

Border Women's Aid

Annual Report 2022-2023



BWA

Prepared by
Trustees & Staff
of BWA



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

#ChooseToChallenge



KEY SERVICE STATISTICS

22/23 Summary

3 Women

In Refuge

627 Days

Women Spent In Refuge

151 Women

Referred to Outreach Service

163 Women

Currently supported by
Outreach Service

For information on Income and Expenditure 2022-23,
please visit www.borderwomensaid.co.uk to view our
annual accounts.



22/23 ACTIVITIES

Strategic Plan 2022-25

The Board, in consultation with the staff, produced a strategic plan for 2022-25. The plan provides clear direction for Border Women's Aid, whilst allowing flexibility to adapt the service to meet the changing needs of women experiencing domestic abuse. We are pleased to report that we have completed our plan items that were planned for 2022 and are now progressing the remaining areas.

Find out more by reading the BWA Strategic Plan 2022-25 here:

<https://www.borderwomensaid.co.uk/about-strategic-plan/>



Refuge

We continued to support women in our refuge accommodation. Both houses have been upgraded to provide good quality temporary homes which are homely and comfortable, as well as meeting the safety needs of women fleeing domestic abuse. We encourage women to add individual personal touches and have implemented a pet policy should women want to bring pets into the refuge.

A House of Multiple Occupation (HMO) inspection was carried out and the HMO Certificate granted.

We continued to engage with partner agencies to enable disabled access accommodation should women require this. We approached SBC Homelessness Services with a plan to develop a protocol for BWA to access their adapted properties if required. A draft protocol is currently being prepared.

As an organisation we support LGBTQ+ women, so our Service Manager attended an LGBTQ+ Safer Sooner event in February, to help us respond effectively to requests for support.

During this reporting period, we had 92% occupancy. We continually monitored the refuge referrals, allowing us to consider our ongoing requirements and, crucially, guide us regarding refuge capacity and whether we need to increase it. By year end it was clear that our current refuge capacity was exactly what we needed. We will continue to monitor.



Read more about our refuge here:

<https://www.borderwomensaid.co.uk/help-services-refuge/>

Outreach

73% of our referrals were for outreach support, which represents a 15% increase in women accessing the outreach service. Our triaging system enabled us to respond to 87% of referrals within 24 hours. The remaining referrals were submitted over the weekend and attended to first thing on Monday morning.

Just over half were self-referrals, the rest from partner agencies including DAAS, Renew, Children 1st, Police Scotland and Health and Education services. The growing number of referrals from the VAWG partnership reflect 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.



"I honestly can't thank you enough for the support you have provided over the last few months, it made such a difference knowing that someone was there and on my side."

"Hand on heart, since I met you through Women's Aid, the release and relief that I'm not going crazy, flips my stomach and my heart. I have been trapped in a dark room with no light for countless years, the light and life is slowly but surely returning to me, I can't thank you enough."

"I wouldn't be where I am today if it wasn't for Karen and BWA. I have been given another shot (at life) and I will be forever grateful to BWA for this. When I didn't believe in myself, you did."

"From the first contact I felt respected and valued, even normal! This was really empowering. It honestly got my life back on track. Just to know someone was there willing and able to guide me through the minefields at the most difficult times was life affirming. 'Thank you' will never be enough."

"BWA understood my situation when other people and agencies didn't. They made it about the perpetrator and shifted the feelings of incompetence and being a victim to a competent survivor."

"Honestly, I really cannot - or want - to think of how things would have been like if I had not got in touch with them [BWA]. For starters, they made me realise the situation I was in. Looking back, I cannot believe how blind I was... They're so knowledgeable and experienced, I believe they understood my situation a lot better than I did!"

"Thanks to BWA - I now am living My life, My new chapter - rather than just existing and feeling invisible."

Own My Life

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 – is now fully operational and is now an integral part of our Outreach Service. We have run courses across the Borders, in Duns, Galashiels, Kelso and Selkirk, as well as online sessions. BWA now has three fully trained OML facilitators, with the intention that all our support staff will be trained to deliver OML sessions. One of its greatest benefits is that women who have undertaken the course have recognised the power of peer group support. Indeed, we have had such positive feedback from women about its effectiveness that we have made OML available to our partner agencies.

The National Lottery Community Fund will be continuing to fund this work from 1 April 2023.



“This course came at a time when I really needed it. It has enabled me to use my voice and speak about the things that have happened to me and I feel stronger and more confident.”

“So helpful. Made me realise I wasn’t ‘mad.’ Helped me almost retrain my brain to the way I thought and dealt with my own feelings regarding my old relationship. A must for anyone who needs help.”

“It’s helped me so, so much. So much. I didn’t understand anything before, but now I do, and I feel like I can move forward. And not just that, it’s given me the tools to avoid me falling into the same position again! Thank you SO MUCH to everyone that made it possible.”

“This course made an invaluable difference to my thoughts and feelings about myself, my experiences and my future. The support I received almost certainly prevented my suicide and improved our quality of life, myself and my son.”

“The amount of help and support this course has given me has no measure. I mean that. The course’s been my guide to a better life and a better understanding of myself and my trauma, and where I felt utterly lost and alone before, now I feel like I’m not alone and that I know where I’m going, even if it’s scary. So if you can help this course reach more people, please please PLEASE do so.”

One of our BWA facilitators has written:

“It’s amazing seeing the transformation in the women from start of OML group to end, they come in quiet and nervous but by end of 12 weeks are smiling and confident, they have their voices back, it is very humbling.”

Women's Involvement

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.

Locally, two women supported by BWA took part in the Scottish Borders Violence Against Women Partnership (VAWP) summit.

Nationally, a woman supported by BWA joined a focus group convened by Police Scotland to discuss and advise on police response to domestic abuse.

Women's feedback to BWA continued to shape and develop our service. In January 2023, we instigated a review process with women using the refuge and outreach services, giving a voice to women on the support we provide while they are still in the service. An action plan has been created to record and track the changes we've made in response to women's feedback.

Additional funding

BWA has had a successful funding year. We entered our final year of the major National Lottery and Robertson Trust grants. In addition, we have continued funding from the Scottish Government's Delivering Equally Safe, and new funding from Scottish Government's Waiting List Prevention. These days it is a sad fact of life that in order to build an effective service which meets the changing needs of women experiencing domestic abuse, and to develop the necessary educational and awareness raising services required to prevent domestic abuse in the future, writing grant applications is essential work, and we are grateful for our funders' crucial contributions which enable our work to continue and grow.

We have been very fortunate to receive significant donations over the period, and we want to express our gratitude to everyone who has donated. We thank the Stella Tennant Memorial Fund for a very substantial donation. We would also like to acknowledge the ongoing financial support from many local organisations and businesses who we have listed at the end of this document. It is particularly satisfying to see young Borderers getting involved in raising awareness of domestic abuse and its prevention. Earlston High and Jedburgh Grammar schools each raised £3,000 through the Young Philanthropist Initiative. As ever, individual Borderers have shown great generosity, even at a time of cost-of-living challenges.

All these donations allow us to build resilience into our service, so it does concern us that this level of donations might be difficult to sustain due to the ongoing financial crisis.

Staffing

We are pleased to report that the BWA staff team has been stable now for two years. The Board recognises how much the work has both expanded and become even more demanding in the past year, and how vital our support workers and their well-being are for the achievement of BWA's strategic aims, as laid down in our Strategic Plan, 2022-25. Regular supervisions, case reviews and training have resulted in a learning platform to share skills, knowledge and experience across the organisation, between staff, management and board. We now hold quarterly joint staff and board sessions. The first meeting in March 2023 included a discussion of BWA's financial structure and the proposed gender recognition reform and how this may impact BWA/women's spaces.

The Board, having recognised the impact the current financial crisis might be having on the staff, approved the payment of a winter bonus and salary uplift. A grant from the Work Wellbeing Fund enabled all 6 staff to enjoy a half-day spa session. "It means a lot to know that the board recognises the stresses of our work and the importance of our well-being. This is the first job where I felt my well-being is important and it means a lot. Thank you."

All staff attended training throughout the year, including: Risk Identification Checklist, Energy Advice, Drugs and Mental Health, Menopause Awareness, Under Pressure, Domestic Abuse in Older People, Embedding the Survivor Voice, Adult Support and Protection, Housing Support Services Webinar. Attending "At the Edge – women, vulnerabilities, and the cost-of-living crisis" helped them understand the impact of the current financial crisis on women's lives. Staff undertook the Thistle Foundation's Good Conversations training to render staff confident in conducting outcomes-focused conversations in difficult situations.

To increase our effectiveness as an organisation, we introduced the Xero accountancy system which has greatly improved our capabilities for overseeing our financial position and budgets.

Our service manager and admin officer received training from Evaluation Support Scotland, leading to a much better understanding and knowledge of how evaluation enhances organisational effectiveness.

Two support workers undertook Own My Life facilitator training.

The team leader completed Escape the Trap training. This is enabling continued development of the service to include prevention/education to young people in schools and youth organisations.

BWA has supported the placements of 3 students, who are working in the fields of midwifery, social work and criminology.

Volunteer engagement has increased. Volunteers support staff with OML groups, run craft groups for women, provide support with taking care of the refuge, and take part in awareness-raising of domestic abuse and the service BWA provides.

Raising our voice: awareness-raising

Given the challenges we face as a service and knowing that domestic abuse and coercive abuse continue to grow, and often are hidden, raising our voice is essential, so that people across the Scottish Borders know us and what we offer. With the aim of increasing our awareness-raising we set up a working group consisting of trustees and three staff members, to develop a BWA Communications Strategy and Policy. These documents are in the process of being finalised.

In January 2023, we launched our new website <https://www.borderwomensaid.co.uk>. It is designed not only to direct women wanting help and support but also to function as an educational resource on domestic violence in all its forms.

We updated our posters to include the LGBTQ+ logo to signal our inclusivity, and premiered our second film made in collaboration with Alchemy Arts and young people across the Borders. *"He loves me, he loves me not"* can be viewed at <https://www.borderwomensaid.co.uk/help-young-people/>

We have taken every opportunity to spread the word with in-person presentations and frequent postings on social media. We were welcomed at Borders College freshers' event to run a workshop on the theme of respect and healthy relationships, as well as presenting at Heriot Watt University's Mental Health and Wellbeing Day. As part of our contribution to 16 Days of Action (UN's global campaign against violence to women and children) we ran a workshop with young people at the Escape Café in Hawick. We visited the workplaces of organisations and businesses who have donated. We led an information session on Own My Life to NHS Midwives, and presented at the Salvation Army's annual Christmas carol service. We worked with S3 and S4 students on the Young Philanthropist initiative.

In November 2022, Rachael Hamilton met with staff to find out more about our work and to discuss the implications of the proposed Gender Recognition Reform (Scotland) Bill for that work. In a subsequent parliamentary debate at Holyrood, she complimented BWA on its work.

We continued to advocate with our partner agencies.



What have we learned this year?

Feedback from the women who use the service reassures us that our holistic, person-centred approach to surviving domestic abuse really works. And moreover, that bringing women with similar experiences together has many benefits – in particular, the value of shared understanding and peer support.

Reflecting on Scottish Women's Aid RISE report on young women facing abuse in their intimate relationships, to which BWA contributed, we've identified a gap in our service. The report highlighted the fact that young people did not think Women's Aid and its services were for them, due to the language used to frame the relationship issues. Consequently, this year we have started to build resources more appropriate for this age group and now have a facilitator trained to deliver Escape the Trap, which is specifically designed for young people. We have also affiliated with Youth Borders. BWA has resolved to make prevention work like this a priority in coming years.

Challenges

When advertising vacant positions, the sharp drop in interest continues to be a challenge. This is in line with recruiting experiences across the public sector. Another is the ongoing funding insecurity, which makes planning and implementation difficult. We take some comfort in knowing these are challenges shared by every organisation in the sector right across the nation.

This year has been a very busy but productive year for BWA. Much has been achieved, so we are hopefully on track to realise our strategic plans for the coming couple of years. So, despite the current financial crisis and other uncertainties, we feel encouraged and optimistic. A massive thank you to everyone who has helped us achieve such a positive year - staff, management, board, donors, partner agencies and other stakeholders, and above all the women who have reached out to us for support.



Our thanks to:

Lodge St John No 104
Lodge St John 32, Selkirk
Fundraiser in memory of Stella Tennant
YPI Scotland via Jedburgh Grammar
Jean Wood (Scotland's Garden Scheme)
Newcastleton Coffee Morning
Andrew & Natalie Collins
William Purves Funeral Directors
Dryburgh District Churches
Carolyn Quinn/Carla Basu Camino Way Walk Fundraiser
Border Sovereign Chapter 24
The Plough Inn Yetholm Pub Quiz Fundraisers
Oxnam Water Ladies OWLS
YPI Scotland via Earlston HS
Salvation Army
Plexus Kelso

And to everyone who donated anonymously to BWA

