

# 2021 - 2022 Annual Report



*Love doesn't hurt.*

## **HEAR HER VOICE:**

The lived experiences  
and words of 91 domestic  
abuse survivors

# The Key Numbers in 2021/22



**543 Women**  
stayed in our refuges  
throughout NI



**7,444 Women**  
received support whilst  
staying in their homes



**397 Children**  
stayed in refuge  
with their mum



**5,897 Children**  
had mums supported in  
Women's Aid services



**8 Babies**  
born to women  
in refuge



**242 Women**  
who were pregnant  
received support from  
Women's Aid



**39 women  
& 29 Children**  
With no recourse to public  
funds stayed in refuge



**2,033 Women**  
with complex needs were  
supported by Women's Aid

## Forward by Sarah Mason - CEO

Change continues to be ever evident, at government level and in the increasingly diverse and complex needs of victims and survivors of domestic abuse. As we tentatively move forward after lockdown, we remain committed to ensuring domestic abuse remains high on the public agenda and that our services are responsive and tailored to needs.

The statistics clearly illustrate the high demand on all eight local Women's Aid services during this reporting period, where we saw increased demand in both refuge and Floating Support services. In particular, Floating Support saw a 20% increase on the number of women supported from the previous year. This is clearly evidenced by the increasing number of women who have been triaged and are waiting on vital support services.

Strong collective planning is crucial to steer an organisation through changing times and we were delighted to launch our 3-year strategy, *Unlocking Potential – Building on Success*. This innovative roadmap sets out a clear vision and 6 big ideas to enable us to work collectively to deliver change. This will help us move closer to realising our vision for the 21st century of eliminating domestic abuse.

We cannot fully know what challenges the year ahead will bring. But what we do know is that we enter into this new year with strong foundations of planning, collective working, innovative partnerships and a never-failing determination and commitment to make a difference for women, children and young people experiencing domestic abuse in Northern Ireland.



# The Powerful Voices of Experts by Experience

The 'Hear Her Voice' project captured the lived experiences of survivors of domestic abuse, through focus groups with women engaged in the eight Women's Aid groups across Northern Ireland. 91 Survivors shared their stories of domestic abuse and its lasting impact on their lives, families, and the future by creative writing, song and powerful art pieces.

Throughout their creative journeys, common themes identified by these survivors, or 'Experts by Experience' have been captured and presented in a diverse range of creative resources that were shared at the launch event on 25th November 2021 including paintings, embroidery, photography, an interactive website, a creative writing book and the 'Hear Her Voice' book.



"I think people don't understand is how gradual, how insidious, domestic abuse is. It's so insidious, and you don't see it happening until you're slap bang in the middle of the situation" - Survivor from the Hear Her Voice Project



Survivors highlighted recurring issues through their creative works which included that survivors and their children are often subject to a range of post-separation abuse, including financial abuse, physical and virtual stalking, and never-ending child contact disputes.

They also greatly emphasised that women and children affected by domestic abuse are more than just survivors, they are 'Experts by Experience' whose voices need to be at the centre of all conversations about domestic abuse, and all efforts to end violence against women and girls in NI.

You can view the Hear Her Voice Project outputs by visiting: [womensaidni.org/hear-her-voice](https://womensaidni.org/hear-her-voice)

**Women's Aid would like to express our sincerest gratitude to all the survivors for sharing their experiences during this project.**

**Your voices are being loudly heard.**

# Seismic Shift in Legislation for NI

Women's Aid has long campaigned on essential and lifesaving changes to the law in Northern Ireland, in order to enhance protections for victims and survivors of abuse and make NI a safer place for women & girls. In the financial year 2021/2022, a number of key pieces of legislation went through the Northern Ireland Assembly.

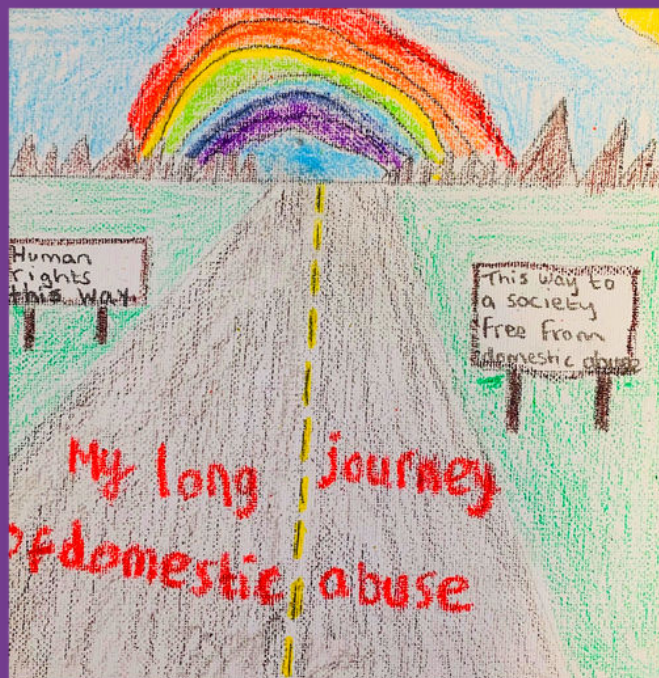
- **The Justice (Sexual Offences & Human Trafficking) Act** which includes the abolishment of the 'Rough Sex' defence, makes non-fatal strangulation a specific crime, and makes threats to publish image-based violence an offence.
- **The Protection From Stalking Act** makes stalking a specific offence in Northern Ireland, as prior to this many perpetrators were charged under less severe, inappropriate harassment laws.
- **Domestic Abuse (Safe Leave) Act** which allows victims of domestic abuse up to 10 days paid leave each year to deal with domestic abuse issues.

The landmark legislative change that took place in 2021/2022 was the commencement of the Domestic Abuse & Civil Proceedings Act 2021, which finally makes coercively controlling behavior a crime in Northern Ireland after years of lobbying. This change brings us in line with the rest of the United Kingdom and Ireland.

## Call for Views: Public Consultation on the Domestic & Sexual Abuse Strategy & Equally Safe (VAWG) Strategy

An extensive regional process was put in place from January to March 2022 to ensure all local groups were involved and more importantly, that the lived experiences of women, children & young people in our services were captured for this consultation process. There was so much vital information and voices heard that this resulted in three extensive responses:

- Survivor Engagement Response from over 70 women in our services.
- Listen Up Government from the responses of over 40 children & young people engaged in our services.
- Overall Submission by WAFNI Policy lead with over 100 Women's Aid staff from across Northern Ireland.



## Unlocking Specialist Training

This year has seen a major increase in external demand for our training expertise, especially following recent legislative changes regarding domestic abuse. We've worked with PSNI, Department of Justice and the Public Prosecution Service to produce specialised training programmes focusing on the context and impact of coercive control.

We were proud to launch our e-learning platform this year which is accessible for all eight local Women's Aid groups staff, volunteers and Trustees to use. We launched the first four modules:-

- **Welcome to Women's Aid: Induction Training**
- **Understanding Trauma & Vicarious Trauma**
- **Understanding Coercive Control**
- **Routes to Support: Induction Training (Women's Aid online bed space system)**

We also became a CPD Centre and progressed our UK-Wide Open College Network centre.

# Small but mighty: the giant steps we're taking in communities

Women's Aid



The 8 local Women's Aid groups throughout Northern Ireland are the vital specialist support service for women, children & young people in your community. They make a massive difference every day to those whom they work with, and here is just a highlight of some of their amazing work in 2021/2022.

## ABCLN

Worked with Spark Opera's 'It's Never Too Late' project, which explores the voices & lived experience of older women who've experienced abuse. The Project has been nominated for the National Lottery Project of the Year Award.

## Causeway & Mid Ulster

Had their amazing work recognised by the then Duchess of Cambridge through a visit to the refuge. Support from Mid-Ulster District Council has allowed the group to progress plans for future housing development.

## Foyle

Expanded their 'Dress for Success' project, empowering women to achieve economic independence by providing a network of support, professional attire and the development tools to help women thrive in work and in life.

## Armagh Down

Have partnered with Craigavon & Daisy Hill Hospitals, and there is now a Specialist Support Worker working within the Social Work team, training staff onsite & responding to female victims of abuse in Emergency & Maternity Departments.

## North Down & Ards

Developed their innovative 3-year strategic plan reflecting their continuing commitment to making a meaningful difference to the lives of women & children affected by domestic abuse.

## Fermanagh

Delivered 'In Safe Hands' Domestic Abuse Training, with Omagh Women's Aid and PSNI; increasing participants knowledge on Domestic Abuse and how to manage a disclosure. 154 individuals from businesses received training in Salons, Pharmacies, Banks & Dentists.

## Belfast & Lisburn

Won the 'Chartered Institute of Housing, All-Ireland Housing Awards 2022 'Excellence in communications' for their amazing film: 'Lonely Lockdown animations: Children Living with Domestic Abuse during Covid-19'

## Omagh

Commenced their EmpowerHer Project, recruiting an Empowerment & Participation Worker, funded by Halifax Foundation to support the delivery of groupwork programmes and to co-ordinate their Survivor's Forum activities.

Women's Aid





**1** Antrim, Ballymena, Carrickfergus, Larne & Newtownabbey Women's Aid  
T: 028 2563 2136

**2** Armagh Down Women's Aid  
T: 028 3025 0765

**3** Belfast & Lisburn Women's Aid  
T: 028 9066 6049

**4A** Causeway & Mid Ulster Women's Aid - Causeway Office  
T: 028 7035 6573

**4B** Causeway & Mid Ulster Women's Aid - Mid Ulster Office  
T: 028 8676 9300

**5** Fermanagh Women's Aid  
T: 028 6632 8898

**6** Foyle Women's Aid  
T: 028 7141 6800

**7** North Down & Ards Women's Aid  
T: 028 9127 3196

**8** Omagh Women's Aid  
T: 028 8224 1414

**9** Women's Aid Federation  
T: 028 9024 9041

## With special thanks to our valued partners:

