

THE ROAD TO CHANGE:

CREATING A SAFER NI FOR WOMEN, CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE

2024 - 2025 ANNUAL REPORT

Women's Aid
FEDERATION
NORTHERN IRELAND

WOMEN'S AID IN 2024/25

524 WOMEN
stayed in our refuges throughout NI

8,393
Referrals made to Women's Aid Services

364 CHILDREN
stayed in refuge with their mum

5,810 WOMEN
received support whilst staying in their homes

6 BABIES
were born whilst their mum was in refuge

5,354 CHILDREN
had mums supported in Women's Aid services

304 WOMEN
who were pregnant received support

66 WOMEN
and 52 children with no recourse to public funds stayed in our refuges

REFLECTIONS BY OUR CEO - SARAH MASON MBE

Women's Aid Federation (WAFNI) regard 2024/25 as the year of recognition of the impact of domestic abuse on children and young people. After many years of lobbying & campaigning we are finally seeing the positive results within Government Strategies, especially within the Domestic & Sexual Abuse Strategy 2023-2030 launched in September 2024, which included a Children & Young People's Pillar. We pay great tribute to the young people within our SAY project who asked for this & fully participated in the consultation process by creating their own pillar.



2024/25 also saw NI's first ever Ending Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy, with a strong commitment from The Executive Office on prevention. Prevention underpins all of WAFNI's strategic themes, as we believe the best way to eliminate violence against women and girls (VAWG) is to prevent it from happening. WAFNI have worked incredibly hard to develop a continuous preventative journey for all children & young people, from early years, to primary, post primary & third level education, ensuring clear messaging about healthy relationships & respect throughout. We are at a time of immense change, & we all have a key role to play, VAWG is not inevitable & WAFNI believes a different world is possible. Together we must get on the road to change.

SEE.
HEAR.
ACT.



This year, the See, Hear, Act project entered its third and final year. The project, funded by Comic Relief, supports WAFNI's ten-year See, Hear, Act strategy, which aims to create:

"A society where all children and young people are safe, supported and surrounded by social guardians who will listen to them, build their confidence and encourage them to be the best they can be."

Working with all eight Women's Aid groups, the project focused on four main goals:

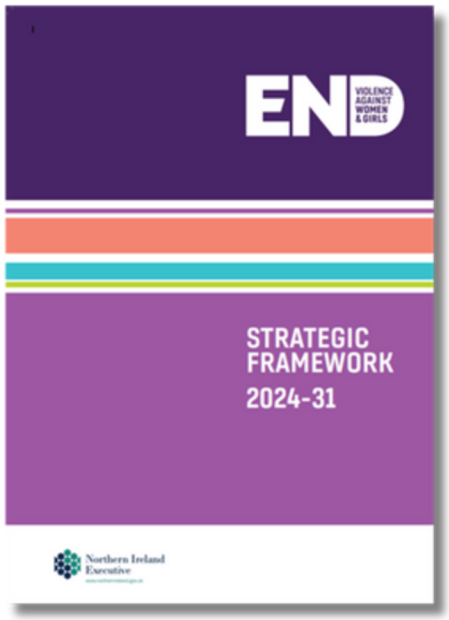
- helping practitioners embed consistent, high-quality practice
- improving professionals' understanding of domestic abuse and how to offer trauma-informed support
- building a network of informed and motivated See, Hear, Act Champions
- Supporting mums of young children (0–5) to help their children survive and thrive; and ensuring mums and young children can access evidence-based, high-quality services.

The project continued to work in partnership with Women's Aid groups, Health & Social Care Trusts, Government Departments, children's organisations, SBNI, Domestic and Sexual Violence Partnerships, universities, teachers and early years providers, including Sure Start, to raise awareness and improve support for families affected by domestic abuse. So far, 168 Women's Aid practitioners have been trained in Trauma Informed Practice (Levels 1 and 2), Connect to Calm, and the Solihull Approach. A further 1,310 external practitioners have been trained on the impact of domestic abuse on mothers and young children.

Importantly, the project has also created a lasting legacy. This year, the You and Me, Mum programme was fully updated and piloted to reflect new research, including neuroscience and sensory play. We have also laid the groundwork for an Early Years version of the Helping Hands programme, long requested by early years practitioners and recommended in Dr. Helga Sneddon's independent evaluation.

POLICY & ENGAGEMENT FOR A SAFER NI

Women's Aid remains committed to creating a Northern Ireland where all women, children and young people can live free from domestic abuse. Following the restoration of the Northern Ireland Assembly in February 2024, we continued to work with Government to ensure the needs of victims and survivors are recognised and addressed.



More than 26,000 people signed our 2021 petition calling for an Ending Violence Against Women and Girls (EVAWG) Strategy, at a time when Northern Ireland was the only part of these islands without a dedicated plan. On 16th September 2024, nearly three and a half years later, the Executive published its first ever EVAWG Strategy. We welcomed this landmark development, as well as the inclusion of ending VAWG as a priority in the Programme for Government.

Women's Aid supports hundreds of children every year who experience domestic and sexual abuse. Therefore we strongly advocated for improved recognition of their needs and welcomed the introduction of a dedicated Children and Young People's Pillar in the revised Domestic & Sexual Abuse Strategy. Also released in September 2024, this is the first time this focus was included. We will continue to lobby, engage and campaign to ensure that victims and survivors across Northern Ireland are safe, and feel safe, in their daily lives.

DRIVING CHANGE THROUGH EXPERT TRAINING



WAFNI are very proud to hold both NOCN and CPD Centre status, which are all part of Women's Aid Centre of Training Excellence goals. We strongly believe the earlier we build professional knowledge the better.

Building upon our strong partnerships with third level education institutions we hope to ensure that knowledge of domestic abuse and VAWG is built into education of teachers, social workers, health practitioners and youth and community workers from the beginning ensuring that professionals are not left to learn about domestic abuse 'on the job'.

This year saw the continued rollout of the Domestic Abuse Practitioner Advocate training to Women's Aid groups across NI. This UK wide NOCN qualification, endorsed by the Home Office for the IDVA role, recognises and strengthens the highly skilled work of Women's Aid staff while enabling valuable collaboration time. Funding from the Department of Justice's Assets Recovery Community Scheme has also allowed us to offer 12 annual bursaries to support local groups with the cost of this important qualification.

FIND OUT MORE

THE VITAL PIECE OF THE PUZZLE:
YOUR LOCAL WOMEN'S AID GROUP

The 8 local Women's Aid groups throughout Northern Ireland are the vital specialist support service for women, children & young people affected by domestic abuse in the heart of 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 2024/2025.

You can find the contact details of your local group by visiting our website: womensaidni.org

ABCLN

Domestic Abuse Specialists from Women's Aid ABCLN had a cohort of practitioners in Northern Ireland successfully complete the National Open College Network (NOCN) Level Three Certificate in Preventing & Tackling Domestic Abuse qualification recognising their extensive expertise and skills.

Foyle

Launched their 'When You Know What They Are Capable Of: Paramilitary-Related Gendered Coercive Control' research report conducted by Aisling Swaine. The research deepened understanding of women's experiences of contemporary paramilitarism in NI. Deep gratitude is owed to the women who shared their stories for this vital report.

Belfast & Lisburn

In September 2024, they opened an exhibition on Royal Avenue showcasing artwork created by women in their service. They were privileged to support many talented women who found art and the creative process helpful in their recovery from past trauma. The exhibition celebrated the women, their cultures, their stories of hope, and their wonderful artwork.

Armagh Down

Launched the 'Changing Hearts and Minds' (CHAMP) project, a Change Fund initiative working within local communities to challenge VAWG. By partnering with sports teams, schools, colleges, community groups and businesses, CHAMP brings Women's Aid expertise directly to the public to help shift attitudes and create safer communities.



North Down & Ards

Won the Chartered Institute of Housing All-Ireland Partnership Award for their immersive Housing and Domestic Abuse training course, developed with Housing Rights. Created with input from women using their service, the VR-based course builds empathy and offers deeper insight into the challenges faced by women experiencing domestic abuse and homelessness.

Causeway & Mid Ulster

Successfully secured funding through the Big Lottery to continue and expand their Starfish Project and delivered educative programmes in schools to 1000 students.

They also continued their work with Queen's University Belfast educating social work students, with some becoming citizen educators.

Fermanagh

Hosted a groundbreaking conference to launch their innovative 'Be the Change' Toolkit.

This toolkit aims to build capacity across society, auditing existing approaches and practices, to provide the organisations with the tools to end violence against women and girls.

Omagh

Continued to provide a variety of empowerment programmes which have been greatly received by all participants.

Refurbishment work was completed at the Refuge to update kitchens and bedrooms. They were also able to provide a dedicated referral triage and crisis response service.

Women's Aid
REGIONAL OFFICES



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

4 Causeway & Mid Ulster Women's Aid
T: 0300 373 1055

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:

Allstate Northern Ireland
FUNDED BY COMIC RELIEF
Northern Ireland Executive
END VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN & GIRLS
ea Education Authority
the Tudor trust
ÉADACH BY SARA O'NEILL
PBNI
Department of Justice
Department of Health
jago
SBNI Safeguarding Board for Northern Ireland