

# STRATEGIC PLAN 2019-24

WEST MERCIA WOMEN'S AID

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## MISSION

Our core purpose is to reduce the incidence and impact of domestic abuse and violence against women and girls in West Mercia by providing support, protection and prevention services that empower those affected by violence and abuse to rebuild their lives and those of their children.

As a team of strong, dedicated women we recognise the need to work with respect, care and collaboration with our service users, our partners and with each other, to make sure that we can give of our best to those that look to us for help and support.

## VISION

Our Vision is for a world free from domestic abuse and violence against women and children, where everyone can live without the fear and reality of all forms of violence, abuse and discrimination.

## PHILOSOPHY AND VALUES

The philosophy of West Mercia Women's Aid has its roots in, and is underpinned by, feminism and the women's movement. We value:

- Women's right to express themselves and be heard
- Mutual respect and non-judgemental behaviour
- Individual responsibility, choice and empowerment
- Being open and inclusive to all women and their children who experience domestic abuse
- Putting the needs of women and children who experience domestic abuse at the heart of what we do



## 04

## FOREWORD BY THE BOARD

The past two years have seen some changes at West Mercia Women's Aid with the arrival of a new Chief Executive in December 2016 and the re-shaping of some services to accommodate the impact of austerity on major contracts. There has been much to do, and the vision and principles of the Strategic Plan 2012-2017 have held fast in this intervening period and guided the organisation as it has faced new challenges. Trustees, staff and volunteers have worked together to secure the ongoing sustainability of West Mercia Women's Aid, re-affirming the Vision and re-shaping the Mission Statement of the organisation to lend greater focus on our strength as a women's organisation committed to women's empowerment.

With core contracts now in place for the medium term and a management structure that is both lean and future-focussed, WMWA is firmly focussed on looking to the future. This new Strategic Plan has not therefore been 'back-dated' to pick up where the previous plan concluded. Rather, it starts from April 2019 and looks forward for a further five years with a continued focus on the priorities to:

- **MAINTAIN AND FURTHER DEVELOP SPECIALIST SERVICES**
- **SUPPORT AND INFLUENCE THE WORK OF STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS AND PARTNERS, AS ACTIVE PARTICIPANTS IN SHAPING THE LOCAL AGENDA**
- **PREVENTION - EDUCATE SOCIETY AND SPEAK OUT AGAINST DOMESTIC ABUSE AND VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS**

It is sadly evident from both national and local data that domestic abuse remains as prevalent – if not more so – than ever before and the data reports in this Plan clearly demonstrates the continued need for specialist domestic abuse services.

The fundamental and lasting damage to people's lives caused by Domestic Abuse is now more widely recognised than ever before by lawmakers and by national bodies, and we welcome the focus on strengthening responses through the development of legislation. We hope that this commitment to action is sustained and matched by the provision of funding to ensure that essential services are retained and further developed at a local level. The Board of West Mercia Women's Aid is committed to working with its partners and stakeholders to inform and inspire local action and ensure that we continue to make a difference for those whose safety and well-being is compromised, whose autonomy and self-determination is stolen, and whose positive sense of self is crushed by the experience of living with domestic abuse.

Nikki Griffiths

**Chair, West Mercia Women's Aid**





## 05

## INTRODUCTION FROM THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE:

“

This is my first introduction to a West Mercia Women's Aid (WMWA) Strategic Plan, having joined the organisation in December 2016. I first worked in the sector in the 1980s and recall with absolute clarity how demand for domestic abuse services was consistently high, yet the resources with which to provide them were scarce and temporary. In spite of these fundamental challenges, there were seemingly no limits to the commitment and skills of those who gave all that they could as trustees, employees and volunteers to ensure that every woman would find the understanding and support that she needed in order to feel able to make her own choices and address the violence and abuse in her life. Thirty years on and I find that little has changed.

Certainly, recognition of the impact of domestic abuse at strategic level is a significant exception, with the prospect of specific legislation on the horizon and the issues for women clearly articulated in the national 'Violence Against Women and Girls' Strategy. The four West Mercia authorities, and the West Mercia Police and Crime Commissioner, are committed to ensuring that local services do their very best to alleviate the misery and harm caused by domestic abuse and to challenge those entrenched attitudes that make it somehow permissible to abuse and control. Their strategies and commissioning intentions clearly demonstrate that commitment.

In those thirty years I have also worked in the local authority children's sector and am well-versed in the extent to which domestic abuse compromises the safety and well-being of children. Whilst the provision of specialist domestic abuse services is not a statutory responsibility, their capacity to provide safe refuge and support from abuse to women with children is indispensable to those statutory services responsible for children's safeguarding. Effective partnership working with local children's safeguarding agencies is as essential for them as it is for us.

## 06

My colleagues working for WMWA have an impressive CV of qualifications, skills and experience – all of which contribute to the success of an organisation that supports people at a critical point in their lives, when they need help and support with circumstances that are potentially overwhelming. Investing in the development of those who work and volunteer for WMWA remains a priority, with team members expanding their areas of expertise and cascading their knowledge and skills to colleagues. A strong focus on recognising and responding to the additional needs of those who approach us for help is a key priority, as the complexity of people's lives increases, and the communities to which they belong become increasingly diverse.

At the heart of Women's Aid's mission is the principle that services should be shaped by those who have used them, with the survivors of domestic abuse as essential partners in a process of continual co-production. When their need for WMWA services has concluded, service users can become part of the supportive network of survivors and go on to become volunteers. Some join the Board of Trustees, or are successful in applying for positions within the organisation. West Mercia Women's Aid is not just a 'service provider': fundamentally we are a stakeholder organisation, run by and for those that know and understand the reality of domestic abuse. Those of us that are not survivors will have relatives and friends who are and whose experiences have touched us in a way that leaves an indelible impression. Our approach to our work is professional and outcome-focussed – but it also comes from the heart. We do what we do – not because we are commissioned to do it – but because the need persists and we have a mission to fulfil. It is both a pleasure and a privilege to be a part of this community of remarkable women.

*Sue Coleman*

**CEO – West Mercia Women's Aid**



## 07



## WHAT WE DO AND HOW WE DO IT:

With over 35 years' experience, West Mercia Women's Aid is one of the longest standing Women's Aid organisations in the UK. A member of the Women's Aid Federation England (WAFE) and holding the WAFE National Quality Standards Award, WMWA is a

pro-active member and draws on the resources and support of the Federation in the development of excellent practice, the delivery of best value, and the affirmation of the core values that distinguish Women's Aid provision from other public service responses to domestic abuse.

Women and children's needs are at the heart of West Mercia Women's Aid's provision. Our services are designed to give women the time and space to make their own decisions – working in ways that matter most to them and help them to make the difference that they need in their lives. Our development has been, and continues to be, shaped by the voices of the women that have been a part of our organisation. This may be as current and former service users, as the mothers, sisters and friends of service users, as survivors who have managed their own recovery without the support of a formal domestic abuse service but who know exactly what it means to strive for the strength to achieve freedom from abuse, or as volunteers and front-line workers with years of experience as witnesses to the struggle and courage of those who choose to re-define their lives. For some – as all of the above. We work alongside women, offering strategies to build confidence, self-esteem and resilience, and creating spaces where women can share their strength and resilience with other women and sustainable peer support can then extend well beyond the need for a 'service response'.

## 08

## WEST MERCIA WOMEN'S AID SERVICES:

West Mercia Women's Aid is a specialist domestic abuse organisation working primarily with women and children affected by domestic abuse, utilising the knowledge and experience gained from over 35 years of campaigning and service delivery. We also support male victims whose needs are regarded as 'high risk', and signpost other male victims to appropriate organisations.

Our services operate across Herefordshire, Worcestershire, Shropshire and Telford & Wrekin. They include safe and secure emergency accommodation in refuge and safe houses, Helpline for those seeking immediate telephone and/or online advice and support, community-based support for those living with friends or relatives or who are in their own homes and surviving abuse, group programmes and peer support networks, and specific safety planning and support through the legal process for those whose circumstances are regarded as 'high risk'.

Our work is centred on each client's experience of domestic abuse and is focused on providing support that promotes independence, choice and empowerment. We offer help to those at risk from, currently experiencing, or surviving past experiences of domestic abuse, enabling them to embark safely on the journey to long-term recovery and self-reliance. We support women from all backgrounds and with a variety of lived experience including poor mental health, learning difficulty, substance use, self-harm, disability and no recourse to public funds – as long as we can adequately and safely meet their needs.

A strong element of our work is with the survivors of abuse once they have resettled. We are a stakeholder organisation, skilled at supporting survivors to continue to rebuild their confidence and pursue either volunteering, training or employment – with WMWA or elsewhere. We recognise that this is all part of helping them to secure a future within which their self-reliance is sustainable.

The largest sector specialist in the region, WMWA informs the strategic scoping and planning of each authority's response to domestic abuse as an active member of key safeguarding and community safety bodies. We provide advice and training to professionals across the public sector - delivered by a partnership of practitioners and survivor volunteers who bring to life the impact of domestic abuse on families.

## 09

West Mercia Women's Aid is committed to making a positive difference in everything that it does for those whose lives have been blighted by domestic abuse. Increasingly, we plan and evaluate the work that we do in terms of outcomes for our service users. Every board member, manager, practitioner, volunteer and survivor contributes to our core purpose in ensuring the following outcomes for the women, children and male victims with whom we work.

The impact of all WMWA services is measured using a common set of outcomes that are recorded for each service user, where they are identified as a need for that particular individual.

**West Mercia Women's Aid Services SERVICE USER OUTCOME FRAMEWORK**

Improved safety by reducing and managing risk  
Access to immediate support, information and advice  
Supported to understand their legal rights  
Supported to understand and use the justice system  
Compliance with statutory orders  
Improved sense of control and autonomy  
Accessed strong and resilient support networks  
Increased resilience and ability to manage stress  
Improved and maintain mental health  
Improved and maintain physical health  
Increased resilience and strategies to prevent further experiences of violence and abuse  
Supported to maintain independence in sustainable safe housing  
Increased confidence to access education, training & employment  
Setting positive goals for the future  
Moving forward in a positive planned way  
Can remain independent in their own home  
Children feel safer and are better resourced to stay safe  
Child's confidence is improved  
Service user is a more confident and effective parent  
Children and young people better understand positive and healthy relationships  
The voice of the child is heard and responded to



# 10

## ACHIEVING OUTCOMES

### HELPLINE

West Mercia Women's Aid Helpline recognises that many callers have never before disclosed the abuse that they have experienced: the initial response is crucial.

WMWA's Helpline is available 24/7 and every effort is made to respond personally – whether directly or in response to a voicemail request for contact. Whilst the WMWA website is accessible for partners and other professionals to make referrals for WMWA services or to ask for advice, on average these enquiries make up around 45% of calls to Helpline. Wherever possible, Helpline prioritises responding to calls from individuals needing support and will offer time-limited ongoing support where appropriate for callers that are unable to engage with any other WMWA service.

Helpline is staffed by skilled and trained practitioners and volunteers who are able to signpost, support and safety-plan, as needed. Helpline staff are skilled in assessing risk and draw on the expertise of WMWA Independent Domestic Violence Advisors (IDVA) colleagues where 'high risk' is identified, or raise safeguarding concerns where appropriate

### REFUGE

WMWA refuges are secure women-only spaces where women and their children are encouraged to support each other as they work to increase their self-confidence and recover from the impact of the abuse that they have left behind.

WMWA provides secure refuge accommodation for women and children in one refuge in Herefordshire and two in Worcestershire. If women need to leave the region, then WMWA will assist them with finding refuge elsewhere through the Women's Aid Federation England (WAFE) national network. Each refuge is installed with appropriate security measures and the Police will always respond to reports from the refuge where there are concerns that security may be compromised.

Refuges are staffed by skilled and experienced practitioners and volunteers who manage the refuge to ensure that residents feel safe and supported by WMWA and by each other. Each refuge has accommodation for those with restricted mobility.

Each resident and their children are able to stay at refuge until they have a safe and long term alternative housing solution. Refuge practitioners provide support and advocacy for residents in finding safe move-on accommodation, and in settling into their new homes and communities.

# 11

## GROUP PROGRAMMES AND COMMUNITY-BASED SUPPORT

Community-based 1:1 support is available over the telephone and face-to-face, and is particularly appropriate for those whose needs are complex and where other professionals are working alongside WMWA.

Well-publicised drop-in sessions are held and are accessible to those that need one-off advice and support.

Evidence-based group programmes provide participants with the opportunity to explore their own experience in a safe and supportive group with others who have had similar challenges. Programmes are delivered as the 'Supporting Change' pathway and include:

- The Freedom Programme
- Power to Change
- Recovery Toolkit
- Parenting after domestic abuse

The pathway is consistently reviewed and enhanced to ensure relevance for all service users, with further programmes being added and developed.

WMWA is now also licensed to deliver the 'Inspiring Families' programme which works with couples where there is domestic abuse. Delivered in group settings, this is an in-depth process which tests out the potential for sustainable change in the abuser's behaviour. The programme provides a framework for supporting women whose primary concern is to safely remain in their relationship: it also creates a protective context so that if – during the programme – the prospect of sustained improvement is not realised, there are safeguards and support that will make it possible for the woman to be able to safely leave. Importantly, partnership with local children's services ensures that the voice of the child is resonant through this process.



# 12

## WORKING WITH HIGH RISK – THE IDVA SERVICE

The main purpose of Independent Domestic Violence Advisors (IDVA) is to address the safety of victims at high risk of harm from intimate partners, ex-partners or family members and in so doing to secure their safety and the safety of their children. Serving as a victim's primary point of contact, IDVAs normally work with their clients from the point of crisis to assess the level of high risk, discuss the range of suitable options and develop individual safety plans. They are pro-active in implementing the plans, which address immediate safety. Plans include practical steps to protect themselves and their children, as well as longer-term solutions. They will also include actions from the MARAC (Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference) as well as sanctions and remedies available through the criminal and civil courts, housing options, and services available through other organisations. IDVAs support and work over the short to medium term to help their clients to access the path to long-term safety. IDVAs are trained and hold a nationally recognised qualification for this role specifically.

WMWA's IDVAs work successfully with all those referred to them, or who are in contact with the service, for whom risk from domestic abuse is formally assessed as 'high'. Both male and female victims are afforded the same level of service from WMWA IDVAs.

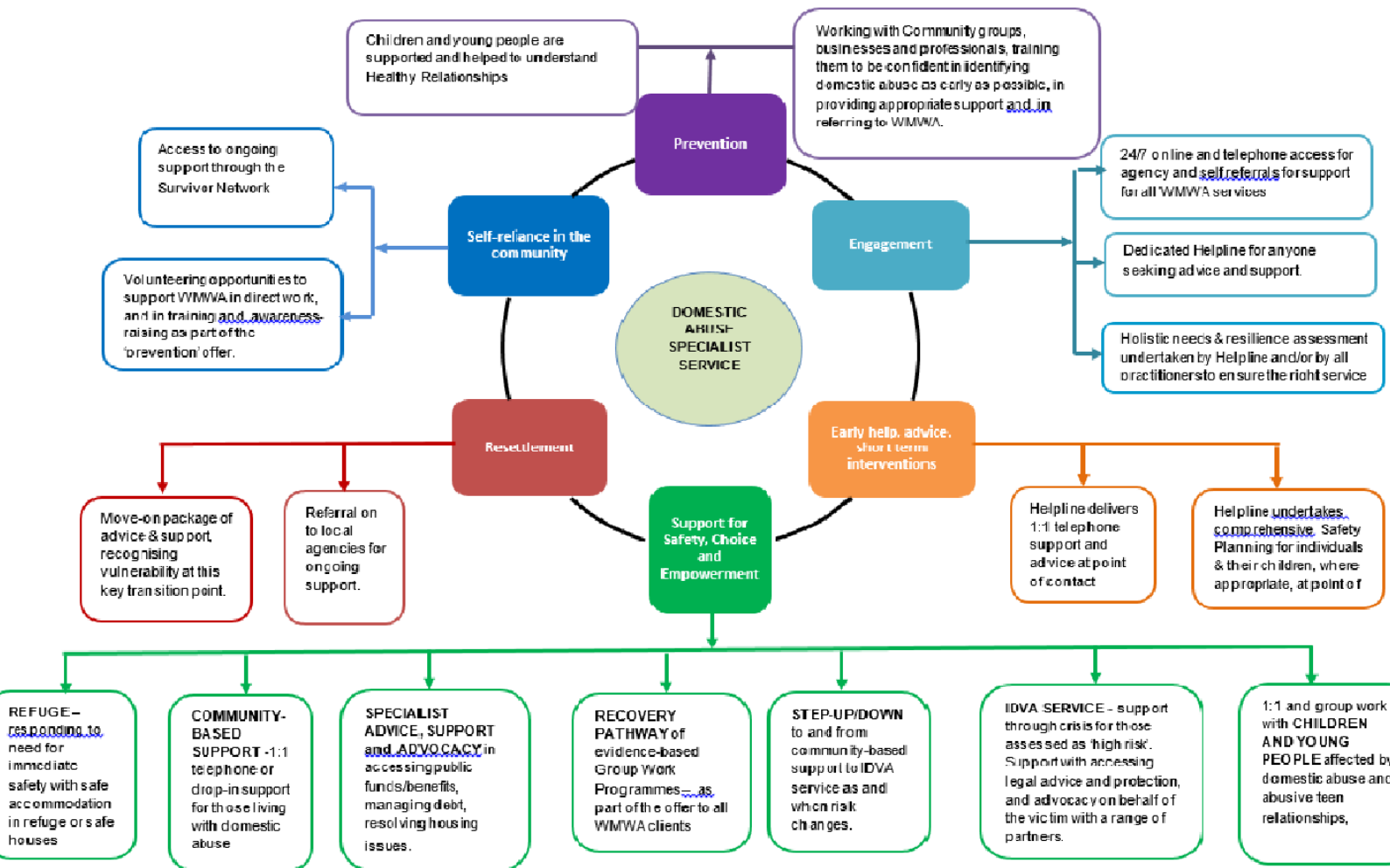
## TRAINING AND ADVICE FOR PROFESSIONALS

WMWA is the recognised regional domestic abuse specialist organisation but there is much that other agencies can do to recognise domestic abuse and provide appropriate support to victims and survivors. There is an important role for WMWA in providing training and advice to other professionals for whom domestic abuse is not core to their business but where nevertheless it will be an issue for those with whom they work – housing officers, social workers, and health professionals including midwives and health visitors are just some examples of professional groups with whom WMWA will work to provide training and support. Multi-agency training – including training for those who attend the Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC) for those considered to be at high risk of harm – is often recommended as a way of building up the partnership working that is essential for an effective response to domestic abuse.

WMWA training packages include input from our survivor networks, to whom mentoring and support is provided to ensure that the sharing of their own testament is a positive experience.



## WEST MERCIA WOMEN'S AID SERVICE MODEL



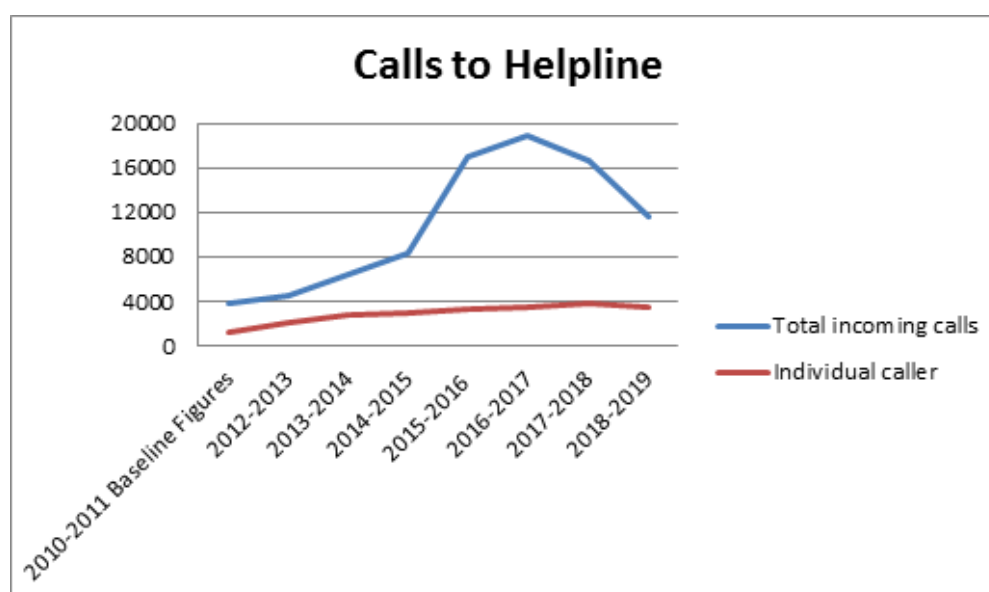
## 14

## TRENDS AND CHALLENGES

### 1. Meeting Immediate Need - Incoming calls to Helpline

The rate of incoming calls to WMWA's Helpline is a proxy indicator of demand for specialist domestic abuse services. All calls to Helpline have more than quadrupled during the five years 2012 – 2017, reflecting the emphasis on Helpline in accessing WMWA services. Contact to Helpline from individual callers increased by 53% over the period. In 2017 work was done to redirect those calls which were not from individuals requiring personal advice/support from WMWA staff in order to optimise the time that Helpline could spend talking to those who had called for immediate telephone support and advice. As a consequence, data for 2018/19 shows that overall calls to Helpline have decreased whilst calls from individuals wanting immediate advice and support have continued and are now well more than double those recorded for 2010/11. We are working to sustain a service that is first and foremost accessible to individual callers, which is all the more vital given the rural nature of the region that we serve.

Helpline	2010/11 Baseline Figures	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19
Total incoming Calls	3808	4438	6470	8317	17046	18833	16689	11614
Individual Caller	1217	1996	2775	2992	3342	3528	3867	3401



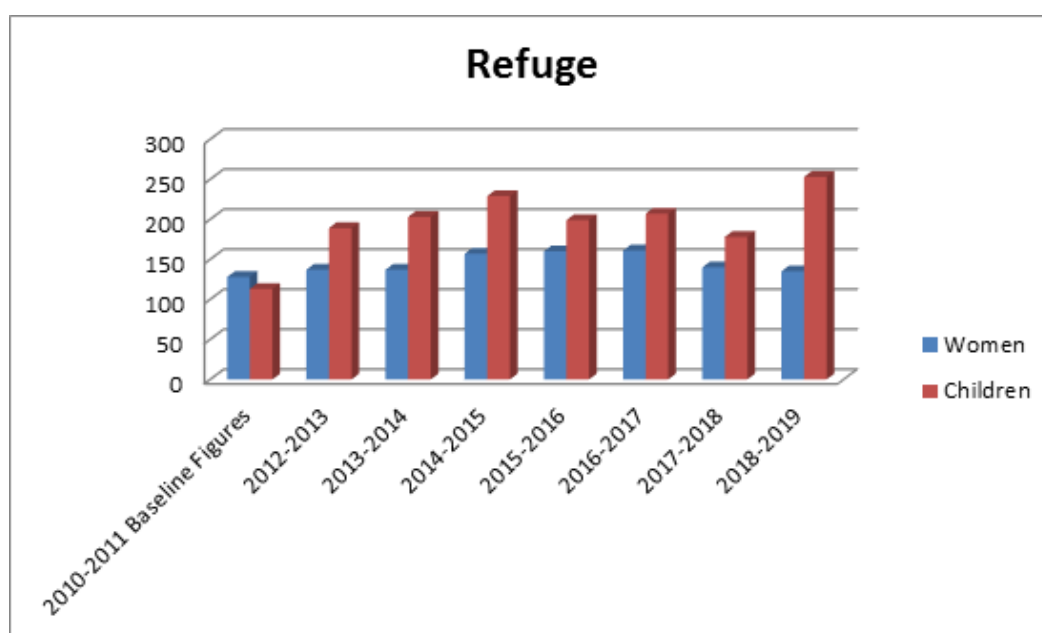
WMWA remains committed to providing a Helpline that is accessible to individual women seeking support and advice within the constraints of diminishing resources.

# 15

## 2. Providing Safe Accommodation - Refuge and Safe Houses

Safe and supportive accommodation in refuge remains a core service at West Mercia Women's Aid, and demand for this provision is consistently high – despite changes to the availability of protective court orders for those who remain in their own homes whilst challenging violence and abuse. Success in helping women to secure move-on accommodation has helped to shorten the length of time that women spend in refuge and enabled WMWA to maximise the extent to which women and children can access this critical resource.

Refuge	2010/11 Baseline Figures	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19
Women	128	137	137	157	160	161	140	135
Children	113	189	203	229	199	207	178	253



In 2017 WMWA moved into a new refuge in Herefordshire, purpose-built by West Mercia Homes. The new refuge provides small but self-contained units of accommodation for families and lays down a benchmark for the kind of accommodation that we would all want for those who have been forced to leave their homes in order to escape violence and abuse.

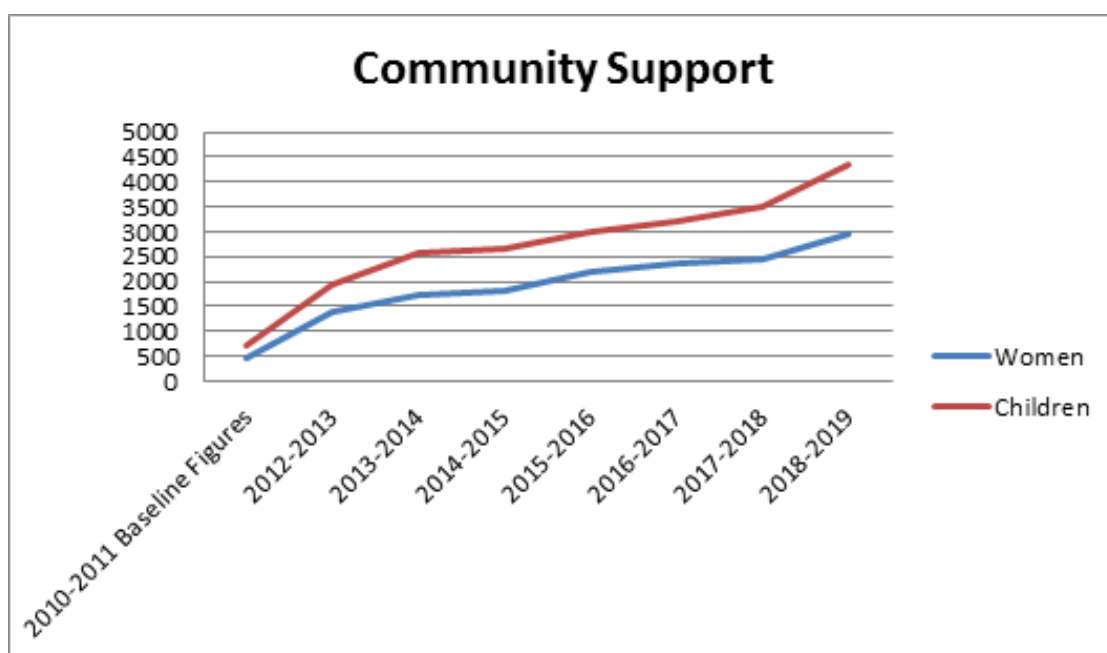
In Worcestershire, WMWA's partnership with Rooftop Housing Association has made it possible to offer 'safe house' accommodation in flats and houses across the county, providing ongoing outreach support through the specialist community-based support team. This is especially appropriate for those women for whom the communal nature of Worcestershire's refuges is particularly challenging, or for those who wish to remain close to their family and/or other networks of support in locations which are some distance from the local refuge.

## 16

### 3. Community-based Support, including 1:1 work, support through Helpline, and through Group programmes

Significant focus over the period on providing support for those women living in the community (not in refuge) is reflected in the increase in the table below. In Worcestershire we are supported by our partners Rooftop Housing Association who are delivering community-based support and the Recovery Programme.

Community Support	2010/11 Baseline Figures	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19
Women	446	1411	1749	1818	2210	2349	2461	2938
Children in client families	702	1938	2561	2641	2997	3202	3519	4344

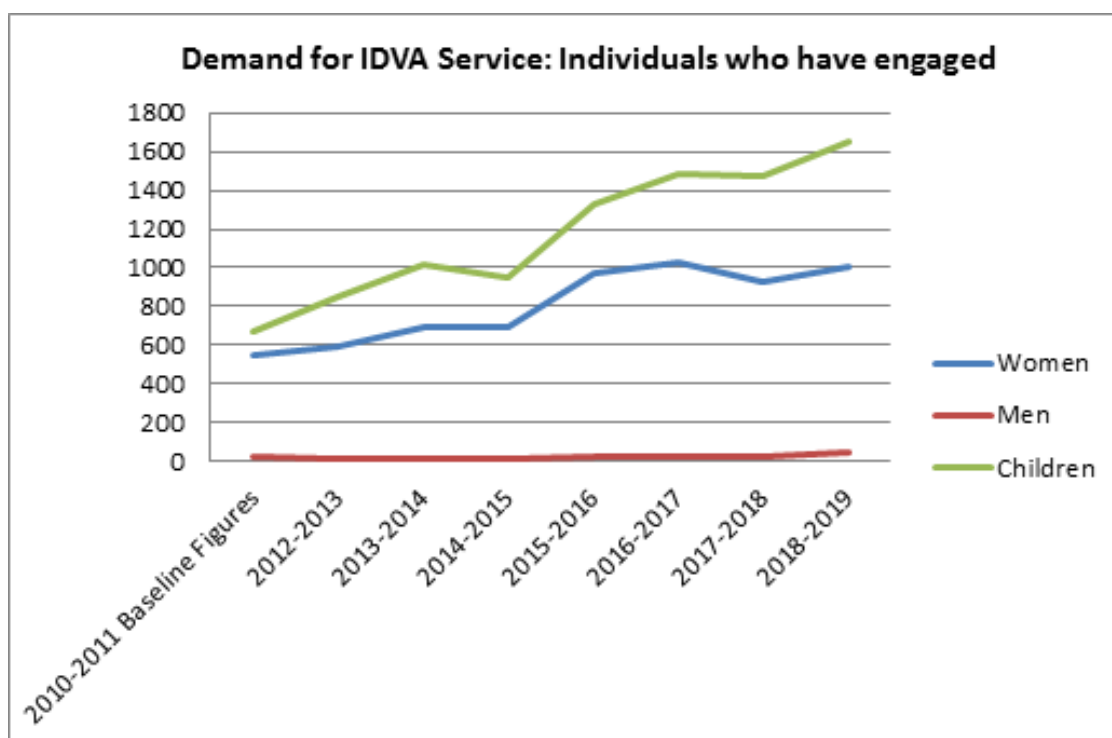


#### 4. Independent Domestic Violence Advisors

The IDVA service works with those who are assessed as at 'high risk' of harm by the Police and/or WMWA's own assessment processes: these assessments are made using evidence-based and nationally recognised assessment tools. Men as well as women can also access the IDVA service, but do so in relatively small numbers.

The increase in the numbers of high risk victims is in part reflective of the increase in capacity through additional investment in this provision by the West Mercia Police and Crime Commissioner and partners in local authorities in 2015. This increase was made in response to clear evidence that demand for this vital service out-stripped capacity to deliver in West Mercia at that time.

IDVA	2010/11 Baseline Figures	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19
Women	548	586	697	695	968	1028	931	1006
Men	18	10	12	11	20	18	19	39
<i>Children in client families</i>	668	854	1016	954	1333	1489	1478	1654



## 18

## WEST MERCIA WOMEN'S AID PRIORITIES FOR 2019 – 2024

- SECURE THE SUSTAINABILITY OF WEST MERCIA WOMEN'S AID
- MAINTAIN AND FURTHER DEVELOP SPECIALIST SERVICES
- SUPPORT AND INFLUENCE THE WORK OF STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS AND PARTNERS, AS ACTIVE PARTICIPANTS IN SHAPING THE LOCAL AGENDA
- PREVENTION - EDUCATE SOCIETY AND SPEAK OUT AGAINST DOMESTIC ABUSE AND VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS



## 1. SECURE THE SUSTAINABILITY OF WEST MERCIA WOMEN'S AID

The evidence is clear that the scale of demand for specialist domestic abuse services in West Mercia has increased steadily during the lifetime of the previous plan: our annual reports show that the level of resources has steadily reduced over the same period. In the past, WMWA has drawn on reserves to bridge the gap and ensure that the organisation retains capacity to deliver high quality services that have a positive and lasting impact for those that seek our support. However, there will need to be a shift in focus in the coming years if the organisation is to continue to meet need as effectively as it has done in the past.

### **Lean and Agile Organisation**

A clear focus on our performance and on achieving value for money has never been more important. WMWA continues to develop service-specific tools to enable managers and practitioners to monitor the outcomes from the work that they do, and to explore new and more effective ways of working that will further improve the experience of service users. Whole-service Annual Improvement Planning will focus on organisational development and the achievement of a culture of continuous improvement. The achievement and retention of the Women's Aid Federation England Quality Standards accreditation is evidence of the extent to which WMWA works as an ethical, inclusive and feminist organisation with a clear commitment to the delivery of services of a recognised quality.



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## **Financial Sustainability**

The emphasis on being a lean and agile organisation will be matched with a clear shift in emphasis on increasing the sustainability of the resources that fund WMWA as an organisation. As the pressure on local authority budgets continues to grow, the capacity of commissioners to resource domestic abuse contracts will become increasingly fragile – with a knock-on effect on service providers. As a registered charity, WMWA has the opportunity to raise funds to support the achievement of its core objectives from a wide range of sources – including not only grant-making trusts but also the generosity of the wider community who are already active on our behalf. The target for the next five years will be to increase the proportion of income to the organisation from alternative sources, and in particular to build upon the support that is shown by local groups and organisations, businesses and individuals for the work that we do.

The importance of volunteers cannot be overstated in securing the sustainability and ongoing development of the organisation. WMWA Trustees are all volunteers, and their commitment – in terms of skills and experience, time and accountability – is the bedrock of the organisation. Opportunities for volunteering at this strategic level, and in supporting the delivery of frontline services, are essential as a way of enabling former service users to become active members of WMWA – helping to shape and develop services and providing much-needed capacity. Volunteering is also an opportunity for women from local communities with a wide range of skills and experience to give their time and expertise to help us in our work. Whilst it is policy for WMWA not to replace paid staff with volunteers, nevertheless there are real opportunities to re-shape services, and to enable those who want to contribute their skills to be a valued part of our team. In 2017/18, WMWA was supported by in excess of 400 volunteer hours – in refuge, in groups, and in supporting the IDVAs in their work with ‘high risk’ clients. WMWA is committed to expanding the opportunities for volunteering for those who wish to expand or apply their knowledge and experience in working alongside practitioners as part of the WMWA team. Equally, WMWA works closely with both individuals and local groups in identifying ways to be pro-active in providing practical and financial support that enables WMWA to continue to ‘make a difference’.

The delivery priorities for West Mercia Women’s Aid for the next five years are reflective of those for the previous strategic plan – the challenges remain the same in principle, and the underpinning values of the organisation are as strong as ever in addressing domestic violence and abuse on all fronts and with absolute determination.



# 21

## 2. MAINTAIN AND FURTHER DEVELOP SPECIALIST SERVICES

All those who have experienced domestic abuse need support in re-building their resilience and self-confidence, in securing safety, health and well-being for themselves and their children, and in having the opportunity to shape and support the services that helped them – ensuring that those services are co-produced with those that need them. WMWA is committed to continuing to deliver that support.

Victims for whom the risk to their safety and well-being is particularly high continue to need safe refuge, as well as the help and support of confident and trained specialists that understand the impact of the service user's experience, the potential for immediate and future risk, and the ways in which a range of measure and agency support mechanisms can help them to make themselves as safe as possible.

### **2.1 ENSURE A SECURE FUTURE FOR REFUGES, AND SUFFICIENT SERVICES TO MEET LOCAL NEED FOR SUPPORT FOR THOSE THAT HAVE EXPERIENCED DOMESTIC ABUSE**

This is a priority because –

...there is consistent pressure on local public services to meet the needs that arise as part of the impact of domestic abuse. First and foremost are the implications for the immediate safety of those who are experiencing domestic abuse and who fear for their physical well-being. Whilst there are legal means of securing protection through the Justice system, there are occasions when women and their families need to leave their homes – if only temporarily – in order to remain safe. Refuge is unique as a safe place where women can collect their thoughts and get the information and support that that they need to consider their options and make choices for the future – sometimes for the first time in their adult lives. Refuge, and local support services for those living with domestic abuse, remain the cornerstone of the work of West Mercia Women's Aid. Demand for specialist domestic abuse services in West Mercia as demonstrated by our own data has risen consistently over the past five years, and West Mercia Women's Aid is committed to sustaining and improving local delivery of those specialist services that victims need to be safe, and to supporting them in making positive choices for their future.

# 22

**We will work to achieve this by –**

...ensuring that our community-based services are outcome-focussed, evidence-based, meet local need and respect diversity.

... continuing to ensure that refuges and safe houses are welcoming and well resourced, working effectively as safe havens for those who are homeless as a consequence of domestic abuse.

... continuing to work closely with local commissioners and partners, and with sister organisations and national campaigning groups, to emphasise the importance of guaranteeing continued and increased resources for refuge provision and community-based support for the victims of domestic abuse.

**We will know that we have been successful when –**

.. WMWA support is accessible for women as and when they need it. Service users report that they have been treated with sensitivity and respect by WMWA, and that they are satisfied with the service that they have received. Service users and practitioners agree that improvement has been achieved in the following outcome areas:

- Personal safety
- Health and well-being
- Stability and resilience
- Resourcefulness to parent

# 23

## 2.2 FURTHER DEVELOP THE CAPACITY OF WMWA TO WORK EFFECTIVELY WITH THOSE WHOSE NEEDS ARE MULTIPLE AND COMPLEX

This is a priority because –

..WMWA's internal monitoring shows that the needs of those that approach us for support are becoming increasingly complex. Poor mental health, and problems with alcohol and/or other substances – often used as a form of self-medication and coping strategy in response to the abuse in their lives – are all increasingly common factors for those in need of specialist domestic abuse support. Women accessing support in escaping from domestic abuse may also be adult survivors of child abuse and their resilience may be compromised by the long-term impact of adverse childhood experiences. Their vulnerability may be compounded by additional physical and/or learning needs, or they may be caught up in the criminal justice system. WMWA is committed to ensuring that its services are effective in meeting the needs of those who are particularly vulnerable due to a range of other issues in their lives.

### **We will work to achieve this by –**

...ensuring that WMWA practitioners have access to the support, training and supervision needed to ensure that their practice is the best it can be. WMWA recognises the need for practice to be informed by an understanding of the impact of trauma on resilience, health and well-being.

... further developing close and effective partnership working with other health and social care agencies: this is essential where a holistic package of support is needed to help those with a number of needs that compound their vulnerability.

... recognising the need for longer term, therapeutic input for some service users, and working with them to source this provision by advocating on their behalf.

### **We will know that we have been successful when –**

... outcomes for service users with complex needs show increased confidence in their capacity to keep themselves safe, have improved health and well-being, have greater stability and resilience, and feel better able to parent.

... service users whose needs are complex report that they have been treated with sensitivity and respect by WMWA, and that they are satisfied with the service that they have received.

# 24

## 2.3 STRENGTHEN THE FOCUS ON MEETING THE NEEDS OF DIVERSE AND VULNERABLE GROUPS AND COMMUNITIES

This is a priority because –

...there are communities of women for whom the experience of domestic abuse further compounds their isolation and experience of disadvantage and prejudice. Mainstream domestic abuse service providers - may not be perceived as able to meet their needs and this can compromise the capacity to access help and support. In West Mercia these will include those who are from black and minority ethnic, and migrant communities, and also those who define as LGBTQ. Cross-service training underpins a strong focus on ensuring that issues such as honour-based violence, forced marriage and modern slavery are well-understood by all who work at WMWA, and close partnership working with community groups and local services helps to ensure that the victims of domestic abuse from all communities are confident in the capacity of our services to help them to achieve the outcomes that they need for themselves and their families.

In the absence of local specialist provision for small and diverse communities of faith, origin or identity, WMWA must be inclusive and ensure that we can meet their needs.

For women whose lives include additional challenges – for example, poor mental health or substance dependency – the impact of domestic abuse can be debilitating and the process to break free and recover will present particular challenges.





# 25

**We will work to achieve this by –**

...ensuring that WMWA embraces diversity and the principles of equality and anti-discriminatory practice in all that it does, providing training and support for all who work for WMWA in working with women from all backgrounds and with a range of needs.

... working alongside service users and stakeholder groups using co-production to develop new approaches that better meet the needs of a diverse local population

...being pro-active in promoting effective and outcome-focussed partnership working with groups in communities of faith, origin and identity – ensuring that they are able to inform and shape WMWA services so that they best meet the needs of women from these communities. In so doing, that WMWA is also supportive of work by those groups to develop their own provision to empower women from their communities who experience domestic abuse.

... ensuring that all who work for WMWA are trained and supported in providing sensitive and client-led services that take account of each individual woman's culture, identity and experience.

... maintaining strong and outcome-focussed partnership working with stakeholder groups and specialist services for those with a range of additional needs

**We will know that we have been successful when –**

...referrals for, and contact by, women from minority communities are proportionate to the demographics of the area, as a minimum.

...Engagement rates by women from BAME communities are comparable to those for the whole population.

...Outcomes achieved for women from minority communities are comparable to, or better than, those for all WMWA service users.

...Full use is made of all available resources to assist women fleeing domestic abuse who have No Recourse to Public Funds in the services they need to become and remain safe.

# 26

## 2.4 PROVIDE EXPERT SUPPORT SERVICES FOR HIGH RISK VICTIMS

This is a priority because –

... demand remains high for support for individuals who are considered to be at 'high risk' from domestic violence and abuse. Referrals come through the Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conferences (MARACs), from the Police, from other services – including other specialist domestic abuse services – and from WMWA's own helpline and other front-line provision. Prompt engagement and effective multi-agency partnership working are both essential in ensuring that victims are made safe and are supported in getting the protection that they need through the legal recourse available to them.

**We will work to achieve this by –**

...further developing our partnership working with the Police, and with the Police and Crime Commissioner who commissions this provision.

...ensuring that priority is given to engaging with victims promptly and that all those contacted are provided with advice and safety planning over the telephone – even if they do not wish to access the full support of WMWA at that point in time.

.... consistently monitoring outcomes for our service users so that we can be sure that support from WMWA is making a positive difference

...ensuring that all IDVAs are appropriately trained and qualified to provide the best possible advice, support and advocacy for each and every high risk victim in the West Mercia area.

**We will know that we have been successful when –**

...Service users and IDVA practitioners agree that the following outcomes have been achieved through a period of support from an IDVA:

- Improved safety/reduced risk
- Immediate support, information & advice has been accessed
- Service users better understand their legal rights
- Service users better understand the justice system and how to use it to protect and support them
- Service users have complied with statutory orders, where these have been made
- Improved sense of control & autonomy
- Service users access strong & resilient support networks

# 27

## **2.5 MAINTAIN A CONTINUOUS FOCUS ON ADDRESSING THE IMPACT OF DOMESTIC ABUSE UPON CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE, THROUGH THE PROVISION OF SPECIFIC SUPPORT**

This is a priority because –

...the demand for services for children and young people has reached a point where it out-strips capacity to deliver. The Police and Crime Commissioner funds the provision of support for 180 children and young people across the region each year. With referrals for support in 2017/18 exceeding 400 children, there is clearly a need to further develop this provision. Local authorities continue to recognise the contribution that a specialist domestic abuse agency can make to reducing the risk to the health, well-being, and sometimes the safety, of children and young people living with domestic abuse, and WMWA attendance at strategy meetings and conferences is frequent. However, the resources with which to undertake effective work are insufficient.

**We will work to achieve this by –**

...further developing the group work programme for children and young people through the offer of the Children's Recovery Toolkit, the review and update of the CRUSH programme, the piloting of play therapy and the further development of partnership working with those who provide 'early help' services to children and families.

...working with commissioners to secure additional resources with which to ensure that WMWA can meet local need

...identifying new opportunities to access charitable funds with which to further develop this area of work

**We will know that we have been successful when –**

...all children and young people are contacted with an offer of support promptly and in a way which meets their particular needs and preferences.

...the outcomes of work with children and young people clearly demonstrate that:

- Children feel safer and better resourced to stay safe
- Children's confidence has improved
- The voice of the child has been heard and responded to Young people feel more confident in their understanding of healthy relationships and in their capacity to extricate themselves from unhealthy relationships

## **2.6 CONTINUE TO EXPLORE AND DEVELOP EVIDENCE-BASED INTERVENTIONS AND GROUPS THAT FOCUS ON THE NEEDS OF ALL THOSE WHO EXPERIENCE DOMESTIC ABUSE – INCLUDING WHOLE-FAMILY APPROACHES**

This is a priority because –

...in light of the scarcity of resources, it is important to ensure that all new developments are tested and evaluated for their effectiveness. This should not however, stifle creativity and WMWA will continue to invest in the development and testing of new tools and approaches, building on our experience and expertise to add to the organisation's capacity to achieve positive outcomes with, and for, the victims of domestic abuse.

**We will work to achieve this by –**

...working with survivors and former service users to maximise opportunities to develop and test new approaches

**We will know that we have been successful when –**

... WMWA can evidence positive outcomes through external evaluation of new approaches to supporting those affected by domestic abuse.



# 29

## 3. SUPPORT AND INFLUENCE THE WORK OF STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS AND PARTNERS, AS ACTIVE PARTICIPANTS IN SHAPING THE LOCAL AGENDA

### **3.1 PROMOTE THE VIEW THAT DOMESTIC ABUSE AS EVERYONE'S BUSINESS, THROUGH EFFECTIVE PARTNERSHIP WORKING**

This is a priority because –

... No-one experiencing domestic abuse has needs that can be met by a single agency. Domestic abuse impacts upon an individual's health and well-being as well as their physical safety; it affects their confidence and sense of self-worth, their capacity to parent, to manage the practical challenges of life, to make decisions for their future.

WMWA is committed to promoting an understanding of the connections between women's inequalities and all forms of violence and abuse, and gives voice to this perspective in those places where local strategies to address domestic abuse are formulated and developed.

#### **We will work to achieve this by –**

... contributing to the work of strategic partnership bodies across West Mercia. As members of Health and Well-being, Community Safety and Safeguarding Boards and their appropriate sub-groups, WMWA will ensure that local partnership strategies to address domestic abuse are well-informed by contributing information from our own data and evidence-base, and by highlighting current and relevant evidence from research by Women's Aid and other sector specialists. WMWA will inform discussions on related issues such as sexual violence and exploitation and modern slavery, ensuring that the inter-relationship with domestic abuse is understood and appreciated by colleagues from other agencies.

WMWA will also support pan-regional developments and encourage collaboration across authorities to work together to better target resources meeting the needs of those affected by domestic abuse.

#### **We will know that we have been successful when –**

... multi-agency domestic abused strategies across the region are ambitious and outcome-focussed, and enable a range of local agencies to make a contribution to the delivery of services that make a positive difference to the victims of domestic abuse.

# 30

## **3.2 SUPPORT THE DEVELOPMENT OF A STRONG AND DIVERSE COHORT OF 'TRUSTED PROFESSIONALS' THROUGH THE PROVISION OF TRAINING AND CONSULTANCY TO PARTNER AGENCIES.**

This is a priority because –

... The understanding and pro-active response of a range of other services is crucial if domestic abuse is to be identified early, help and support provided to secure safety/relief from abuse, and sustainable resilience enhanced and promoted. It is also essential if the collateral damage caused by domestic abuse is to be successfully addressed and the lives of survivors and their children rebuilt. Effective multi-agency working is fundamental for WMWA in achieving its vision: we cannot do this on our own.

### **We will work to achieve this by –**

... developing and marketing training provision for professionals – both multi-agency and bespoke training packages. WMWA will be pro-active in ensuring that the impact of domestic abuse is clearly understood by local partnerships and their membership of public sector agencies, by offering high quality training which promotes the confidence of professionals in identifying domestic abuse, in ensuring that their clients are appropriately supported by their own agency, and in helping their clients in accessing specialist domestic abuse support.

### **We will know that we have been successful when –**

... partner agencies referring to WMWA demonstrate a comprehensive understanding of domestic abuse and have explained the nature of the service that we offer to their client, gaining their consent for WMWA to contact them.

# 3 1

## **3.3 DEVELOP, TEST AND SHARE THE LEARNING FROM OUTCOME-FOCUSSED INNOVATION IN BOTH PREVENTING AND TACKLING DOMESTIC ABUSE**

This is a priority because –

... WMWA is in the perfect position to provide evidence of 'what works' in supporting those affected by domestic abuse. Monitoring and evaluating the impact of our work is essential if WMWA is to use resources affectively in improving outcomes, and the organisation will develop and maintain a strong focus on performance against priority outcomes. This intelligence will be shared with commissioners and partners where it can contribute to the wider understanding of the development of effective practice in WMWA.

**We will work to achieve this by –**

... actively promoting a culture of continuous improvement - using data, staff and service user feedback to inform service planning and development. The service 'dashboard' will be used as a tool to enable all those who work for WMWA to see the 'golden thread' that links their work to the achievement of the mission of the organisation. Focussing on outcomes and quality will enable WNWMA to innovate with confidence and remain an agile organisation, consistently delivering best value. Ensure that the voices of our service users are central in informing our understanding of 'what works'.

**We will know that we have been successful when –**

... WMWA responds successfully to new challenges by using evidence to understand the impact of innovation in improving outcomes.

# 32

## 3.4 WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH OTHER VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS (VAWG) PROVIDERS AND KEY STAKEHOLDER AGENCIES THAT SHARE WMWA OBJECTIVES AND VALUES

This is a priority because –

... the collective strength of the VAWG sector is essential if a transformation of the lives of women and girls is to be achieved. National and local data continues to illustrate the extent to which domestic abuse is a gendered crime that arises directly from the unequal position of women in society. It is essential that VAWG agencies collaborate effectively, supporting each other in achieving common goals for the empowerment of women and girls to make their own choices and lead lives free from abuse.

**We will work to achieve this by –**

... Avoiding competition with other VAWG agencies for contracts and funding opportunities, and working together to maximise the potential for new resources to be brought into West Mercia to combat domestic abuse and support the delivery of services for survivors.

**We will know that we have been successful when-**

... collaborative approaches to draw in additional resources to the sector in West Mercia are successful.

... joint working with other organisations like Shropshire Domestic Abuse Service and West Mercia Rape And Sexual Abuse Centre delivers positive outcomes for clients, and creates the context for collaboration that will deliver best value for the sector in the future.



# 33

## 4. PREVENTION - EDUCATE SOCIETY AND SPEAK OUT AGAINST DOMESTIC ABUSE AND VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS

### 4.1 PRIORITISE EARLY INTERVENTION AND PREVENTION WITH YOUNG PEOPLE (AS HIGHLIGHTED IN THE NATIONAL VAWG STRATEGY).

This is a priority because –

... children learn about relationships from what they see around them. Attitudes towards women and girls are changing for the better but the representation of women through both social and traditional media continues to focus on personal appearance and sexual availability in a way which re-enforces traditional views about the limitations on women's right to self-determination, choice and respect. There is evidence from WMWA's own CRUSH groups that girls can still have an expectation of being sanctioned for independent behaviour in their intimate relationships – that power and control is still the prerogative of young men, and violence and abuse is a way in which this can be preserved – “that's just the way it is”. These attitudes, if unchallenged, become expectations in adulthood and domestic abuse will continue.

**We will work to achieve this by –**

... raising awareness for children and young people in understanding what makes a healthy relationship, through 121 and group programmes with those that are referred to WMWA for support. Support schools and youth services in addressing the issue by providing information and source materials. Develop and deliver healthy relationships input to children and young people in partnership with schools, and targeted services for those who are vulnerable and marginalised.

**We will know that we have been successful when -**

... the children and young people with whom WMWA works report and demonstrate a positive view of healthy relationships. Children and young people in wider education (formal and informal) settings report positively about their aspirations for healthy relationships as they move into young adulthood.



# 34

## 4.2 BUILD THE CAPACITY IN LOCAL COMMUNITIES TO CHALLENGE DOMESTIC ABUSE AND PROVIDE SUPPORT AND SIGNPOSTING TO THOSE EXPERIENCING DOMESTIC ABUSE

This is a priority because –

... domestic abuse takes place in homes in communities. The power of local communities to identify issues for those that live amongst them, and to design and deliver effective community-based action that challenges attitudes and supports the vulnerable, is well evidenced for issues such as substance misuse and street crime. There is a wealth of ‘untapped’ resource in local communities that can be unlocked for the benefit of those women and families experiencing domestic abuse – and for providing support that can be accessed earlier and less formally.

**We will work to achieve this by –**

... using the Women’s Aid ‘Ask Me’ framework, co-production and community development principles to engage with community and stakeholder groups, creating peer support networks of ‘ambassadors’

... creating information resources to help local ambassadors communicate with local people about their role and about the specialist services available

**We will know that we have been successful when -**

... local peer ‘ambassador’ networks become self-sustaining and work in partnership with WMWA in referring for specialist support, and in supporting those who re-locate in the community once that support is concluded.



# 35

## **4.3 USE LOCAL AND NATIONAL MEDIA – INCLUDING SOCIAL MEDIA - TO RAISE AWARENESS OF THE PREVALENCE AND IMPACT OF DOMESTIC ABUSE, AND OF THE AVAILABILITY OF LOCAL SERVICES**

This is a priority because –

... it is an inherent characteristic of domestic abuse that those that are abused are isolated from others, are bullied into believing that the abusive behaviour is their fault and that they are not deserving – or indeed entitled to – support and access to a life that is free from abuse and coercive control. Many will ‘normalise’ abusive behaviour and find ways to live with and manage abuse before they reach a point where they feel that they cannot carry on and they ask for help.

Part of the work of all domestic abuse organisations is to empower women to understand abuse and recover their sense of self-worth and confidence in leading a life that is free from abuse, fear and control. In addition, national research and local experience indicates that a significant proportion of those experiencing domestic abuse will be uncertain as to where to go for advice and support – despite the presence of domestic abuse services in the area for over 30 years.

### **We will work to achieve this by –**

... using social media to raise awareness of issues related to domestic abuse and reach as many people as possible, ensuring that they also know that WMWA provides services across the region

... working with the conventional press through radio interviews and press releases to publicise WMWA services and contribute to local and national news debates

... challenging the portrayal of negative and damaging images of women in the media, and promote positive messages that highlight choice and empowerment

### **We will know that we have been successful when -**

... monitoring of Facebook and Twitter shows a steady increase in engagement with posts from WMWA

... there is a steady increase in contacts to the WMWA Helpline from individuals seeking advice and support

# 36

## 4.4 SUPPORT LOCAL AND NATIONAL CAMPAIGNS THAT RAISE AWARENESS OF DOMESTIC ABUSE AND CHALLENGE THE OPPRESSION OF WOMEN AND GIRLS

This is a priority because –

... national campaigns have local credibility and draw together a range of partners in focussing on domestic abuse as an issue for local people. It is important for specialist domestic abuse services to lend their weight to the support that such campaigns can generate in other agencies for raising awareness and securing commitment to tackle domestic abuse. It is the strength of effective partnership working that will have the greatest impact on tackling domestic abuse and supporting survivors.

...this is a way to provide women in the local community.....

### **We will work to achieve this by –**

... actively supporting local and national campaigns that highlight the impact of domestic abuse on women and families eg national Sixteen Days of Action/White Ribbon Campaign, International Women's Day

... using the media to highlight the need for additional services, and/or issues that threaten the sustainability of services for the victims of domestic abuse

... engaging with local decision-makers to promote their understanding and canvas their active support for local campaigns

### **We will know that we have been successful when -**

... feedback from partner organisations and campaign participants year on year demonstrates a continued commitment for high profile challenges to the attitudes that underpin and sanction domestic abuse in West Mercia.





## SECURING CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT FOR WMWA

The agenda for WMWA over the next five years is challenging. The organisation itself must be as effective as possible if it is to continue to provide excellent services and to ensure that tackling domestic abuse remains a priority across West Mercia for both public agencies and local communities.

A process of annual Improvement and Development Planning will set challenging targets for the organisation in ensuring that we have the capacity to deliver our mission and stay true to our values. Our aim must be to strengthen and sustain the organisation and prioritise the delivery of best value for the people of West Mercia.

**The WMWA Board will set the agenda and monitor progress against achievement in key areas such as:**

- Performance management - focussing on outcomes and tracking the impact of what we do.
- Promoting the financial sustainability of the organisation and ensuring effective use of all WMWA resources
- Becoming a 'Learning Organisation', and investing in the skills and knowledge of staff and volunteers, as the 'core' of the organisation.
- Continuous co-production of our services with service users and survivors
- Promoting inclusion and equality in all aspects of our work
- Securing effective partnership working
- The Improvement and Development Plan will be refreshed annually, and complement a review of progress against the overall Strategic Plan; this will be published on the WMWA website.

## COMMENTS ON THIS STRATEGIC PLAN

We are interested in your views on this Plan and would be happy to respond to any queries that you may have.

If you have any questions or comments, then please email us on [general@wmwa.org.uk](mailto:general@wmwa.org.uk) and request a Strategic Plan Feedback Form. This can then be returned to the same email address.