. These included:

### Vision

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

### Mission

We are women supporting women to live empowered lives free from domestic abuse in all its forms

### Values

We resolved to work in a way that reflected these core values:

- Equality
- Respect
- Commitment
- Trust

With these foremost in our deliberations, we created a 3-year plan to achieve the following strategic objectives:

### Optimise refuge provision

### Structure to empower

### Develop our support role

### Raise our voice

### Fundraise to support improvements to the service

Between 2018 and 2021 we made great progress with these objectives, scoring considerable successes against the familiar background of financial uncertainty and the challenge of the Covid pandemic.



**“I thank my local women’s refuge, Border Women’s Aid in Hawick, for its important work. It has worked tirelessly to help women gain freedom from abusive relationships. It provides safe accommodation and specialist support for up to a year for women and their children who have left abusive homes. Through its excellent outreach service, it supports many women in the community who currently live with abuse while they plan for a life beyond it.”**

**Rachael Hamilton, MSP.**

**In Scottish Parliament, 28 January, 2021**

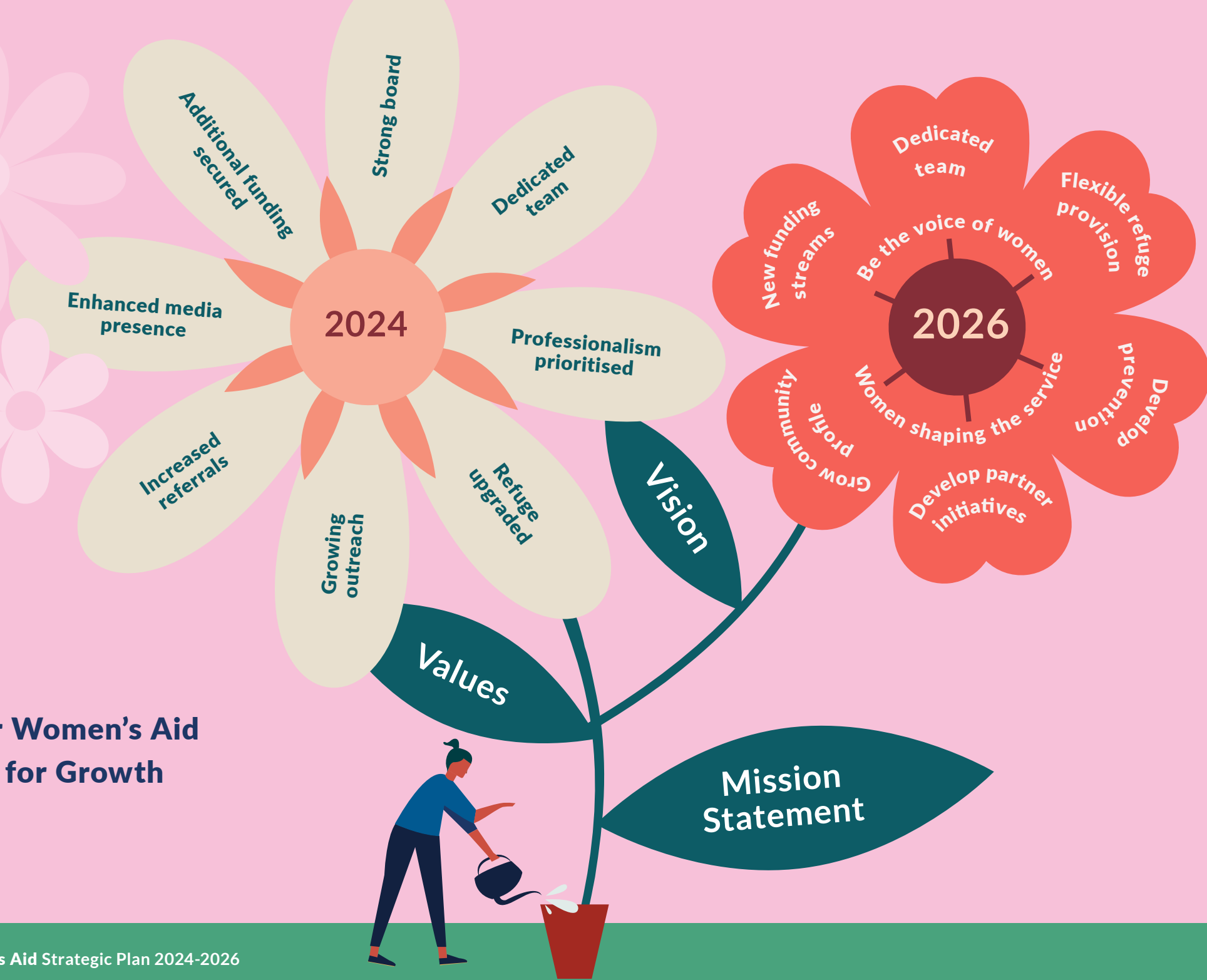
## Where we are today

Once the immediate challenges of the pandemic were behind us, BWA published our strategic plan for 2022-2025 which drew up a list of service goals which would ensure the resilience, sustainability and effectiveness of a much-enlarged service whilst remaining true to our vision, mission and values. Early in 2024, we undertook a 'midterm' review of which goals had been achieved and what remained to be done or revisited in light of changing circumstances. It is gratifying to be able to report that many of our goals have been achieved, and the service flourishes due to the commitment and dedication of our team.

The new Strategic Plan for 2024-2026 has been written considering the changing needs of women experiencing domestic abuse, and the very uncertain financial roadmap for the years ahead. The inevitability of change is always a challenge, but with this revised strategic plan BWA heads into the future confident in our ability to manage risk and change, to make the most of the opportunities that change can present, and to continue to provide a service that meets the needs of women experiencing domestic abuse.



# Border Women's Aid A Plan for Growth



## Strengthen Board

### Key Considerations:

- Recruit more members of the board to increase board resilience, to represent a broader demographic, and to reflect the fact that younger women are at greatest risk of domestic abuse, especially coercive and controlling behaviour
- Run regular recruitment campaigns (on social media and /or as necessary)
- Reach out to local colleges and other relevant local organisations, e.g. Heriot Watt, Borders College, etc.

### Strategic Objectives:

- Continue to review and strengthen board membership in alignment with objectives outlined in our Strategy, e.g. the plans to develop a youth work programme. Continue to run recruitment campaigns as necessary to ensure the board's resilience and the continuation of its enthusiasm and energy for our work.
- Board development and training to include not only an understanding of trustee responsibilities but also to inform the board members about political, social and legislative changes which affect how our service is delivered.

What has been the benefit of working with BWA?

“Sharing information to help each other progress the support given to those requiring the services and their families.”

Partner agency

## Service Provision and Resilience

### Key Considerations:

- Staff recruitment and retention is of utmost importance because, without the right kind and number of support workers, this is a major risk factor to the service both in terms of meeting the needs of women and ensuring optimum levels of staff well-being, energy, and enthusiasm, which are essential for their jobs of keeping women safe and empowering them effectively.
- The core service continues to evolve and expand in response to a fast-changing world. Data indicate that, because of our unique expertise, we are the service of choice for direct referrals and, increasingly, for partner agencies. The outreach service took off during the pandemic and continues to grow rapidly as women's needs change and statutory services' budgets are constrained. Scottish legislation in respect of combatting domestic abuse and coercive control may well drive further change as protection orders, etc. come into use. In addition, we know that today young women, including teenagers, are at greatest risk of abuse, so the service is evolving to address their concerns. Own My Life group courses, which started in 2023, have proven both popular and effective, so ongoing funding is extremely important.

### Strategic Objectives:

- To deliver a resilient service.
- To ensure that we continue to respond to what women tell us they want and need, the support BWA provides and the tools used to help women understand the dynamics of domestic abuse continue to be reviewed and evaluated. Support staff are encouraged to share case studies with the Board, enabling them to be a voice of women in order to drive institutional change.
- BWA will produce a best practice guide which will include guidelines to help women with "institutional advocacy." BWA must not just "talk the talk" of empowerment but "walk the walk" of self-empowerment.

**“Working for BWA is a privilege as we are invited into women’s lives... BWA is all about women lifting up women to own their own lives.”**

**BWA Support Worker**



## Employee Remuneration and Wellbeing

### Key Considerations:

#### Staff Wellbeing and Mental Health:

- At the best of times, the nature of the work at BWA is intensive and stressful, since every day we deal with human trauma and hurt, sometimes resulting in vicarious trauma for our staff. As the service evolves, so has the role of the team. The extended greater range of services now offered requires a greater level of skills, training and experience in the staff. The legacy of the pandemic continues to be felt in the growing numbers of women seeking support. This, together with additional pressures of the cost of living, highlights the need for the service proactively to address the matter of staff wellbeing and mental health. Taking care of these issues is vital to the resilience and effectiveness of the service as a whole.

#### Remuneration:

- Recruitment and retention are real and pressing challenges in the current climate, with cuts in public spending, rising inflation, cost of living, and the shortage of suitably qualified staff. Therefore, in the spring of 2024, BWA carried out a comprehensive review of the Support Worker salary, as well as evaluating the benefits of any incentives/rewards package we might offer. Inevitably, this was dependent on funding opportunities and constraints. This will be reviewed on an annual basis and any changes will be dependent on funding.
- Review and benchmarking of salary structure needed to go hand in hand with a review of the Support Worker role profile. Considering how the service has dramatically changed, we have now redefined the profile to reflect the new demands of the role. Looking at comparable profiles in the sector and data from previous benchmarking exercises was a fundamental part of this exercise.

- We need to bear in mind the fact that we are a small service, so the opportunities for progression within the service are limited. Nevertheless, now that the new support worker profile and salary scale have been completed, there is a structure in place to enable staff to progress within the service as increased skills, knowledge and training are acquired. We believe that this major review and its implementation reflects the growing increased challenges of the job. Competitive and fair remuneration and opportunities for professional development will help in the retention of skilled staff and recruitment when the need arises.
- In carrying out such a review, it is essential that we remember we are an inclusive service founded on collective, feminist principles. Staff were consulted – and continue to be consulted - on their expectations of BWA as an employer and continue to be involved in shaping our strategy. These consultations are both formal and informal, both 1:1 as well as within a group.

#### Strategic Objectives:

- Having completed our major review and implemented its findings in 2024, we will continue to monitor the role profile, salary and benefits, as the service continues to expand and change.
- Appropriate board and staff engagement and feedback to ensure that staff voices are heard in respect of their needs and well-being, and to acknowledge that our frontline support staff are also powerful advocates for the women who reach out to us for support.
- Continue to enhance an open, honest and supportive team-working culture.
- Continue to access suitable training for staff
- Continue to encourage staff to take care of their well-being, including access to external confidential mental health consultation and support.

## Service Delivery - REFUGE

### Key Considerations:

- We have two spaces in the refuge which currently, and for the foreseeable future, continue to meet our needs (even bearing in mind the Istanbul Convention which advises 4 places for the size of our population in the Borders). The arrangements we have in place are continually being reviewed with feedback from women and our agency partners considered.
- BWA now has in place an Adapted Property Request Protocol with SBC ensuring we meet the needs of women with disabilities.
- We now have a specific budget to ensure we can support any woman who has No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF).

“(In refuge) I had time to process what is happening in my relationship, somewhere safe to retreat to, knowing I can walk away if he does not change. I have a choice.”

**BWA Service User**

### Strategic Objectives:

- We will continue to build on our unique holistic ‘whole woman’ approach to refuge, which is based on a continuum of support that includes both refuge and outreach, engaging with other professionals and partners where necessary.
- We continue to review provision including feedback from women and our partners to ensure it aligns with our ‘whole woman’ approach. To ensure maximum awareness and use of our much-improved refuge provision, we will actively promote this on social media and our website.
- BWA will be actively involved in the recently established Borders Housing Network (BHN) Domestic Abuse Working Group. BHN comprises the four registered social landlords in the Scottish Borders and the aim of the working group is to raise awareness of domestic abuse and to improve access to support.

## Service Delivery - OUTREACH

### Key Considerations:

- BWA's Outreach Service is well established, thanks to the Robertson Trust and the renewed National Lottery Community Fund. It has been more successful than we ever anticipated.
- One element of outreach is supporting women experiencing domestic abuse out with the refuge. The second, equally essential, element is prevention, and actively developing an educational and consciousness-raising programme.

### Strategic Objectives:

#### Own My Life:

- Continue to deliver our embedded and highly successful Own My Life programme and develop OML groupwork both online and face to face.
- Continue to roll out the programme to our partner agencies who are now recognising our OML expertise and training.
- Continue to evaluate and improve this part of the service.
- Continue to review the service structures, so that outreach, including prevention, can be delivered in the most effective way.
- Monitor the success of BWA's prevention work with a view to establishing a new staff post specifically to deliver educational programmes and support to young people.

#### Supporting Young People:

- Educating and informing young people about the dangers of domestic abuse and coercive control, especially in a world dominated by social media, is vital. Thus, prevention is assuming a bigger role in the work of BWA. BWA established a formal link with Youth Borders in 2023.

- We will continue to work with local educational and arts partners to raise awareness of abuse.
- We will continue our focus on prevention by delivering the Escape the Trap (Teenage Relationship Abuse Prevention) to high schools in the Scottish Borders. By raising awareness about domestic abuse and coercive control, and educating young people about healthy relationships, we will help to empower the younger generation.

#### Transgender:

- Continue our inclusive policy, aligned with Scottish Women's Aid policy.
- Incorporate trans information into our refuge/employment policies, with inclusiveness reflected in all our internal and external communications.

#### Language Inclusivity:

- BWA is aware of the language barriers, including access to translator services, which inhibit our ability to deliver services to certain vulnerable groups. Recognizing this challenge reflects our commitment to continuing our capacity to support ethnic minorities and women with disabilities.
- BWA will continue to ensure that our services, initiatives and working practices conform to ongoing national legislative and social change. Our commitment to inclusiveness means that all our literature now carries the LGBTQ+ logos and we now have a budget to ensure we can support any woman who has No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF).

## Partnership Working

### Key Considerations:

- Recent cuts in funding to partner services and the subsequent increase of referrals have implications for BWA. We actively monitor the impact on our service delivery.
- The importance of stakeholder involvement in BWA's vision.

### Strategic Objectives:

- Continue to play a key role in the Violence Against Women Partnership and actively bring a BWA perspective to the partnership. We have successfully continued to increase our partnership engagement and visibility at both local and national level.
- Continue to identify who our stakeholders are and identify ways we can work together.
- Support staff in working with our partners.

“Working alongside with BWA has been a very enjoyable experience. We have an open and honest communication that makes a positive impact in the delivery of the services.”

**BWA Service User**



## Raise Our Voice / Activism

### Key Considerations:

#### External Communications:

- We continue to improve our ability to respond swiftly and accurately to news items of the day. Not only because it's important that the truth is reported but since this is an opportunity to raise awareness, educate and inform public opinion, and promote our work locally.
- BWA is proactive in picking up issues in the press and flagging them for response. To do this efficiently we will develop a bank of responses, talking points, and core messages.
- BWA needs to build a closer relationship with the local media outlets so that our work, our message, and particularly our successes, are promoted regularly and often.
- We delivered BWA's new website in January 2023 and this is reviewed on an ongoing basis
- BWA has a comprehensive communications policy and practice manual.
- In 2024 we have hired an experienced PR and Communications specialist to enhance and expand our Communications capacity in line with our strategic plan.

### Strategic Objectives:

- Undertake a feasibility exercise with the recently appointed external communications and PR practitioner to explore ways to continue to grow our engagement with the press, local policy makers and influencers so that our work is publicised in the most effective and positive of ways.
- Develop a best practice guide to "institutional advocacy," to support women and young people to use their voices to shape our organisation.

**“Your support has given me more confidence going forward and helping me to understand about domestic abuse in lots of ways”**

**BWA Service User**

## Funding

### Key Considerations:

- In the last couple of years, BWA has successfully increased its income streams. Whilst SBC funds the refuge service through its homelessness remit (which funding has now been renewed until 2026), many of the newer elements of the service have been funded by major grants like those from the National Lottery and the Scottish Government's Equally Safe programme. Local fundraising is also becoming a vital additional revenue source. Nevertheless, as with much Third Sector work today, funding remains insecure and uncertain, even as demand for services increases. Therefore, fundraising is now very definitely a necessary and pressing part of BWA's work.

### Strategic Objectives:

- Continue to seek out new potential funding streams.
- Continue to apply for appropriate national and local grants.
- Actively fundraise here at home to increase income through voluntary donations.
- Aim to increase support and awareness of our service by encouraging local business and organisations to make us their service of choice for their charity giving. In this regard, we will draw up a list of potential donors.
- Our recently appointed freelance Communications and PR consultant understands fundraising is a major part of her brief. Her experience and extensive local connections will facilitate this.

“Knowing that I was not alone and have support really lifted my spirits.”

**BWA Service User**

“I am more confident in my decisions regarding men and relationships.”

**BWA Service User**

“I still have a long way to go but BWA has helped me on my recovery journey.”

**BWA Service User**

## In conclusion

By implementing the plans outlined above, BWA has committed to continuing its transformative work of keeping women in the Scottish Borders safe and empowering them to live lives free from domestic abuse.

Here is what our service users and stakeholders can expect from the Strategic Plan 2024-2026.

### Service Users:

- Consistently high standards of service
- Innovation in service delivery in response to changing needs and what women really want
- Equal commitment to supporting ALL women
- Empowerment

### Stakeholders:

- A trusted partner
- A pipeline of powerful evidence-based ideas and innovation
- Continuous service evaluation
- Strong compliance and governance

This Strategic Plan provides a robust framework for managing change and navigating uncertainty, enabling BWA to continue to work towards fulfilling its mission according to its vision and values. We are a local organisation that has a deep vested interest in the women of our community and in our community as a whole.

“You put my head back on straight and made me feel less mad. I am more like me again and I love it.”

**BWA Service User**



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