



women's aid

until women & children are safe

"I'm a survivor because  
of Women's Aid."

Dawn Lee

# Annual Review

2015-2016

**150** active  
Campaign Champions,  
many of them survivors  
of domestic abuse

More than **12,200**  
women and their children have  
been supported to access refuge  
accommodation via the National  
Domestic Violence Helpline (run  
in partnership with Refuge)

Over **72,000**  
Twitter followers  
(an increase of 130% from  
last year)

**30,000**  
signatures on our Child  
First campaign petition

Until women & children are safe,  
we are here.

Over **221,000**  
calls were made to the 24-  
hour Freephone National  
Domestic Violence Helpline  
which provides a safe and  
confidential service to  
survivors

**20,600**  
Facebook followers  
(an increase of 67% from  
last year)

Over **1000** frontline police  
officers have been trained by our  
National Training Centre

Around **220** local organisations  
are members of our Federation



# Welcome

Many months ago now, the Women's Aid Board of Trustees took a difficult and brave decision. We heard overwhelming evidence from survivors themselves and from our Federation of local services that agencies across the public sector and beyond still fail to listen to survivors, meet their needs, or support them to achieve long term recovery and independence. So we decided to invest Women's Aid's precious reserves in developing a ground-breaking new model.

The result was Change that Lasts, and we ended the 2014/15 financial year (after a long journey) finally in a position to start piloting the approach, thanks to the Big Lottery Fund, the government, Public Health England and the Lankelly Chase Foundation.

Building on the 40-year experience and expertise of our local services, Change that Lasts puts the strengths and needs of women at the centre of decisions about them and their families (find out more on page 16-17).

Watch this space. We have more to learn as we go, of course, but we are determined to show what meeting survivors' needs really means.

**Femi Otitoju and Beverley Pass,**  
Co-Chairs

Thanks to the support we receive from survivors of domestic abuse themselves, including our Survivor Ambassadors, and from our Federation of local services, we have seen our influence grow over the past year.

Perhaps most important, our continued campaign to save life-saving refuges and other specialist services from further closure resulted in the government announcing an additional £40 million funding for domestic abuse services.

In partnership with courageous survivor Claire Throssell, whose two sons were killed by their father who had been given unsupervised contact despite a known history of domestic abuse, we launched our Child First campaign to put children's safety back at the heart of decisions in the family courts.

We saw the new criminal offence of coercive and controlling behaviour come into force – and increased awareness and understanding of coercive control through our advisory role with BBC Radio 4's *The Archers* and other campaigning.

Change takes time and joint effort. Local services still face closure and devastating cuts in some areas. We've proved we can make change happen. If you want to be part of it, join our network of Campaign Champions, also launched this year. Or support our work financially by becoming a Key Supporter. Survivors need us all.

**Polly Neate, Chief Executive**

## Objective # 1

Supporting survivors and working with them to improve awareness and understanding of coercive control.

"...it's the 'emotional abuse' that tortures us most."

Facebook community comment

This year, we have continued to provide a range of lifeline services to women and children experiencing domestic abuse.

Over 221,000 calls were made to the 24-hour Freephone **National Domestic Violence Helpline** (run in partnership with Refuge) which provides a safe and confidential service to survivors. Over 38,100 professionals, family and friends of survivors were provided with advice and information.

Helpline staff also responded to over 3,700 emails from both survivors and professionals supporting them.

More than 12,200 women and their children have been supported to access refuge accommodation via the helpline.

This could not happen without **UKRefugesOnline (UKROL)**, our unique, secure online database of around 460 domestic and sexual abuse services across the UK.

With it, helpline workers and other domestic abuse professionals are able to find spaces in refuges and other services across the country.



*“At the time I was hanging off a cliff and you held me by that tiny thread and it changed my life forever.”*

*Caller to Helpline*

We also redeveloped the **Survivors’ Forum**, a safe online space where survivors can share their experiences, support each other and get expert support from our trained workers as well.

This year we improved the Forum based on what survivors told us they would like.

*“Sometimes what we need to know the most is that we are not alone in this. I have found that knowledge through this forum, which I am so grateful for. We do not win this fight alone, we win it by fighting alongside other people.”*

*Survivors’ Forum member*

We campaigned hard for the new criminal offence of coercive and controlling behaviour, which came into force in December 2015. The new law provides better protection to victims experiencing repeated or continuous abuse. We are now working with domestic abuse professionals and communities to recognise controlling behaviour and support victims.

Our new **National Survivors' Participation Panel** is a group of women working together to ensure that survivors' voices are heard and believed, can influence policy and practice within the voluntary and statutory sectors, and inform local and national government thinking. The women come from all walks of life and all over England.

“Contributing to the work of Women's Aid at the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Domestic Violence was empowering and therapeutic. Women's Aid literally saves lives, including my own.”

National Survivors' Participation Panel Member



## “The Archers Effect” – a 17% increase in Helpline calls at the height of the coercive control storyline

We're proud to have advised on the domestic abuse storyline for popular BBC Radio 4 soap *The Archers* which highlighted the insidious nature of coercive control and its corrosive effect on victims.

Millions of listeners tuned in to hear what would happen to Helen as she faced the coercive and controlling abuse of her husband Rob.

The storyline has led to more women coming forward to access our services and find the help they need.

“I met with Louiza [Patikas], who plays Helen, to help her understand and convey Helen's experience of coercive control and domestic abuse. It is vital that domestic abuse is portrayed clearly, in all its ugliness – and *The Archers* has not shied away from that.”

Mandy Thomas, Women's Aid Survivor Ambassador



“It made me feel very strongly that if I was in the situation I was in a few years back and I watched this, I would understand that I needed to get help... hopefully other people will too.”

Young survivor advisor on #lovedontfeelbad

On Valentine’s Day we launched **#lovedontfeelbad**, an online resource supported by Avon, to help young women recognise controlling behaviour and spark discussion about what is acceptable in relationships, raising awareness of what healthy relationships and love really look like.

Chlo Winfield, a survivor and member of our Young Person’s Advisory Board, advised on the development of a new website and set of films, produced with support from Avon, to support the campaign: [www.lovedontfeelbad.co.uk](http://www.lovedontfeelbad.co.uk)

We also worked with Avon to create a toolkit for parents to help them recognise if their child is being controlled by their partner, help them to talk about healthy behaviour in relationships, and know where to go if they or their child need help.



“Sexual bullying and name-calling often goes unchallenged in schools but it all contributes to the idea that it’s okay for young men to have that power over young women. We need to learn about gender-stereotypes, about things like everyday sexism and how it oppresses women, about respectful relationships and consent. And young people need to know that if someone is making them feel afraid in a relationship, afraid they’re going to hurt them or afraid to disobey them, it’s not normal and it’s never their fault.”

Chlo, young survivor

## Objective #2

Strengthening local services and highlighting the barriers women face.

“We cannot allow specialist domestic abuse services to close, as for many women they are the best chance of getting to safety and freedom.”

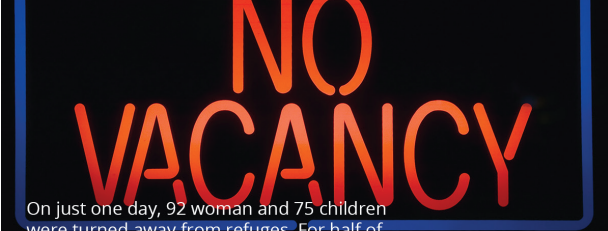
Zlakha Ahmed, Chief Executive  
of Women's Aid member service Apna Haq



Our Annual Survey of domestic abuse services in England is the largest collection of such data in the country, giving invaluable insights into the work of specialist services and the experiences and needs of the women and children they support.

Our 2015 survey highlighted the diversity and complex needs of survivors, and showed that services are increasingly struggling to meet these needs in the face of commissioning practices by public sector funders that look for low cost alternatives, as well as increasingly limiting support only to women who report abuse to the police and are then assessed as “high risk”.

To understand better why women with complex needs are falling through this net, we launched a new project, **No Woman Turned Away**, to reduce the barriers facing survivors when trying to access support. Funded by the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG), the project is staffed by a small team of case workers who work alongside the National Domestic Violence Helpline and UKROL to help more women on their journey to specialist support.



On just one day, 92 women and 75 children were turned away from refuges. For half of those women, this was because there was not enough space for them at the refuge.

Based on responses from 129 service providers in September 2015  
Source: Women's Aid Annual Survey 2015

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Only 1 in 5 of women using refuge services on census day had any criminal sanctions or an ongoing criminal case against the perpetrator.

Out of 1,864 women, 129 services requested  
Source: Women's Aid Annual Survey 2015

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**1,984** children and young people were being directly supported by **98** community-based services in just one week in 2015.

Source: Women's Aid Annual Survey 2015



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They are also collecting detailed data on survivor journeys and the barriers they encounter so we can identify gaps in service provision. Learning and evidence from this project will inform the government's planning and allocation of funds.

The survey also found half of local services said that the most challenging issues they faced were funding cuts and uncertainty about future funding.

This year we have continued to share our expertise on domestic abuse, train professionals in how they can best support survivors, and work with employers and communities on prevention and awareness-raising.

We worked with the Royal College of Policing to train over 1,000 first response officers and 200 coaches and supervisors on coercive control and domestic abuse.

43 specialist domestic abuse workers were successful in completing the National Certificate and were registered with the title **Domestic Abuse Prevention Advocate (DAPA)**.

Ten prison wardens from Holloway Prison were trained to facilitate our **Power to Change** programme so they can run domestic abuse support groups for survivors in the prison.

In partnership with Imkaan, which supports specialist services run by and for Black and minority ethnic women, we launched the **Sustainability Partnership**, funded by the Lloyd's Bank Foundation, which strengthens the capacity of independent, specialist domestic abuse services, and helps them to survive.



Women's Aid Integrated Services (Nottingham) receive the Women's Aid Quality Mark

“On Track is an easy to use system that will allow you to understand your service and show how lives have changed.”

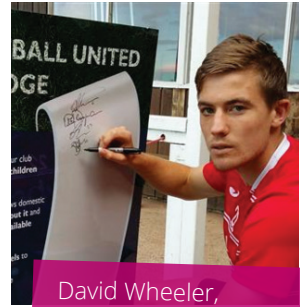
Jo Gough, RISE (Brighton)

Women's Aid and Imkaan also offer practical support, advice and guidance to commissioners about service user needs in local areas and how they can commission appropriate services to meet it. We have developed **On Track** as part of the Sustainability Partnership, a bespoke case management system that has been coproduced with input from survivors, frontline workers, commissioners and academics.

The new system enables local services to gather data on who uses their services, what support

they offered and what difference their support makes. This improves the survivors' support, and also helps services identify gaps, share what works best, and report on the quality of their work to attract new funding.

Our **National Quality Standard** is a quality mark for Women's Aid services that identifies and rewards best practice and ensures consistent quality of service delivery by accredited providers across England. During the year, 21 more services were awarded the Women's Aid Quality Mark.



David Wheeler,  
Exeter City player

## We're working with communities to prevent domestic abuse

We have continued our work with schools through the **Safer Futures** project to ensure that respectful relationships education is delivered responsibly and effectively.

Over 630 professionals have taken part in workshops since the project launched in 2014, including teachers.

The workshops identify the work which is already happening in schools, find the gaps, build networks, brief professionals on educational resources and good practice, and recruit Schools Advocates to act as local champions for prevention work in schools.

We supply **Expect Respect** resources on healthy relationships and a lesson plan for every age group from reception through to year 13.

“In the UK, in any one year, more than 20% of employed women take time off work due to domestic violence, 20% of those have been absent for more than a month.”

Kering

In January 2015, the Kering Foundation signed a joint charter with Women's Aid to prevent and combat domestic violence in the UK.

The partnership with Women's Aid will engage 1,260 UK-based Kering employees in a two year training and awareness-raising programme.

In September 2015, Exeter City become the second club to officially sign up to our **Football United** campaign to call out the sexist behaviour that can underpin violence towards women and girls.

“I am honoured that Exeter City have joined Football United Against Domestic Violence. It is vital that we channel the power of football into positive causes and send out the message to fans that domestic abuse can never be tolerated. I am proud that Exeter City are using their position within the community to tackle domestic abuse.”

Paul Tisdale,  
Exeter City manager

## Objective #3

Lobby decision-makers to ensure better support for survivors.

“The family courts must change.  
All contact with children  
must be safe.”

Claire Throssell, survivor and  
Child First campaign spokeswoman

Survivors' experiences are at the heart of our policy, campaigning and research work. This year we have continued to influence Government policy by campaigning on issues that matter to survivors and our federation of local specialist services, and conduct research into key areas of domestic abuse to inform and shape best policy and practice.

Since 2014, we have been calling on the government to **Save Our Services** by preserving the national network of specialist refuges.

To get the funding crisis known much more widely, we teamed up with *The Sun*, the UK's most-read newspaper, on the **Give Me Shelter** campaign.

We called for:

- a national guarantee of funding for refuges;
- no more refuge closures;
- the number of refuges to return to pre-2010 levels.

In 2010 there were 187 specialist domestic violence refuges. By 2014, there were 155. And the closures continue.

**Give Me Shelter** launched on *The Sun's* front page, and this was only the start of huge coverage. Within weeks, the



Polly Neate, Charlotte Kneer, survivor, and Michelle Dewberry, television personality, presenting the Give Me Shelter petition to Downing Street

government had responded, giving £3.2 million of emergency funding, providing immense relief to the refuges that we identified as being most in crisis.

Then, in the Spending Review and Autumn Statement, the Government committed £40 million for services for victims of domestic abuse, doubling the dedicated funding provided over the previous Parliament.

We welcomed the funding commitment and we are still stressing that a considerable portion of this funding must be invested in securing the long-term sustainability of domestic abuse refuges, and that government must hold local public sector funders to account for ensuring the full range of specialist support is there for the women we serve.

“My Lords, every week, on average, two women are murdered in this country by their partner or ex-partner. Women’s Aid has taken 40 years to build up a network of refuges that save lives every day, yet they and other refuges – those that have not yet closed – have to turn away hundreds of women and children.”

Baroness Oona King,



In the build up to the UK General Election in May 2015 we launched the **Hear Her, See Her, Believe Her** campaign pledge, calling on Prospective Parliamentary Candidates (PPCs) to:

- empower survivors to use their vote by providing them with information on how to register to vote safely;
- listen to the voices of survivors and what's important for them;
- ensure their constituency office is a safe space for survivors.

PPCs from all the main political parties supported the pledge.

The new network of Women's Aid **Campaign Champions** was launched in December 2015. By March 2016 there were 150 active campaign champions, many of them survivors of domestic abuse.

**"I signed up because I feel very strongly that as a society we need to do much more to stop domestic violence and to help women who are living with it..."**

**Gill Cathles,  
Campaign Champion**



After the General Election in 2015, Women's Aid was able to re-form the All-Party Parliamentary Group (formerly the APPG for Domestic Violence and Sexual Violence) with a sole focus on Domestic Violence.

The APPG held a meeting just after the General Election on the top policy priorities for a Government committed to tackling domestic abuse, and also held an inquiry on domestic abuse, child contact and the family courts.

During the Inquiry the APPG heard from over 20 key witnesses and experts, including survivors of domestic abuse, about how the family courts tackle domestic abuse and the impact of unsafe child contact on children and non-abusive parents.

The report's recommendations will be followed up on throughout the 2016/17 Parliamentary term by the APPG.

**"The family courts should be a safe place for all who go through them. As the report shows, they are routinely being used for perpetrators to continue their campaign of abuse – and this can ultimately put children in very unsafe situations. The Government must address this as a matter of urgency."**

**Jess Phillips MP, Chair of  
the APPG on Domestic  
Violence**



“No parent should have to hold their children and comfort them as they die or be told that their child has been harmed in an act of revenge or rage. All too often children’s voices are not heard or acted upon. The number of people that are coming forward and saying how personally affected they are by it highlights just how important this campaign is. The family courts must change. All contact with children must be safe.”

Claire Throssell, survivor

“A recent survey by Women’s Aid of women survivors of domestic abuse who have attended the family courts regarding child contact found that a quarter reported being directly cross-examined by their abuser.”

Helen Hayes MP

We launched our **Child First** campaign in January to stop avoidable child deaths as a result of unsafe child contact with dangerous perpetrators of domestic violence.

This was informed by our members and survivors of domestic abuse.

Our campaign report, *Nineteen Child Homicides*, highlights the stories of 19 children and 2 women in 12 families that were killed by perpetrators of domestic abuse in circumstances related to unsafe child contact within a ten year period. It’s possible that these

deaths could have been prevented if the domestic abuse had been considered as an ongoing risk factor.

Survivor and Child First spokeswoman Claire Throssell’s two sons, Jack, 12, and Paul, 9, were both killed by their father, a known perpetrator of domestic abuse. Claire has been an integral part of the campaign.

Our petition calls on the government and Family Courts to make sure that no more children are killed through unsafe child contact and has gained over 30,000 signatures.



“For many women, when you first try and tell someone you are experiencing domestic abuse, no one listens to you.

The person you are telling might not recognise what you are experiencing is abuse or know how to ask the right questions.

They might not know how to offer the support you need, or know where to refer you for help.

And when somebody, finally, does listen, and everyone jumps into action, your voice can get lost again.

Decisions can quickly be made about your safety, family, and future, without consulting the expert, you. Despite the fact that you understand your situation better than anyone.”

Mandy Thomas, Women’s Aid Survivor Ambassador



Our decades of experience of working with survivors of abuse such as Mandy have shown us that by making sure women are listened to, can get help they need earlier, and are at the heart of the decisions about what happens next - we can make change that lasts, saving lives.

“The way the system as a whole currently responds to domestic abuse is inadequate. The main gateway to support is an assessment of “risk”, with support increasingly rationed to those victims deemed at “high risk” - and melting away when the risk is considered to have been managed. Clearly this is not early intervention, nor does it promote long term recovery, nor is it reducing domestic abuse, as evidence shows.”

Polly Neate

We believe the only change that can work is one which puts survivors of abuse themselves

at the centre. We must create communities which visibly refuse to condone abuse and in which victims can come forward in safety. Rather than reinventing the wheel, we must enable survivors and their children to access the services which already exist, and ensure that those services respond helpfully.

We have worked with survivors of abuse, with a wide range of services and in partnership with Welsh Women's Aid to identify a set of core elements. This new approach is called **Change that Lasts** and should be co-developed at local level between survivors and their local services.

One of its key principles is that every point of interaction with a survivor is an opportunity for intervention. It should not be missed, and should never add to the huge barriers survivors already face. In response to this, we have developed a scheme that will widen the opportunities there are for survivors to access help within their communities.

The **Ask Me** scheme is just one key element of Change that Lasts. It will increase the opportunities survivors have to disclose abuse, by working with local businesses, agencies, services – anywhere

survivors tell us they have the space to disclose the abuse they are experiencing.

Thanks to funding from the Government, Public Health England, Comic Relief and Lankelly Chase Foundation, plans are underway to pilot the Ask Me Scheme in different local areas and within different sectors, with a strong evaluation element so the true impact of the approach can be tested and evidenced.

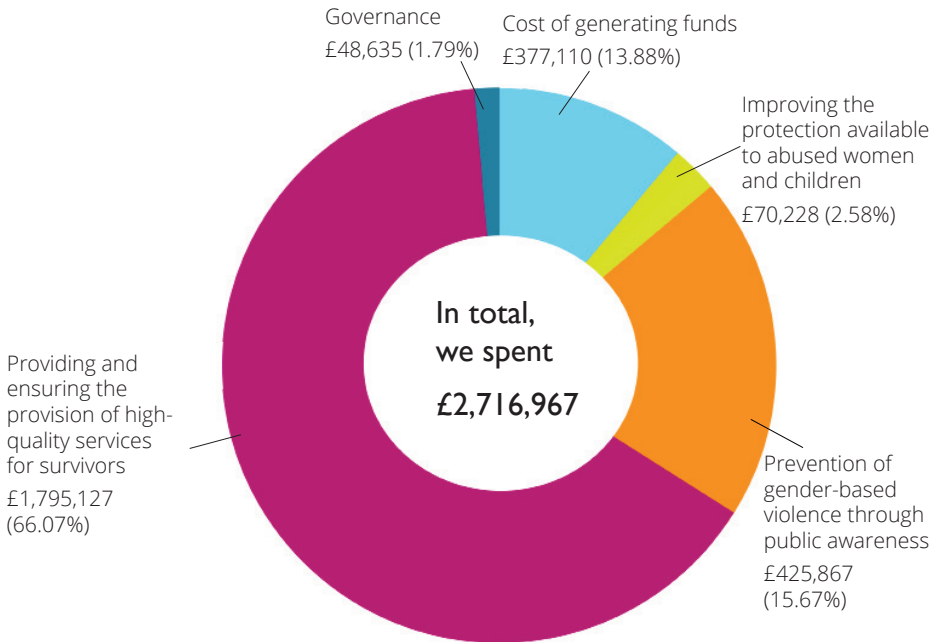
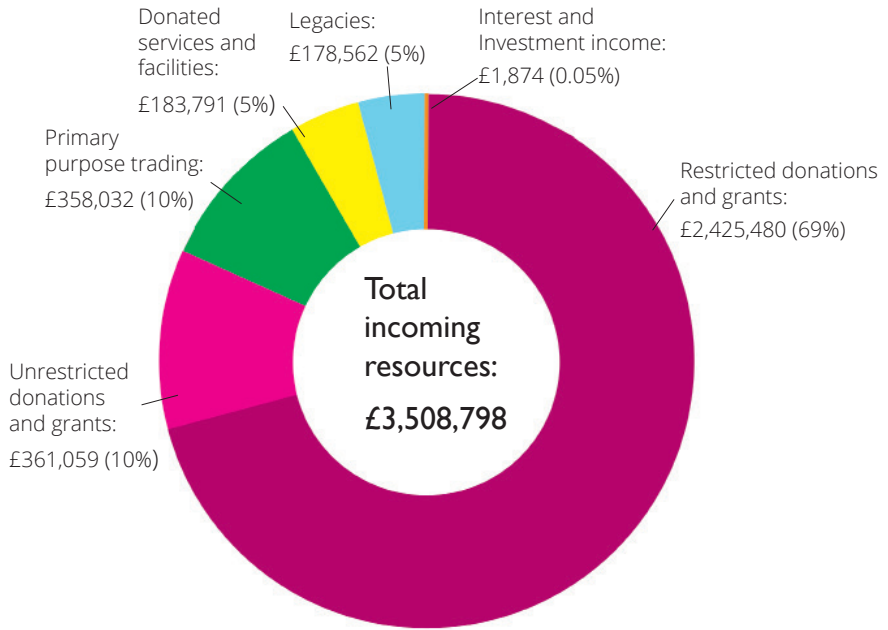
“Women in Wales have told us how important it is for local communities to understand domestic abuse and the help available. Living with abuse in rural areas means survivors are further isolated and it's vitally important they have effective routes to safety and support. So we are pleased to be working in partnership with Women's Aid in England.”

Eleri Butler, Chief Executive of Welsh Women's Aid

# Our money and how we spent it

"I ran for Women's Aid not only to raise money but to raise awareness. I have friends who have been victims of abuse either as a child or adult and have heard from teachers and police officers about the great work Women's Aid do. To me this shows how important Women's Aid is when women and children need their help and support the most."

Matt Whyatt, supporter and marathon runner for  
#TeamWomen'sAid





"Thank you so much to everyone who has supported Women's Aid in the past year.

Through your support, we continue to provide women with the help they need to escape relationships that are controlling and abusive, providing practical information and emotional support at every step.

Our vision is of a world without domestic abuse, and we can only achieve that if we can continue to educate young people about healthy relationships, and raise awareness about what domestic abuse is.

If we continue to expand our work with trusted professionals, like the police, and whole communities, to change the way we think about and respond to domestic abuse, more women will get the support they need sooner.

Again, thank you all – until women and children are safe, we are here."

Julie Walters, CBE,  
Patron of Women's Aid

Freephone 24hr National Domestic Violence Helpline

*(run in partnership between Women's Aid and Refuge)*

**0800 2000 247**

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