

Border Women's Aid Annual Report 2023-2024



‘I will be forever grateful for the kind and helpful support during a very traumatic time. You are all amazing in helping women.’



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



KEY SERVICE STATISTICS

23/24 Summary

6 Women

In Refuge

532 Days

Women Spent in Refuge

201 Women

Referred to Outreach Service

184 Women

Supported by Outreach Service

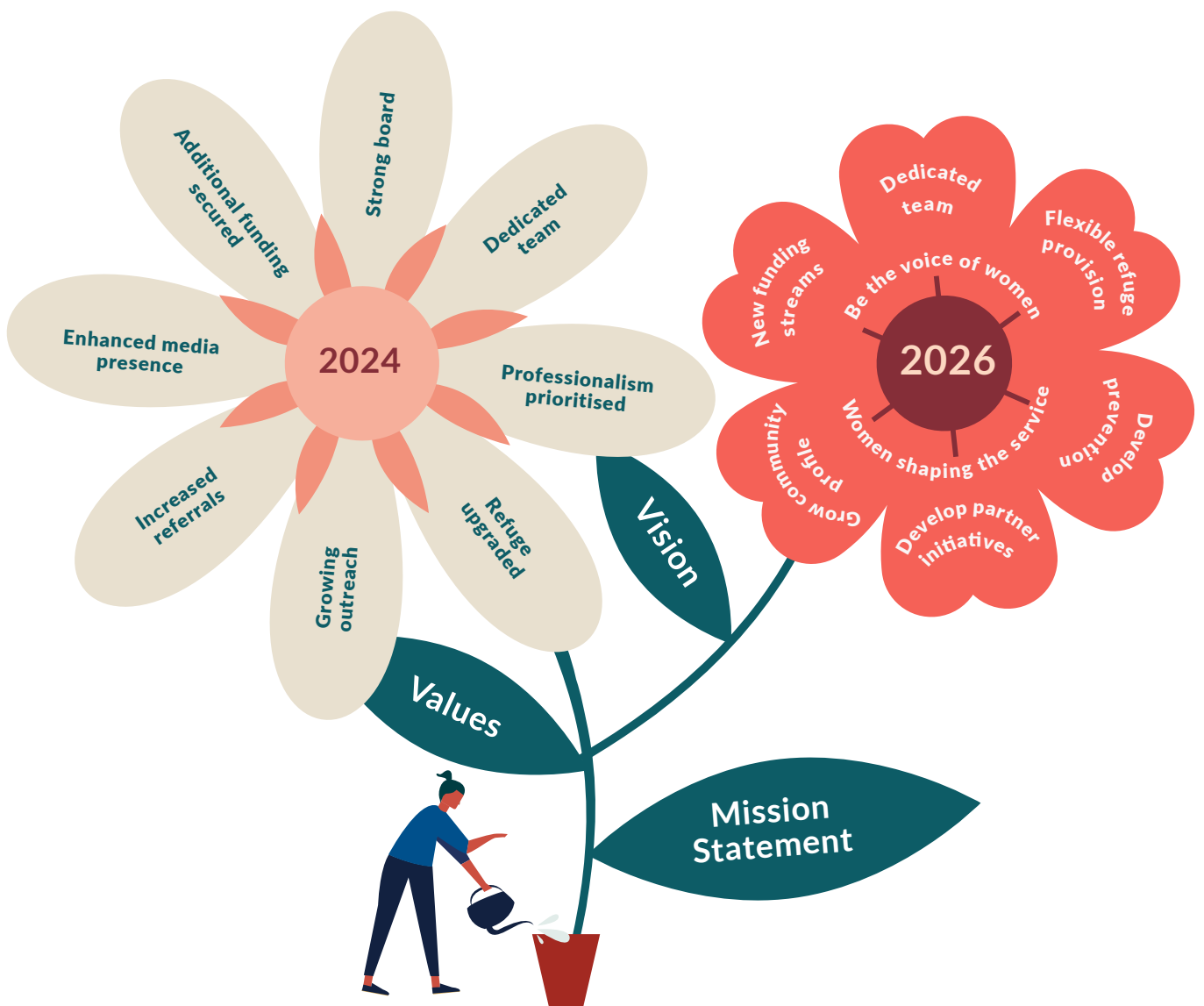


2023/24 ACTIVITIES

Strategic Plan 2024-26

Early in 2024, we undertook a 'midterm' review of which goals had been achieved and what remained to be done or revisited in light of changing circumstances. It is gratifying to be able to report that many of our goals have been achieved, and the service flourishes due to the commitment and dedication of our team. A new Strategic Plan for 2024-2026 has been written considering the changing needs of women experiencing domestic abuse, and the very uncertain financial roadmap for the years ahead. The inevitability of change is always a challenge, but with this revised strategic plan BWA heads into the future confident in our ability to manage risk and change, to make the most of the opportunities that change can present, and to continue to provide a service that meets the needs of women experiencing domestic abuse.

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



SBC Community Engagement Officer visited BWA as part of her induction

External supervision training for all staff / Safe & Together Overview training

All BWA staff completed 2 day NHS trauma training



Commencement of 3 year grant from NLCF

BWA Communication Policy & Procedure in progress

Awareness-raising at Borders College, Farne Salmon alongside Police Scotland, SBRCC, DAAS

Affiliation with Scottish Women's Aid renewed for 3 years

Short-Life Working Group met to discuss Youth Service

Team Leader commenced IDAA training



Awareness-Raising: Presentation to Domestic Abuse Workplace Support (DAWS) Group / Borders Older People's Forum / Borders College

Interviews held to fill vacant Support Worker post IDAA training

Partnership working: Visit from Homelessness Services team leader / Visit from NHS Wellbeing Services

'Own My Life' commenced in Hawick & Galashiels

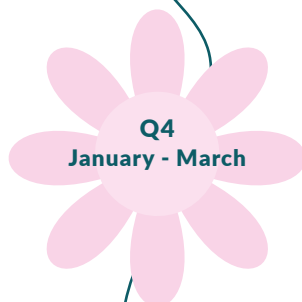


Awareness Raising: Guest speaker slot at 'Unbroken', one-women dance event at the Heart of Hawick / Attended Nurture the Borders Families Service Event /Awareness-raising with Police Scotland during 16 Days of Action

New Support Worker joined BWA

Awareness-raising: Presentation to the NHS RENEW Service and Burnfoot PS

BWA Team Leader successfully completed IDAA training



'Escape The Trap' Pilot commenced in Berwickshire High School

Review of BWA Strategic Plan 2022-25

Refuge

We continued to support women in our refuge accommodation. We have two spaces in the refuge which currently, and for the foreseeable future, continue to meet our needs. The arrangements we have in place are continually being reviewed with feedback from women and our partners to ensure they align with our 'whole woman' approach.

6 women and 7 children lived in our refuge accommodation during the reporting period. Our refuge was occupied for a total of 532 days, giving a 73% occupancy rate.

We continued with our programme of improvements by replacing the boiler and windows, laying new flooring and decorating. In response to women staying in refuge, we had new blinds fitted and purchased sun loungers and firesticks for both TVs.

BWA now has in place an Adapted Property Request Protocol with SBC ensuring we meet the needs of women with disabilities.

We now have a specific budget to ensure we can support any woman who has No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF).

“(In refuge) I had time to process what is happening in my relationship, somewhere safe to retreat to.”



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

Outreach

BWA's Outreach Service is well established, thanks to the Robertson Trust and the renewed National Lottery Community Fund (NLCF). It has been more successful than we ever anticipated. Outreach during the period was funded by the Scottish Government Waiting List Prevention and 100 days emergency fund grants.

The number of women referred to the Outreach service has continued to rise and during this reporting period, 201 women were referred, representing a 30% increase on the previous year. Our triaging system enables us to respond to most referrals within 48 hours.

Nearly half were self-referrals, and the rest were referrals from partner agencies. Scottish Borders Council Domestic Abuse Advocacy Service referred 55 women for ongoing recovery support. Police Scotland referred 14 women and Mental Health Services referred 21 women for our specialist support. The growing number of referrals from the Violence Against Women Partnership (VAWP) 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.

“My life is amazing and I'm grateful for all the help you gave me and continue to give others like me. Keep doing what you're doing, it worked for me.”

“You (support worker) were my guardian angel through that really hard time... you really truly deserve a medal for the work and support you do. Thank you”

“Very, very helpful in improving my life and recovery. Everyone has been helpful and supportive.”

“Thanks to BWA - I now am living My life.”

Read more about our refuge here:

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

Own My Life (OML)

A 12-week online or in-person group programme to help women who have been subjected to abuse to regain ownership of their lives – was initially piloted back in 2022. It is now a fully embedded part of our Outreach Service, with online and face to face group sessions taking place right across the Borders. As we do with all other aspects of our work, we want to evidence the difference attending OML has made to women, using women's feedback to monitor and improve our delivery of the programme. For example, when planning the sessions we have ensured we factor in breaks during school holidays.

OML has been so successful that we have made the programme available to our partner agencies.

The National Lottery Community Fund has continued to fund this work.

When asked if they would recommend the course to other women comments included:



“Do it, you won't regret it, do it!”

“It might seem scary but it is worth it, an opportunity not taken is an opportunity missed. I have made friends for life who really understand what I have been through.”

“I just wanted to give you an update on my life and thank you for all your input at the 'Own my Life' group you ran. It helped me to process my previous life and focus on my future life.”

“Everyone was amazing, it made me more aware and less self-blaming, more confident.”

“(I got) support and understanding from people who have been through similar things and finding other people just like me.”

Escape the Trap

BWA's outreach is centrally focused on supporting women experiencing domestic abuse. However, using what we learn from women we have supported, we have a growing awareness of how domestic abuse and coercive control can profoundly affect the lives of young people. BWA sees prevention as an important additional strand to the service. 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 relationship. The programme encourages discussions about seeking help, from who and from where. By raising awareness of abuse and educating our young people about healthy relationships, we aim to help empower the younger generation.

In March 2024, we successfully piloted the programme at Berwickshire High School in Duns, and plan to extend the programme across schools and colleges across the Borders.

“Thanks again for the sessions. If they are running this academic year I would love for you to come back and deliver the sessions again. They really were so thought provoking!”



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. Women's feedback to BWA continued to shape and develop our service. We now consistently record and track the changes we've made in response to women's feedback.

Partnership working

BWA continued to play a key role in the Violence Against Women Partnership (VAWP) to bring a BWA perspective to the partnership. We continued to increase our partnership engagement and visibility at both local and national level, and to identify ways we can work together.

During the year we have provided information sessions to agencies to ensure they are aware of the services we provide. For instance, the Homelessness Services Team Leader visited us, as did SBC Community Engagement Officer as part of her induction. We also had a visit from NHS Wellbeing Services.

“Working alongside with BWA has been a very enjoyable experience. We have an open and honest communication that makes a positive impact in the delivery of services.”

“Sharing information to help each other progress the support given to those requiring the services and their families.”



Funding

The SBC Housing Support Grant for refuge provision was secured for 3 further years. The National Lottery Community Fund, and the Scottish Government's Emergency Funding have supported our outreach work and Own My Life delivery. The Scottish Government's Delivering Equally Safe grant funds our team leader post.

We are grateful for our funders' critical contributions which enable us to build a resilient, sustainable and effective service. However, we must acknowledge that there are significant financial challenges ahead as we anticipate the end of the major grants we have received in recent years and the knowledge that most Third Sector organisations are competing for the same shrinking pool of revenue sources.

Despite the cost of living challenges, we have been very fortunate to receive donations over the period, and we want to express our gratitude to everyone who has donated. We would like to acknowledge the ongoing financial support from many local organisations and businesses who we have listed at the end of this document.

All these donations allow us to build resilience into our service, but it does concern us that this level of donations might be difficult to sustain. Because of this, communications and fundraising will increasingly have to become a necessary and pressing part of BWA's work. With this in mind, we established a Short Life Communications Group to drive forward ways in which BWA might expand its fundraising opportunities.



Resourcing

We are pleased to report that the BWA team has continued to be stable. One colleague left us to go travelling. In her exit interview she stated that

“I feel really lucky to have been part of such a supportive team – this has been one of the best bits of the job.”

Despite the recruitment challenges felt throughout the sector, we successfully recruited her replacement. 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. Regular supervisions, case reviews and training have resulted in a learning platform to share skills, knowledge and experience across the organisation, between the team, management and the board of trustees.

Opportunities for development and training are important for retention and satisfaction. BWA has instigated external supervision training for the team, who have also undertaken Safe & Together Overview Training and NHS Safety & Stabilisation Training (Trauma). The team have also attended sessions on human trafficking, cuckooing/county lines and gender equality. Our team leader successfully undertook the IDAA (Independent Domestic Abuse Advocate) qualification, so we now have 2 qualified IDAA's in the service.

Two support workers undertook Own My Life facilitator training.

The team leader also 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 2 students, who are working in the fields of social work and criminology.

Raising our voice: awareness-raising

Given the challenges we face as a service and knowing that domestic abuse and coercive control 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 team members, to develop a BWA Communications Strategy and Policy. Its findings will form part of our Strategic Plan 2024-26.

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 for several sessions on domestic abuse and healthy relationships. We presented at Farne Salmon, Craneware, Handbags and Gladrags (Kelso), Borders Older People's Forum, the "Unbroken" dance event in Heart of Hawick, Nurture the Borders Families Services Event, NHS RENEW Service, Burnfoot PS, and Domestic Abuse Workplace Support Group (DAWS). We collaborated with Police Scotland during the UN 16 Days of Action on violence against women and girls in November/December 2023.

Challenges

This year has been a very busy but productive year for BWA, despite the challenges we have faced related to the increase in, often complex, referrals. 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 – our team, management, our board members, donors, partner agencies and other stakeholders, and above all the women who have reached out to us for support.



Our thanks to:

Saints & Sinners

Jean Wood via Scotland's Garden Scheme

Lady Emma Tennant and those who donated to purchase her catalogue

Fancy Drawers

Borders Sovereign Chapter No 24

Selkirk Sheriff Court Tea Bar Charity Fundraisers

Peach Wax Studio, Kelso

George Widger

Craneware

Christine Bradley

And individuals who nominated anonymously





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