Border Women's Aid

Annual Report

2025-2026

"Border Women's Aid stands for kindness, strength, and the belief that women deserve to feel safe and respected."



Prepared by Staff & Trustees of BWA
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Introduction

As Chair of Border Women's Aid, I am pleased to present our Annual Report for 2025-26.

This year has been one of both achievement and challenge. Across Scotland, domestic abuse continues to affect the lives of thousands of women and children, and the Scottish Borders is no exception. Behind every statistic is a woman seeking safety, support and the opportunity to rebuild her life free from abuse. Border Women's Aid exists to ensure that no woman has to face that journey alone.

During the year we supported increasing numbers of women through our outreach and refuge services, continued to deliver the Own My Life programme, expanded our prevention work with young people, and strengthened our partnerships across the region. The stories and experiences shared throughout this report are a powerful reminder of the difference that our support can make.

I would like to extend my sincere thanks to our dedicated staff team, volunteers and trustees. Their professionalism, compassion and commitment ensure that women experiencing domestic abuse receive the support they need at some of the most difficult moments in their lives. I would also like to thank our funders, partners and supporters whose continued confidence in our work enables us to deliver these vital services.

As a Board, we are proud of what has been achieved, but we remain alert to the challenges ahead. Demand for services continues to grow, the needs of the women we support are increasingly complex, and the financial pressures facing the third sector remain significant. Ensuring the long-term sustainability of our services while maintaining the quality and accessibility of support will continue to be a key priority for the Board.

Looking ahead, we will focus on securing sustainable funding, supporting our staff and volunteers, strengthening survivor involvement, progressing quality and governance initiatives, and continuing to work collaboratively with partners to prevent domestic abuse and improve outcomes for women and children across the Scottish Borders.

Finally, I want to thank every woman who has trusted Border Women's Aid to support her. Your courage, resilience and determination inspire everything we do.

Together, we remain committed to a future where all women and children can live safe, empowered lives free from domestic abuse.

Sharon Thomas
Chair, Border Women's Aid

About BWA

BWA provides specialist support to women and their children living with domestic abuse. We recognise that women are experts in their own lives, so we are led by what women themselves want from a support service. Our women-only spaces provide a physically and emotionally safe environment which is vital to survivors' safety and recovery, aim to reduce their isolation, and enable them to develop peer support networks. As they rebuild their lives, we continue to provide support by sourcing community activities and enabling involvement and belonging, thus empowering women towards a better future.

"Thank you from the bottom of my heart for everything you have done and still continue to do!! I wish it was more than 5 stars I could rate you!"



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...



How We Supported Our Community

6 Women and 8 Children

accommodated in refuge

473 Days

of safe accommodation provided

232 Women

referred to Outreach Service

215 Women

supported by Outreach Service

37 women

completed the Own My Life course

60 young people

completed the Escape the TRAP programme in school

For information on Income and Expenditure 2025-2026, please visit www.borderwomensaid.co.uk to view our annual accounts.

Police Scotland recently published the latest figures for domestic abuse incidents. In 2024-25, 64,967 incidents were recorded, an increase of 2% on the previous year. Four out of 5 of the victims were female and 89% of those incidents occurred in the home.

In line with this national picture, Border Women's Aid continued to deliver support to ever-increasing numbers of women in the Scottish Borders experiencing domestic abuse. The good news is that, thanks to the dedication and professionalism of our team, together with support from our funding partners and the community at large, BWA has been able to meet the challenge.

Yet there remains so much work to be done.

Domestic abuse is not a woman problem but a community problem. The women living with it are in our towns and villages, isolated homes, our schools, clubs and workplaces. They are our neighbours, colleagues, friends and family. The individuals responsible for the abuse live around us as well.

"No woman or girl should ever have to feel unsafe in her own home, and we must do more to tackle domestic abuse in our society. Too often, it happens behind closed doors, and in every part of our community. I will continue to do all I can in the Borders to stamp out this appalling crime."

[John Lamont, Scottish Borders MP]



Find out more by reading the BWA Strategic Plan 2024-26 here:
https://www.borderwomensaid.co.uk/about-strategic-plan/

Some highlights of our year



Q1 April - June

- **Prevention:** Delivered Escape the TRAP at Berwickshire High School
- **Partnership Working:** visit from new Social Work Assistants to raise awareness of BWA's work
- **Own My Life:** commenced in Galashiels and on ZOOM
- **Awareness-Raising Events/Visits**: Women's Wellness Day Kelso; Mental Health Awareness Week event; Peebles High School; Innerleithen Rotary Club; Eyemouth Women's Group; Mental Health Older Adults Team Meeting
- **Networking**: Scottish Women's Aid National Conference

Q2 July - September

- **Staff:** New Support Worker joined the team; plus, two new volunteers with hypnotherapy and Life Coach skills
- **Trustees:** new trustee joined BWA Board
- **Service User Involvement:** STV News interviews to support Prevention of Domestic Abuse (Scotland) Bill
- **Awareness-Raising**: BWA meeting with Pam Gosal MSP for West Scotland to discuss her Private Member's Bill: Prevention of Domestic Abuse (Scotland) Bill
- **Professionalism:** National Quality Service Standards (NQSS) pilot session with Scottish Women's Aid
- **Partnership Working:** Safe Lives MARAC workshop

Q3 October - December

- **Staff Training:** Trauma Informed Approaches Community of Practice event
- **Partnership Working:** BWA Team Meetings attended by Children 1st Team Leader, The Wise Group and Criminal Justice Social Work Team Leader
- **Awareness-Raising:** 16 Days "Do Your Bit to Stop Domestic Abuse in the Scottish Borders" Pledge Campaign launched
- **Service User Involvement:** hosted 'Community Conversations" session with SBC to enable women to have a say on Council Plan and Budget

Q4 January - March

- **Funding:** awarded £40,000 over 2 years by Borders Community Action; new application submitted to National Lottery
- **Donation/Awareness-Raising:** Kelso HS students secured a £3000 grant for BWA through the Youth Philanthropy Initiative and raised awareness among young people
- **Awareness-Raising:** BWA invited by Social Security Scotland to take part in research; participated in SBC Community-Led Support event at Borders General Hospital.
- **Partnership Working:** Body-Worn Video session with Police Scotland; Nurture the Borders attended BWA Team Meeting
- **Own My Life:** commenced in Hawick and via Zoom
- **Staff Training:** ACAS Getting the Best out of Neurodiverse Workers and Unlocking Potential

Refuge

Our refuge consists of two private, independent units. With the participation of the women and our local Violence Against Women and Girls partners, we continually review this arrangement to ensure it meets the needs of the women and children who live there, and that they align with our 'whole woman' approach.

In addition, we have an agreement with Scottish Borders Housing Association, one of our local housing providers, that, if suitable housing is available, they will provide adapted housing for any woman we support with additional physical needs.

During this reporting period, we supported 6 women and 8 children in the refuge for a total of 473 days. This represented 65% occupancy, and the longest stay was 150 days.

"[Refuge was] 100% and being able to have respite, with the stress of not having to worry about money and catch my breath, having access to having someone to speak to when needed, regular support. Knowing that someone was going to come in which helped me feel safer as I had thoughts that someone might try and kill me as this was the threats I received. I like the support at the weekends too. I don't think I would be in the position I am in without BWA."



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

Outreach

Six years on, BWA's Outreach Service is now well established, and demand for this service continues to grow. Referrals have risen from 27 in 2020-2021, the year the service was established, to 232 in 2025-2026. Of these referrals, 215 then received on-going support from the Outreach Service (a 15% increase on the previous year), demonstrating that more women than ever need our help.

Our data over 6 years show that consistently over 50% of referrals come from women seeking help for themselves, with the other half coming from our partner agencies in the Scottish Borders Violence Against Women Partnership (VAWP) and other external agencies. The growing number of referrals from partner agencies reflects not just the growing numbers of women needing help in the Borders, but the increased financial pressures in services across the region. They also recognise that BWA uniquely offers a specialist, holistic approach to women experiencing domestic abuse. BWA is the only Borders organisation that helps women who need longer-term support to recover from their trauma.

"I found the [Outreach] support invaluable. I cannot express in words just how much BWA has helped. They listened, educated and gave me tools to get on with my life."

These raw figures don't even begin to tell the whole story. There is a clear trend that our team is increasingly supporting women presenting with more complex needs, in particular those referred by mental health services, together with women affected by post-separation abuse, court and child contact issues, or immigration problems, and who may lack Recourse to Public Funds.

The National Lottery Community Fund continued to support our Outreach Service, but the Scottish Government Waiting List Prevention grant ended in March 2025.



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

Case Study

Here is a case which reflects how our OUTREACH SERVICE is changing:

We had a referral to our outreach service from a central service after a woman was rehoused in the Scottish Borders following police and social work intervention due to child protection and domestic abuse incidents. BWA are supporting her while her application for asylum is processed. During a service review, she provided the following feedback on her support from BWA:

"BWA and you (her support worker) worked your magic and everything just seemed to get done in the first meeting. You got my medicines, the clothes swap, gifts and the book you gave me really helped. I felt so alone the first week, then I met you. You never once judged me for being an asylum seeker, you made me feel I belonged...I don't know where I'd be without you taking me under your wing and being so non-judgemental. There are so many people who judge people like me and you never made me feel like this."



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

Own My Life (OML)

Own My Life (OML), an "understanding domestic abuse" programme, is now a firmly established part of the Outreach Service. Six groups met in person and online in 12 weekly sessions in Galashiels and Hawick. The online sessions were created as a direct response to what women requested, so that they could attend sessions around work or familial duties.

OML enables recovery through shared learning and mutual support, and it has created a powerful social network for sharing experiences, practical advice and information. Some OML attendees have gone on to complete the SBC Employability Service women-only project "Your Future – Reclaim and Rebuild". The programme includes opportunities for women to gain accredited qualifications in Improving Wellbeing, Employability First Steps and Responsibilities of Employment. Others were allocated key workers for employability support.

In February 2026, BBC2 aired *Lover, Liar, Predator,* a powerful documentary which explored the chilling reality of coercive control and how four brave women finally succeeded in getting their serial abuser convicted. One of the women featured is Natalie Collins, the victim-survivor of domestic abuse who devised OML. One of the other women featured in the film had been supported by BWA. National Lottery Community Fund funded OML until March 2026. We are currently seeking new funding so that this important work can continue.

We asked participants what they found most valuable about OML. The following responses reflect what many women told us about taking part:

"Making connections with brilliant, strong women and feeling less alone because of similar experiences. The pace and structure of the course were brilliant and I gained a lot including from the hardest parts of the course."

"The inspiring stories from other women and the comfort of learning I'm not alone. The strength and confidence the leaders helped us to find."

Escape the TRAP

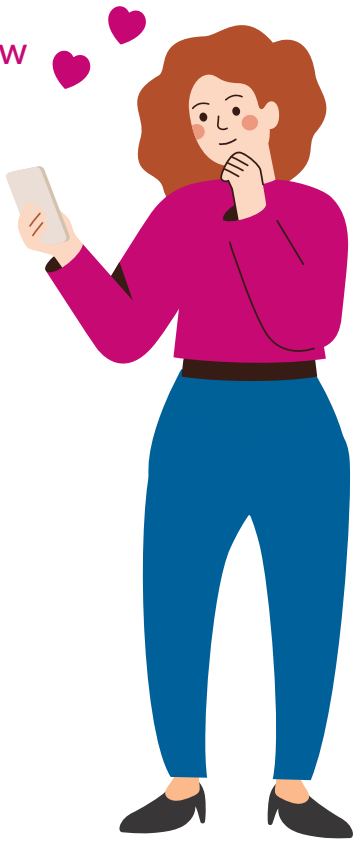
BWA also sees prevention as an important additional strand to the service, an investment to prevent future abuse. Escape the TRAP (Teenage Relationship Abuse Programme) is specifically designed to help all young people, however they identify, to recognise the difference between a healthy relationship and an unhealthy one, and to understand how coercive and controlling behaviour negatively affects their lives.

In 2025-26, 60 young people completed the 8-week ETT course at Berwickshire High School. Our "lived-experience" volunteer, Eve, told her story and many of the young people said this was the most valuable aspect of the course. Social media has provided many more opportunities for coercive control and other forms of abuse, especially amongst the young. By the end of the course, 71% of those who participated said they felt confident to spot the signs of abusive behaviour early on in a relationship.

"I think at this age not enough people know about abuse. Now I know what to do."

"It taught me what to avoid when dating someone."

"It was very helpful in creating insight into abuse and teaches you how to get help and support."



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

Our People

This year we welcomed a new trustee to our Board.

Anna joined our Board in August. Originally from the Scottish Borders, now living and working in Glasgow, Anna is a Senior Solicitor at Latta & Co. Solicitors. Her role includes regularly advising and supporting women who have experienced gender-based violence, including those who are victims of commercial sexual exploitation. Anna's work also includes providing legal support to asylum seekers, many suffering from complex mental health difficulties due to their traumatic experiences.

"I joined BWA as a board member in August 2025. As a legal aid solicitor, I work closely with women affected by domestic abuse and have witnessed the deep impact that domestic abuse has on all aspects of a woman's life. At the same time, I have witnessed the extraordinary resilience of these women in the face of such trauma. These experiences motivated me to apply to join the BWA board.

It is tempting to believe that domestic abuse is an issue that society has managed to move past. The reality however is that domestic abuse remains a widespread issue across society, often taking subtle forms. The support that BWA provides to women is therefore crucial in ensuring that women experiencing these issues can be supported to recover from their experiences and regain their independence. I feel very privileged to play a small role in supporting the incredible work of the BWA team."

Danielle is a long-standing volunteer for our service. She completed the Own My Life programme as part of her healing journey and subsequently took part in a podcast with OML creator, Natalie Collins who was so impressed with her passion for the course she offered her a place on the Facilitators training! Danielle is now an integral part of the OML facilitating team for BWA.

"Border Women's Aid gave me something I really needed at a difficult time, support, understanding, and a safe space where I felt listened to. They helped me feel less alone and reminded me that my voice mattered. To me, Border Women's Aid is about more than providing a service, it is about giving women the confidence to believe in themselves, rebuild their lives, and know that they are not alone. It stands for kindness, strength, and the belief that women deserve to feel safe and respected. And I feel lucky to be a part of that cause through volunteering."

Carol joined our volunteer team more recently but already her enthusiasm for our work has proved invaluable. If you've spotted one of our posters in your local area, Carol almost certainly put it there! She also provides women with emotional and practical peer support wherever it is needed.

"Because of the support and knowledge gained from attending OML, I offered to volunteer with BWA and now offer peer support. I attend the Own My Life courses and am happy to share my experiences with each group of women who come along. I also meet with a couple of women on a one-to-one basis for a chat and also find this very rewarding. The support I have received, and continue to receive, from BWA has, I believe, helped me to regain control of my life and improve my confidence to move forward. I am only too happy to continue volunteering and hopefully give something back"

At BWA, volunteers are a vital part of our team. We highly value their contributions, whether as a member of the board, helping us to deliver services, or fundraising and raising awareness of our work in the community. Volunteering increases the range of skills, diversity and perspective within our organisation. It is also a fantastic way to gain skills and work experience, and there is lots of training on offer so that one can learn and develop.

We encourage women from all sections of the community to volunteer.

If you would like to learn more about this, please don't hesitate to contact us.



Partnership working

BWA continued to play a key role in the local 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 levels, and continued to identify ways we can work together.

Our commitment to partnership collaboration is reflected in our meetings with other members of VAWP, NHS, mental health organisations, Police Scotland, etc. We enjoyed awareness-raising visits from/to new social work assistants, the Mental Health Older Adults team, Children 1st, The Wise Group, Criminal Justice Social Work, and Nurture the Borders.

We worked across the board with local businesses, community groups, schools, and colleges of higher education, including Kelso and Peebles High Schools, the Rotary Club, and local women's groups. Some of our women attended a "Community Conversations" session with SBC enabling them to have a say on the Council Plan and Budget.

At a national level, we attended the Scottish Women's Aid National Conference and were invited by Social Security Scotland to take part in research. We were particularly pleased to have a meeting with Pam Gosal, MSP for West Scotland, to discuss her Private Member's 'Prevention of Domestic Abuse (Scotland) Bill'. A woman who was supported in our service was interviewed by STV about this proposed bill.



RAISING OUR VOICES

Pledge Campaign



On 25th November 2025 we launched our Pledge "Do Your Bit to Stop Domestic Abuse in the Scottish Borders." The associated post on social media was our most viewed one, with 3210 hits.

Every week in Scotland, a woman is killed by her partner or ex-partner (source: STV News, 2023). Every day, women across the Borders are living with fear. Controlled by their partner. Trapped by threats, shame or the fear of speaking out. Some will be blamed for staying and many won't be believed.

We highlighted the fact that hundreds of domestic abuse incidents are reported annually in the Borders, but thousands more go unreported. Behind each number is a woman whose life is being destroyed by physical and emotional torture. Many are raising children in the middle of it, who often suffer deep trauma as a result. These women are hiding in plain sight. We already know many of them, and we know their partners too.

This campaign is about showing women and girls that they're not alone, and reminding the rest of us that we all have a part to play in stopping domestic abuse in the Scottish Borders, and that together, we can help stop domestic abuse in our community. By the 31st December 2025, 134 people had signed the pledge and 77 signed up to receive our quarterly newsletter. A number of supporters not only signed the pledge but gave a donation or committed to regular monthly donations.

If you want to be involved by signing the pledge go to:
https://www.borderwomensaid.co.uk/pledge/

"I'm doing my bit ... to stop domestic abuse in the Scottish Borders."

Sign the Pledge

"I wanted to give something back to BWA for the help and support I received last year. Honestly cannot thank all at BWA enough!"

[Woman supported by BWA now donating £10 p/m by D/D]

"Keep up the amazing work you all do. This service is vital in giving people hope, giving them the support they might not even know they need, and giving them their lives back. No one should suffer domestic abuse. We all retain the right to live and fulfil our lives in meaningful ways. Let's choose to lift each other up, and make the most of life."

[This man signed the pledge and made a £100 donation]

"I'm doing my bit ...

Funding

Like most organisations in the Third Sector doing valuable community work, funding is a continual challenge. Financial uncertainty has made essential an increased focus on the hugely time-consuming task of grant applications and other forms of fundraising. We are constantly on the lookout for additional sources of income. As a result, BWA is sustained by a portfolio of grants from both governmental and non-governmental sources.

In the current year, we were successful with our funding application with Borders Community Action, our first time applying to this organisation. They awarded us £40,000 over 2 years from their Mental Health and Wellbeing Fund. An application to the National Lottery Fairer Life Chances fund for our outreach service was submitted on 10th February 2026.

https://www.borderwomensaid.co.uk/news/news/bwa-receives-community-mental-health-and-wellbeing-grant-funding/

At year-end, here is a list, including status, of the grants which support out work:

1st YEAR

2nd YEAR

FINAL YEAR

Borders Community Action – first year

CORRA/Henry Duncan – second year

The Robertson Trust – second year

Delivering Equally Safe – final year

NLCF – final year

Housing Benefit (SBC) – ongoing

Housing Support Grant (SBC) – ongoing

Borders Community Action

CORRA FOUNDATION voice • power • change

The ROBERTSON Trust

DELIVERING EQUALLY SAFE

Scottish Borders COUNCIL

COMMUNITY FUND

Thank You!!

We would like to say a huge 'thank you' once again to everyone who has helped to make 2025-26 another rewarding year for BWA – our staff, management, board members, funders, partner agencies and other stakeholders, and above all to the women who reached out to us for support. And not forgetting the members of our Borders community who support us through fund raising initiatives, donations, volunteering, signing our pledge, and otherwise speaking out against domestic abuse. We end the year feeling encouraged and optimistic, determined to do more and do better, taking the service to the next level.

In the words of our pledge, we are all doing our bit to stop domestic abuse in the Scottish Borders.

"From the age of 16 to 21 I experienced domestic violence. There was no refuge then, no one talked about it, I even wondered if it was normal. I know how hard it can be to leave, thankfully there were no children involved. I think it's important for women to know there is life beyond the abuse, ok, it took a long time to learn to trust and not flinch, but I got there, married a good man and had a family. I try to keep things local so found your details and sent a few quid. Thank you for the vital service you provide."

[S., aged 69]



Our thanks go to every individual who has donated big or small and also:

EQ Accountants Charitable Trust

Lady Tennant and Presents Galore

Borders Sovereign Chapter No24

Jean Wood via Scotland's Garden Scheme

Selkirk Sheriff Court Tea Bar

Rotary Club of Innerleithen

U3 Band

One Acchord Ladies Choir

Barrie Benevolent

Your support makes a real difference!



A Reflection on 2025-26 from our Service Manager

The past year has been another significant one for Border Women's Aid. Across our services, we have continued to see the devastating impact of domestic abuse on women, children and young people across the Scottish Borders, alongside growing demand and complexity. Many women accessing our support face multiple and interconnected challenges, including deteriorating mental health, financial hardship, housing insecurity and ongoing coercive control, reinforcing the need for timely, compassionate and specialist support.

Despite these challenges, our team has delivered exceptional support with professionalism, dedication and empathy. From crisis support to the Own My Life programme and partnership working, their commitment is evident in the difference they make for women, children and young people.

This year has also strengthened collaborative working across our region. We are grateful to our statutory and third-sector partners, whose support helps improve access, raise awareness and contribute to wider efforts to prevent violence against women and girls.

At the heart of our work are the women who place their trust in us. Their strength, resilience and determination continue to inspire our team. The stories shared throughout this report demonstrate not only the impact of domestic abuse but also the positive outcomes that can be achieved when women receive the right support at the right time. Our collaborative, person-centred, "whole woman" approach enables women to regain safety, confidence and control over their lives.

Looking ahead, demand, funding pressures and increasingly complex needs will continue to shape our work. We will focus on delivering high-quality services, supporting our staff, strengthening survivor voices and securing the resources needed so women and children across the Scottish Borders can access specialist support when they need it most.

I would like to thank our staff, volunteers, trustees, partners and funders for their ongoing commitment to Border Women's Aid. Also, huge thanks to all those in our community who fundraise and make donations whether it be money or useful items like furniture and toiletries. Most importantly, I want to thank the women who have shared their experiences and allowed us to be part of their journey. It is a privilege to support them, and their courage continues to drive our work every day.

Carol Walker
Service Manager



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